

Memorial University of Newfoundland

Department of English Language and Literature

Academic Program Review Report

Panel Members

Dr. Jennifer Andrews, Department of English, University of New Brunswick

Professor Karyn Butler, Department of Geography, Memorial University (Chair)

Dr. Sean Cadigan, Department of History, Memorial University

Dr. Kevin McGuirk, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Waterloo

May 2012

Memorial University Department of English—External Report (2012)

I. INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL OVERVIEW

Process

The panel received a substantial self-study report, *curricula vitae*, and supporting documents in a large binder in early winter 2012. The panel requested some extra information and the department complied with a large set of undergraduate syllabi and the results of a student questionnaire survey administered to both undergraduate and graduate students. All of this material was received prior to the site visit. There was an orientation dinner on March 14 hosted by the Associate Vice President Academic which included the review panel, the interim Dean of Arts, the Dean of Graduate Studies and the APR coordinator. The site visit took place on March 15 and 16. The whole of both days was taken up with interviews with faculty, staff and students of the English Department. At the end of the day on March 16, 2012, the panel met with members of the Department to share with them some preliminary findings and to answer any questions from those in attendance. A list of the meeting schedules for the site visit is attached to this report.

The “Physical Plant”

The physical environment in which an academic department is housed is very important to the functioning of programs and to the morale of members of the community. The self-study points to the benefits of the common room for faculty which was acquired after the 2003 APR. Such space is crucial in allowing for informal social gatherings which tend to build a sense of community in a department.

The review panel was briefly shown this common room which has been deemed unusable due to the presence of toxic molds. It is reassuring to see that there is currently rehabilitative work being done in the room and that hopefully it will be soon available for the collective use of the departmental members. Water leaks in the departmental office were quite visible as was the makeshift hose and bucket system to deal with the problem. Facilities Management should be urged to remedy this problem as it is an eyesore in the office and the dampness could probably cause mold and general health hazards in future if left unchecked. The furniture in the Head’s office is tired-looking and does not offer a positive first impression. The old furniture should be replaced by a new work station and chair, and the office requires a fresh coat of paint. There are channels within the university whereby faculty members can obtain ergonomic furniture.

The Reid Theatre has been part of the Department of English space since 1985. Perhaps it was, at that time, seen as a beneficial acquisition—used for supporting courses in the Diploma in Performance and Communications Media and for the broader theatre/music community outside the university. Its 400 seat capacity and splendid acoustics have led many people to laud the attributes of the Reid Theatre and its importance to the Newfoundland theatre community.

However, it is symptomatic of a broader university wide concern. Responsibility for managing the Reid Theatre is one thing, but responsibility for maintenance is quite another. Neither the Department of English nor the Faculty of Arts has the operational budget needed to support essential renovations to this facility.

Notably, the Reid Theatre is an integral part of Memorial University's war memorial in the main lobby of the Arts and Administration Building. It has served as a gathering place for many university activities, from first-year orientation meetings for new students and their parents to public eulogies for members of the university community who have passed away suddenly. It is a Memorial University responsibility and funds must be forthcoming as a separate Reid Theatre line item. It is a significant venue for community outreach and should be restored to full use as soon as possible. (While this is happening, the co-ordinator of the Diploma program pointed to alternate small spaces that can be used to support performance teaching on the campus.)

Office space for departmental members is a concern in perhaps every unit of the university. There are members of the English Department in a number of different buildings on campus, some by choice, while others have been placed in other spaces due solely to availability. One can understand that the sense of community is diminished when people are physically separated. There appears to be a significant number of prime offices along the main corridor that could be reallocated to use more central to regular academic functioning. These offices should be assigned to regular full time faculty only. Research units should be given space that is smaller and less central. The space freed by the relocation of research units could better serve the department. Contractual and per course instructors need more privacy that would be available in, for example, the English Language Research Centre (ELRC) Room. But the MA students could all be housed in that room with some imaginative arranging of desks.

English Language Research Centre

With the department's decision to eliminate English 2390 as a required course and its recognition in the recent self-study that there is "no full-time faculty member with a commitment to the goals and projects of the ELRC" (page 25), it seems clear to the committee that there needs to be decision-making around the future location and purpose of the Centre in relation to the department as a whole. The panel sees the research (digitizing words, sayings, proverbs, place and family names) as being very important to the university and to the general public in the province. ELRC has a large amount of prime office-space in the department, adjacent to the secretarial staff and Department Head, that could be repurposed for use by graduate students who currently are housed in a small and dingy room with no external light and inadequate physical facilities (such as computer work stations or a sitting area conducive to meeting with undergraduate students). The physical archives of the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* are

being digitized and with this, the need for a space to house the notecard collection of word entries will be less pressing. Moreover, for preservation purposes, these archives should be housed in the library (potentially the Centre for Newfoundland Studies) or another venue on campus that would ensure the appropriate level of conservation and heighten the visibility of these materials to a wider audience of potential users. Although moving this Centre might be initially challenging and would require a considerable commitment by the department to take action and streamline their priorities, such a decision ultimately would be beneficial. The department needs to make choices that reflect a vision of the future, rather than relying for guidance based primarily on past endeavours when there is no longer the faculty interest to sustain them.

Survey of English Students

A survey was administered to both undergraduate and graduate students in the Department of English in March 2012. The panel appreciates the cooperation of CIAP, the Head, the instructors and the students in the collection of their opinions and experiences. The in-class undergraduate survey resulted in 372 completed forms, and the email survey to graduate students garnered 29 surveys.

