April 16, 2014

PROFESSOR STEPHANIE JED, Chair
Department of Literature

SUBJECT: Undergraduate Program Review for the Department of Literature

Dear Professor Jed,

The Undergraduate Council has discussed the Department of Literature’s 2013 Undergraduate Program Review. The Council supports the findings and recommendations of the review subcommittee and appreciates the response from the Department. The Council’s comments centered on the following:

- **Curriculum:** The Council is concerned with the low enrollments in some of the language-based majors and encourages the Department to examine the structure of the curriculum. The Council is pleased at the popularity of the Literature/Writing courses and major and hopes to see more resources dedicated to the program.

- **Faculty Resources:** The Council concurs with the program review report that a strategy be created to address the shortage of faculty for the popular writing program courses. Rather than recommending additional FTEs, the Council encourages the Department to examine how current faculty resources could be distributed more effectively. Revisions to the curriculum may result in more faculty being able to teach in the writing program.

- **Publicizing the Majors and Courses:** The Council recommends the Department create a plan to publicize the different Literature majors and course offerings to the UC San Diego undergraduate community. The Council encourages the Department to first reflect upon how they would like to be seen by undergraduate students and then incorporate that vision into their publicity efforts.

The Council will conduct its follow-up review of the Department in Spring Quarter 2015. At that time, our goal is to learn about the Department’s progress in implementing the recommendations of the program review subcommittee and the Undergraduate Council. The Council extends its thanks to the Department for its engagement in this process and we look forward to the continued discussion.

Sincerely,

James Nieh, Chair
Undergraduate Council

cc: G. Boss K. Pogliano
    L. Carver R. Rodriguez
    S. Lerer B. Sawrey
The Literature Department at UCSD is unique in that it encompasses education in writing, literatures, languages, and culture, with multiple majors offered. The original vision of the department was to develop conversations around different languages, cultures, and literatures. This is something that is clearly of value to the Department and University, and makes an important contribution to the fields of literature, language, and world culture. Efforts are being made to connect areas within the Department as well as with other departments in order to facilitate interdisciplinary collaborations and conversations.

The Department serves the University as one of the few units offering upper division courses for students of languages. Literature Department faculty teach writing in the Department as well as in several of the colleges. Also, students from all over campus take offerings from the Cultural Studies sections to fulfill diversity requirements.

A. Brief description and analysis of the strengths and weakness of the current operation of the program.

A1. Strengths of the current operation of the Program.

From its inception, the highly interdisciplinary Literature Department has taken up the challenge of how the study of literatures and cultures can address the challenges engendered by changes in our theoretical understanding of the world. The roots of its strengths and weaknesses are both found in this ambitious goal and in the diversity and flexibility of its structures and intersectional offerings.

The newly appointed Chair has already organized a faculty retreat to begin discussions about the future of the Department and how to streamline and strengthen the programs. Such items as clustering smaller language and literature offerings, creating tracks, certifications, or designated emphases for majors, explaining the significance of inter-cultural skills, language study, and translation work in light of the globalization of cultures, and establishing substantive links with other programs in the Humanities and other Departments on campus, including in the Sciences and Engineering, are being considered. The Chair meets regularly with Language area non-Senate faculty as part of a plan to strengthen communication among instructors and will soon begin spearheading campus-wide communication, including ideas about website and brochure development, catalog text revisions, and possibly a new Department name, about what the Department has to offer. Many of the faculty members we interviewed indicated that they were energized by these efforts and eager to participate in them.

Graduate students were enthusiastic about their studies as well as about the faculty, whom they said were supportive and inspiring. As has been noted, faculty and courses in the Literature Department receive very high CAPE reviews. The undergraduate students expressed appreciation for faculty advising, which is currently organized through section heads and is a major strength of the current organization of the Department. Undergraduate students said that they would be happy to participate in helping the Department in any way possible, including
forming a student organization to work on programs and activities and working on the website, a newsletter, the website, and peer counseling about future career possibilities and graduate school.

A2. Weaknesses of current operation of the program.

Clearer and more consistent communication seems needed among groups in the Department. As already noted, the Chair has been working on this. We might suggest an orientation procedure or at least a handout for non-Senate faculty. The Chair will need to work closely with the MSO, perhaps as a conduit for a while, as there are complaints from both staff and faculty about communication difficulties and so that she can provide faculty with better understanding of Department resources (budget). Perhaps some departmental procedures can be streamlined to eliminate some layers of approval. Meeting regularly with undergraduate advisers to map out course assignments to assure majors’ timely progress to degree is important.

