

1. Overview of the English Program

The English department is at the center of the College's mission of providing its students with an education grounded in the liberal arts. English faculty members are nationally-known scholars and innovative teachers whose passions for language and literature enliven the classroom. Our program emphasizes small class size and personal contact between faculty and students. English majors and writing minors work closely with their faculty advisors to plan a course of study; and faculty work as mentors, guiding students to consider such opportunities as a semester of study abroad or preparing work for publication. The department's web site makes visible the intellectual work of English—from the professional activities of faculty to the accomplishments of students and alumni.

The Catalog description of the English program summarizes our goals and aspirations: "Students in the English major will study the historical development of literary and rhetorical traditions, of literatures written in English, as well as world and European literatures in English translation. The department stresses critical thinking, the analysis of texts, clear and effective writing, aesthetic appreciation, and theoretical sophistication. We value small class sizes and personal contact between faculty and students. English majors and minors can expect to work closely with their academic advisors to plan a course of study, and faculty work as mentors, guiding students to consider such opportunities as a semester of study abroad. In addition to fostering a lifelong appreciation of literature and language, a degree in English provides a range of personal and professional opportunities. Surveys of employers consistently stress the value of the skills we teach: the ability to communicate effectively with others, to think critically and creatively, to read carefully, and to write with clarity and purpose. KSC English majors have gone on to graduate and professional schools; they are working in the field of teaching; they work as writers; and they are employed in publishing, journalism, business, public relations, library science, and many other fields."

Our program objectives reflect an emphasis on the study and practice of close reading, critical thinking and effective writing. Nine core courses focus on the production and reception of texts, language and poetics, as well as criticism and critical theory. Students consider how historical, social, and cultural contexts shape literary works, including those works in literary and expressive traditions produced by cultures whose collective humanity and aesthetic identity have been historically devalued, denied, or dismissed; students study genres of literature, understand how literary works relate intertextually, and appreciate the ways in which the history of language has affected the development of literature; students are introduced to the history of criticism and critical theory, its application in literary analysis as well as current scholarly debates in the field of English studies; and students learn the conventions of critical analysis, including careful reading, the use of literary vocabulary, an orderly critical approach, and the use of writing for a range of expressive and persuasive purposes.

2. History of the English Program

Since the expansion of the College faculty in 1966, the English Department has evolved to meet the needs of the College and in response to changes in the discipline of English studies. The evolution of the English curriculum has strengthened the College's commitment to diversity and multiculturalism; transformed the first-year writing experience; and continued a long tradition of offering an extraordinary range of general education courses (now housed in our Integrative Studies Program) to inspire students and to develop their reading, writing and creative thinking. More recently, the department's curricular innovations include a new major, as well as new courses designed for the College's Integrative Studies Program (ISP). A tradition of commitment to common expectations and program flexibility sustains a vibrant program of study that challenges students while offering faculty the freedom to design new courses in keeping with their current scholarship.

In 1996 the department revised its major in response to student needs, developments in the field of English studies, and evolving faculty expertise. Working with a core set of shared expectations for students, the faculty designed a program of twelve three-credit courses that emphasized intensive reading and writing; historical breadth; core surveys in British, American and Multicultural/World literatures; and the study of critical approaches and literary theory. Students were introduced to the major through a threshold course. They then completed at least six additional courses at the 300 level and four courses at the 400 level, a pre-1660 British literature course and a pre-1800 literature course in any area.

This program of study offered greater breadth and depth; however, it did not sufficiently address the ongoing challenge of developing effective writers. One of the goals listed in the "Five Year Planning" section of the English Department's 2000-01 Self Study Report is a four credit English 101 class. "The additional credit," we explained, "acknowledges the many hours of student contact in conference time, the many hours of writing and revising, and the many hours of grading that this course requires" (39). Faculty discussions of how we might offer students more challenging experiences with writing—and create conditions for us to support them as they met these challenges—led the department to envision a more ambitious change: a programmatic move from three to four-credit hour courses. The department then developed a four-credit course proposal predicated on the language of the College's Mission: "to promote and sustain strong relationships among students, faculty and staff that emphasize creative and critical thinking, scholarship and research, and a passion for learning." The proposal sought to 1) improve conditions for student learning (most students would take fewer courses/semester); 2) enhance faculty working conditions (faculty would teach three instead of four courses each semester); and 3) redesign our courses to deliver our new program objectives and course outcomes more effectively.