Undergraduate Student Survey

In general the survey showed a fairly high degree of satisfaction with the space used for lectures and seminars, but less so with student society space and confusion about academic advising services. The undergraduate courses appear to stimulate interest and are offered in a wide range, with appropriate challenges. Instructors provide helpful feedback, inspire the students' interests and treat them with respect. Courses are not always available when needed and it is not always clear that a course prepares for a similar one at a higher level. In terms of personal development, students felt that the department's courses have really developed their writing and critical thinking skills. However, they expressed concern that speaking skills have not been as well developed and this may be an appropriate area of focus for some courses in the future. When asked about one thing that could be done to improve the educational experience of English students, there were varied answers. Some of the main ones were: better course selection, more attention to the diploma programs, more grading consistency among professors, making grammar required again and facilitating a better developed student society and advising system.

Graduate Student Survey

A majority of the respondents completed their undergraduate degree at Memorial. Students were attracted to MUN English by a number of factors such as: a previous positive experience in the Department, low tuition cost, nearness to home, working with a specific supervisor, and the opportunity to study Newfoundland literature. The graduate students pointed to a fairly poor sense of community in the Department and insufficient activities between faculty

and students beyond the strict course work and supervision. Again, there were some concerns with inadequate academic advising. The survey responses also outlined key problems relating to the level of funding received by some students. Several others pointed to the need for more interaction between graduate students, especially in the yearly cohorts. Many were disgruntled by the low diversity of course offerings. Suggested improvements include: “I do think that there should be more communal activities that bring faculty and graduate students together.”

Alignment with the University’s Strategic Plan

The self-study of 2011/12 was a more positive document than its predecessor. The study attempted to employ a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis to many of the issues facing the Department. This indicated that there was a careful consideration of these issues in the context of the current department, faculty and university at large. The Department arrived at a list of ten key strategies that had been developed since the last APR. The overriding objectives outlined in this document are to maintain a high standard of teaching and to foster a high standard of intellectual development of faculty and students. These objectives are in line with both the strategic plan of the university and the teaching and learning framework.

Some of these focus on funding and research. The objectives include: to focus on two or more research clusters, to encourage applications for external funding, to explore funding for specific activities, including outreach, to develop new undergraduate courses and increase student enrollment, to increase the visibility of the Department within the university and in the community, to support community arts activities, to foster the study of NL literature and culture, and to undertake faculty renewal. Clearly, these specific goals are in line with many of the goals of Memorial’s Strategic Plan. Concentrating on and advertising research clusters and collaborations should strengthen the ability to recruit graduate students and increase success in external funding competitions. The Department already does a commendable job of community outreach with regular theatrical, musical and literary events. Clearly, faculty members in the Department make a great contribution to the vibrant arts scene in the St. John’s area. The panel encourages them to continue with their valuable contributions to community outreach.

Several novel undergraduate courses have been developed since the last APR. These courses have captured specific markets for increased student enrollment both on campus and through distance modes. The Department should continue its regular commitment to programs at the Harlow campus as this has proven to be a great recruitment tool as well as a very satisfying university experience for most all participants, especially the students. The Department is currently developing an MA program in Creative Writing. This innovation should serve as a graduate recruitment tool as well as help to gel this research cluster within the Department.

The first goal of MUN’s strategic plan is titled Foster Student Success and Retention. The Department of English is quite aware of its pivotal position in the plan as it leads most

everything else in the self-study. Within the description of Goal 1 are several references to the university's first year, specifically bullet #6 which reads "*New initiatives will be developed to help improve overall performance in introductory English and Mathematics courses as a foundation for academic success.*"

Much of the English Department's collective energy and resources have been devoted to the first year courses for many years. The last APR report recommended 8-10 new positions to support the teaching of these mandatory first year courses. If that was not possible, then the report recommended a reduction in the English requirement at the first year from six to three credit hours for most students. However, neither of these requests was granted at the time by the Dean of Arts and/or at the Vice Presidential level. This created a sense of frustration within the Department. The commitment to first year teaching obligations is such a consuming issue in the self-study as well as the interviews that the panel believes that the Department should reconvene and if the reduction to three credit hours is still the agreed upon option, then it should again be presented to the Dean/VPA. Personnel changes and a focused teaching and learning framework might mean different responses now to the same proposal.

The health of the teaching and learning environment is central to an academic department. The Department is certainly cognizant of this, but can do more to support its faculty and students. In this report there are several suggestions for ways of improving the teaching and learning environment that are relatively simple, yet need a majority consensus in the department to move forward. A regular seminar series of papers previously delivered or works in progress has proven in other departments to develop a great sense of community, especially when graduate students are expected to deliver a paper at least once during their program. A healthy environment is one that is also open to change and recognizes that some things must be dropped and others embraced. Of course there must be debate at meetings regarding these items as they arise, but the environment of the departmental meeting is also integral to the health of the whole teaching and learning structure. In particular, this report recommends some substantial changes to the committee structure of the department. Adherence to these changes should improve the obstructive atmosphere of some departmental meetings and allow for more harmonious planning for the future.

Goal #20 of the university's strategic plan is entitled "Importance of People." Many of the issues that face the English Department are those of human resources relationships of faculty and staff. The Department has competent and contented staff who are appreciated by faculty and students. But the administrative and committee structure must establish appropriate mandates for operation. A regularized comprehensive mentoring system should be developed by award-winning teachers for the contractual and per course instructors. This could be done in a way that would not threaten the non-permanent faculty and build bridges which should aid in the creation of pedagogically sound courses and, at the same time, dispel much of the distrust and alienation felt by them. Such a change requires a collective and coherent commitment by all current

permanent faculty but with this backing, it could be done. Such action would be especially crucial should the first year system remain at *status quo*.

