



13 May 2021

To: Weber State University Department of English Faculty  
From: Deborah Uman  
Re: Dean Response to English Self-Study, Reviewers' Report, and Department Response

First, I would like to offer a sincere thank you to the English department faculty for such a comprehensive and thoughtful report. Special thanks go to Hal Crimmel, for leading this prodigious undertaking, and the self-study team members: Jason Barrett-Fox, Christy Call, Mark LeTourneau, Eleanor Olson, Jose Otero, Julia Panko, Emily January Petersen, Ryan Ridge, John Schwiebert, Abe Smith, Brooke Stapes and Megan Van Deventer. Having read through the initial report, the evaluation team response, and the department's response, I am confident in the many strengths of the department, including the range of curricular offerings, the success of your students, the teaching and scholarly excellence of the faculty, and the quality of leadership. It is no surprise that the evaluation team did not identify any shortcomings.

My comments below are meant to highlight a few of the many ways in which the department is commendable and to offer a few thoughts on some of the challenges the department faces and how the dean's office can support the department in achieving its goals.

**Curriculum:** The review committee identified curriculum as a significant strength of the department. While offering a variety of programs to appeal to diverging student interest, the department continues to review and revise its courses of study and offers quality instruction in all of its programs. The recent *College Rank* recognition of WSU's writing program as second in the country is an amazing testament to the careful work and dedication of the department's faculty. Within the discussion of curriculum, the review committee pointed to some unevenness in reassigned time for program directors. The question of reassign time and equity is one I would like to address at the college level; in general, the college has much to learn from the careful work of the English department in this area.

**Assessment:** The department has worked diligently to create a robust assessment process to measure student learning. When I read the initial report, I was struck by the number of learning outcomes associated with each program. Similarly, the review committee suggested that the assessment process might be "too granular and complex" and does not necessarily drive programmatic change. In my experience, the more assessment people are required to do, the less likely it is to be meaningful. Like the reviewers, I strongly recommend a streamlined assessment process that leads less to quantifiable data and more to conversation that ultimately informs teaching and curricular decisions.

**Advising:** Despite its recognition that the college could use more advisors, the search committee singled out the department's centralized advising system, headed by John Schwiebert, as a strength. I have heard many good things about John's advising skills and understand that this system works well for the department. My preference would be to have



departmental advising formally divided among all full-time faculty to help build the mentoring relationships that are often critical to student success; however, I am not asking for any changes at this time.

**Administrative Support:** It does not come as any surprise that the staff in the department feel supported and included. They are clearly a vital part of the department's success and are treated as such. I understand the need for a part-time staff member to support the vast work happening in the composition program. Given the interest in composition and developmental writing, particularly from the associate provost's office, and the instructional role the program plays for the university as a whole, I think we can make a compelling case for such support.

**Faculty:** The key to the department's success is its faculty, whose talents are incredibly impressive. In addition to reading over the report, I have had several opportunities to meet with department faculty and to read their materials for various levels of promotion. Their teaching innovations and scholarly and creative output would be remarkable in a regular year; that they continue to accomplish so much during this year of all years is deeply humbling. The topic of building a career track for non-tenure track faculty has my full support. I helped develop such a track at my previous institute, similar to that established at SUU, and look forward to creating something similar here. I hope we can have those conversations at the college level and bring these suggestions to the Faculty Senate for university-wide discussion. The department has also prioritized the need for more racially diverse faculty. Again, this meets with college- and university-wide priorities; my hope is for us as a college to develop some common processes, based on best EDI practices, to guide all of our faculty and staff searches.

It has been a pleasure participating in the English department's review process and learning so much about the efforts and strengths of the department. I look forward to our continued collaboration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Deborah Uman".

Deborah Uman  
Dean, Lindquist College of Arts & Humanities