

Date: February 28, 2020

To: John Stalvey, Interim Provost

From: David Stevenson, Professor, Coordinator, Creative Writing and Literary Arts

Cc: John Petraitis, Interim Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
David Bowie, Professor, Chair, Department of English

Program in this Review: Creative Writing and Literary Arts MFA

Program Response to Dean's AY20 Expedited Program Review Findings

Overview

We are grateful for the Dean's recognition of our program's many successes and general excellence. Our reading of his findings observes a disconnect, a moment of cognitive dissonance, between his "Commendations and Recommendations" and his "Decision" to recommend deletion of the program. This raises the rhetorical question: *What are we willing to spend to maintain a highly successful program and excellent program that serves its students, the local community, and the state of Alaska so well?* If the decision to delete the program is upheld the answer to that question is: *nothing*.

We believe our best argument was made in our Expedited Program Review. To this, we will here add a few points of clarification and a proposal for going forward.

Student Credit Hour Production/Full-time Equivalencies

As the Dean notes, CWLA ranks near the bottom of CAS' masters programs in student credit hours per full-time equivalent faculty. This is not surprising. Over half the instruction in the 45-credit degree program is delivered in one-on-one mentorships between students and professors. This is fixed feature of low residency models.

The real question is: how much is the gap between tuition revenue and the costs of running the program. IR data included in the Expedited Program Review indicates this figure is about \$60,000 per year.

Note, for context: program budget has been decreased by two-thirds over the last six years.

Workforce Ramifications

There seems to be a disturbing sense underlying some of these proposed cuts that the arts are superfluous because they don't contribute to the workforce. That the arts don't contribute to the workforce is a gross misconception.

The arts economy of Alaska represents over 11,000 jobs and \$1.4B in value added to the state economy according to a study conducted by the Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account (ACPSA), which is produced jointly by the National Endowment for the Arts' Office of Research & Analysis and the Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Commerce Department. The UAA CWLA program prepares graduates for employment in this vital and growing economic sector.

Many—one-quarter to one-third—of our graduates are teachers. For example: of the thirteen full-time professors in UAA's Department of Writing, six are graduates of UAA's MFA program.

Program Duplication/Distinctiveness

In his findings the Dean mentions "overlap" between the UAF and UAA MFA programs. I am not sure to what overlap he refers to here. As stated in our Expedited Review: UAF and UAA's programs are so different in structure that they do not attract the same constituency of students; as far as we know, no applicant has ever applied to both programs. We serve completely different student needs.

Potential Actions

1. Continue efforts to petition the BOR to allow the program to charge a tuition surcharge of 20% as is currently done in the College of Engineering and College of Business and Public Policy. This was the directive of the Provost's response to our last Program Review (Fall 2019). This action, were it approved, would significantly close the gap between tuition revenue and program costs. Preparations for this petition were already underway when paused for the Expedited Program Review.

2. Professor [REDACTED] has offered to retire (early) if that would "save" the program. Professor [REDACTED] was one of the founders of the low-residency model here and is one of the driving forces of the program, beloved by all. She is a full professor in the Department of English working on a 60% contract. Losing her would completely close the gap between revenue and expenses. There is no question that this would be big loss, but we could probably survive it. We would then have an all adjunct faculty, but this is typical of other low-residency programs nation-wide.

Please note that we would never have made such a suggestion; this is Professor [REDACTED]'s proposal.

Decision

We know that the state and the university are facing hard fiscal times. We know that these recommendations have not been arrived at lightly and that difficult decisions will be made by well-meaning people who are trying to do their best for all of us.

Please consider revising our status from “recommended for deletion” to “continued review.” We think that despite the Dean’s conclusion his findings actually make a very strong case for continuation.