

## English Department Review

College of Humanities and Social Sciences  
North Carolina State University

### Review Team:

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## Purpose

An external review of the academic programs of the Department of English from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHASS) was conducted on October 17 - 18, 2022. The review team met with the Dean of CHASS, the Associate Dean for Academic and Faculty Affairs of CHASS as well as the Dean of the Graduate School, the Senior Associate Dean from DASA, program administrators, staff, students, and faculty. This report is based on information from those meetings and the self-study report provided by the department. It consists of strengths of the program and areas for improvement with accompanying recommendations.

The following document is meant to give guidance to the incoming department head, to others in departmental leadership, and also to make suggestions for targeted work as part of the next departmental strategic plan. The committee finds many strengths in the work of the English department and its faculty, which it wants to mark, while making suggestions for future work.

This review committee did not feel that it had adequate data to be able to make specific recommendations on program prioritization or budget reallocation. We could see where resources need to be increased, but we lack the information to be able to determine from where those resources should be taken.

The committee also wants to stress that the issues identified below are not the responsibility of any one person to address. We are recommending that the department spend time thinking about the following issues and recommendations, understanding that we are primarily outsiders making these recommendations.

## Executive summary

Some issues rose to the surface frequently in our meetings and discussions.

One was the **lack of resources** in the form of competitive salaries, faculty lines, travel funding, and support for research. Though we commend the work that has been done to raise graduate student stipends, many more resources need to be funneled into the English department to address the resource issue.

Another large issue **centered on communication**, both among faculty of different ranks and between department leadership (including committee and program heads) and faculty. The review committee noted instances where faculty across the ranks and programs did not understand how or why decisions were made, how roles were defined, how career progressions were made, general governance issues, and what constituted different faculty ranks. We also heard the desire for greater communication and clarity about the budget from the college and department. Communication on the intradepartmental level likely needs attention, including work on and education on the department's bylaws and policies, which could be achieved through committee work as well as the work of leadership. Suggestions for communication are threaded into the recommendations below.

Third, an issue of **morale** came up in conversations across the department. Some of this is the result of the above two points (low resources and also communication), but as well, we wonder about a lack of community across the ranks. Tenured/tenure track faculty expressed higher job satisfaction and a sense of community than professional teaching faculty, but across the board we heard the words “burnt out.”

## Strengths

- English serves as a “big tent” that brings together a range of scholarly and creative interests. The department exhibits very productive synergies across programs. While the manifest needs of the various academic areas are in competition for limited resources, the committee noted a lack of in-fighting and resentment among the programs. The department’s innovation in collaborations and interdisciplinary structure are also positives.
- Several programs, including Linguistics, Film, and Professional Writing, offer courses that attract undergraduate majors who might not otherwise find themselves in English.
- The department and CHASS promote a culture of high achievement in scholarship. The faculty have an outstanding record of earning prestigious awards and fellowships. Somewhat unusual for an English department is the fact that several faculty members have also been awarded large extramural grants, and they praised the CHASS staff who helped in the development of these proposals.
- The department is housed in a space that a number of members of the community have identified as adequate and welcoming. Private offices for faculty and adequate space for conferencing with students cannot be overestimated as an asset for morale and cohesion.
- Graduate student funding increases will make recruiting easier and also increase student ability to not have to seek outside jobs.
- Decisions about departmental priorities in hiring faculty come from a representative faculty committee, a structure that offers a strong model for shared governance.
- The department is relatively stable (in fact, quite healthy) in terms of students overall and numbers of majors and graduate students, which is not the typical situation nationwide for English departments.
- Graduate students in the MSTC program described the professional development, mentoring, and overall program communication as phenomenal. Graduate students reported receiving weekly emails about job opportunities in the field. The steady communication as well as access to faculty gives them confidence in their ability to locate a job in their field after graduation.

- Graduate students spoke very highly of the faculty.
- In the meeting with Dean Dannels and other university administrators, there was no shortage of praise for the management of the department and the department's overall reputation. In the midst of the significant and ongoing budget changes, the Dean reported that the department has "held its own" and that English was "held in high regard" in the College. The department's programs, in particular the graduate programs, were described as having a "stellar reputation," and the Dean said she was "proud" of the department and its many accomplishments, noting its strength in DEI work.
- Undergraduate students strongly identify with the department and feel well connected with the faculty. They recognize the value of the department's small classes in fostering learning communities.
- The MFA program in Creative Writing has solidified its national reputation in part due to the caliber of its current faculty, but also because recent MFA alumni have moved on to notable careers as writers and/ or professors. The program received high marks from current students and alumni about its close-knit community, and the quality of mentorship and instruction.
- The MSTC and Rhetoric and Professional Writing program faculty have national reputations for their research and publication profiles. Their exemplary credentials should continue to be leveraged for recruitment into undergraduate and graduate programs.
- The Linguistics faculty have outstanding records of scholarship and have also served the University's land-grant mission through trailblazing efforts in community outreach. The North Carolina Language and Life Project has established an internationally recognized model for translating scholarly insights into meaningful actions through community-based collaborations. These efforts are seen across the state as well as across the campus and thus raise the profile of the department among various constituencies.
- The graduate programs have an "on ramp" through non-degree seeking courses for non-traditional students who wish to return to school for a career change, which makes the department an asset to the larger research triangle community.
- The department has excellent collaborative relationships with libraries and their unique digital resources, special collections, and high-tech spaces.
- The department has a long history of participating in, and providing leadership for, DEI programs and initiatives. Since the last program review, all graduate programs demonstrated considerable improvement in ethnic and racial diversity within their enrollment numbers.
- The department has a great deal of latitude in terms of its budget, salaries, contracts, and other decisions, which could facilitate making changes.

