

**AY20 Expedited Program Review: English MA**

**Submission date: 10 February 2020**

**Program/s in this review: English MA**

**Specialized accrediting agency (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_**

**Campuses where the program is delivered: Anchorage**

**Members of the program review committee:**

- David Bowie, Professor and Chair, Anchorage
- Jackie Cason, Professor, Anchorage
- Jared Griffin, Associate Professor, Kodiak
- Trish Jenkins, Associate Professor, Anchorage
- Emily Madsen, Assistant Professor, Anchorage

**1. Centrality of Program Mission and Supporting Role (700 words or less)**

**Relevancy of program:** The MA in English provides students the opportunity to obtain a deep understanding of the use of the English language across several domains. Our program offers students the opportunity to learn in ways that are useful beyond the classroom because 1) our innovative curriculum encourages lifelong learning, critical thinking, and effective writing; 2) we teach textual work as an engagement with history, convention, culture, and place so that students can adapt and contribute responsibly in a changing regional and challenging global environment; and 3) our students practice a full range of literacies – written, digital, and visual – so that they may become active and well-equipped citizens. Furthermore, the Department attends to Alaska’s diverse cultures, the North Pacific Rim environment, and networked technologies, all intersecting through forms of textuality.

**Partnerships:** Among other initiatives, the department co-sponsors the Democracy and Civic Action Week essay contest, and faculty are involved in the Alaska Center for the Book, the Books of the Year program, and (through the Center for Community Engagement and Learning) Welcoming Anchorage.

**Workforce development and employment opportunities relevant to the program:** According to the key findings of the AAC&U’s 2018 Employer Research report, employers value applied knowledge in real-world settings, and they also find the ability to write an absolutely crucial skill. We have reworked our curricular offerings to allow more opportunities for application of knowledge both inside and outside of the classroom, and, as would be expected of graduate work in English, the program provides extensive instruction in writing across genres and for multiple audiences. Several of our students make use of our internship course, which combines both of these by having students apply their writing expertise and disciplinary knowledge in real-world settings.

Through our internship course, our program supports workforce development and provides the potential for employment opportunities relevant to our program. The internship course places students at local businesses, non-profits, and on the UAA campus where they acquire experience in a professional setting. The student intern meets one of two types of expectations: They can be contracted to work 1) in a professional setting not necessarily related to their respective area of study but that needs a writing expert who composes with precision and clarity as they produce documents in response to a variety of situations; or 2) in a professional setting that is related to their respective area of study and needs a writing expert who can also apply disciplinary skills and knowledge. The internship experience typically requires students to draw upon skills that writing courses develop such as writing, editing, design, document production, document analysis, and research knowledge. In many cases, interns are also able to use their experience to then mentor other students.

**2. Program Demand (including service to other programs), Efficiency, and Productivity (7 year trend; 1400 words or less)**

**Summary:** The Department of English offers one graduate program (the MA in English). The department's faculty, and therefore the program, takes an English Studies approach, in which the field of English is made up of a dynamic, evolving collection of subfields that, when taken together, provide a better understanding of the world's most widely spoken language in all of its forms and uses. Although the MA in English has experienced significant changes during the review period, the department has taken steps to react to those changes, and has maintained the program's strengths while making it much more efficient.

**Program productivity:** The MA in English is a small but consistently productive program, producing at least four graduates per year during the review period. The program, when pursued full-time, is designed to take two years, but some of our students are part-time, and so they generally take three years. The faculty are careful to admit students who have the ability to be successful at completing the program, and this is reflected in low DFW rates.

**Support to other programs:** The MA in English underwent a major transition during the review period. During the first few years of the review period the program directly supported the Tier I writing general education courses, because the students in the program were trained to function as teaching assistants in those courses. With the move of those courses out of the Department of English, the English MA was no longer able to maintain that function, and since the program's curriculum was designed to support that role, that necessitated a curricular revision.

As part of the ensuing curricular revision, the program was revised so that it could directly support the BA in English, which had not previously been the case. This was primarily done through a move to stacked courses, with the student learning outcomes for the graduate courses explicitly designed to have the graduate students act as mentors to the undergraduates in the paired courses. The specifics of how this is done differs by course, but can take the form of graduate students developing expertise in a particular topic and helping undergraduate students develop skills in that area, or graduate students acting as team leaders for groups working on significant projects.

