University of Colorado **Boulder**

2025 Program Review

Department of English

Academic Review and Planning

Advisory Committee Report

Approved

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Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs | Date

1/12/2026

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2025 ENGL Program Review

Process Overview

The Academic Review and Planning Advisory Committee (ARPAC) review of the Department of English was conducted in accordance with the 2025 program review guidelines. The degree program report and goal setting exercise were prepared and submitted by the unit. An external review committee (ERC), consisting of two experts from outside of the University of Colorado Boulder, engaged in a virtual visit and submitted a report based upon review of relevant documents and interviews with faculty, staff, and student unit members and university administrators. ARPAC staff, employing web conferencing tools, facilitated the external review as a remote visit over April 21 and 22, 2025. The ARPAC unit liaisons submitted a summary of findings derived from the goal setting exercise. ARPAC reviewed and considered these materials, met with the chair, and wrote this report.

Past Reviews

In 2016, ARPAC's recommendations focused on improving departmental climate and community, improving curriculum and degree programs, and engaging faculty more in undergraduate education and the assessment of learning outcomes. In discussing the previous (2016) ARPAC review and process, the current external reviewers praised the department for its overall responsiveness to that report, noting: "The leadership has addressed and continues to address the issue of lack of collaboration and communication, and low culture of collective decision making or shared governance. It is acknowledged that the lack of shared space hinders this progress. Collaboration and communication go hand in hand and will be an ongoing process."

It would appear that progress has been made on the issues of climate and culture alluded to in the previous ARPAC cycle. However, the department notes that it has struggled to build and maintain community while away from its permanent home (Hellems); classroom space has been an issue, and access to standard office workspace has been disrupted. On the point of progress from past review cycles, the current external reviewers stress the need for continued improvements in communication between the department and administration (though this communication dynamic is disputed by the current chair of the unit).

Unit Analysis

The campus' standardized description of the Department of English is available on the website of the Office of Data & Analytics (D&A) at https://www.colorado.edu/oda/institutional-research/institutional-level-data/information-department/academic-review-and-planning. D&A updates the profile annually in the fall semester. This report cites data posted in August 2024, reflecting the state of the Department of English as of the academic year (AY) 2023-2024.

Teaching and Learning Excellence and Assessment

The Department of English offers a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in English (with tracks in Literature and Culture and in Creative Writing), a Master of Arts (MA) in English, a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Creative Writing, and a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in English, as well as undergraduate minors in Literature, Creative Writing, and (in conjunction with the Program for Writing and Rhetoric) Writing and Public Engagement. These offerings have a broad range of pedagogical goals, including developing students' communication and research skills and broadening cultural and linguistic

knowledge. The undergraduate program reaches a large number of students across campus, with about two-thirds of credit hours coming from non-majors. The MA and PhD programs are specifically tailored to prepare students to conduct advanced research and to be college-level teachers.

In the degree program report, assessment metrics largely focus on program sizes, enrollment and retention, and outcomes such as internships, PhD matriculation, and alumni success. The department has plans around creating new programs (e.g. certificates and minors) around popular and useful curriculum offerings such as Data Science for the Humanities that may both enrich current students' education and draw in new majors. The department has also completed a Three-Year Student Learning Assessment (planning 2021-2022; reporting AYs 2022-2023, 2023-2024, 2024-2025), using various audit exercises to gauge the extent to which it is achieving learning goals in its undergraduate courses.

The department makes a positive assessment of its undergraduate program in terms of increased enrollment, low "melt," and the ability to offer both large lecture classes that are able to serve a large number of non-majors and small, seminar-style classes for majors. They are also offering a range of specialized classes that are very popular, e.g., "Writing in the Age of AI (Artificial Intelligence)" that had 100 students on a waitlist. The external reviewers also note that these types of classes have contributed to student interest in the department and major, and also that a shift towards more applied skills is in line with the evolution of the field.

Relatedly, the department is piloting themed cohorts around topic areas for PhD students as a way to weave together research and teaching and to revitalize the program, which has had declining numbers in recent years. The external reviewers praised this plan, calling it a "smart approach" to supporting both research and teaching. And though one should take such rankings with a grain of salt, because the previous ARPAC report (2016) explicitly noted a drop in the department's ranking in English graduate programs via U.S. News and World Report from 46th to 50th, it is worth noting that the current ranking is 40th in the 2025 rankings.