The panel was impressed by the number and range of committees and working groups in which members of the Department were involved within and beyond the university. Such commitment adds to the increasing visibility and reputation of the whole unit in the eyes of the larger university community. Many of these involve direct contact with the public as well as internally (e.g. convocation) and go a long way in bridging the gap between “town and gown.” Such academic service is valuable and should be continued.

Recommendations:

1. Continue lobbying through the Dean of Arts, Vice President Academic and all other routes to provide the funding necessary to restore the Reid Theatre to the levels needed to remain the theatrical centre of the university.
2. Rework the internal space of the English Department, especially the main corridor in the Arts Building to prioritize office space for current full time faculty, staff and graduate students. The ELRC should be moved to other space either in the QEII Library, or within the Faculty of Arts.
3. Continue with the Department’s successful attention to undergraduate and graduate teaching. More communal activities between faculty, staff and students could help build a more vibrant community.
4. Continue to focus on the ten strategies outlined in the self-study that have been developed since the last APR. These are in line with both the strategic plan and the teaching and learning framework of Memorial University.

II. UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS

The undergraduate programs in the Department of English at MUN are extremely wide-ranging, serving both the university population as a whole in the case of first year required courses, and offering a diverse array of choices for English Majors, Minors, Honours, and Joint Honours students, particularly through its Diploma programs in Creative Writing, Performance and Communications Media, and Professional Writing. The breadth of such a program creates enormous challenges, particularly at a time when the Department needs to make important decisions about its future directions. The committee did note that the undergraduate students who attended the site visit meeting were very enthusiastic about their experience as English Honours students and specifically commended Ms. Nava Bobby for carefully guiding them through the advising process. Moreover, the student response segment of the latest department study confirmed this sense of happiness amongst Majors, Minors, and Honours students in the department’s programs; the students feel that they have good access to their professors, that the

programs suits their needs, and that they are receiving a quality education. One small concern expressed was a lack of coherent community for undergraduate students, exacerbated by the dismal Undergraduate Lounge which the students seemed either unaware of or disinclined to use. The room seems to be a dumping ground for old books and files and little effort has been made to highlight its existence or promote its use amongst students. However, it could be a vital gathering place for undergraduates, who are—like the department faculty—dispersed among several buildings. A cheery coat of paint, a donated coffee maker with a collection jar, a bulletin board to advertise upcoming events (such as undergraduate conferences or social events) and a decluttering of the space along with signage telling students about its existence could be a cheap and effective way to create a more vibrant and coherent undergraduate community.

First Year Service Courses

Right now, the Department of English offers two first-year courses for virtually all students entering MUN. While a few faculties—Music and Engineering—require only one semester of English (usually English 1080: Critical Reading and Writing), most insist on 6-credit hours of first-year English, which means that almost every student at the university comes into contact with the department in his or her first year. This can—and has been—perceived as a burden, due to the large number of per-course instructors employed through such a commitment to the university; however, the committee does not believe that these first-year obligations are so much a resource issue, as a challenge for department morale and a means of ensuring divisiveness between part-time and full-time faculty members. In particular, the term “academic freedom” was frequently used during our site visit as a justification for not streamlining the offerings and selected texts for a course such as English 1080. Indeed, the self-study from November 2011 mentions precisely this concern (see page 17), and the resulting difficulty of creating a consistent vision for the first-year service courses since the ratification of LUMUN.

The question of the relationship between academic freedom and the development of curriculum for first year service courses is partially a matter of fair treatment between members of the Department of English who are under the MUN-MUNFA Collective agreement and those who are members of LUMUN. Both groups must consider the wisdom of allowing the department to develop a common curriculum for first-year courses that would be binding on all instructors, whether MUNFA or LUMUN members. A careful reading of Article 20 of the union agreement between LUMUN and MUN suggests that there is room to assert a common vision in these courses because while the per course instructors can exercise their right to academic freedom, “the design and/or presentation of the course” must accord with the university calendar description and is “subject to the regulations, resolutions, guidelines and policies of the University, including those of the Academic Unit” (16). The department should investigate whether the provisions on academic freedom in Article 2 of the MUN-MUNFA Collective Agreement may permit a fair application of such a common vision to all teaching staff.

The Department of English, through these first-year courses, touches the lives of most first-year MUN students (2278 students in fall of 2010), yet has failed to capitalize on this unique recruitment opportunity. That same year, there were 576 English Majors, 148 Minors, and only 28 Honours students, which represents, in total, just over 33% of the initial enrollment in first-year courses. Certainly having full-time permanent faculty staff some sections of those first year classes and actively recruit potential students is an excellent idea, and though it may not be easy given the resistance of enrolled students to taking these required courses, there will be times when recruiting can and will happen. Not all students will remain in the faculty they have chosen upon entering MUN, and this puts the English Department in a unique position to be seen as a welcoming alternative destination. The Department Head assigns teaching and should use this authority to ensure that the first-year courses are appropriately staffed by putting full-time faculty into regular rotation rather than allowing full-time faculty to use releases to avoid teaching introductory courses. Perhaps more importantly, improving the morale of the per course instructors, which may be achieved in several ways, could make the task of changing perceptions about these courses for faculty and staff easier. Firstly, building faculty morale can have an immediate impact on part-time or per course instructors. Creating clear and effective governance structures that give the Department Head much needed support in conducting his or her job, and ensure strong and consistent communication channels throughout the department can translate into happier staff members. But the department also should consider the following larger questions, namely, is teaching two terms of first year courses to the university as a whole necessary or beneficial to the Department? How would the Department's status change in relation to the University as a whole, if that obligation was reduced? Given that the 2011 Department's self-study describes the efforts made in 2007 to reduce English's commitment to first-year service courses by cutting the general requirement from 6 credit hours to 3 credit hours, the committee would advocate revisiting that proposal; there have been significant changes in the administration of the Faculty and the University that could result in a different outcome. But the department also needs to understand that in making these changes, they will see a reduction in per course instructor assignments. Shifting from the 6-credit hour to 3-credit hour obligation could also be an opportune time to turn some of those positions into limited term contract positions that would remain focused on first-year teaching commitments yet also ensure that there are fewer, slightly better paid instructors who might be more readily incorporated into the department. Such a reduction in staffing has residual benefits with respect to space allocation too—with fewer per course instructors, it could be easier to find more appropriate office space for them. Finally, it would benefit the department to consider what role the First Year Committee plays in facilitating the success of these first year courses. The committee does not appear to have much involvement with per course instructors; the committee primarily reads and approves exams. Moreover, it is staffed exclusively by full-time faculty members, who may or may not have taught the first-year curriculum. Such a committee exemplifies the governance challenges faced by the Department of English. Ideally, a First Year Committee, if its existence was deemed necessary by the department in its strategic planning and vision of a governance