**Efficiency:** The English faculty recognized a few years ago that our approach to teaching the MA in English—basically, taking the traditional path of teaching several small courses for our graduate students—was inefficient, and particularly so in an era of declining budgets. Therefore, we shifted our curricular offerings to a model involving several stacked courses, so that faculty time could be allocated more effectively. This also allowed us to shift the focus of the MA in English in a way that it could directly support the BA in English (as discussed in the next section).

This approach has the dual advantages of enhancing the BA in English by allowing undergraduate students the opportunity to have contact with students who have more experience and knowledge (whereas there had previously been little such contact), and also by increasing the efficiency with which faculty resources are used. That is, given that the MA in English is a small program, class sizes are small; by shifting to a stacked-course model, that means that while the program involves small graduate sections and therefore appears to have a high cost per SCH, only a small proportion of faculty costs are actually involved in the delivery of those sections, since they are simultaneously teaching larger undergraduate sections.

**3. Program Quality, Improvement and Student Success (1500 words or less)**

**Summary:** The Department of English offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in its mission to educate students to become active and literate citizens, and has taken important steps to adapt to the changing landscape of English Studies. The department has developed, and continues to develop, curriculum in accordance with its own mission and expectations for student success, its disciplinary expectations, and UAA's values and expectations for academic programs. The MA in English provides an opportunity for students to gain a fuller understanding of English Studies as an integrated field of study encompassing the subfields of writing, rhetoric, literature, literacies, and linguistics, all while also developing skills in leading and mentoring undergraduate students.

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**Curriculum and program design:** We have developed, revised, and implemented our graduate curriculum in concert with our revisions of our undergraduate program to reflect student learning and diversity that is consistent with our mission and UAA's values. A shift toward topics courses allows flexible offerings and course stacking. We can sustain the graduate program offerings with limited enrollments while providing leadership opportunities for graduate students and enriched experiences for undergraduates. Specifically:

### Courses

- A shift toward topics courses allows flexible course offerings and means that the faculty can more easily adjust course offerings in response to student desires and needs.
- A shift to stacked courses has allowed us to increase faculty efficiency (as discussed in section 2), and has also allowed for the pedagogical advantage of allowing graduate students to become mentors to undergraduates as they (the graduate students) develop their subject-matter expertise further, providing an enriched experience for graduate and undergraduate students simultaneously.
- We continue to work on curricular changes that underscore these initiatives to keep our curriculum current and relevant.

### Program Design

- We initiated a significant redesign of our program under a multidisciplinary English Studies model. This redesign features a restructuring of our program's curriculum through innovative program design to continue to meet our discipline's and UAA's expectations and values. The integrated model of the English program requires a small set of courses that underscore the breadth of English Studies, and then provides students freedom to (in consultation with their advisors) select courses that support their goals.
- Because our MA students follow diverse paths after graduation (e.g., pursuing further graduate education, working in industry, serving nonprofits, teaching), students may complete the program with either a thesis or a project, opening a range of opportunities for both theoretical and applied research.
- In our redesigned program students experience a range of disciplined inquiry methods, from literature to linguistics to rhetoric and writing studies.

**Program Student Learning Outcomes assessment:** The English Department prides itself on being a supporter of UAA's mission and is intentional in our service to that mission. To that end, we see UAA's General Education Requirements not just as a useful statement of the aims of an undergraduate education, but also as the foundation of higher education more generally, and therefore we have taken deliberate action to align our Program Student Learning Outcomes with UAA's General Education Requirement Learning Outcomes, albeit, of course, at a higher level of expected ability.

### English Program SLO 1: Address precisely articulated critical questions

- GER SLO #3 – Relate knowledge to historical context
- GER SLO #4 – Interpret different systems of aesthetic representation and understand their historical and cultural context
- GER SLO #8 – Adopt critical perspectives on globalization and diversity

### English Program SLO 2: Demonstrate deep familiarity with print and electronic scholarship

- GER SLO #7 – Locate and use relevant information
- GER SLO #9 – Integrate knowledge and employ skills gained to synthesize creative thinking, critical judgment and personal experience in a meaningful and coherent manner.