## Areas for Improvement with Recommendations

### I. Larger Workforce Issues

- A. **DEI:** Recruitment and retention of faculty and students of color needs further attention, with support from the college and university.

**Recommendations:**

- Increase funding for recruitment and retention of faculty and students of color.
  - Create special programs and pipelines for recruitment of underrepresented students and faculty.
  - Within the department as well as at the college and university levels, resources should be allocated to build structures to support faculty of color more effectively. In addition to mentoring, such resources could support research workshops, initiatives, speakers, and research funding earmarked for diversity, equity, and inclusion projects.
  - Fund targeted hiring initiatives at the college level. The College recently lost nine faculty of color and even if those losses can be explained with individual extenuating circumstances, an aggressive recruitment response is warranted. The College could invite departments to submit proposals for targeted diversity hires. Other universities have taken this [approach to increase faculty diversity](#). An investment in hiring now will help the College adhere to its goal of strengthening diversity across its research, teaching, and service missions. Targeted hiring initiatives will help the College and the department meet Goal 3 of the College's new Strategic Plan that calls for "groundbreaking and effective action to promote equity, diversity and inclusion."
  - Improve support structures within the department and across campus for faculty of color. If the department cannot provide senior faculty of color to mentor junior faculty, colleagues from other units might be invited to provide additional mentoring. This work must be made visible and compensated.
  - Create additional funding and mentoring support for students of color.
- B. **Rank of hiring:** Retirements have created a hiring situation that threatens to result in a bottom heavy department, without enough senior faculty for mentoring early career faculty or for moving into (and out of) departmental leadership positions. This is also impacting the research, as senior research faculty noted that they were not able to pursue major external funding as systematically as they could due to service and teaching commitments that are limiting the possibility of externally funded research leaves.

**Recommendations:** Create half of the faculty searches in the next five years as open rank hires, and recruit heavily senior faculty, especially senior faculty of color. Again, we recommend that the college aid the department in this endeavor.

- C. **Funding for future positions:** The forthcoming engineering enrollment expansion will put significant pressure on existing course caps and create pressure to hire a large number of professional teaching faculty. These positions will need to be funded.

**Recommendations:** Funding for new positions to address the increase in enrollment over the next five years needs to be a high priority for the Provost and Dean. Salary issues have led to retention and morale problems amongst existing professional teaching faculty and so current positions and new positions should be funded at competitive levels. Positions should be split between tenure track and professional faculty.

The increased enrollment in engineering will also drive demand for upper division writing courses, especially ENG 331: Communication for Engineering and Technology. Faculty administrators who manage the teaching assistants and Professional Faculty who teach the many sections of this course are doing excellent work staffing sections and supporting those instructors. However, as demand for ENG 331 grows (along with ENG 332: Communication for Business and Management and ENG 333: Communication for Science and Research) additional tenure-track faculty are needed to stabilize the program. The professional faculty who teach ENG 331, 332, and 333 strongly desire to diversify their teaching opportunities with a course other than these three at least once a year. Allowing professional faculty to teach other undergraduate courses within their areas of expertise will assist with morale and help them grow their teaching portfolios.

Moreover, this expansion of engineering students will affect demand in the Writing Center, since engineering graduate students especially will seek additional help with writing assignments. The writing center will also need additional funding either from the college or the provost.

- D. **Morale and community:** A declining sense of a whole-department community among some faculty is affecting morale in the department, especially among professional teaching faculty. We recognize that in a post-covid world, many departments are working to rebuild a sense of community, especially departments with a large non-tenure track contingency.

**Recommendations:** Hold more frequent all-faculty meetings and social events, where a sense of collective community can be fostered and barriers intentionally broken down. Look for additional shared governance opportunities to involve professional teaching faculty in the department's decision making. Consider creating teaching partners or groups to help professional teaching faculty better connect with other faculty. Or even better, make the groups mixed rank so that faculty across ranks can better connect over shared issues of teaching. Consider incentivising reading and writing groups across

ranks to help create community. Community can be achieved through a range of means and should consider the needs and interests of faculty members.

- E. **Support and retention of professional teaching faculty:** Professional teaching faculty comprise over 50% of the department. Some, particularly senior teaching assistant and associate professors, noted their appreciation of the flexibility their positions offered for their career trajectories. However, by and large this class of faculty feels significantly undercompensated and undervalued.

Many have also been limited to fixed-term, one-year contracts, which make job security difficult. Given the need to retain professional teaching faculty at all levels and expand their ranks in order to deal with the coming influx of Engineering students, this is a major issue for the department to address.