structure, could become a site for outreach and community building between part-time and full-time faculty, and a resource for new and experienced instructors of these courses.

The external review committee understands that part of the attraction of retaining the current first-year service component of the department is because of an instituted tuition incentive structure, which provides budget for the department based on the number of students occupying seats. Not surprisingly, this incentive has had a paralyzing effect on the department's efforts to change that obligation. It would behoove the Vice-President, Academic, and the university at large to make an exception for the Department of English in this instance, and to allow the department to make self-sustaining and focused decisions about its existence and its future. Conversely, only with better governance will the department gain more credibility for its choices and be able to actively shape its own vision in relation to the university as a whole; these go together and thus, a clear articulation of the department's present and future plans (including its approach to first-year service courses) should be undertaken before approaching higher administration to initiate such changes.

ESL Program

The Department of English is currently, in the words of one reviewer, "juggling too many balls." One of those balls is the ESL Program which is part of the department's longstanding commitment to language studies. The ESL Program, while ostensibly part of the Department of English at MUN, now operates as a virtually autonomous unit with the very capable program head, Janet Bengler, reporting in her capacity as the head of IE directly to the Dean of Arts. Given that both IE and ESL have been relocated to Spencer Hall and that the mandate of these programs differs from that of English, the Faculty of Arts should recognize its responsibility to administer the programs separately from the English Department. Memorial University has actively recruited both undergraduate and graduate students in foreign countries whose mother tongue is not English. There is a distinct increase in students needing ESL education. The university should increase its commitment to service these students with qualified, at least contractual, instructors who can plan their upcoming terms and the necessary pedagogy. This piecemeal last minute instruction should not continue; if the university is recruiting these students, then there has to be a better investment in their special needs. Moreover, the panel wonders whether or not the ESL credit courses should be administered by the English Department. They could be renamed ESL courses and administered by the Dean of Arts Office where the ESL manager reports in the first instance. Removing the link to the English Department would lighten their load and centralize the ESL endeavour, perhaps making it possible for the DOA to request funding support for this essential service to an ever-growing foreign student cohort.

Undergraduate Co-ordinator

The Department of English has no Undergraduate English Co-ordinator in its current governance structure, a gap that has resulted in inertia when revising undergraduate programming, purging inactive courses, and guiding the overall vision of what undergraduate studies in English at MUN aims to achieve through its curriculum planning. While shaping undergraduate programs is ultimately a collective departmental process and product, there needs to be leadership to ensure that quality, viability, and coherence are constantly being examined and refined. The Undergraduate Co-ordinator would, ideally, be appointed and supported by the Department Head; s/he would be given at least a one-course remission to ensure that there is accommodation for the increased administrative workload, and would lead a committee on Undergraduate Programming that would, in concert with Ms. Bobby, provide a faculty-driven framework for recruitment and retention of students. While Ms. Bobby's position has streamlined the advising process and her hands-on approach with students has been successful, interaction with full-time faculty is vital to the sustained success and growth of undergraduate enrollments—from the first-year courses onward. Moreover, the Undergraduate Co-ordinator and committee should set the agenda for the future. In particular, the committee may want to begin by revisiting course calendar listings, which are abundant but don't necessarily reflect current department offerings and thus give students an inaccurate and needlessly confusing introduction to the department. Presenting a clearly articulated program that is not littered with inactive courses is critical when reaching out to students; by refining the course offerings, the department will create a logical narrative about its purpose, aims, and goals to students, staff, and other units. Moreover, during the external review students noted that they would like to see a theory course offered as early as the second year of the degree and a more logical flow of courses from year to year; these are suggestions that should be explored by the Undergraduate Co-ordinator and committee. At a practical level, the handbook could use some refinement, including more detailed and engaging course titles and descriptions (which may not be as readily accomplished through course calendar entries where length is highly regulated) and information about who is scheduled to teach what courses, at least at the more senior levels. That link between professors, their areas of expertise, and their courses bridges the gap between teaching and research and enables students to contact professors in advance to get reading lists and introduce themselves, if they wish to do so. It also ensures that students have a clearer idea of who might be an appropriate supervisor for an Honours research paper. In other words, the experience of undergraduates can, in small ways, be much more personalized with very little effort on the part of faculty members.