Faculty workload is heavy, and some historically underserved areas remain underserved. Some faculty wanted more teaching assistance support for those with larger enrollments, or at least that that teaching assistance continue to be provided for classes with 30 students. Others pointed out that writing cannot be taught effectively in courses enrollment as many as 30 students. Course relief for service is needed. The Writing Program currently has the largest number of majors, and the Committee sees room for more faculty in this area.

The departmental website seems to be an ongoing issue. The website is difficult to navigate, and, although everyone in the Department seems to be aware of this problem and interested in fixing it, other duties or lack of experience with website development seem to have stalled the project. Since some Engineering and Visual Art classes can assign website development to their students and since undergrads have expressed interest in working on this and other items, the Chair might tap these resources to assist the technical staff and faculty. In particular, some faculty (although we believe it to be a minority) have been slow to respond to staff’s requests for information for the website. If technical staff could work with students, who might be assigned to interview faculty members, take pictures, etc., this problem might be able to be bypassed.

B. Analysis of Strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum


The Literature Department curriculum has many strengths that can be built upon while the Department moves to revise its program. The program is highly interdisciplinary, and connects the study of literature and language to a diverse set of theoretical, cultural, and historical themes. The curriculum is designed to serve the needs of their majors and at the same time provide important learning opportunities for the entire campus in languages, writing, and transnational culture. The importance of this has only grown as UCSD students face the career challenges of increasing globalization.
Another unique aspect of the program is its dedication to the study of literature in its original languages. While this has presented challenges with shrinking enrollment in some areas, it is truly valuable for promoting in depth cross-cultural understanding. So it is worth thinking about how this can be maintained.

The writing program is distinctive in its dedication to a broad range of writing practices across fiction and nonfiction. It is an area with the largest number of majors and has great potential for attracting more majors to the Department, especially as it can articulate to practical and theoretical challenges of new forms of writing in an increasingly global and networked society. There are strong potentials for integrating the theoretical and critical foci of the other curricular areas with this program.

The faculty are dedicated teachers and advisors, and it is clear that this has resulted in happy and motivated students. CAPE scores and course recommendations are high.


One of the most apparent challenges for the Department is addressing the large number of distinct majors, several of which have few students and are shrinking along with overall enrollment of majors in the Department. This has led to courses being cancelled and difficulty for students trying to take the classes required to complete their majors. Additionally it seems to be contributing to an overall fragmentation of the Department whose strength has been in its interdisciplinary nature. There are compelling reasons to consider breaking down the boundaries between the areas and replace separate majors with clusters that are distinct from the language requirements (and are built on affinities of faculty interests from different languages and sections). As the Department looks to revise the curriculum, there seems to be a need to consider how the relevance of areas of study in the Department can be made more legible to potential majors. From the outside (to incoming students, parents, and even administrators), Literature is often conceived as a field that is largely academic and lacks relevance to or value for career opportunities. As the curriculum is reshaped, the design and (re)naming of courses, tracks or clusters, and the Department can help these constituencies to understand that the Department is engaged in preparing students for a range of professional and graduate opportunities in areas, including public policy, law, diplomacy, social services, business, etc. Even in the STEM fields, most employers hire a significant number of employees based on their needs for communication and intercultural skills rather than technical or scientific training.

As indicated above, the writing area is still understaffed. Significant opportunities are being missed because of the paucity of faculty who can teach highly significant and in-demand areas such as screenwriting and writing for new media. The disproportionate number of non-ladder rank faculty in the area seems like an impediment to developing a program area that has strong potential to distinguish the Department. This is not just an issue for staffing courses, but for creating leadership in conceiving the scholarly direction of the program and its integration with
the other areas. Also, the courses in the writing area are far too large (Ideally the current sizes would be reduced from mid 20s to a maximum of 20). Writing courses are substantially larger than in writing programs at other universities, and faculty and students would likely all benefit from capping them, as well as sections in some of the cultural studies classes (currently in the high 30s, but ideally would be in the mid 20s).