**Recommendations:**

- Raises, multi-year contracts, and clear promotion structures need to be prioritized for professional teaching faculty.
  - Raising salaries to competitive levels for professional teaching faculty of all ranks (lecturers, senior lecturers, assistant teaching professors, associate teaching professors, and teaching professors) is critical in order to retain the current faculty in the department. We agree with the recommendation in the self-study report that the minimum base salary for lecturers be raised to \$45,000 and that for senior lecturers be raised to \$50,000. We also recommend that the department do a comparison study of salaries from peer institutions for the three teaching professor ranks, and that the salaries of the current faculty, as well as new hires, be raised to competitive levels.
  - We recommend that new faculty be hired on one-year or two-year contracts for a two-year initial probationary period. Each subsequent contract should be longer in length, ideally 3-5 years.
  - We recommend that the department review and revise, as needed, the promotion guidelines and rules for the professional teaching faculty ranks. We also recommend that the department reconsider the possibility of promotion from senior lecturer to assistant teaching professor upon review and recommendation by the departmental voting faculty.
  - We further recommend that the college consider adding a promotion structure for lecturers that includes the opportunity to be promoted to senior lecturer without that promotion being considered a separate job. This could be a point to be advocated for in the faculty senate.
- More direct communication between department leaders (including personnel committee chairs) and faculty across the ranks. Administration leaders should make an effort to speak directly to professional track faculty, many of whom expressed currently feeling marginalized. In particular, given the differences across departments, we recommend that the dean have separate annual meetings with the professional teaching faculty and lecturers in each department.

- If mentoring of graduate students or others is viewed as part of professional faculty's duties, this should be accounted for in their statements of faculty responsibility.
- Explore opportunities for professional teaching faculty (especially those in First-Year Writing and Professional Writing) to teach occasionally (perhaps 1 course/year) outside their usual course offerings.
- Explore ways to expand shared governance with professional teaching faculty.

## F. Mentoring

**Tenure-Track Faculty:** The mentoring of tenure-track faculty produces mixed results due, in part, to uneven engagement from some senior faculty. Further, It may be difficult for early career faculty to share concerns about their teaching and/or research with mentors who may also be on their review and evaluation committees.

### ***Recommendations:***

- Provide professional development and perhaps incentives for effective mentoring.
- With the loss of senior faculty due to retirements, the department should restart conversations on the responsibility and requirement that associate and full professors take on in mentoring roles and relationships.
- Allow tenure-track faculty greater agency in choosing/switching mentors.
- The department should explore the possibility of working with another department (or departments) to develop a mentoring collaboration in which each junior faculty member is assigned a mentor outside of their home department (in addition to their mentor within their home department).

**Professional Faculty:** The workshop and group-based mentoring of professional teaching faculty produces mixed results as well.

### ***Recommendations:***

- More formal support structures should be put in place for professional teaching faculty, including the possibility of one-on-one mentoring arrangements.
- Explore incentives for effective support and mentoring.
- Mentors and mentees should develop a shared vision of the goals and expectations of their mentoring relationship.

G. **Communication of Departmental Policies and Procedures:** Lack of understanding and clarity about the budget, decision-making processes, professional track promotion processes, and other key elements of departmental administration is creating confusion



among faculty, a sense of panic and foreboding and also creating barriers to the sharing of information, processes, practices, and procedures.

**Recommendation:** The department should reorganize to include program leaders more in decision-making (less as advisors to the head), also creating a pipeline for information to be dispersed through committees and programs. It might be helpful to create a budget committee that could also be involved in budgetary decisions and in helping to educate the department on the budget.

The department should work through and write down as many departmental procedures as possible, making them readily available for all to see, to increase transparency, communication, and institutional memory. This should be a department-wide project and should include how program directors are compensated, term limits, and succession plans.

The department leadership should also undertake a review of existing bylaws as a department-wide project, making sure that bylaws are up to date and that everyone knows what they say.

- H. **Stipends:** The graduate student stipend increases and also the funding of new/replacement tenure lines creates a potential budget stress on the English department.

**Recommendations:** Clarification of the budget and budget decisions, greater input of faculty (beyond chairs) on budget decisions. Program directors should be part of these discussions. Further, while the increase in stipends has been recently announced, this should be considered a first-step. Graduate students have further needs that a stipend increase may not address, like the need for travel funds and support for professional growth and development.

- I. **Lost Institutional memory:** Loss of faculty and staff has diminished institutional memory within the department leading to uncertainty about some policies and practices.

**Recommendation:** Establish an online repository for departmental records (e.g., meeting minutes), governance materials, etc. Access will likely need to be restricted to department personnel. Department governance should be formalized into by-laws, with clear statements about how policies may be amended and records of changes made. These materials should also be readily available to all members of the department.

- J. **Staff Workload:** The workload and working conditions of the staff are unsustainable and their salaries are not competitive for the market. This has led to significant turnover of staff in the past year, making the workload issues even more significant given the loss of institutional memory.

**Recommendations:** At least one new staff position is needed so that the budget and HR functions can be split between two staff positions. Explore reorganization of space

and/or duties to provide coverage of “walk-ins” to the department so that staff are not interrupted throughout their workdays. There should also be cross-training of staff so that vital needs are met when staff are on leave. Staff salaries must be raised to be competitive with other colleges and regional companies. These changes should be made after consultation with existing staff about their needs and abilities. Staff should be empowered to work with leadership (make suggestions) to ensure the most effective and efficient workload possible. Perhaps English staff could coordinate with staff in other departments to share information and procedures, which might also positively affect staff morale.

- K. **Faculty Salaries:** The resources and pay for all faculty is not commensurate with the standard of living of the research triangle.

**Recommendation:** Work with the dean on funneling resources to the department and incrementally raising salaries to make them more competitive.

- L. **Strategic Plan:** The self-study notes that the department’s strategic planning document was “developed in 2012 and is now outdated.” The new Head will oversee the preparation of a new plan as soon as possible. In the meeting with the Dean, the College’s new Strategic Plan and strategic priorities were mentioned several times.