The English department's four-credit proposal generated a lively and sustained campus discussion. Department members and the Dean of Arts and Humanities, Dr. Denvy Bowman, spent innumerable hours meeting with individual faculty, staff, departments, and schools to explain the proposal and its implications for English majors as well as for general education

students. In 2002 the College Senate voted to approve the English proposal, and the department implemented four-credit courses in the fall of 2003.

In our preliminary assessments of the change, both faculty and students noted improvements consistent with the objectives of the English program as well as the college's efforts to deepen the intellectual environment for undergraduate study: more consistent and challenging writing instruction; in-depth class discussion; individual and small-group conferences; varied and innovative pedagogical approaches; one-on-one interaction with students; and individualized help to talented students who need to be challenged, as well as less skilled students who need extra help.

The department assessment committee subsequently undertook two initiatives: a direct assessment of student writing at the 200 level and the creation of a database to track student progress through the program. The database allowed us to glimpse patterns in what courses students take, and in what order. In reviewing the records of students we found that their paths of fulfilling requirements for the major were far more random than our distribution system would appear to allow. The results of this indirect assessment led to an intensive year-long discussion of the English major. For we quickly realized that the move from three- to four-credit courses—and, perhaps more significantly, the move from a twelve to a nine course major—presented a new set of challenges for us and our students. At the same time we began to see opportunities to resolve a number of problems. Our collective work in weekly meetings and retreats was informed by the findings of faculty workgroups that surveyed major course requirements in programs at other colleges and universities. As we considered our distribution requirements we faced the fact that our primary categories were neither logically coherent nor transparent to our students. And we realized more clearly the gap between our program objectives and our learning outcomes.

During the spring and summer of 2005 the department worked in small groups to envision the components of a program that would resolve these issues as well as better meet the diverse needs of our students. We acknowledged that over the last three decades the once clear lines that defined literature in national terms have been blurred. The 1996 English curriculum addressed these developments by adding a Multicultural / Continental / World (MCW) requirement. But in practice many of the same courses fell into both American *and* Multicultural categories, such as American Indian Literature or African American Literature. Moreover, our study of student transcripts showed us that in the 1996 program a number of students had met the MCW requirement by taking two courses in canonical literatures and approaches. Too, we discovered that our students' ways of fulfilling requirements was inconsistent and, more often than not, at odds with the program objectives and student learning outcomes that provided the rationale for our distribution requirements.

The result of our work was a new program no longer organized around national literary traditions. Since we would still offer the same range of courses, and students would still choose their nine courses from among them, we were confident that the majority of our majors would receive as much "coverage" of the different areas of literary study as they had in the major we

were replacing. The program design also did not presume that all of our students needed exactly the same courses in literary traditions and themes. It is worth noting that our work explicitly departed from the 2000-01 recommendation of both the outside review and the Academic Overview Committee that the English department require courses in canonical works and traditions. Rather we chose to move away from a program organized around the idea that four years of undergraduate study could provide sufficient coverage of the national literary traditions “British” and “American.”

The new major was formulated in response to frank discussions about what we wanted our students to know and be able to do as graduates of our program. We recognized that the knowledge and competencies we valued were not visible in the program design; and we discussed openly the fact that the distribution categories in the major made it difficult for us and our students to meet the learning outcomes in reading and writing we presumably valued. Moreover, we knew from our assessment of student records, as well as from our enrollment data, that students seek courses in areas they are most comfortable studying. We also considered that they are able to do the work in other areas, but often need to be engaged in this study before they understand the richness of these areas or their own interest in them.