Research, Scholarly, and/or Creative Work Excellence

Faculty in the Department of English teach and produce scholarly and creative works in the areas of African American Literature, Black Girlhood Studies, Black Popular Culture, Black Young Adult (YA) Literature, Modern and Contemporary Literature, Victorian Literature, Romanticism, Renaissance Literature, Popular Culture, Film and Digital Media, Poetics Aesthetics, Medieval Literature, Literary Theory, History of Books, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Ethnic American Literature, Literature of the Americas, Post-Colonial Literature, Environmental Literature, Eighteenth Century Literature, Cultural Theory, Cultural Studies, Creative Writing, Composition, Rhetoric and Pedagogy, and British Literature.

The external reviewers noted that "on average, tenure-line faculty members produced 0.5 refereed books, 0.2 edited volumes, 3.7 refereed articles/chapters, and 8.0 creative works over a seven-year reporting period." Faculty research has also resulted in grant funding focused on topics such as digital humanities, data science, and related topics. In the previous program review cycle (2016), productivity was reported as follows: "Average research productivity per faculty member during those seven years derives from self-reported publications in the annual Faculty Report of Professional Activity (FRPA) and includes: 0.8 refereed books and monographs per tenured and tenure-track faculty (TTT) (ranking ninth of 16 units); 4.0 referred articles and chapters per TTT

(ranking ninth of 16 units); and 20.6 creative works per TTT (fifth of 12 units reporting creative works)."

The department's goal setting exercise includes some promising plans towards providing faculty opportunities that might help them with research and creative output. These include designing courses around faculty research areas and using student credit hours (SCH) to lower teaching loads for research-active faculty (and it is worth noting that making these decisions and adjustments would likely be easier with more transparency from the college to the department around the revenue model.) There is also a strong desire to encourage more ambitious grant writing, which the department believes could be accomplished by providing faculty more time via reduced teaching, given available resources. There may also be opportunities for encouraging grant writing by making it a more explicit part of promotion and tenure criteria, an opportunity noted by the external reviewers. The external reviewers also expressed that the department should work on other ways to think about how scholarly output besides monographs should or could potentially count towards tenure and promotion.

As noted above, the themed PhD cohort model is promising, and the external reviewers agree that it has potential to support faculty research in addition to the department's educational mission. Although the external reviewers were skeptical about the potential for its revenue to be self-sustaining, the expansion of Subito Press seems like an excellent opportunity for the department's scholarly and creative mission.

Hiring and Mentoring (Faculty, Staff, Postdoctoral Fellows)

According to the D&A profile for AY 2023-2024, faculty in the Department of English consisted of 30 tenured and tenure-track faculty, 3 teaching-track faculty, and 15 "other" (honorary/lecturer/visiting/adjunct). However, the unit submission (presumably more currently accurate) lists 38 TTT faculty (16 full professors, 15 associate professors, 7 assistant professors), 6 teaching professors, and 14 lecturers. The department's goal setting exercise (as well as the external reviewers) note that English has lost quite a few faculty over the past 10 years (14 total; 13 tenure-track faculty and one teaching track faculty member), resulting in a smaller department.

Given these losses, the department sees hiring tenure-track faculty as an important goal, and although there are multiple areas of need, they specifically mention global literature, creative writing, and humanities and technology. In this context it is worth noting how often needs around technology-related areas came up across this documentation—e.g., the waitlist for the Writing in the Age of AI course and the statement that "entire initiatives—such as Data Science—fall to one faculty member." Given the class's popularity and size, it is possible that some of these challenges could be addressed by hiring more teaching faculty with expertise in these areas. Additionally, though the chair strongly expressed the importance of prioritizing tenure-track faculty (and particularly pre-tenured faculty given how few there currently are in the department) in order to maintain the department's research identity, it is possible that hiring teaching faculty in important areas would also help solve some problems.

By the most recent unit profile, English's average salaries at the assistant professor and associate professor levels are roughly in-line with Association of American Universities (AAU) public peer averages (assistant average is 100% of AAU public average comparison; associate average is 98% public AAU public average comparison). However, the average salary among full professors is about $15,000 below AAU peer averages for that rank (88% of AAU public average comparison). In

the goal setting exercise, the department notes a need to revise its salary procedures to be in-line with the faculty Salary Procedures Working Group Report.

The external reviewers describe mentoring for pre-tenured faculty as "reactive," suggesting that more could be done to put programming in place. Additionally, with respect to mid-career faculty, the external reviewers noted that "too many associate professors get 'stuck' in rank for 10-20-30 years," adding that this seems to especially be the case with women faculty. The department has had a number of promotions to full professor in recent years. Still, this may represent both opportunities for further mentorship and the need to clarify or revisit promotion guidelines.

According to the D&A profile for AY 2023-2024, staff personnel in the Department of English consisted of 1 classified staff member and 2 student assistants. The department website lists 3 staff: an undergraduate academic services professional, a graduate program coordinator, and a manager of finance and operations.