**Recommendation:** The department Head and program administrators may want to begin the process now in documenting the ways their programs speak to the three primary points of the College plan: 1. Be the nation’s most innovative humanities and social sciences college 2. Design and build for collaboration to help solve critical challenges 3. Take groundbreaking and effective action to promote equity, diversity and inclusion.

## II. Programmatic and Curricular Issues

- A. **Course load issues:** Graduate students in the department have to take exactly 9 hours per semester. To qualify for TA-ships, they also need to accumulate 18 hours during their first year in English. This puts significant restrictions on the courses they can take, limiting opportunities for interdisciplinarity and for enhancing their degrees with graduate certificates they might be interested in.

**Recommendations:** The department may want to reconsider this policy with an eye toward allowing exemptions, perhaps with approval from DGP. We also recommend considering targeted summer graduate classes to allow students greater flexibility during the school year.

- B. **Mental health resources:** Graduate students and undergraduates appear to lack knowledge of existing campus mental health resources. Further, there is an additional

fee to access counseling resources during the summer for those students who are not enrolled in summer school courses.

**Recommendation:** Not only should information be more readily accessible to the general student population, but there should be an assessment to determine whether these resources are adequately serving the needs of the student population in the post-COVID era. Also, summer access to the campus mental health center is critical, and financial support should be provided (or fees reduced for summer access).

- C. **Core curriculum:** The issue of the core curriculum for all concentrations within the undergraduate program needing to be revised was raised during several program meetings.

**Recommendations:** We recommend reassessing the core curriculum requirements (for majors in all concentrations) and potentially reducing them across the concentrations. As they stand now, they introduce students to the various disciplines housed within the department, but a more pedagogically structured approach may be warranted.

The department's undergraduate curriculum committee should begin this challenging process as soon as possible.

- D. **Diversity-focused courses:** We heard very positive things from undergraduate students about courses focused on African American literature, race and inclusion in teacher education, as well as on topics of gender and sexuality in literature as well as in film.

**Recommendation:** Given the critical nature of these topics, we would encourage the department to continue bolstering this area of the curriculum, particularly as it assesses the inclusiveness of the curriculum.

- E. **Literature major and MA:** The curriculum (according to faculty) has been revised but is still mismatched with what students are asking for. Curriculum need not be driven exclusively by student preference, but we take the student feedback as a useful moment to reflect further on the diversity of the curriculum. The curriculum is oriented around traditional American and British literature.

**Recommendation:** A committee should review the curriculum of both the major and MA to create space for diversifying the curriculum, with attention to relevant global literatures and courses that will appeal further to majors.

- F. The **literature program** has greater demand than it can meet with its current number of faculty and the sense that student credit hours are not funneled back into the program in additional resources.

**Recommendation:** The program could target one or two courses that can be converted to larger lecture sections in order to create revenue that will be funneled back into the program for research funds or additional faculty lines.

- G. The **literature faculty** expressed a lack of time and resources to do the kind of research they find invigorating and for which they are rewarded.

**Recommendations:** The program should assess what is needed for research. Perhaps an internal works in progress series could help faculty better support each other's research emotionally and cognitively. The program could also strategize for how to provide strategic releases (or the collapsing of two courses into one) to allow focused time for research. In the end, the issue of resources will have to be resolved in work with the chair and dean. The department should work to find creative ways to create competitive research awards. External research awards should be rewarded with release time, even if the awardee is a program director.

- H. There are a number of issues facing the **Film Studies Program** that restrain its full potential. One major issue is that the undergraduate curriculum is split across two units, which loses focus and visibility. There is the English BA concentration in Film Studies and the Art Studies Concentration in Film Studies, both of which are staffed almost entirely by English Film Studies faculty, and comprise almost entirely English Film Studies courses. The Art Studies Concentration is outside of the department, and Film Studies faculty do not have full control over the curriculum. However, there are less core requirements in Art Studies, which makes its curriculum more viable as a standing major/concentration. The Film Studies faculty may want to consider moving the Art Studies-Film Studies curriculum into the Department of English, bringing those majors to the department. However, to do this, flexibility on the English core curriculum requirements (currently 18 total credits) would be needed in order to mount a full version of the Film Studies major within the Department of English.

**Recommendations:** We recommend moving the Art Studies Concentration in Film Studies into English and waive or significantly reduce the English major core requirements for the concentration. This would replace the existing Film Studies concentration in English, thus eliminating the duplication of efforts. This would also result in ca. 70 total majors in Film Studies within the Department of English. With more focus and visibility (and staffing), there would also be much room to grow these numbers. The Minor in Film Studies should stay in place to serve those students not interested in majoring in Film Studies.

- I. **Film Studies staffing** has been in a crisis, due to the loss of tenure stream positions over the last decade, and also due to the limited, fixed-term, one and two-year contracts of the current Teaching Assistant Professors in the program. In the past, the program functioned smoothly—in terms of course offerings, capstones, mentorship, dissertations and administration—when it was staffed by five tenure stream faculty and two professional faculty.

**Recommendations:** The current, in-process tenure stream hire in Film Studies for a single position is an excellent step in the right direction. The second position, which was planned for this year but had to be postponed for budgetary reasons, should be reinstated for next year, and a third potential position should also be prioritized in the coming years. Further, the current Teaching Assistant Professors in Film Studies should be moved to renewable, multi-year contracts as soon as possible to bring them in line with other Teaching Assistant Professors within the department. They should also be given a clear progression to promotion, to Teaching Associate Professors. This is important both for equity and also to recognize the significant administrative and advising load that the Teaching Assistant Professors have taken on since the departure of tenure-stream faculty.