Our faculty working groups developed program requirements that worked with course sequences to meet the challenge of sustaining student learning across the four years of undergraduate study. The major is therefore organized around two course sequences: the introductory sequence is made up of two courses. English 200, Literary Analysis, focuses on writing and an introduction to literary genres. The second course, English 300, is designed to offer an introduction to the history of literary movements and periods early in the major. This course provides in-depth work with one of the genres introduced in the first course of the sequence and introduces students to the study of the development of genre over time. The advanced sequence addresses a longstanding problem with students seldom having the necessary background for the advanced work we would like to see them doing at the 400 level. For example, we found that a student would take a 400-level Black American Women Novelists course without ever having studied Black American literature or the American novel. The advanced sequence therefore combines two courses so that the 300-level course serves as a foundation for more advanced work at the 400-level.

The course sequences were also explicitly designed to strengthen student’s critical writing and reading abilities across their four years of study. One of the shortcomings of the 1996 major was what we came to call “the excluded middle,” or the gap between a common intensive experience in the introductory course and the common experience in an advanced seminar. The structure of the current major acknowledges that the advanced work we expect from our students requires a more sustained focus on their ability to understand, interpret, and analyze the complexities of challenging texts. The new design for the major uses small class size (twenty in the first sequence and twenty in the advanced sequence) to ensure more one-on-one interaction with students, more individualized help for students who need it, more opportunity for students to practice their critical skills, and more sustained and challenging writing instruction.

The new program underscores the need to study theory and differing cultural perspectives as well. First, while the 1996 major had a critical theory requirement at the 400-level, too often our students came to this upper-level requirement woefully unprepared. So in the new major, theory is explicitly introduced in English 200 and 300 and all 400-level courses incorporate critical theory to enhance work in the historical background foundation of 300-level courses and the advanced sequence. Second, the program requires students to take a course in what we call differing cultural perspectives. Previously, our students selected two courses from among our Multicultural / Continental / World (MCW) offerings. However this requirement too often resulted in students taking very traditional and Western literature (Classical Literature of Greece, Bible as Literature, Russian Literature) so that they received little to no exposure to the textual production of people who have been historically marginalized. The current program strengthens the “multicultural” requirement by more carefully defining the category as “Differing Cultural Perspectives” and requiring students to take one course in this category.

Courses within the category “Differing Cultural Perspectives” begin with assumptions and encompass perspectives that identify them as part of the growing tradition of reading “multicultural texts.” The writers either focus on or are from particular groups of people that have historically been marginalized. This literature foregrounds the issues of marginalization and structural inequality in significant historical and literary ways: through narrative strategies, inclusion of new perspectives on historical events, use of literary discourse as a tool of cultural survival, challenges to the use of an “authorized” language as assimilation to the colonizer, to name a few. Although the texts often speak to and have been influenced by mainstream, Western assumptions and perspectives, the more pervasive assumptions of marginalized groups create new traditions and invite new pedagogies that have become important and recognizable in their own right.

The current English program also requires every student to complete one pre-1800 course. The department recognizes the continued significance of texts produced before 1800 and these courses investigate discursive/literary traditions and explore the variety and complexity of these traditions. We believe that our students should understand that literature engages with pre-1800 social and cultural contexts that are significantly different from contemporary contexts; that the interpretive tools and assumptions that are deployed in approaching pre-1800 texts are significantly different from those used in approaching more contemporary texts; and that there are significant continuities and connections existing between past and later traditions. The new major thus maintains one pre-1800 literary requirement so that students will develop historical awareness of textual production, reception, language and literary traditions.

Finally, the new English program was designed to assure students flexibility in meeting program requirements while retaining a challenging intellectual course of study. Under the past system, eight of the nine courses for the major were necessary to fill requirements. This left students with only one elective. The new major balances four core courses in the introductory and advanced sequence while allowing students increased flexibility of up to five electives (selected

with the help of an advisor). This flexibility allows students to prepare for their future (graduate school, a specific career option) or to follow a particular area of interest. Importantly, offering more flexibility does not compromise the intellectual rigor of the program.

