

## Minutes of the English Department Meeting on Wednesday, October 13, 2010

### Updates and Announcements

- Ginney Fowler: Because of some red tape, the applications deadline has been extended to this coming Monday, October 18.
- Carolyn Rude: The College Faculty/Staff Association meets tomorrow, October 14, 4-6 p.m. in Owens Banquet Hall. Dean Ott-Rowlands will address university metrics, among other vital issues.

Dean Sue Ott-Rowlands addressed the department about how our work aligns with the College Strategic Plan and then responded to questions from department members.

The Dean said that...

- This department is a strong department, very well respected in the university, made up of very talented and dedicated people, which is recognized throughout the university.
- English is noted for being strong in undergraduate research, very productive in scholarly and creative work, and supportive of four programs—Undergraduate, MA, MFA, and PhD.

She addressed five areas in the College Strategic Plan:

1. Undergraduate Education
2. Graduate Education
  - a. The challenge in these areas is to recognize the need for, and to maintain, the balance between our undergraduate and graduate teaching, and to resource both.
3. CLE/Majors Teaching and Funding: It is a challenge to balance our service teaching (to non-majors) and our teaching to our majors.
  - a. We're unlikely to see funding for CLE teaching as base funding; it will likely remain in the provost's office and be allotted to departments based on enrollment and year-to-year profiling.
  - b. Dean Ott-Rowlands has advocated, and will continue to advocate, for moving a portion of that funding into base funding, to make possible hiring on a permanent, regular, continuing basis. One argument for keeping the money with the Provost is to protect it from being reduced in budget cuts to departments; the Dean believes such funds could be just as well protected in the college's base.
  - c. The College received \$1.9 million this year in CLE funding.
4. Engagement: Three domains in the University Strategic Plan are *Learning*, *Discovery*, and *Engagement*.
  - a. College goals include diversity, international and experiential learning, undergraduate research.
  - b. Major College goals are in service and experiential learning, and English scores are way up in this metric.
5. Infrastructure:
  - a. The College has identified critical infrastructure issues—including the need to hire new tenure-track faculty, not just replacements for retirees.
  - b. The College lost 6 staff positions in the recent budget cuts, and those are difficult lines to get back.

Other College concerns related to the Strategic Plan include enhancing revenue streams, advancing mentoring, and supporting faculty development. The College is developing a strategic plan for addressing stress points in the next hiring plan.

How does English align with the College's Strategic Plan goals?

- In the balance of Undergraduate/Graduate teaching and CLE/Majors teaching, our numbers are good.
- English does quite a lot in international and outreach areas. Carolyn outlines this work clearly in the annual report.
- English research and creative productivity are very good.
- English is good at nominating our people for awards—with many winners, named chair holders, etc.
- English diversity contributions are good.
- English is strong in support of undergraduate research—for example our promotion of research, our Undergraduate Conference, etc.
- In graduate research, our students are getting published, winning awards, finding strong recognition.
- English is particularly strong, highly visible, and well respected in the humanities, teaching a wide variety of types of courses and types of students.

The Dean devoted the rest of the hour to addressing questions from Department Members.

1. Paul Heilker asked how the College understands and addresses the fact that class sizes and student/teacher ratios depend on the type of classes we teach—writing classes must be smaller than content classes.

Dean Ott-Rowlands responded that college is aware of the issue and keeps taking note of it. The view is that 75-80% of courses need to be taught in the 35-40 range, but the College has done a pretty good job of advocating for our numbers to stay as they are. She will advocate against changing the section size for writing courses. There is the need to be careful not to drop below the minimum.

2. Paul Heilker also mentioned the abuse of continuing adjunct faculty on one-time money, saying that it is not ethical.

The Dean said she will continue to advocate for base funding. The College was allocated only 2.75 lines to cope with the extra 100 students per year by which Engineering plans to increase out-of-state enrollments; these lines went to grad student funding. The fact that Engineering actually took in 400 more students than intended is a separate issue. Admissions extended 250 fewer offers to students who would have been majors in our College for this year, so we saw our incoming major figures drop, and one of the measures the University looks at to provide funds is increasing majors, a metric applied only just after Communications, History, and Political Science had successfully capped their majors to control runaway internal transfer increases.

3. Penny Livesay noted that as an adjunct, she often know less than a month before classes start that she'll be hired for the semester, and sometimes for course she has not taught before.

