



The College at Brockport  
State University of New York

**Department of English  
Program Review, 2018-2019  
Degrees: BA and BS**

## Part One – Program Self-Study Outline

### I. Executive Summary (to be completed at the conclusion of the Self-Study)

#### Department of English PPR 2018 Executive Summary (Undergraduate)

The English program at SUNY Brockport is complex, with responsibilities that extend from general education through graduate degrees. It includes a 36-credit undergraduate major, a 36-credit Masters Program, and an 18-credit minor. At both the undergraduate and graduate levels, students choose between the literature and the creative writing concentrations. About one third of English majors are also preparing for certification to teach at either the childhood or adolescence levels. The department houses the film minor, as well as the College Composition Program. It hosts a long-running speakers series, The Writers Forum, and a recently initiated conference for graduate students, SEGue. It has an active student club that edits and publishes the College literary magazine, *Jigsaw*. English faculty staff the Oxford Summer Program. Having moved into the newly constructed Liberal Arts Building in 2014, the department has very fine facilities, both in terms of classrooms and offices.

At the time of our last review, the Department of English in the middle of a decline in majors, dropping from an all-time high of 456 in 2008 down to 246 in 2014. This curve reached its nadir in 2015 when the department had 223 majors. Since then, it has recovered strongly, with 276 majors registered in fall 2018. The 30-year average for English majors at Brockport is about 260.

Course offerings are extensive and play a major role in developing advanced skills and content literacies among our students. The department offers undergraduate courses in British, American, world, and children's/ YA literature; composition; film; and literary theory. In creative writing, the department offers courses in poetry, prose fiction and non-fiction, and playwriting. The department cross-lists classes

with Women and Gender Studies, African and African-American Studies, Theatre, and Environmental Science. English plays an extensive role in General Education, offering courses that satisfy a wide variety of general education distribution requirements. We offer business writing as a service course to the business department and offer courses in advanced writing that are recommended for students in the pre-med track and health sciences.

The teaching faculty of the department consists of 20 tenure lines (of which 16 are tenured), one full-time lecturer, and about 15 adjuncts/ semester, most of whom have been teaching in the department for many years. The faculty is highly productive as scholars and creative writers. Since our last review in 2014, we have published 11 single-authored books, seven edited books and journal special issues, 58 scholarly and creative essays, and four poems. We have also won 13 external grants. In the same time, we have delivered over 100 papers and readings.

For course offerings in American and British literature we are adequately staffed. However, we are critically understaffed in world literature and significantly understaffed in creative writing and composition. Since our last review we have lost two positions in world literature and added one position in composition studies. The two lost positions—a senior professor and a lecturer—have left us struggling to offer an appropriate diversity of courses to satisfy the world literature requirement of a contemporary English major. Though we do not face critical shortages in staffing creative writing and composition courses, we do rely too heavily on adjunct instructors in these categories. Overall, the ratio of adjunct to full-time sections is higher than optimal, though the adjuncts are concentrated in Freshman Composition, Introduction to Creative Writing, and Business Writing. Full-time faculty teach slightly more than 50 percent of sections offered by the department. Our standard is for tenured and tenure-line faculty to cycle through introductory composition and creative writing courses on a regular basis. Shortages in staffing content specialty areas have required that we suspend this standard in order to put the most qualified instructors into advanced, content-area courses. This practice both raises the adjunct/ full-time ratio and disconnects senior faculty from the composition and introductory creative writing areas of the program.

The department is satisfied that it offers a rigorous program at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and it is satisfied that the programs are rigorous in both the creative writing and literature concentrations. In discussing the curriculum to prepare for this review, however, the department also reached consensus that it is time to revisit requirements in the literature concentration. The literature curriculum requires coursework in both historical periods and geographical regions. It also requires that students develop skills in close reading, contextualization, research, and that they have sophisticated literacy in literary and cultural theory. This set of requirements gives students a thorough and rigorous preparation, but the multiplicity of requirements also creates significant hurdles in scheduling, both for faculty and students. Further, the lines of distinction between geographies and historical periods may restrict course design in ways that no longer reflect current trajectories of literary scholarship and pedagogy. One of the opportunities that this PPR offers is to give us a starting point for a discussion of the curriculum in 2019-2020.

On the creative writing side, budget cuts to the Writers Forum have put the quality of this part of the program at risk. The Writers Forum course is the capstone of the creative writing curriculum. It is a linch-pin in both the undergraduate and graduate creative writing curricula. A pillar of the College cultural programming, it is also the primary vehicle through which we introduce students to the world of professional authorship. Cuts to its budget have significantly undermined efforts to recruit authors to participate in the series. In fall of 2018, the Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences committed to reviewing and increasing the Writers Forum budget. It will be important to define a Writers Forum budget that is sustainable in terms of college resources and allows the Writers Forum directors to offer a program worthy of its history.