The external reviewers explicitly called out the skill of the staff and how well they work together. However, there are also multiple identified needs for further staffing; the unit notes the need for staff positions in marketing and outreach (publicity, social media, and alumni and donor relations) as well as support for the creative writing program. It is worth noting that the 2016 ARPAC report included a recommendation for additional staff support for the MFA program. The department also notes the loss of a faculty internship director, so perhaps staff support could help there as well.

Student Success and Mentoring (Undergraduate and Graduate Students)

Per the AY 2023-2024 unit data profile, English has 431 undergraduate majors—this represents a 15% decline in majors over the past 5 years. The unit has 144 undergraduate minors (a 13% increase over 5 years). The unit produced 14,483 student credit hours (a 16% decline over the past 5 years), of which 67% were taken by non-majors. Thirty-four percent of the unit's student credit hours are taught by TTT faculty, while 11% are taught by teaching-track faculty, 32% by graduate part-time instructors (GPTIs), and the remainder by "all other credit." The percentage of student credit hours taken by non-majors is substantial, which is consistent with service teaching. Surveyed seniors (2021) reported high satisfaction—85%—with the major.

The department reports placing 25-45 students per year into internships. However, it is possible that this benefit may be at risk following the loss of the faculty director of the program.

The external reviewers also note waitlists for upper-level courses within the major. This has the potential to create dissatisfaction among majors, perhaps even delaying graduation. There are multiple possible root causes and possible solutions to this issue (e.g., class sizes, teaching loads, teaching staffing) that are worth investigating.

Per the AY 2023-2024 unit report, English had 57 graduate students (41 MA students and 16 doctoral students).

Graduate students are concerned about the losses in faculty and smaller graduate cohorts over the past decade—the external reviewer report notes this, and this also came up in ARPAC's conversation with the reviewers. The external reviewer report states that graduate students feel like the university is not invested in the humanities, and that English has had "to do more with less." The unit notes that teaching loads are higher than some peer institutions for their PhD students,

potentially slowing students' scholarly progress. The external reviewers note that many peer MFA programs tend to fund their students, while CU Boulder generally is not able to fund its MFA students.

Inclusivity and Unit Culture

In February 2022, a collaborative group met and identified the following five goals to advance diversity, equity and inclusion at CU Boulder: (1) employee skills and development; (2) student achievement outcomes; (3) community building; (4) employee recruitment outcomes; and (5) preparing students to participate in a diverse democracy. The external reviewers praise the unit for its commitment to inclusivity—they note that "the department's intellectual and pedagogical identity incorporates core values in ways that are deeply tied to literary analysis and creative practice, not as superficial inclusion of values, but part of rigorous critical thinking and expression."

English has been without a permanent meeting space during key portions of the present cycle, which has made it hard to work on unit culture and interpersonal investments. The unit is excited about soon being back in a permanent physical space and is planning events that will help with feelings of disconnection.

The external reviewers suggest that additional work on communication is needed between different units within English, as well as between the department and members of the administration. There is some dispute on this characterization per the chair's response to the external reviewers' report. ARPAC's follow-up conversation with the chair of the unit raised the possibility that different understandings of budget matters may be at the heart of these comments about communication dynamics.

In the 2021 Campus Culture Survey, the average response to the statement "respectful treatment is the norm"—with respect to the department of English—was 5.0 among undergraduates, 4.5 among graduate students, and 3.7 among faculty. Responses were measured on a 6 pt. "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" Likert scale. The average response to the statement "everyone is treated with dignity" was 4.8 among undergraduate respondents, 4.2 among graduate students, and 3.4 among faculty. The average response to the statement "angry outbursts are not tolerated" was 4.9 among undergraduate respondents, 4.3 among graduate students, and 3.0 among faculty. Finally, the average response to the statement "rude behavior is not accepted" was 4.8 among undergraduate respondents, 3.8 among graduate students, and 3.2 among faculty.

These numbers suggest some opportunities for improvement in the department, though ARPAC would note that they can also be imperfect and transient indicators. It should be noted that the external reviewers praised the department for its rapport with students, remarked on the department's strong support for its leadership, and mentioned that non-tenure-track faculty reported feeling supported.

Unit Planning and Governance Structures and Processes

The department's short-term goals focus in part on clarity and fairness regarding current processes, including standing rules and salary procedures. There is also a focus on outreach and fundraising, including the plan to establish an external advisory committee. Given that many of the goals of the department could benefit from more resources, this seems like a good strategy to try.