Students seem underinformed about the rationale for their language requirements and their articulation to their career goals. This seems to be partly a communication issue, but there is also room for curricular changes that would tailor different language sections to general areas of study (some geared toward reading/writing, others emphasizing oral skills, or sections that emphasize language related to policy or health, etc). Students’ satisfaction with the Language requirements seems to vary with their desired outcomes from the major. Students in the writing program appreciate the need for language exposure, but do not feel that the large portion of their time spent in language prerequisites and advanced courses is beneficial to them. Other students, especially those in language majors, seem to value the level of language exposure. More than one student expressed that as they have applied to graduate schools and jobs, their language training was key to their successful applications--this should be conveyed to students early on. Some students who were graduate school-bound seemed to think that more of a focus on reading in lower division courses would be more beneficial than conversational language for their majors (although other students appreciated conversational training, and in fact wished that discontinued conversation courses could be reinstated). One approach to resolving this would be to find a mechanism for communicating the importance and benefits of the language requirements to the students.

Another significant problem that students noted in relation to language courses is the lack of sensitivity to the different needs of students coming from a broad range of proficiencies of heritage and non-heritage language speakers. Some of this is a problem of attention to placement of students in appropriate courses, but also a question of pedagogical approach within classes.

There seems to be a large number of students needing to petition courses to fulfill requirements, either because courses are canceled due to low enrollment, courses are not offered to begin with, or courses not being available across majors. One possibility raised by the faculty was to cross list courses between areas, but another possibility is to revise the structure of the curriculum so that students might major in Literature (or a renamed Departmental major that better captures the unique character of the Department), with a focus on a specific language/literature, culture, or writing. This might also address another issue in the Department. Some of the smaller majors and courses have very low enrollments, which can affect course offerings and faculty workload (e.g., faculty from such majors may be recruited into teaching things not in their area of interest if their own courses are routinely undersubscribed). Currently, the Department has no procedure in place for tracking courses that have been successfully petitioned in the past and fast tracking future petitions of the same class. This has a major impact on staff workload, and could be eased considerably by creating a running list of courses that have previously been approved.
The language requirements and the Department’s dedication to the study of literature in its original language are a major strength of the curriculum, but they have become something of a “blessing and a curse”. The Department is trying to be very interdisciplinary, which is good, but it is also trying to do many things at the same time that are not necessarily congruent with each other. Given the cross-cultural and interdisciplinary focus of the Department, it seems that there should be many ways for students to learn in novel ways (e.g., learning languages by doing service practica off campus). This idea met some resistance among the faculty and graduate students, but the view of the committee was that many undergraduate students would be attracted by such offerings, which could also address students’ conflicting concerns about the Language requirements.

C. An analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the program in the context of campus and University policies.

C1. Strengths.

As indicated above, the Literature Department has a highly unique program that is in line with the campus-wide dedication to interdisciplinary learning/scholarship and preparing students for an increasingly global society. The Department is poised to expand on this and to build on the strength of their growing writing program to address the changing roles of language in transnational and networked economies and cultures. Within the context of a leading research institution, it is important that these potentials of the program are recognized throughout campus as an important balance to the development of the STEM programs, rather than as a Department that is focused on service teaching.

The Literature Department makes significant contributions to the teaching of language and culture on campus. In addition, faculty, graduate students, and lecturers play a major role in teaching the writing programs and the GE requirements within the colleges.

The faculty are highly motivated to make connections with other departments and divisions, and are eager to increase their appeal to students from a range of fields. The Chair has made some important steps in this area, and efforts in this direction should continue.

The faculty are actively engaged in rethinking their syllabi and developing innovative courses that might draw interest from students from around campus (e.g., Poetry for Physicists; Distributing Literature).

College Advisors seem to have a good understanding of the language courses issue, and the Chair has recently met with and provided them with a chart (formed in collaboration with Linguistics) to guide advising of students into language courses.

Given the recent focus on diversity on the campus, the Literature Department is uniquely positioned to expand on its already major contribution in this area. Not only does the
Department have a diverse faculty and student body, but it also provides instruction and focus on diversity and culture that can be a model for the rest of the campus.

A relatively new strength in the Department is in the area of African Diaspora Studies. Given the presence on campus of an African Studies and African American Studies minor, it might be beneficial to the campus to more closely relate Literature courses on African Diaspora with one or both of these programs.

C2. Weaknesses.

