



The College at Brockport
State University of New York

**Department of English
Program Review, 2018-2019**

(Degrees: MA and Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing)

Part One – Program Self-Study Outline

I. Executive Summary—English Graduate Programs

The Brockport English department offers a 36-credit MA in English with tracks in Literature and Creative Writing. As a separate degree, we also offer a 15-credit Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing. Our graduate students come from a range of backgrounds, and have a variety of goals in seeking MAs and Certificates from our department. We serve teachers who are seeking Master’s degrees to maintain their New York State teaching certifications; students seeking advanced credentials on their way to doctoral study or full-time employment; students who are working in fields including law, research, not-for-profits, or education, who may be seeking a career change; and students who seek advanced study in English for personal enrichment.

Over the period of this program review, the number of active graduate students at any one time has hovered around 30. The size of our program allows us to provide personalized instruction to our graduate students while structuring their graduate school experience around learning cohorts. These two features evidence a key plank of our identity as an intellectually intensive program in which students’ creative and scholarly work is taken seriously, where they are challenged by rigorous material, and where they are given the tools and support to grow as writers and thinkers. Close intellectual and creative engagement between students and faculty, and among our student cohorts, is at the core of what we do in our graduate program. We believe that this is what our students seek from our programs; we have taken recent steps to enhance such engagement; and we aspire to grow our program’s capacities for doing so in the future.

In recent years we have taken steps to enhance the core elements of our graduate programs. We have sought to strengthen the Literature curriculum by adding a required Introduction to Graduate Studies course to give all of our Literature-track students a solid grounding in literary theory and methodology. The past five years have also seen the inception and immense growth of our graduate student symposium, SEGUE, which provides all of our students, as well as visiting graduate students from other universities, the chance to present their best work in a professional setting. SEGUE is a critical program as it teaches many of the “soft” skills that accompany and bolster strong academic work, and it also reinforces cohort learning and cohesion among our graduate students. Alongside SEGUE, the graduate programs continue to make use of the Writer’s Forum as a high-impact learning opportunity for our graduate students. Finally, we have recently designed a new Combined Degree in English Literature that will allow our best undergraduates to seamlessly transition into graduate study in our department; the Combined Degree (which has been approved by the Brockport College Senate and is under review at SUNY) maintains the rigorous standards of our MA program in Literature and invites highly capable undergraduates to join and strengthen our learning cohort.

During the review period we have faced challenges that threaten to impede our delivery of the kind of program we would like to be. Recent structural changes at the College have eliminated the Graduate School, which transitioned to the lower-profile Center for Graduate Studies, and repeated turnover in academic leadership has left us uncertain about the status of graduate studies within the College’s priorities. We have faced cyclical enrollments over the past five years, especially in the Literature track of our program; some years have seen rather thin new enrollments, while others have been more robust. We are currently on an upward trajectory in our Literature-track enrollments, and we outline in this self-study some of the specific strategies that we are using to ensure robust cohorts of Literature track students; we note, however, that the aforementioned structural and leadership turnover at the College has left us with little support for recruitment efforts, and these are largely maintained by additional faculty workload. In the Creative Writing MA and Certificate tracks, enrollments remain steadier, though we have reached an enrollment bottleneck of sorts. Enrolling more students in the Creative Writing graduate programs will intensify workload pressures on creative writing faculty (mainly for Thesis direction and readerships, which remain largely uncompensated), and also complicate course scheduling for graduate sections. There is evidence that the Creative Writing programs could grow, but we are concerned that doing so with current staffing levels would compromise the close faculty-student interaction that is at the core of our program.

In addition, we have struggled to fund the signature programs that differentiate our English graduate experience. This report details the steady decline of funding for the Writer’s Forum over the past number of years; while the visiting writer series isn’t solely for our graduate students, it is a distinctive learning experience that we are able to offer our students every semester. Our newer program, SEGUE, has shown marked growth in the number of participating graduate students, the inclusion of keynote speakers, and in our partnering with like-minded departments for maximum impact, but without dedicated funding it is labor-intensive to maintain, and its future remains tenuous.

Our response to the above-named challenges has been to emphasize rather than water down, the programs that we offer. We believe that the intensity and personalization that our students can access is the key differentiator for the Brockport English MA, and we believe in skills and outlooks that our students gain during their studies with us. At the same time, we have taken steps to help students articulate the value and applicability of what they do in their graduate program. We have, for instance, added graduate-level courses in Career Preparation and Professional Writing. These courses are designed not as an alternative to the literary and creative studies that students undertake, but as a way of enhancing and directing the advanced capabilities that students develop in their graduate classes and independent projects. Our program is definitively within the domain of the liberal arts and the humanities specifically, and by design it does not *singularly* prepare students for specific job functions. Rather, our programs train students for the advanced knowledge work is now required in so many sectors; if there is one thing of which we might be certain when it comes to the opportunities of the near future, it is that the job titles and descriptions that we see today will not be the same in five or ten years. Advanced training in the humanities—and specifically in literary and cultural analysis, and creative craft and practice—generates flexible, resourceful, critical mindsets that can develop with the changes in the world around us.

We want our graduate program to be known as the kind of place where students can do innovative scholarly and creative work that grows from rigorous courses and challenging collaborations with faculty and peers. We are keen to bolster the core components and offerings of our programs, and we look forward to the reviewers’ insights.

(End Section I)