The proposal for a new major was completed in the summer of 2005 and was passed by the College Senate in the fall semester of the 2005-2006 academic year. The first advanced sequences were offered in the Fall of 2008. In the Spring of 2009 the new major was fully implemented and all requirements for students in the new major were being offered. We anticipate that by the 2010-2011 all tenure-track faculty members will have had the opportunity to teach either the introductory or the advanced sequence.

In the 2008-2009 academic year the department's Committee on Learning and Teaching (COLT) worked with the department to refine program objectives consistent with the goals of the major: 1) Production and Reception, 2) Language and Poetics; 3) Criticism and Theory, and 4) Reading and Writing. These four program objectives are linked to objectives for the nine core courses in the major: the introductory sequence (English 200 and English 300), the advanced sequence (English 395 and English 495), the pre-1800 course and the Differing Cultural Perspectives (DCP) course.

3. Result of Last Program Review

The 2000-01 Program Review process identified a number of areas for consideration and improvement. We have addressed many of these areas in our transition from three- to four-credit courses and in our revision to the major. However, as explained more fully below, the design and implementation of the Integrative Studies Program (ISP) has significantly altered the English department's role and its contributions to the College and as a result has changed our focus and priorities.

Adjunct Faculty: The department no longer provides two required general education courses for all students at the College: English 101: Essay Writing and a 200-level literature course. As a result, the overdependence upon adjunct faculty to teach the first-year writing course identified in the 2000-01 Program Review has been somewhat ameliorated. The overdependence upon adjunct faculty is therefore less a problem of the department and more of a College-wide problem.

English 101: Essay Writing: The report of External Reviewers notes a potential problem with consistent standards in the first-year writing course. At the same time they praise the constructive efforts of the then new Director of Writing, Dr. Kirsti Sandy. However since the 2000-2001 Program Review the culture of writing at Keene State College has been transformed in significant and lasting ways. English department members Dr. Sandy and Dr. Long have been instrumental in leading the campus to re-envision the first-year writing course as one of two foundation courses in the Integrative Studies Program (ISP). The new first-year writing course, "Thinking and Writing," is now taught by faculty from across the College. Tenure-track and adjunct faculty and their students now work more closely with the library faculty and peer

mentors at the Center for Writing; throughout the year, Dr. Sandy has led faculty workshops for Thinking and Writing faculty; and many of the faculty now teaching the first-year course have participated in the Calderwood Institute, an intensive workshop for faculty in the teaching of writing designed and co-facilitated by Dr. Phyllis Benay, professor of Interdisciplinary Studies and Director of the Center for Writing, Dr. Sandy and Dr. Long.

Canonical and Non-Canonical Writers: In a Department memorandum to Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Robert Golden, written in response to the 2001 Academic Overview Committee (AOC) Report on the English Department dated 13 August 2001, the English Department sought to clarify our response to a comment about our program. The AOC echoes the External Review's comment that "familiarity with American and British canonical works should be ensured rather than be dependent solely on advising." Our response in the memorandum seeks to clarify this complex set of issues. We write that the suggestion that "requiring majors to take 'a course' in 'canonical literature' might be possible or desirable seems highly limiting." We go on to say that rather than consider these issues in terms of course requirements, "we present to the college a department that engages itself and its students in powerful and productive deliberation about the texts of human culture and the questions they pose for our lives." In fact, consistent with the recommendation of the VPAA report that the English Department consider "tightening its curricular structure," we have engaged these questions around course requirements, ongoing outcomes assessment, and clarification of program outcomes in a more comprehensive effort to design and implement a new program of study.