Faculty in the English program have long worked with students preparing for careers as educators. Since 2015 we have been working with Brockport's Department of Education and Human Development (EHD) to establish teacher preparation programs that will meet the changed requirements related to SUNY seamless transfer, revised content specialty tests, new financial aid restrictions, and the Excelsior Scholarship. The outcome of the dialogue about Adolescence Education is that the English

department (and seven other departments) will introduce two new majors at the adolescent level. One, English Adolescence Education, will prepare students for certification as English teachers in high schools. The other, English Inclusive Adolescence Education, will prepare students for certification both as English teachers and as teachers for students with disabilities.

We are currently working on programs for teacher preparation at the Childhood Education level, grades 1-6. The proposal advocated by Brockport's EHD will be harmful to the English program. It will tightly narrow students' options, making it impossible for any student simultaneously to prepare for childhood education certification and to study English. The program proposed by EHD also has no equivalent in the State of New York—of the 51 colleges that offer Childhood Education preparation, 51 also offer a concentration in English. The English option in childhood education programs are structured either as content sequences within a major housed in the Department of Education, or through a major in English that includes a childhood education track. Students in Childhood Education have historically made up 10-15% of the English major. For our college to choose to exclude all students pursuing childhood education referral will have a significant impact on enrollments, compel a profound change in the identity of our department, and create a situation in which English offers two program options at the adolescence level but none at the elementary level.

In response to the proposal EHD has submitted to the College Senate, the English Department has coordinated with other programs invested in childhood education preparation to advocate for the inclusion of 30 credit concentrations as options within the proposed Education major. This model—a Childhood Education major combined with a content core concentration—is practiced by 65 percent of New York State colleges that offer Childhood education programs. However, since EHD remains strongly opposed to such content core concentrations in their major, the English Department is also preparing an alternative that will allow students to major in English while completing a pedagogy track that satisfies all requirements of the program proposed by EHD. This model—a content area major combined with a teacher preparation track—is practiced by 35 percent of NYS colleges that offer childhood education programs.

The English Department has begun to develop a career preparation program. We introduced a career preparation course as an elective in 2016 and have been working with the Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences to coordinate career preparation programs across the College. The program emphasizes a multi-year approach that begins by addressing the career options question during the admissions process.

During the 2017-2018 academic year, the college revised its assessment practices, shifting toward an emphasis on summative assessment. 2018-2019 will be the first year implementing the new process, including curriculum maps and mapping onto the college strategic plan. We anticipate that this new process will both sharpen our assessment practices and bring down the labor that has gone into assessment.

The assessment process has been important to ensuring the quality of our program, but it has also brought into the foreground a strong sense that service expectations have expanded in ways that undermine the ability of faculty to maintain research agendas, stay current in their fields through reading and collaboration with colleagues, and even to maintain the highest standards of time management in our teaching. Several factors have led to this imbalance in the way we are able to allocate our time between teaching, scholarship, and service activities. First, the faculty is receiving mixed messages regarding expectations for participation in recruiting, advancement, alumni relations, and so on. Second, the department has extended itself to develop and embrace a stronger co-curricular culture for English Majors. This extension includes more intensive advisement practices organized through the office of the Associate Chair, the development of a departmental awards ceremony, recruitment of students for resume building opportunities such as NURC (National Undergraduate Research Council), the development of the SEGuE Graduate Conference, and careful mentoring of students in the English Club, among others opportunities. Third, as more members of the English department attain full rank and are thus recruited for positions of responsibility in campus-wide activities, service commitments are simply added to an already expanded departmental service workload. These increases in service workload have coincided with significant budget cuts and ambiguity regarding administrative support for advisement. Cuts to the

department budget have undermined our ability to support student activities and create unique high impact teaching events. The position of Associate Chair, crucial to supporting advisement, co-curricular, and recruiting activities is currently approved on a year-by-year basis, but it needs to be stabilized so we can have predictable support for advisement. In the department's annual spring retreat, members of the department identified this issue of service expansion and its impingement on both scholarship and teaching as the issue we most wanted to take up for discussion.

In sum, the Department of English offers a robust program delivered by an accomplished faculty. The program is rigorous, requiring both breadth and depth in both the creative writing and literature concentrations. Staffing is not sustainable in world literature and the quality of the program is risked by over-reliance on adjunct instructors in composition and creative writing. With the exception of an internal threat from SUNY Brockport's Department of Education and Human Development, the challenges it faces are typical of those faced by other English, humanities, and liberal arts departments. Stringency in the budget has exacerbated the ability of faculty to maintain quality in scholarship, teaching and service. It has begun to face these challenges first by developing a career preparation program for its students and second by preparing to rethink the curriculum to synchronize more fully with current external circumstances.

**(End Section I)**