

Internal Reviewer Review Report – English BA and MA California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

The purpose of this internal review of the English BA and MA is to provide an unbiased examination of the quality of education and service in the program, and to identify opportunities for improvement and growth. After carefully reviewing the program’s Self Study, we took part in an campus visit on February 29th with the English Department to review. This report is divided into sections based on the lines of inquiry and highlights the strengths, challenges, and recommendations.

Inclusive Polytechnic Identity	Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The department’s mission clarifies how they work to instill the inclusive values of the university. English has an extremely diverse faculty with wide-ranging expertise and a great deal of enthusiasm about their respective fields and their students. Their curriculum reflects their efforts to diversify and decolonize Literary Studies. • The polytechnic nature of the English curriculum is well-designed to meet the university mission. They have heeded the university’s call to focus on this and their students benefit from the institutionalization of this into their curriculum. They have created a strong polytechnic experience for students by increasingly involving them in research and creative activities and offering PolyX courses. The department has built on their linguistic strengths by creating a wealth of study abroad programs for students. They require one polytechnic course in their curriculum. • The faculty engage in a lot of interdisciplinary work.
	Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The very diverse specializations among faculty make for a wide variety of non-composition courses and increase the difficulty of scheduling in a way that creates equal opportunities among faculty for teaching these. • The current budget challenges have made it difficult to maintain their newer polytechnic initiatives and outright prevent further initiatives. The workload is heavy, morale is very low, and they often end up taking on unrecognized labor to maintain it. It is unlikely that they will be able to maintain these elements unless something changes.
	Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mission could be separated out into mission and vision easily. The way it is written lends itself to this. They also could add to it something about the many polytechnic experiences they offer. This would help better highlight how well they fulfill that aspect of the university’s mission, vision, and values. • The university and college should support their mission by endorsing and increasing support for the program’s inclusive polytechnic efforts to avoid their removal from the curriculum. • The program could try to maintain as much of the rich curriculum as they can. However, if the university does not provide the needed resources, the program should reflect on their workload and the untenable burden that is currently falling on faculty should not be ignored. If possible, they could try to prioritize those experiences that benefit the most students and distribute the associated workload across faculty either simultaneously or by semester. This may mean losing some of these enriching elements, unfortunately. However, the heavy workload and associated strain the faculty is experiencing is clear and must be addressed somehow. • If the university does not provide the needed resources to offer courses within specialization, and given the wide variety of specializations, perhaps the department could intentionally rotate and track the faculty who get to teach specialized courses that also meet curricular needs.

Department Structure and Organization	Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program is extremely diverse, bringing a lot of different perspectives together. This creates a very rich experience for students with diverse interests and experiences. Despite the great deal of diversity, and the many disciplines represented, they all have the same goals in mind and are well-intentioned faculty. They have devoted a great deal of effort on optimizing their department's strengths and meeting challenges despite the many challenges that have risen over the last decade. The diversity of the faculty and their dedication to students has created a very rich curriculum and student experience.
	Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The diverse nature of the faculty also creates some disagreement in terms of where the focus should be. The benefits of diversity outweigh the challenges. However, the challenges do exist, and are exacerbated when a group is under stress, when group membership changes, and when group interactions are via media that are less rich than in-person interaction (i.e. zoom during the pandemic). Consequently, diverse groups benefit from a concerted effort to improve cohesion, particularly when they are existing under these circumstances. With retirements, the committee memberships and advising work seems to have been picked up largely by junior faculty. This inequity was exacerbated by the loss of course releases for burdensome roles.
	Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One of the program's strengths is in assessment and closing the loop. Perhaps they can capitalize on that strength by devoting some time to discuss equity in service. Perhaps more transparency in terms of service obligations would help reduce division and encourage collaborative solutions. Given the loss of support from the college and university, there may be misunderstandings about how burdensome different roles have become. Given the recent additional stressors they have experienced, in combination with the fact that they are a large and diverse group, it might be helpful for the college to provide someone with experience working with diverse groups to guide the department through this discussion to make it productive and increase cohesion in the group.

Assessment	Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment procedures include both indirect and direct evidence. They collect many (sometimes up to 100) artifacts. Basing assessment on many artifacts, as they do, is encouraged as good practice. They review the results annually during their department retreat and are proactive in making reforms to react. Assessment efforts are also robust for the graduate program.
	Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In order to maintain the high quality assessment efforts, numerous faculty provide unpaid labor during the summer to analyze artifacts because their workload does not allow for this during the contracted portion of the year.
	Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain excellent assessment efforts already underway. College or University could provide some assistance in terms of managing the workload of scoring artifacts to maintain what is happening. If the college or university cannot provide the needed resources to support summer analysis, consider reducing the number of artifacts to a number that could be managed within the contracted employment period. This may mean lower quality assessment, but faculty workload must be considered.

GI 2025	Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program is well-informed about issues related to serving URM and first-gen students. They regularly revisit this issue to discuss possible routes to narrow the gap. They are pro-active in creating equitable opportunities such as textbook lending libraries and best pedagogical practices such as using equitable syllabus language, advising students on relevant resources, and using innovative grading and assignments.
	Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The pandemic, as it has everywhere, seems to have exacerbated the URM gap. This might have been mitigated somewhat by the department's efforts, but it made it impossible to narrow. Student progression through the major suffers because they are unable to offer many classes outside the basics and A2s due to budget restrictions.
	Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain the excellent reflective and proactive approach to reducing the URM gap. Although they did not see a reduction in the gap, it is highly likely that they mitigated a worse outcome from the pandemic because of their efforts.