Diploma Programs

The Department of English has some wonderful and potentially very important recruitment tools through its administration and teaching of three Diploma programs in Creative Writing, Professional Writing, and Performance and Communications Media. But again, the viability of these programs should reflect current faculty interests and be supported and nurtured

according to department strengths and its collective vision for the future. The enrollments in these programs vary, though all three are relatively small due to the kind of teaching required, often through hands-on training (performance) or workshopping of individual submissions (creative and professional writing). The Undergraduate Co-ordinator in concert with the Undergraduate Programming committee and the heads of each Diploma program need to decide on whether all three streams are sustainable. If an MA in Creative Writing is developed, the undergraduate diploma in Creative Writing could become a potential feeder for the best and brightest students, and might quite productively be turned into a Minor. The current faculty strengths in the department would support such a change and be a way to sell the Department of English at MUN as distinctive, particularly because there is such a vibrant writing culture in Newfoundland from which to draw when organizing readings, author visits to classrooms, and writer-in-residence stints, as well as potential adjunct faculty or honorary research associates. Likewise, the Performance and Communications Media diploma seems to be thriving, with enrollments exceeding capacity. To address this, the Undergraduate Co-ordinator and committee should, in conjunction with the department as whole, decide if this is a priority and strategically plan to request a faculty hire in the near future to sustain this program. Pragmatically speaking, this diploma also needs some basic resources including a usable and safe theatre space; placing the maintenance of the Reid Theatre in the domain of the English Department is reprehensible, given the department's limited budget. The university is responsible for maintaining that communal space and if it isn't willing to repair and renovate the theatre back to a usable condition, the university needs to find a modest location from which to run the Diploma in Performance and Communications Media, perhaps in the form of a smaller space that could be used by students to build sets and learn basic technical skills. To make such an argument, however, the department needs to show through an integrated strategic plan why the creation of such a workspace should be a university priority, and how it will directly benefit students. Without that larger vision, convincing the university to undertake this small but vital project may be impossible. Finally, the Professional Writing Diploma is in need, as its director has stated, of some simple curricular revisions that will differentiate it from the Creative Writing stream; as well, courses that reflect current trends in professional writing would strengthen the diploma's relevance to current undergraduates (through a course on Writing for the Web, most obviously). Again, the Undergraduate Co-ordinator and committee should, in consultation with the directors of these diploma programs, review their viability and whether all three can realistically be serviced by the department to the level they would need to be in order to thrive. Focusing on areas of strength and developing those niches may be more productive than retaining all three diploma options, but that decision can only be made by the department. Advertising through the website and making visible the diploma programs by word of mouth, local media, and targeted recruitment should also ensure their health into the future.

Recommendations for the Undergraduate Program:

1. Revitalize the undergraduate student lounge.
2. Dean of Arts Office to take administrative control of the English as a Second Language Program. That should enable planning for a more stable teaching staff and lobbying for more funds to support the increasing international student numbers.
3. Appointment of an Undergraduate Co-ordinator with a single course remission in order to oversee undergraduate course revisions, curriculum planning, website updates of offerings, developing links between faculty and their areas of expertise and organization of community oriented activities.
4. Undergraduate Co-ordinator and the Co-ordinators of the three diploma programs should do a thorough review of these programs to reflect the availability of specialty teaching and current trends in the sub-disciplines. The results of this review should be brought to the Department for action, if required.
5. Revisit the proposal to reduce to three credit hours the current general requirement for most incoming students to do six credit hours of courses in English. The current situation is clearly having a paralyzing effect on the Department's ability to plan for the future.
6. Increase mentoring and integration of per course and contractual instructors through the large pool of teaching award winners in the Department.

III. GRADUATE PROGRAM

Memorial has a longstanding graduate program in English with unique strengths and opportunities, along with a set of challenges. We begin by observing that administration of the program is clearly in better shape than it was nine years ago when the last APR was conducted, and the Department is to be commended for its work so far.

One of the successes of the PhD program, the self-study states, is that it attracts students working in contemporary, Canadian, and Newfoundland literatures; some graduates in these areas have landed permanent jobs after graduation. (However, last year no PhD students came to MUN, so the lack of new students even in these areas is indeed a cause of concern.) A continuing strength of the program, as reported by students, is that PhD students receive training in teaching during the first term of their enrollment and thereafter teach independently, ensuring that they leave the program as seasoned instructors. The MA program also has sustained certain strengths, continuing to admit students for the thesis option and the coursework option. With respect to coursework, both the PhD and the MA program benefit from a minor but critical improvement:

the Department has consistently planned and offered ten courses per year, as the Report of 2003 recommended. The graduate page of the Department's website presents a complete account of programs, including descriptions of courses well in advance of the year in which they are offered. (A minor suggestion: revise the rather stodgy standing titles for courses—"Studies in 17th-century Literature," etc.—to reflect contemporary scholarly practice and values.) The Department seems to have eliminated some of the basic administrative problems noted in the last Report.

One of the most significant developments since 2003, however, is likely the addition of a cohort of young, ambitious faculty members to the ranks. This group is short of a critical mass and still slightly junior, but if the Department can continue to hire as positions come open, then the graduate program may be on the verge of a renewal. The increasing centrality of this group—witness the role they played in producing the new self-study—along with the continuing presence of senior members of the Department active in research, supervision, and administration augurs well for the future. As noted already, the graduate program is better organized and, therefore, has a stronger "infrastructure" than it did nine years ago. These things together provide reason for confidence in the continuing improvement of the program and its prospects. There remains, however, much to be done, especially in light of the recent decline in admissions to the PhD program.