### English Program SLO 3: Apply detailed evidence to support claims

- GER SLO #3 – Relate knowledge to historical context
- GER SLO #4 – Interpret different systems of aesthetic representation and understand their historical and cultural context

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English Program SLO 4: Utilize field-appropriate theories and methodologies effectively

- GER SLO #3 – Relate knowledge to historical context
- GER SLO #5 – Investigate the complexity of human institutions and behavior
- GER SLO #6 – Identify ways science informs understanding of natural processes

English Program SLO 5: Write analytically according to disciplinary conventions

- GER SLO #7 – Locate and use relevant information
- GER SLO #9 – Integrate knowledge and employ skills gained to synthesize creative thinking, critical judgment and personal experience in a meaningful and coherent manner.

English Program SLO 6: Document fully according to disciplinary stylesheets

- GER SLO #1 – Communicate effectively
- GER SLO #7 – Locate and use relevant information
- GER SLO #9 – Integrate knowledge and employ skills gained to synthesize creative thinking, critical judgment and personal experience in a meaningful and coherent manner

Out of the nine GER SLOs, the English department has aligned its program to support eight (with SLO #2 “Reason mathematically and analyze quantitative and qualitative data competently to reach sound conclusions” the only obvious exception). Few UAA programs can make such a claim to support UAA’s GERs so broadly and intentionally.

**Student success:** While one would certainly expect graduate students to enter a program having already proven themselves successful as students, the English Department has taken several measures to facilitate and implement student success initiatives, a UAA core focus, at the graduate level to ensure student growth through the program. These initiatives include High Impact Practices and individual, targeted advising.

- Student engagement in High Impact Practices is a notable feature of our program
  - Writing Intensive Curriculum (WIC). The program’s courses are all, by their nature, writing-intensive.
  - Scholarly collaboration with faculty members and internships. Our internship program (ENGL A695 Internship in English) pairs students with projects both inside and outside the university. In conjunction with these internships, students have collaborated with faculty on research projects, leading to co-presentation and -publications.
  - Portfolios. E-portfolios are commonly used for courses in the program.
- Students receive individualized advising from relatively early in their degree program. Our advising strategies support students as they progress through the program, as evidenced by our efficient time to degree (discussed in section 2), and we have implemented strategies to make sure that the advising relationships works ever more smoothly.

**Student accomplishments:** These characteristics of our programs, from curriculum revision to student success initiatives, have resulted in noteworthy student accomplishments. Many of our students have pursued their degrees as a way to advance further in their careers (e.g., ASD and MSBSD teachers, members of the military), and a number of our recent graduates have continued on to further graduate or professional degrees (e.g., PhD in Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy at Ohio State; PhD in Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media at North Carolina State; MPhil in Political Theory at Oxford; MA in Speech Language Pathology at Ohio State).

#### 4. Program Duplication / Distinctiveness (300 words or less)

UAA’s integrated English Studies program is distinct from the MA in English at UAF, which centers entirely on the study of literature. We have designed a curriculum that fosters students’ capacities to interpret texts, create meaning, and engage diverse communities across all of the various subfields of English Studies. All students in the program, before specializing in one of these subfields, receive an intensive background in the theories and methods of linguistics, rhetoric, literacies, literature, and writing. This means that students graduate from our program knowing how to practice multiple methods of inquiry and compose in multiple professional genres, fostering concision. Our program curriculum also provides many elective choices, making it accessible and flexible in serving students’ diverse goals.

**5. Summary Analysis (500 words or less)**

Our program stands alone as the only comprehensive English Studies program in the State of Alaska, and it provides a valuable service for Alaskans seeking to advance their careers and/or pursue further education in English Studies. Thanks to our decision to stack our graduate courses with corresponding undergraduate courses, our graduate program is efficient and cost effective. Faculty have used this stacking as a way to provide new experiences for our graduate students, including tasking them with leading small group sections of undergraduates, asking them to deliver lectures in areas of content they specialize in, and providing them additional opportunities to discuss theory connected to the content of the course. Both graduate students and undergraduates have commented on the liveliness of the stacked classroom, and the way it enriches both sides of the experience.

In the future, we would like to conduct more outreach, both internal and external, to boost our enrollment numbers for the graduate program. While it is cost-effective even with smaller numbers, larger cohorts result in a greater sense of collegiality and community in the program, and we want to continue offering that to our students. We will continue to support graduate students who want to go on to pursue higher degrees, and we plan to build on the success of the high numbers of students from our program who go on to terminal degrees and successful careers in technical writing and other fields to create a vibrant, supportive alumni network.