The Dean responded that usually the University sees for sure what's really coming only in August, thus the late adjunct hires. The practice is definitely not good, and it is a national issue. Adjuncts by and large do excellent teaching; we often end up relying on such instructors to teach four sections.

4. Penny Livesay noted further that though individual writing class size may be 20-21, instructors teaching four sections teach 80 students, which is not a low faculty/student ratio at all.

Dean Ott-Rowlands responded by noting that even our 1/80 ratio is low compared with someone in Business who teaches 500. Though the University wishes that the need for small composition class size were different, they understand and acknowledge it.

5. Bernice Hausman said that perhaps some of our 16xx courses could enroll more than 80, but there are too few classroom spaces for large classes, so we cannot expand those offerings.

The Dean noted that there will be two half-day meetings next week to update the 6-year plan. The College is a strong advocate for the new classroom building, a number one priority now, that may get started relatively soon, though it could still be years before it opens.

6. Bernice Hausman also noted that as her research matures, she is becoming less willing to fund her own research. Earlier she generated many of her own research rewards, feeling that she was doing the work by herself, and she has become increasingly aware of how few College resources we have for research rewards. She asked whether there are any initiatives in this direction.

Dean Ott-Rowlands noted that one priority for the capital campaign for the College is faculty support for research. \$3 million of the \$30 million goal is designated for faculty research. The campaign has so far generated about \$27 million, of which \$11 million is undesignated and so can be allocated to unmet areas (like the \$3 million for research); some goals for these undesignated funds include faculty development, the library, and scholarships. She agrees that we're really deficient in research support and would like to see us double the available funding for research on a competitive basis. The campaign closes Dec 31.

7. Sue Hagedorn pointed out that some instructors who teach four courses each semester are also engaged in research. She asked whether there might be any research support for these instructors.

The Dean replied that it's something that's been talked about. The College's first obligation is to pre-tenure faculty, and there is also a strong obligation to tenured faculty to maintain their research productivity. She would not rank instructor research as highly, but that doesn't mean there can't be some support available. She will ask the College to consider it—the question arises often.

8. Gena Chandler asked about support for grant writing.

The Dean responded that since every college is quite different in their approaches to grants, there is not much incentive for the University to set up such support beyond the University Office of

Sponsored Programs. CLAHS has been trying to find a way to fund a new staff position for a grant-writing support office for the College—it's in the Strategic Plan. This year the College received an A21 grant that supports a 3rd-year PhD candidate in Human Development to assist faculty in finding funders and writing grants, and she has been highly effective. The Dean asked Carolyn to send her name and email address to the department. She is Manjushree Palit (“Manju”), [mpalit@exchange@vt.edu](mailto:mpalit@exchange@vt.edu), 1-4568

9. Dan Mosser asked whether the College could provide guidelines for cost-sharing initiatives.

The Dean answered that when there is a need for cost sharing, people are referred to the Office for Research. English faculty interested in a cost-sharing project should start with Carolyn, who can always ask the College, and then the College looks for funds to match, though they can't always fund everything.

10. Jane Wemhoener noted that one obstacle to engagement/outreach is the difficulty of crossing college and department funding barriers for collaborative and interdisciplinary teaching.

Dean Ott-Rowlands asks that the department chairs work out these plans. She has discouraged departments charging each other for the services of its faculty, and noted that some charge more than others. She herself highly values working on a collaborative partnering basis and feels there should be no barriers to team-teaching across departments, but every case is different, and it does happen a lot.

The Dean then wrapped up with a few remarks:

After two years of hiring almost not at all, the College now has 23 searches approved, with 21 in progress. She has said the College wants 26 or next year. The specific 5-year plans recently completed indicate that 108 hires will be needed over that time, and this year's and the proposed next year's put us well on the way to that goal, barring further budget losses like the \$4 million incurred during the last three years. She feels that about half of these positions should be funded by the Provost's office and half by the College; of this year's 23, 7 are funded by the Provost.

Some top concerns:

- We need for more staff lines.
- We need more support for faculty research.
- Some operating budgets are too low—she will study the situation.
- Faculty salaries overall are too low. We are going through the second round of the plan to address salary compression, and Carolyn will submit a plan for English.
- Given the budget losses in the last three years, the Dean is optimistic now.

The meeting adjourned at 1:15 p.m. Thanks to Paul Heilker and others who helped to set the room up for the meeting, and to Penny Livesay who stayed to help me re-set it to its former configuration.

Respectfully submitted,  
Cheryl Ruggiero