- J. The **MA track in Film Studies** could be bolstered significantly if brought in line with the CDRM PhD program.

**Recommendations:** The Film Studies faculty would prefer to shift the MA track in Film Studies towards an interdisciplinary MA in Comparative Media, which would build upon and enhance the strengths and synergies of the CRDM PhD Program. This is an excellent idea, with much room for growth. We would recommend solidifying the undergraduate curriculum in Film Studies in tandem with this development.

- K. **Potential for an Accelerated BA/MA Program:** There is currently a concentration in Teacher Education within the English Department's bachelor's degree program and an MAT with a concentration in secondary English Education housed in the College of Education. (The MAT is not intended for students with an undergraduate degree that focuses on English Education.) Undergraduate students in the Teacher Education concentration currently do not have the option of participating in an accelerated bachelor's/master's program with a focus on secondary English Education.

**Recommendation:** The Department should work with the College of Education to explore the possibility of establishing an accelerated bachelor's/master's degree in secondary English Education.

- L. **Discussion of online instruction:** The review team heard mixed responses about the use of and support for online instruction.

**Recommendation:** The department should hold an explicit and data informed discussion about its wishes in online instruction, where remote classes would be advantageous and where not and for what programs, to ensure that the department expresses its wishes and data driven decisions about its own programs, so that they will be honored by the college and university leadership.

### **III. Appendix**

*This section contains additional considerations from the Review Committee. The programs and department are invited to take into account what is reported here as they develop their response document. However, they only need to respond to the recommendations from parts I and II above; some of these recommendations are repeated above from the considerations offered below.*

#### **The MFA in Creative Writing: Possibility for growth.**

At the moment, this program has been successful despite challenges to faculty numbers. Two poets were hired recently, and the chair mentioned that one or two more fiction writers would have to be added in the near future. Until there is growth in the number of full-time tenured and tenure track faculty (possibly hiring senior faculty to address the strain on present small number of senior faculty who have to undertake program director duties), the review committee does not recommend increasing the number of graduate students enrolled in the program, unless the MFA program is comfortable accepting students without graduate student stipends or other financial aid coming directly from the department. Additionally, in the self-study, the MFA program noted that its two-year program (compared to three-year programs) left them at a “distinct disadvantage.” There wasn’t enough information given to the review committee to assess whether or not that is accurate or to make a recommendation about the matter. The review committee does suggest that if the MFA program is seriously considering this change, that it present a more substantive argument or study attesting to the conclusion that three-year programs are more advantageous than two-year programs. That said, the high volume of applications and the stellar reputation of the MFA program are two factors that will ensure that growth is possible in the future.

#### **Linguistics**

Faculty in linguistics have outstanding records of scholarly productivity and the program has a reputation in the field for excellence in training undergraduate and graduate students in research. Linguistics faculty are deeply involved in preparing undergraduates interested in careers in secondary education, speech-language pathology, and many other areas that at other institutions might be covered by several academic units. The MA concentration in linguistics also serves students with diverse career goals. The 2019 closing of the PhD in Sociolinguistics, a unique collaboration between English and Sociology, is disappointing to a faculty so committed to mentoring students in research.

The Review Committee recommends the following. Maintain and, as resources are available, expand course offerings in high-demand areas (e.g., sociolinguistics, audiology in speech-language pathology). Continue to pursue opportunities for collaboration on PhD training with other units on campus or other institutions with PhD programs in linguistics.

## **MSTC and the Rhetoric and Professional Writing Programs**

### **M.S. in Technical Communication (MSTC)**

The MSTC is a [33-credit hour degree](#) requiring a set of Core Courses, Applications Courses, and Theories and Methods Courses. Students must also complete a semester of professional work experience and a comprehensive capstone project. The catalog of course offerings in support of the degree is robust including courses such as Advanced Technical Writing and Editing, Publication Management for Technical Communicators, and Usability Studies for Technical Communication. MSTC faculty are to be applauded for their efforts to “continuously and actively” update their curriculum to keep current with industry needs (p. 28). All MSTC courses are taught by tenured or tenure-track faculty.

**Faculty.** By 2017, four faculty retirements (Miller, Dicks, Covington, Katz) represented a significant loss of high-profile colleagues with national and international reputations. Although the MSTC program is “slightly reduced” in number, newly hired and existing faculty bring their own award-winning and high-profile research to the program (p. 28). The MSTC program benefits from exemplary tenured or tenure-track faculty and administrative leadership of the program. Indeed, as noted in the self-study, four out of five faculty affiliated with MSTC hold administrative roles including director of the MSTC (Ding), internship program (Walls), the professional writing program (Pigg), and associate head of English (Swarts). Administrative positions have teaching reassignments for faculty in these roles limiting the number of courses they are able to teach. Graduate students in the program reported that faculty were one of the great strengths of the MSTC program and commented specifically on access to faculty and open communication.

**Placement.** The [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (BLS) has for many years reported the job outlook for “technical writer” as growing as fast or faster than the national average. The BLS is currently reporting the median salary for a technical writer as \$78,000 a year which aligns with salary figures for graduates from the MSTC program reported in the self-study (p. 31). Placement of MSTC graduates is exemplary with the self-study noting that over 90% of graduates are in “high-quality positions upon graduation” (p. 31). Interviews with graduate students in the program yielded praise for the faculty as well as the “phenomenal” job opportunities and job placement. Students said they receive “weekly emails” about job opportunities. The regular correspondence as well as the conversations with other MSTC students gives them confidence that they will be able to find jobs in their field.