Additional Tenure-Track Lines: The external reviewers during the 2000 English Self Study review, Dr. Sharon Dean (Rivier College) and Dr. Ausra Kubilius (New Hampshire College), note that "at least a 15-member core English faculty is necessary at current student enrollment to handle well and equitably the teaching, curriculum development, scholarly activity, student advising/mentoring, committee responsibilities, and campus and community enrichment work." Since the 2000 review, however, the department has created a writing minor and a number of its faculty have increased their interdisciplinary commitments.

In 2007 the department was granted a new tenure-track position to strengthen and expand our offerings in writing. We were fortunate to hire Dr. Kate Tirabassi, who brings expertise and enthusiasm for developing new writing courses for majors, minors and students in the Integrative Studies Program. Notably, however, the demand for writing courses continues and we need additional faculty to staff writing courses. The Writing Minor is currently sustained in part by the contributions of adjunct faculty and this situation is unsustainable given the intensive work with students in the portfolio course, and the multiple professional obligations of tenure-track faculty. In addition, five members of the English department now teach courses in the American Studies Program. Dr. Antonucci, Dr. Doreski, Dr. Joyce, Dr. Lebeaux, and Dr. Long regularly offer core courses and cross-listed electives in this interdisciplinary program. These commitments are evidence of the contributions of our faculty to the liberal arts mission of the College as well as to the recent curricular emphasis on interdisciplinary and integrative

study. This significant work with students studying in disciplines other than English offers another compelling reason to add an additional tenure-track faculty appointment in English.

Internships: Dr. Kate Tirabassi teaches “Writing in the World,” a course that gives students the opportunity to study the theory and practice of writing in “real world” contexts. In addition, Dr. Long has initiated discussions with the Keene State College of Advancement and Media Relations to design an internship in professional writing for advanced majors.

Working Conditions: Working conditions for faculty have improved significantly with the move from three- to four-credit courses. Teaching three courses each semester has helped faculty work more closely with students and devote adequate time to their scholarly work. The English faculty has also benefitted from building renovations, specifically the basement of Huntress Hall. However the failure to provide adequate air conditioning in Parker and Morrison Halls continues to compromise the classroom experience of students as well as faculty office space.

4. Program Goals

The English Program emphasizes the study and practice of close reading, critical thinking, and effective writing. Nine courses help students understand the production and reception of texts, language and poetics, as well as criticism and critical theory. In 2009 the department developed the following four program objectives to guide our work:

Production and Reception: The program considers how historical, social, and cultural contexts shape literary works, including those works in literary and expressive traditions produced by cultures whose collective humanity and aesthetic identity have been historically devalued, denied, or dismissed;

Language and Poetics: The program expects students to study at least two genres of literature, understand how literary works relate intertextually, and appreciate the ways in which the history of language has affected the development of literature;

Criticism and Theory: The program expects students to understand the history of criticism and critical theory, its application in literary analysis as well as current scholarly debates in the field of English studies;

Reading and Writing: The program teaches the conventions of critical analysis—including careful reading, the use of literary vocabulary, an orderly critical approach, and the use of writing for a range of expressive and persuasive purposes.

5. Relation of Program to Mission of College

The Department embraces our institution’s mission as the public liberal arts college of New Hampshire. Our activities enrich the campus community through diverse faculty expertise, a

range of course offerings in the Integrative Studies Program and in the major, and through sponsorship of readings and visits from prominent writers, intellectuals, and accomplished artists. The English faculty model and promote academic excellence through the integration of teaching, learning, scholarship, and service, and celebrate student achievement through an honor society and annual awards. Our program thereby exemplifies two of the core strategic goals articulated in “The Keene State College Academic Plan 2009-2014” (4.13.09 Draft).

1. Enhancing the quality of our academic program

Curriculum: The English department’s commitment to improving faculty working conditions and conditions for student learning led to four-credit courses and a new major. Our example initiated a campus-wide move to a four credit curriculum as well as an overhaul of the general education curriculum. English courses in the major, and in the Integrative Studies Program, challenge students to communicate effectively with others, to think critically and creatively, to read carefully, and to write with clarity and purpose—abilities identified in the College Mission as preparing students to “engage in active citizenship, and to pursue meaningful work.”