Certainly, the provision of adequate funding for graduate students is basic. A program simply cannot attract good students in significant numbers if it cannot compete with other programs financially. Increasing funding options will be essential to future success, and the University, if it wants to see its graduate programs in the Humanities flourish, needs to show its support in the form of funding equivalent to that provided by mainland universities. The Department should continue to present the case for improved funding using comparative data and whatever else it can muster to make its case. The emphasis of this Report, however, is on what the Department can do on its own terms, partly in order to make that case to the University in the most positive way, arguing from the position of certainty about its own potential. This Report as a whole suggests that the Department must jettison or minimize some of the burdensome and unwieldy responsibilities it carries in order to better fulfill its core mission, of which a key component is its graduate programs. Graduate education is increasingly important across the country; governments have been promoting graduate growth for several years now, and MUN's own position among other universities will depend partly on its success in graduate education across the disciplines. In this connection, one might question the relevance of the view, expressed in plaintive terms in the self-study, that one of the Department's challenges in recruiting is the limited number of Honours students applying to MA programs. In fact, there are increasing numbers of students applying to MA programs, and it behooves the Department to take advantage of this trend. Understandably, the Department might feel itself to be in a double-bind: in order to get more support from the University, the Department needs to improve its graduate programs; in order to improve, the Department needs more support. It is the case rather

that the Department needs to continue its good work on two fronts. The university, of course, has its part to play; what we want to emphasize is that the Department can do more in its own bailiwick.

Areas of Action for the Graduate Program

1. Support for Students. A graduate program is a collective enterprise. A successful graduate program is successful because of the contributions made by faculty members as a whole. It is incumbent upon all faculty members, then, to exercise something like a “duty of care” with respect to graduate students. This means not just working well with individual students but collaborating with other faculty members in supervising and developing mature scholar-teachers; supporting the process of professionalization; and performing all the less tangible, but nevertheless crucial, gestures that create the nimbus of possibility surrounding every successful program. For students, atmosphere is important, or, to put it another way, students are formed as scholar-teachers in part by the culture of the program of which they are a part. Despite the positive words in the self-study about faculty mentoring and advising (p. 7), our visit suggested that support for graduate students is at best uneven among faculty members. Graduate students report areas of definite satisfaction, but this is usually attached to specific faculty members. One student apparently felt the need early on to go outside of the Department to find professional support and intellectual community. Another complained about the “toxic” atmosphere at some department meetings. This can be profoundly alienating to students and it is the faculty members’ responsibility to make things better.

In more concrete terms, it appears that the Department needs to provide consistent professional support. While it is important for the Department to be concerned about graduating PhD students into an uncertain employment situation, we agree with one student who complained that PhD students need, not negating reflections on the job market, but first and foremost positive professional support in their efforts to advance in the profession they have chosen. This might include, for example, regular “brown bags” on aspects of professionalization. Admittedly, it is important for the program, like others in the country, to educate students about the general value of their degree, and, like other programs, to educate itself in order to provide professional advice to students about non-academic careers.

2. Administration of the Programs. Elsewhere in the Report we comment on the lack of coherence in Department governance (see below). This extends to the graduate program. We learned that there are two administrative positions: a Graduate Co-ordinator and a Graduate Chair. Aside from everyday confusions about responsibility that must arise from this division of labour, the fragmentation of leadership cannot be good for the program. Future success will depend on leadership provided by a single individual who is close to the both the everyday functions of the programs and to planning. Running a graduate program is a major service commitment. The Graduate Co-ordinator must be invested with responsibility for all aspects of the program, supported by a committee (the formation of which is addressed elsewhere in the

Report), on the one hand, and by the Head, on the other. The result of such a commitment, enabled by appropriate course remission, will be a more coherent, well-managed program than appears to be possible with the current arrangement.

In this connection, we might mention an area of administrative ambiguity that came up in discussion with graduate students. We heard concerns about the administration of PhD exams, including a lack of clarity about who is responsible for assembling the student's committee. Certainly, it is the case that students sometimes fail in their responsibility to inform themselves properly. The structure of the exams is clearly outlined in the graduate portion of the website. But it is easy to imagine how a problem like this could arise from (again) an unwieldy administrative arrangement. To start with, it seems hardly necessary to have the Head *and* the Graduate Co-ordinator sit on every exam committee, along with *three other faculty members!* Getting the members of a five-person committee together can be a challenge in itself. Three, or even two, members should be adequate, with the Graduate Co-ordinator, or his/her representative from the graduate committee present to chair the oral portion of the exams. The Head need not be involved if the Graduate Co-ordinator is properly invested with authority to run the program. Add to this frustration the very intensely demanding experience of the exam—three sessions in one week—and we can see how unnecessarily stressful the exam process will be for students if it is not administered with absolute clarity.

3. Recruitment. The key thing to highlight about recruitment is the difference between recruitment at the point of application and recruitment at the point of admissions. The Department needs, in the first instance, to work on increasing the number of applications to its programs. In other words, the “success and failure in recruiting” to which the self-study alludes needs to be addressed by increasing the number of applications before it can hope to increase admissions. In addition, one of the by-products of increased numbers of applications will be to strengthen the Department's position when it comes to lobbying the University. The Department needs to embark on a virtual campaign to identify potential applicants by highlighting its strengths—the local setting and community and low tuition, along with the academic features of the program—and to reach potential applicants through channels both formal and informal: email posters and other forms of advertising, contact with colleagues at other universities, etc.. The Department's website is crucial in this regard. The Department has made great strides since 2003 in improving content and general design. It should be noted, though, that while students are interested in information about courses and program requirements, they are also interested in faculty members. Here is a place where the collective image of the program is important and where the faculty's uneven commitment to the program is made graphic. Some faculty members have no profile while the presentation of existing profiles is inconsistent. This is partly a matter of form, but achieved form communicates competence, confidence, and the sense of collective enterprise. The Department needs to consult further with SGS about strategies for recruitment as well as any Departments at MUN that have recently improved the pool of applicants to their programs.