**Graduate Students.** The self-study reports that there are “currently 125 students enrolled in three English graduate degree programs” and that includes 24 in MSTC (p. 16). Of those 24, “about half the students are employed full-time” while “others seek part-time work, internships, and cooperative education assignments with local organizations” (p. 27). Only a modest number of students are supported with teaching assistantships (~20%) and those students are typically “trained to teach classes in technical, business, and scientific communication” (p. 27). Graduate students reported that “funding was a huge consideration” when weighing their decision on selecting a graduate program. While they did comment that the stipend for teaching assistants

was too low, they also recognized that they did not have to teach in their first year. At least one student reported having another job while a first-year graduate teaching assistant.

The self-study noted that in addition to striving to replace retired MSTC faculty and reevaluating course content, a major objective for the program has been “diversifying the student population” (p. 28). Application and enrollment data is encouraging: “In 2021, 11 out of 32 students reported themselves to be non-white or non-resident aliens (that majority of whom are non-white), making them 34% of total enrollment” (p. 27-28). Reviewers learned that 1-year Provost Fellowships are available to students in PhD programs only. The Fellowships could be an excellent opportunity for recruitment into graduate programs like the MSTC if upper administration would consider expanding the program.

The self-study also reported that “aggressive efforts” to increase international student populations in the program by way of 3+2 partnerships with Chinese universities have been unsuccessful due to the pandemic (28). International programs have indeed suffered during the pandemic but as travel restrictions have been lifted, we would encourage you to maintain your support for your international partnerships in a continued effort to internationalize the program.

Graduate students offered their critiques of the program, too, including:

1. Two graduate students reported “limited options” for MSTC course options, in particular, elective options in their second year. Given the number of faculty in the program and their different administrative responsibilities, limitations on graduate elective offerings do not come as a surprise. The program director (Ding) acknowledged this challenge, too. Ultimately, graduate students reported that they felt they received a “very good” education and were happy with the program. That feedback coincides with the findings of the surveys in the self-study with students responding that they were “very strongly” prepared for their careers (p. 31).
2. Students complained of the 18-credit hour rule that they reported requires them to take their initial 18 credit hours in English. Students want the flexibility to pursue other course offerings that they feel more directly inform their future careers. This complaint is compounded by the issue noted above regarding limited elective options at the graduate level. They also noted their inability to take more than 9 credits a semester in their first year while they weren’t teaching. While they acknowledged the challenges that would come with taking more than 9 credits, they felt like they missed opportunities to take classes that wouldn’t be back in rotation during their careers as graduate students.
3. Students from all programs noted the high cost of living in Raleigh and the need for additional funding opportunities and/or increased stipends.

**Modality.** The self-study makes it clear that the MSTC program wishes to maintain “its commitment to in-person instruction as part of its curriculum, even as competing regional programs involve online distance learning” (27). In conversations with Professor Ding, she noted that an in-person only program can be a challenge for recruitment as it is not uncommon for potential applicants to ask for online course offerings. It should be noted that at least one of the MSTC students interviewed for this report said that they chose the program specifically because it was an in-person only program. Like a vast majority of the students in the program, this



student was treating the MSTC as a terminal degree and said they appreciated the applied nature of their coursework that they felt was preparing them for a job. If program directors consider online offerings for the MSTC program, we politely caution that online instruction can often yield the same issues the self-study reported for MSTC students during the height of the pandemic including: “lack of interaction with faculty and peers and a sense of isolation when taking classes and working on internships online during the lockdown” (p. 27). This is not to say that program directors should not continue to be mindful of regional and even national competition for MA/MS degrees in technical communication. Faculty are likely aware of Lisa Melonçon’s programmatic research including her online maps that track program types such as [online TPC programs](#). In terms of regional competition, the map shows the online graduate certificate in [Professional Communication from East Carolina University](#). There may come a time when more programs are pushed into online offerings in order to remain viable.

### **Rhetoric and Professional Writing (LWR)**

[Rhetoric and Professional Writing](#) (LWR) is one of the six concentrations offered from the department with a current enrollment of 84 students. Its curriculum was revised in 2020 and as noted in the self-study, the “current form emphasizes oral, written, and visual communication in professional settings, including journalism.” The [18-credit hour core curriculum](#) requires courses across American Literature, British Literature, World Literature, Film, Linguistics, and Rhetoric. Within the remaining 21 hours of coursework for the concentration, two courses (6 credits) are “English electives” meaning a potential for more coursework taken outside of the Rhetoric and Professional Writing concentration. The self-study notes that the core “provides majors broad exposure to the department’s areas of faculty expertise” but that it hasn’t been revised since 2010. Despite its popularity, Creative Writing is missing from the core. In addition, faculty departures have made it more difficult to staff a range of offerings in support of the core.

After a brief preliminary presentation to the department, the review team was asked whether there would be a recommendation forthcoming in this report on the English core. One review member noted that there are at least some national trends that point to consolidated “foundations” or “gateway” courses that provide students a more condensed overview of department strengths and concentration options. It should be noted that the English core is not representative of an agreed upon national standard for an English B.A. organized by historical period or field specialization. The core here is instead representative of the many diverse and admirable strengths of this particular department. While this section of the report is dedicated to the Rhetoric and Professional Writing concentration, revisiting the English core requirement and the viability of its staffing options, would likely benefit all English concentrations.