There were some concerns regarding campus-level administrative obstacles to making the Department work effectively. For example, new courses are seen as taking a long time to get through the approval process. On the one hand, this signals the need for higher level administration to entrust departments with more authority to make changes within their own programs. On the other hand, an immediate suggestion is that the Department attempt to address curricular changes en masse rather than piecemeal, in order to streamline the approval process.

The Department is home to three undergraduate programs and minors, and participates in several others. Some of these are run by Literature faculty (e.g. as director of the program), but are administered through other departments. The Program for the Study of Religion, Third World Studies, and the Chicano/a, Latino/a Arts and Humanities Minor, are administered in Literature. The core faculty in these two programs are entirely from Literature, as are a large number of faculty from the minor. These programs have the potential to make important interdisciplinary contributions to the campus. However, because most of the core faculty associated with the programs are in Literature, connections with the rest of campus through the programs and minor are limited. Connections with the rest of campus could be improved by recruiting faculty from other departments to play a central role in programs.

Students in Literature do not seem to get much guidance from Career Services, and it is not clear that the Career Center talks with the Department about potential career trajectories and opportunities for Literature Students. The Department may want to meet with Career Services to provide them with information regarding career possibilities for Literature students.

D. Recommendations.

1. The Department should consider moving away from majors driven by regions and linguistic groups, and should instead consider grouping majors by affinities or clusters.

2. Course sizes for writing workshops should be capped, and a reduction in section sizes for cultural courses should also be considered.

3. The Department should continue its efforts to make connections with other departments and programs on campus, and should continue to consider offering innovative courses that would
attract students from across campus. Programs administered through Literature (Third World Studies and the Program for the Study of Religion) should attempt to recruit core faculty from other departments on campus.

4. The faculty in writing should be increased further. A great deal of teaching is done by lecturers (who seem excellent and motivated, but who do not feel that they have a strong voice in the Department). More FTEs in writing focuses should be made available, and new hires could focus on needs that might attract students and expand potential areas of career development for writing majors (e.g., writing for technology, writing for the web, translation, science writing, etc.).

5. The Department should think creatively about how language faculty might best contribute to the needs in the writing area, while maintaining the ability to teach in their own areas of interest. Restructuring the curriculum and developing courses around affinities rather than language might facilitate this.

6. The Department seems to have a core of excellent and highly motivated undergraduate students who are invested in the health of the Department. The Department should support and encourage the establishment of an undergraduate student club or society. A group like this could serve many functions. It could provide forums through which students might learn about potential career trajectories after graduation. In addition, an undergraduate organization might make it easier to communicate to students about how their coursework could articulate to their long-term goals. An organization could also help students make connections with alumni of the Department, which might be helpful to them as they consider their career paths.

7. The Department should continue to take creative steps to resolve the issues around the language requirement. The chart on language courses worked out between the Chair and the Linguistics Department is an excellent start. Faculty could articulate more clearly to students the reasons for their language requirements and how those requirements might benefit their long-term career goals.

8. There are several possible solutions to the website problem. Students might be an excellent resource for helping to resolve this problem. For example, students in a writing course might be able to get credit for creating content for the website. If students were encouraged or given opportunities to work with technical staff on website design and content, they might be able to help bypass the problem of unresponsive faculty mentioned by staff. Collaborations with Visual Arts or Computer Science might also provide (free) resources that could be used to assist with the website update.

9. Communication between Faculty, lecturers, students, and staff needs to be improved. Section heads and curriculum planning committees should at minimum meet regularly with advising staff to discuss student needs and course offerings. These meetings should be structured as ongoing communication rather than initiated solely around pressing needs or problems as they arise. Graduate students and staff should be represented, at least in an informational capacity, on
departmental and especially curriculum-related committees. For example, graduate students can be one of the best resources for faculty to find out what undergrads are thinking about and coping with. Beyond the contact between individual faculty and their TAs, much can be gained from inviting grad students to occasional faculty meetings that are focused on undergraduate teaching concerns. This is especially important throughout the process of broad curriculum revision that the Department is considering.

10. Perhaps most importantly, the Department should think carefully about how it looks to the outside in order to communicate its strengths to potential majors and other campus constituents. In this regard, the committee commends the faculty’s intention to consider renaming the Department to better reflect its actual identity. The department appears to have several important ideas regarding clustering, adding new and innovative courses, and creative ways of deploying instructors that should be encouraged. In addition the faculty should also consider the (re)namning and (re)structuring of courses, tracks, and clusters to make more clear how they fulfill student goals and needs.