4. The M.A Program. So far we have focused on the PhD program, but it is at the MA level that the Department can make the most marked and bold changes and stands to make the greatest gains. Some of these gains may flow into the PhD program. The self-study makes the unremarkable claim that one of the greatest strengths of the MA program is its flexibility: students can complete the degree through course work only or by course work plus thesis. However, many MA programs have even more flexibility since they include the option of a Major Paper equivalent to two courses, along with the thesis and coursework options. The Department needs to find other forms of distinction. In fact, it might actually benefit the Department to promote the coursework MA as a standard to increase enrolment in classes. Some committee members were surprised to hear from an MA student that part way through his first year he decided to write a thesis, informed the Graduate Co-ordinator, and was granted a second year of funding. Subsequent review of guidelines on the website revealed that thesis students are effectively enrolled in a different program with different funding commitments, even though the different MAs are exactly equivalent degrees. The Department might consider whether to eliminate this difference. Providing a second year of funding for one existing MA student effectively, as we understand it, eliminates one offer that might be made to an incoming MA student.

In making our strongest recommendation about the MA program we essentially wish to support a proposal already under discussion by the Department. It seems to us that the most positive move the Department might make to improve its graduate programs is to develop an MA in Creative Writing. The reasons are many. If the Department is, as the self-study claims, in competition with a large number of programs for a limited supply of potential MA students, this is definitely not the case in Creative Writing. There are still a limited number of graduate programs in Creative Writing in Canada and a large number of potential applicants. MUN is ideally suited and situated to develop a successful program. The benefits are easy to list: more applications to the graduate programs as whole; more students in courses; closer connections with the community; prestige for the Department and, possibly, for the University; more students in MA programs leading to increased applications to the PhD program. Finally, the idea of a one or two-year sojourn in St. John's as a creative writing student will likely have a broad appeal not only in Canada but in the United States. An MA program then provides an opportunity for the Department to contribute to the University's international recruitment campaign.

In the view of the committee, the Department ought to make an MA in Creative Writing a priority, if not "a rush." Developing the program would be a major task within the remit of the Graduate Co-ordinator and his or her committee. There are many ways to run a program but the remarkably successful seven-year old University of Toronto program might serve as a model. As that program draws on the Toronto writing community for mentors, similarly MUN might draw on the remarkable writing community in St John's. There are many questions to be answered. The prospect of an MA in Creative Writing at MUN, however, is an exciting one and we recommend that the Department draw on all possible resources to make it a reality.

Recommendations for the Graduate Program:

1. Develop an MA in Creative Writing. Prioritize the program in all aspects of planning, including hiring.
2. Eliminate the position of Graduate Chair and invest authority in the Graduate Coordinator who, with appropriate course release, will run the program and develop new initiatives with the support of the committee with whom he/she works closely and with the support of the Head to whom he/she reports.
3. Start a campaign to increase applications to the programs through various forms of outreach. Consult with other Departments and work more closely with SGS to find creative ideas for recruitment and funding.
4. Establish regular forms of support for PhD students to help develop a more coherent and healthy program culture, which will nourish the intellectual and professional aspirations of students in the Department's care.
5. Continue to refine the website's content and design, including, for example, providing more consistent presentation of faculty and their interests.
6. Examine program structure at the PhD level, to see if certain processes, like area exams, might be streamlined.
7. Reflect on MA thesis second-year and whether it is advisable to keep it, given funding constraints.
8. Continue to offer at least ten graduate courses per year.
9. Rename/remove many of the graduate courses in the calendar to reflect contemporary practice.

IV. PLANNING ISSUES & PROCESS

The means by which an academic department administers its academic programs is as important as the undergraduate and graduate curricula that comprise them. At first glance, a comparison of the 2003 and 2011 self-studies, and a consideration of the 2003 Academic Program Review report, suggest that resource issues related to complement, faculty renewal, and the first-year program were significant problems for the Department of English, and a perceived lack of university action on the report's resource recommendations is a significant source of poor

morale in the department. However, the complex administrative structure of the Department of English appears to be a more important impediment to the establishment of clear planning and priorities that would allow the department to better advocate for appropriate resources on its own behalf.

The evidence for administrative problems emerged many times from the individual submissions of faculty, staff and students to the Academic Program Review Panel. For example, the 2011 self-study suggests that the working environment and morale of the department of English has improved significantly since 2003. Yet, in a number of interviews panel members were cautioned not to take such improvement for granted because the department had consciously decided to “put its best foot forward” rather than to create the impression that there were problems to overcome. A recurrent theme was that department meetings often took an unpleasant turn, and are easily derailed by strong personalities. Few people indicated that they were clear about who was responsible for setting department priorities, what were the precise relationships between officers of the department, and between these officers and the other administrative departments of the university. Most disturbing were comments that suggested that faculty may well speak inappropriately of each other within the hearing of students, that some people associated with the department have difficulty accepting decisions made collectively by their colleagues, and that newer faculty continue to feel that they work amidst deeply rooted tensions that, no matter how tenacious, have no place within a department that has experienced considerable renewal in the past seven years.

The Academic Review Panel would like the Department of English to consider whether the current administrative structure of the department is an outgrowth of old tensions, one that may keep the tensions alive long after the original reasons for them have disappeared. The diffuse administrative structure of the department appears to provide for an inefficient administration of academic programs or development of new initiatives. The basic administrative structure described in the Policies and Procedures Manual seems to be quite old, aside from the very positive development of a committee established to promote research and the establishment of a manager of academic programs. The otherwise complicated structure appears to be directed more at creating a system of checks and balances on power in the department than clearly administering academic programs.