**Undergraduate Internships.** Internship programs do indeed offer significant professional development opportunities to students and the program is to be applauded for being made available to students outside just the Rhetoric and Professional Writing program. The self-study notes a sharp drop in enrollments (currently in the single digits) and the study is no doubt correct that the pandemic “is a factor” (p. 12). The recent curriculum revision added “a practical experience co-requisite” to the concentration that will likely help enrollments. As more companies adapt to online and remote work environments, internship opportunities may actually

increase for qualified students. The program is wise to continue to invest in a faculty member to serve as an internship director and provide resources to maintain essential industry partnerships.

**Staffing and Hiring.** This report advocates for much-needed replacement faculty lines for most English programs and the Rhetoric and Professional Writing concentration specifically is in need of tenure-track faculty dedicated to teaching in both the MSTC and the undergraduate Rhetoric and Professional Writing concentration. However, should dedicated lines not be available, faculty may wish to consider exploring more shared positions. The self-study notes the department's success with this strategy, reporting that the "last three lines (Journalism-Creative Writing and two in Creative Writing-Literature) have been, at the faculty's direction, shared between programs" (p. 7). This growing collaborative nature of department programs may present opportunities with **Journalism** and **CRDM**.

**Journalism.** As mentioned, the 2020 revisions to the Rhetoric and Professional Writing concentration "emphasizes" journalism. A productive overlap with Journalism is evident on the [catalog page for the Journalism minor](#) where students may take ENG courses such as Introduction to Editing, Designing Networked Communications, Professional Internships, and Analysis of Scientific and Technical Writing to satisfy the minor. Likewise courses requiring journalism expertise such as Advanced News and Article Writing satisfy the [RPW Methods, Strategies, and Context](#). The review team learned that there are currently three journalism faculty members, and the self-study notes journalism is another area with demand for courses that remains difficult to staff. While separate hires in both journalism and Rhetoric and Professional Writing are preferred, a shared position could assist with staffing demands.

**CRDM.** The review committee learned from Andrew Johnston, the CRDM PhD director, that CRDM will receive its own separate review in the spring. Communications and English both contribute to the program and the director reports to an executive committee. The program has a remarkably high placement rate for its graduates into tenure-track positions. The placement rate drives recruitment for the program and not graduate assistantship funding. The number of faculty participating in CRDM is now at a record low as colleagues are not hired specifically to teach in the program. Relying on what amounts to the generosity of colleagues to teach in the program creates structural instability for CRDM. As noted about journalism above, while separate hires in both CRDM and Rhetoric and Professional Writing are preferred, a shared position could assist with staffing demands.

### **Challenges and Recommendations (MSTC and LWR/RPW)**

During an interview session, a faculty member remarked that the programs are not "broken" but there is the sense that "they could break at any time." This sentiment seems to be shared among colleagues, too, and again is not a critique of department-level administration. Contributing factors include:

1. The incoming increase of engineering students who will drive demand for ENG 101 and the ENG 33x courses. As already noted in the report, staffing the increased course offerings will present a significant challenge for the department.
2. The high turnover rate of Professional Faculty. The self-study noted that last year, “20% of our professional faculty resigned, citing low salaries as their main reason for leaving” (p. 6).
3. The retiring or departing full-time faculty who are not being replaced. From the self-study: “In the period of 2014 to 2021, the departmental faculty has decreased from 118 to 98, or a loss of 20 faculty: 13 tenure-track faculty and 7 professional faculty” (p. 32).
4. The low number of graduate assistant opportunities available for the MSTC program and the recruitment challenges for the program. Reductions in diversity enhancement fellowships in number and dollar amounts.

Corresponding recommendations may overlap with some of the larger findings of this report (see Areas for Improvement with Recommendations) but here include:

1. Stabilize the Professional Faculty. A 20% turnover rate among Professional Faculty is not sustainable. It places program administrators in a constant state of searching and hiring as well as training and credentialing for instruction. Program administrators and the department head should approach the Dean’s office for the needed resources to increase salary and/or promotion opportunities for professional faculty. Given what will likely be a sustained demand for writing courses, 3-year contracts for professional faculty should represent limited risk to upper administration while providing a substantial amount of stability for lecturers and senior lecturers.
2. Replace faculty departures and increase the total number of full-time, tenure-track faculty. As noted above under discussions on journalism and the CRDM programs, collaborative hires should be explored if MSTC/RPW aren’t able to make dedicated hires.
3. Explore recruitment opportunities for the MSTC program. The department is to be applauded for subsidizing the diversity enhancement fellowships especially after there was a reduction in number (from three to two per program) and in dollar amount (\$3,000 to \$2,500). However, if diversity really is to be a main focus of the college’s strategic plan then departments and their program needed additional support from college and provost level offices. As we understand it, Provost Fellowships (1 year) are only available for PhD students. The program should explore whether the Provost’s Office would consider those Fellowships for the MSTC program, too, especially given the comparatively lower number of PhD programs in the College.

All the above contribute to the larger and collective morale of the programs and the larger department. The MSTC and RPW programs at NC State have outstanding faculty and faculty administration, curricula, and students that should have the necessary resources to allow all to thrive.

**The Literature major and MA:** Literature faculty hold a range of areas of expertise and are award-winning, highly successful teacher-scholars who deserve additional support for their own career success. A significant area for growth exists in digital humanities work, and the self-study mentions a perceived choice between DH or more diverse courses. The review team wondered if those two areas might be combined in future hiring initiatives.