2. Clearly and continuously communicating our mission and values and fostering a strong sense of community

Web Site: Since 2003 a department web site has made visible the intellectual work of English at Keene State College. The web site is maintained by Dr. Long and has been recently overhauled to make it more useful for current students, prospective students and parents, alumni, and others seeking information about the department and its activities. The web site provides a portal into the ongoing work of faculty and students; a listing of events, activities, and awards; profiles of students and examples of student work; as well as program planning documents and a list of relevant campus resources. Dr. Long has also worked closely with graduates of Keene State College to build an alumni page that offers a glimpse of the lives and careers of KSC English majors. The dozens of brief professional biographies demonstrate the range of opportunities available to our students and foster a deeper sense of community among our graduates.

Reading Program: The English department established the Keene State College Summer Reading Program in 2001 to further the College’s mission to “provide and maintain an intellectual environment grounded in the liberal arts.” Generously supported by the Commission on Multiculturalism and Diversity, and coordinated by the department of English as well as committee members from the campus community, the reading program was designed to facilitate a campus-wide discussion of ideas as well as to help first-year students make the transition to college, where the reading and discussing of challenging, diverse texts is integral to the campus community. The reading program began in the idea that becoming a more efficient, engaged, and productive reader is among the most meaningful outcomes of a college education. Each year our first-year students purchased the selected book to read before classes begin in late August. Once the school year begins, the book has been the focus of discussions in residence halls, in the first-year writing course and other classes, and at special events

throughout the year. The campus community has joined first-year students in reading Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (2006-2007), Tracy Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains* (2005-06), Janisse Ray, *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood* (2004-05), Gish Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land* (2003-04), Sherman Alexie, *Reservation Blues* (2002-03), and John Edgar Wideman, *Brothers and Keepers* (2001-02).

The 2007-2008 academic year marked a significant change in this signature program. We renamed the program “Keene is Reading” to signal a more ambitious goal: to engage first-year students, continuing students, faculty and staff, as well as residents of Keene and the wider Monadnock community. Programming for the book discussions were therefore held on campus and in local libraries, and included members of the local community. In 2007-2008 the selection was Luis Alberto Urrea’s, *The Devil’s Highway*, and in 2008-09 the community read and discussed Michael Pollan’s *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*. The selection for the 2009-2010 academic year is Mark Kurlansky, *Cod*. The program committee has been directed by Dr. William Stroup and Dr. Brinda Charry, and has included department members Dr. William Doreski, Dr. Sally Joyce, Dr. Mark C. Long, Dr. Meriem Pages, Dr. Kathryn Tirabassi, and Dr. Michael Antonucci.

Campus and Community Events: The English Department exemplifies the core mission of the School of Arts and Humanities, “to cultivate in our undergraduate students, and in the regional community, an understanding of the human condition through scholarly, artistic, and civic engagement.” On campus we build a strong sense of community among citizens from the Monadnock region by organizing literary and cultural events each academic year: we showcase faculty work in our monthly Third Tuesday Series; we invite prominent scholars, such as Stephen Greenblatt, Dymphna Callaghan, and Lauret Savoy to speak at the annual Janet Grayson Lecture in Literary Studies; and we regularly schedule public readings by guest writers/scholars such as Grace Paley, Ross Gay, Janisse Ray, and Sherman Alexie. Our faculty also demonstrates extraordinary service to New Hampshire and the New England region. This ongoing work includes regular travel to local libraries to facilitate book discussions as scholars for the New Hampshire Humanities Council (NHHC) reading programs; organizing and facilitating NHHC sponsored workshops for teachers and students in local schools; offering readings of creative work to audiences around the state; teaching workshops for faculty at Keene State and other colleges and universities; judging national writing competitions; and serving on chairing local and regional boards.