Graduate Program	Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focuses on getting students job-ready, increasing their professionalism, and offering important learn-by-doing experiences in these efforts. The curriculum distinguishes the program as unique from other comparable programs. The rigorous program does not allow students to use BA credits toward their MA, it allows for double-specialization, and it has a Professionalization Practicum course, as well as active clubs, a journal, a lab, and field experiences, nurturing well-educated job-ready graduates. The grad program mirrors the undergraduate program in their efforts to diversify and decolonize the curriculum. They have created an advising-intensive experience to keep students on track and feeling supported.
	Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While theses would provide another applied experience for students, both the student and faculty workloads make these labor-intensive experiences implausible. There used to be a centralized position to oversee the program and create a cohesive experience for students. However, with budget restrictions, that capability has been lost, resulting in overworked faculty sharing the burden. The students' experience is consequently suffering. Like the undergraduate program, the grad program has worked hard to create polytechnic experiences for grad students (online journal, zines, etc.). However, some of these have seemingly stalled recently, due to faculty being spread too thin.
	Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College or university could return some of the support they used to provide that made the smooth polytechnic experience in the MA possible. Given it is one of the largest MA program at the university, more support for the grad coordinator would help return the health of the program.

Technology	Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The department website seems to be kept relatively updated and provides students with important event information. • The program capitalized on website-building skills to create online journals and zines for enriching the student experience.
	Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology has not been particularly challenging, but infrastructure has. The classrooms they are assigned to are not suited for them. They are small, the desks are inflexible, the clocks do not work, the doors squeak. They were unable to access a lab and had to eliminate a website-building class as a result. Because SPICE no longer applies to some of these more basic types of improvement / modernization, they are unable to get things like flexible desks, whiteboard walls, etc.
	Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is recommended that the guidelines for SPICE be revisited. Given that there are departments who are struggling with basic infrastructure, it seems prudent to allow for these types of improvement projects.

Support	Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In terms of assessment and closing the loop, the program is performing excellently and not particularly in need of any additional support.
	Challenges	<p>Most of the program’s challenges are around support from the university.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First, budget cuts mean their staff have been reduced from 3.5 to 2 and they have lost course release that once helped them maintain their rigorous programs. • Second, the expectations put on the program due to GE demands have created the perception that they are a service department and their identity as a thriving and robust major has suffered as a result. They find great difficulty in fitting in any classes outside the core that utilize the diverse expertise of the faculty because they are required to offer A2s for everyone else instead. This also has the consequence of slowing progress toward graduation for their majors. • The writing-intensive nature of their courses demands low SFR. The changes to GE have cut the classes that made this possible resulting in an increase in SFR (1:33) well beyond what is recommended (1:18) and what is seen at peer institutions (1:22, 25, 28). This diminishes the quality of the education. Consequently, the new GVAR courses will not be a feasible addition to the curriculum due to the low SFR required. <p>In sum, the budgetary and GE-related challenges have increased their workload and threatened their identity as an independent and robust major, not just a “service” program. This has created a great deal of stress for this program. The program has a great deal of student interest, but the loss of support makes it difficult to serve those students and instead requires focus on A2. These changes in the program’s situation have exacerbated problems that, under normal circumstances, would be manageable. Issues like inequity of service are harder to address because of all the other stresses they are under and that require their full attention.</p>

	Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently the program is working hard to manage the large increase in stress they are currently experiencing due to budget and GE changes. It is recommended that there be support from the college for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Finding ways to allow the English major to maintain its identity outside of being a “service department,” perhaps through supporting proper replacements for the GEs that were lost and that supported the department’s smaller classes; ○ Aiding in managing the changes that have resulted from fewer service-related course releases and less staff and that have strained the large diverse group by increasing the workload. Perhaps by improving cohesion and transparency in the group and by finding ways to reduce that workload.
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Summary

Despite the notable strengths of the program and the commendable quality of work produced by the faculty, it is evident that the department is grappling with significantly low morale due to the issues previously outlined. The major issue is finding great difficulty in fitting in any classes outside the core that utilize the diverse expertise of the faculty because of the requirement to offer A2s for the entire campus as a service.

In such a diverse department, low morale can lead to a multitude of problems that impact not just the faculty members personally, but more importantly, the quality of education for students. This impacts the the program quality at a higher level, the department's ambiance, and the overall efficacy of the institution.

Addressing this issue of low morale in a diverse department demands a comprehensive and leadership-backed approach that champions diversity, fosters open communication especially about the faculty workload, and meaningfully involves faculty in the decision-making process. This approach might necessitate changes in the college and university leadership’s approach, a thorough examination of the department's underlying structure and infrastructure, enhancements in working conditions, and initiatives aimed at improving workload-imposed responsibilities balance and fostering a sense of community within the department. This holistic strategy is essential for revitalizing the department's environment, ensuring the well-being of its faculty, and maintaining the high standards of education and research.

Sincerely,

Reviewer 1:  Signature/Date: March 22, 2024

Reviewer 2: *sh. lotfipour* Signature/Date: March 22, 2024