The department is governed by a chair who is elected by secret ballot (of all voting members) and serves a term of three years. The department also has the positions of associate chair for

undergraduate studies, associate chair for graduate studies, and associate chair for creative writing, all of which are also elected by secret ballot (and also serve 3-year terms). Per the standing rules (last revised, March 2021), the voting members of the department include professors, associate professors, assistant professors, and those holding the titles of teaching professor, associate teaching professor, or assistant teaching professor (with a 50% appointment). The department's existing rules specify processes for handling both student and faculty-related grievances.

As the department itself noted, English needs to revise its standing rules and its rules related to salary and merit, as both are out of line with respect to university policy. The department head has started the process of revising the unit's governance documents, per the external reviewers' report.

Notes from the external reviewers regarding promotion and tenure guidelines (particularly what might "count" outside of traditional measures, including grants) as well as their observation of "stagnant" mid-career faculty may point to the need to revisit these guidelines as well.

Recommendations

The members of the Academic Review and Planning Advisory Committee address the following recommendations to the Department of English and to the offices of responsible administrators:

To the Unit:

1. Continue the commitment to develop innovative courses that will attract student majors and help support faculty goals. Increasing majors should be prioritized over increasing minors or non-majors taking English courses.

2. Continue and assess the themed PhD cohort model with respect to both its pedagogical benefits and impact on research.

3. Confer with graduate students to determine if there are actually needed clarifications around milestones and procedures.

4. Review and update the department's tenure and promotion criteria and guidelines (which are dated 2012) in line with expectations for peer and aspirational peer Research 1 universities in English and to ensure that they appropriately account for relevant types of scholarly output.

5. Assess the department's number of TTT and teaching faculty, as well as temporary faculty in relation to degrees, courses, majors, and students. If there is a need and an opportunity for tenure-track faculty hires, prioritize hires at the assistant professor level and in topic areas that appear to be particularly in demand, such as at the intersection of technology and humanities. Consider using "bridging funds" to hire pre-tenured faculty, given the department's disproportionate number of senior faculty.

6. Assess the mentoring and support needs of mid-career faculty.

7. Explore ways to cultivate donation and gift funds, e.g., create an external-facing chair position for a senior or emeritus faculty member to work on external relations, fundraising, and outreach.

8. Continue efforts to advocate for an Arts & Humanities budget process that accounts for the unit's high share of student credit hours from non-majors.

9. Explore ways to engage more cooperatively with the Program for Writing and Rhetoric that might be mutually beneficial.

To the Dean of the Arts and Humanities:

10. Create greater legibility and transparency around the student credit hour revenue model that will support the department in decision making including facilitating access to data needed to inform decision making.

11. Continue efforts toward an Arts & Humanities budget process that accounts for units' high share of student credit hours (SCH) from non-majors and develop a plan to robustly account for and reward these SCH, recognizing units' significant educational contributions. Under the current

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budget model, there are concerns that ENGL will not be allocated appropriate resources for the courses taught/students served.

12. Work with the department to increase and stabilize funding support for graduate students.

13. Help the department assess needs and funding priorities for additional personnel (e.g., staff support, faculty lines) based on prioritizing the recruitment of new English majors.

14. Explore creating shared administrative support services for certain key functions for which individual units, especially smaller units, may not have staff personnel, e.g., graduate student administrative support, event support, budget and finance support, etc.

15. Emphasize and support the important role that ENGL—and the creative, visual, and performing arts and the humanities disciplines as a whole—play in CU Boulder's mission when communicating and advocating to university administration, the local community, and the state of Colorado, including in central campus (SRC) communications and storytelling.

To the Provost:

16. Support the dean in developing a mechanism to robustly account for and reward non-major student credit hours, recognizing the department's significant educational contributions. Under the current budget model, there are concerns that ENGL will not be allocated appropriate resources for the courses taught/students served.

17. Emphasize and support the important role that ENGL—and the creative, visual, and performing arts and the humanities disciplines as a whole—play in CU Boulder's mission when communicating and advocating to university administration, the local community, and the state of Colorado, including in central campus (SRC) communications and storytelling.

Required Follow-up

The chair of the Department of English shall submit two follow-up reports—one due on the first of April 2027 and one due on the first of April 2029. The follow-up reports shall focus on the implementation of the recommendations from ARPAC detailed herein. The dean of Arts and Humanities and the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, as well as the provost and other relevant central campus leadership will also respond to all outstanding matters under their purview arising from this review year's recommendations. The dean of Arts and Humanities and the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences will submit one follow-up report due on May 1, 2028, while the provost and relevant central campus leaders will submit one follow-up report due on June 1, 2030.