For example, as we noted above, the Department of English delegates responsibility from the Head to a Graduate Co-ordinator. While the Graduate Co-ordinator handles the relationship between the department and the School of Graduate Studies, most of the officer’s work is related to handling promotion of the graduate program, handling of graduate applications and graduate students’ funding applications, course offerings, and establishment of supervisory and examination committees. However, the Graduate Co-ordinator may only work in conjunction with a Graduate Studies Committee, which appears to have all of the legislative authority for the Department of English’s graduate program. The Graduate Studies Committee also elects its own chair. All committees in the department are staffed on the recommendation of a Committee on

Committees. The Department Head serves “ex-officio” on all committees. Overall, this seems to be a very cumbersome structure that apparently allocates too much of the department’s faculty resources to the administration of the graduate program. The great pains taken to separate the process of developing policy and procedures for the graduate program from its administration – the legislative from the executive – seems to be unnecessary.

The situation appears even more complicated for the undergraduate program. There is no Undergraduate Co-ordinator, but the department has a full-time Manager of Academic Programs. The department has an Undergraduate Studies Committee and a First Year Studies Committee. Both committees have their own chairs. It is unusual to have two committees delegated with responsibilities for an undergraduate program. The arrangement appears to have originated in the special status of English first year courses in the university’s overall curricula. While the first-year teaching obligations make heavy demands on departmental resources, our panel heard that the First Year Studies Committee does very little now but review first-year examinations. We also heard that, despite the listing of duties for the Manager of Academic Programs, there is a somewhat confusing overlap between this position and the work of the Head.

Our overall impression is that the English Department has too many committees, committee chairs, and co-ordinators to allow for clear planning of its academic programs. Further, although the department has lengthy lists of the responsibilities for many of these, it does not have a clear understanding about what the Head should be doing. The Department’s Policies and Procedures Manual correctly notes that “the Head is responsible for the Department academically and administratively,” but it is difficult for our Panel to understand what this means in the context of planning and implementation of academic programs. Our Panel heard, time and again, of concerns about inertia in the department and of a lack of direction and leadership. However, we also heard that the Head has a great deal to do in simply trying to manage diplomatically the various tensions of the department. Our Panel contends that the structure of the Department of English is also so complex and burdensome that it likely distracts rather than assists the Head.

We recommend that the Department of English provide itself with a simpler administrative structure. Such a structure must be founded on a commitment to planning for the future rather than enshrining an administrative legacy of past departmental tensions.

Recommendations for Departmental Planning and Process:

1. One graduate committee chaired by a graduate co-ordinator. The graduate co-ordinator would be appointed by the head, but the committee should be constituted by the department, possibly through election.
2. One undergraduate committee constituted by the department, possibly through election. The First-Year Studies Committee would be eliminated. The Manager of Academic Programs could serve ex-officio as a non-voting member. However, this position is a

non-academic appointment and may not be responsible for academic decisions under university regulations. The undergraduate committee would require a chair/program coordinator, with appropriate course remission, who would oversee the program. Although the Manager of Academic Programs replaced the former position of Undergraduate Coordinator, it would be desirable to restore this position to serve as chair of the committee and to guide the undergraduate program.

3. Clear delineation of the Head's (including delegation of the Undergraduate Co-ordinator) and the Manager of Academic Program's responsibilities for the administration of the undergraduate program. The Head must be conscious that academic matters and the course plan are the responsibility of that position by university regulations. As part of this process, the Head should be very careful about what that person should actually be dealing with directly or simply referring to other university departments. In particular, matters related to the academic freedom of instructors are matters of interpretation of various collective agreements, and are best dealt with in consultation with the Office of Faculty Relations.
4. A Policy and Priorities Committee to advise and support the Head in the development of strategic initiatives for the department. This committee would be chaired by the Head, and should be comprised of the graduate coordinator, chair of the undergraduate committee, one or two other members elected by the department, and the holder of a new position: a deputy head.
5. A Deputy Head could either be appointed on the recommendation of the Head or by election from the department. University procedures provides for the Dean's authority in the appointment of an Interim Head during the Head's absence. Ideally, the Deputy Head would be suitable for this role. The purpose of this appointment would be for the department to identify likely successors for the Head, and to provide a means for such successors' training. In return, the Head would have a person to whom they might delegate specific responsibilities or from whom they might ask assistance.

Under this proposed structure, other committees would have to be reviewed in terms of an overall assessment of what the Department of English may actually do in the future.

CONCLUSIONS:

The Department of English at Memorial University has a dedicated commitment to teaching and learning and a vision for a focusing of some research agendas. Individual members play key roles in departmental, faculty, university-wide, national and international committees and organizations. There is a vibrant connection with the arts community and the general public in the province. The review panel applauds the contributions and the efforts of many to forge a path ahead for the Department. The observations and recommendations that appear in this APR report represent the unanimous consensus of four external colleagues. The Department is doing

lots of things “right”. Yet, there are many areas described herein, where the panel recommends changes. We urge the Department to view these as ways whereby some challenges could be overcome. We agree with the graduate student who said in a questionnaire “*I think the English Department has the ability to make their program(s) great with some organization and some effort.*” We also understand that in order to booster morale and foster a positive sense of looking forward, there has to be faculty renewal incremental to retirement replacements. Because of drastic cuts in faculty numbers that occurred in the 1990s from which the Department has not really recovered, we strongly recommend that two new faculty positions be awarded to the Department. Two positions, we believe, along with normal replacements, would help accelerate the process of faculty renewal initiated since the last APR and support crucial new programs like an MA in Creative Writing. The areas of expertise of these new positions, however, will be determined by a consensus of the reorganized department.

Recommendation:

1. Two incremental faculty positions, areas of specialty determined by departmental majority following the restructuring described herein.