Graduate students expressed satisfaction with the program and appreciation for its flexibility in letting career professionals attempt a second career.

## **Curriculum**

- A. The curriculum (according to faculty) has been revised but is still mismatched with what students are asking for. Curriculum need not be driven exclusively by student preference, but we take the student feedback as a useful moment to reflect further on the diversity of the curriculum. The curriculum is oriented around traditional American and British literature.

**Recommendation:** A committee should review the curriculum of both the major and MA to create space for diversifying the curriculum, with attention to relevant global literatures and courses that will appeal further to majors.

- B. Related to DEI, we heard very positive things from undergraduate students about courses focused on African American literature, race and inclusion in teacher education, as well as on topics of gender and sexuality in literature as well as in film. Given the critical nature of these topics, we would encourage the department to continue bolstering this area of the curriculum, particularly as it assesses the inclusiveness of the curriculum.

**Recommendation:** We would recommend reassessing the core curriculum requirements (for majors in all concentrations) and potentially reduce them across the concentrations. As they stand now, they introduce students to the various disciplines housed within the department, but a more pedagogically structured approach may be warranted.

- C. The literature program has greater demand than it can meet with its current number of faculty and the sense that student credit hours are not funneled back into the program in additional resources.

**Recommendation:** The program could target one or two courses that can be converted to larger lecture sections in order to create revenue that will be funneled back into the program for research funds or additional faculty lines.

- D. The literature faculty expressed a lack of time and resources to do the kind of research they find invigorating and for which they are rewarded.

**Recommendation:** The program should assess what is needed for research. Perhaps an internal works in progress series could help faculty better support each other's research emotionally and cognitively. The program could also strategize for how to provide strategic

releases (or the collapsing of two courses into one) to allow focused time for research. In the end, the issue of resources will have to be resolved in work with the chair and dean. The department should work to find creative ways to create competitive research awards. External research awards should be rewarded with release time, even if the awardee is a program director.

## **The Film Studies Program**

### **Curriculum**

The Film Studies Program is an essential and dynamic, interdisciplinary area of the department, and its faculty carry out significant research, teaching, and administration. Given its faculty's work at all levels of the curriculum, there is also much room for growth, which would be enabled by bolstering the types of interdisciplinary collaborations fostered by the CRDM PhD program. However, there are a number of issues facing the program that restrain its full potential. One major issue is that the undergraduate curriculum is split across two units, which loses focus and visibility. There is the English BA concentration in Film Studies and the Art Studies Concentration in Film Studies, both of which are staffed almost entirely by English Film Studies faculty, and comprise almost entirely English Film Studies courses. The Art Studies Concentration is outside of the department, and Film Studies faculty do not have full control over the curriculum. However, there are less core requirements in Art Studies, which makes its curriculum more viable as a standing major/concentration. The Film Studies faculty may want to consider moving the Art Studies-Film Studies curriculum into the Department of English, bringing those majors to the department. However, to do this, flexibility on the English core curriculum requirements (currently 18 total credits) would be needed in order to mount a full version of the Film Studies major within the Department of English. Such a concentration/major could also prioritize student access to, and credit for, interdisciplinary course offerings in other departments, for instance enabling students to take production and area studies courses (e.g. "Digital Video Production" and "Spanish Cinema") that may be available outside of the English Department.

This assessment is driven not just by faculty input, but also by student feedback from the discussion sessions: one of the undergraduate students who is an English major and either a Film Studies concentrator or Film Studies minor (she used both interchangeably) said that there is confusion amongst students about the various concentrations and degrees in Film Studies.

**Recommendation:** We recommend moving the Art Studies Concentration in Film Studies into English and waive or significantly reduce the English major core requirements for the concentration. This would replace the existing Film Studies concentration in English, thus eliminating the duplication of efforts. This would also result in ca. 70 total majors in Film Studies within the Department of English. With more focus and visibility (and staffing), there would also be much room to grow these numbers. The Minor in Film Studies should stay in place to serve those students not interested in majoring in Film Studies.

## **Staffing**

Film Studies staffing has been in a crisis, due to the loss of tenure stream positions over the last decade, and also due to the limited, fixed-term, one and two year contracts of the current Teaching Assistant Professors in the program. In the past, the program functioned smoothly—in terms of course offerings, capstones, mentorship, dissertations and administration—when it was staffed by five tenure stream faculty and two professional faculty.

**Recommendation:** The current, in-process tenure stream hire in Film Studies for a single position is an excellent step in the right direction. The second position, which was planned for this year but had to be postponed for budgetary reasons, should be reinstated for next year, and a third potential position should also be prioritized in the coming years. Further, the current Teaching Assistant Professors in Film Studies should be moved to renewable, multi-year contracts as soon as possible to bring them in line with other Teaching Assistant Professors within the department. They should also be given a clear progression to promotion, to Teaching Associate Professors. This is important both for equity and also to recognize the significant administrative and advising load that the Teaching Assistant Professors have taken on since the departure of tenure-stream faculty.

## **MA Track in Film Studies**

The MA track in Film Studies could be bolstered significantly if brought in line with the CDRM PhD program.

**Recommendation:** The Film Studies faculty would prefer to shift the MA track in Film Studies towards an interdisciplinary MA in Comparative Media, which would build upon and enhance the strengths and synergies of the CRDM PhD Program. This is an excellent idea, with much room for growth. We would recommend solidifying the undergraduate curriculum in Film Studies in tandem with this development.