

# Data-Based Decisions: Master of Arts/Sciences in English

## 2017-18

All student assessment data is shared with the Department Head, Graduate Advisory Committee (comprised of directors of all five graduate programs in English and the Director of Graduate Studies, and the Master of Arts/Sciences in English Graduate Curriculum Committee.)

The following are four important data-based decisions that the Master of Arts/Sciences in English Graduate Curriculum Committee (“the Committee”) has undertaken or initiated in order to improve student experience and mastery of learning objectives.

1. **Data Indicating Problem/Issue:** The Committee has for several years witnessed declining enrollments in graduate literature classes, while enrollments have increased or held steady in the areas of creative writing and rhetoric/composition studies.

Recent declines in graduate enrollment in the overall program has also affected class enrollments.

**Discussion:** The committee discussed offering just one literature class in the spring semester, instead of two. The committee also discussed discouraging internships and Directed Studies, which take students out of graduate classes. The committee discussed increasing overall efforts at recruitment. The committee emphasized offering graduate courses after 4:00 to accommodate local teacher/graduate students to take our courses.

Outcome data shows that we have increased enrollment in literature graduate courses in the current year.

**Proposed Solution:** Five solutions have been implemented to address the declining enrollments in graduate literature courses:

1. offering one literature class in the spring, instead of two;
2. allowing, on a semester by semester basis, graduate literature courses to be cross- listed with a 5000-level undergraduate class;
3. having literature faculty assigned to teach a graduate literature course also assigned a “fall-back” undergraduate class in case the graduate class does not make;
4. offering grad classes after 4:00, to make it easier for teachers to take our courses;
5. increasing recruitment efforts (attending graduate school fairs, using our scholarship monies wisely (especially to attract teachers to the program), working to reduce student teaching loads).

### **Evaluation of Solution:**

Outcome data shows that in the current year, we have seen some increased enrollment in graduate literature courses. The above named remedies appear to be working, at least to some extent, as evidenced by "Course Assessment Outcome" tables:

ENGL 6330 Spring 2018 (Burkert) :	7 students
ENGL 6350 Fall 2017 (Crumbley)	(no data received)
ENGL 6330 Fall 2017: (McCuskey)	5 students

2. **Data Indicating Problem/issue:** New Specialization in Creative Writing. At the November meeting of the Master of Arts/Sciences in English Graduate Program Committee, Dr. Jennifer Sinor, chair of the Undergraduate Creative Writing Emphasis, presented to the Committee a proposal to create a new specialization in Creative Writing in the Masters in English Program.

**Discussion.** The Committee noted that

1. a cw specialization would serve our graduates students: enrollment data and analysis has shown that for the past ten years, approximately 2/3 to 3/4 of Master of Arts/Sciences in English Graduate students have chosen to do creative-writing theses;
2. a cw specialization would enhance recruiting, as it would create niche specialization not currently offered by many universities in the region, and one that would be appealing to undergraduates;
3. a cw specialization would promote diversity, by attracting more students from outside our local state and region.

**Proposed Solution:** The Committee voted to approve the creation of a Specialization in Creative Writing

**Evaluation of Solution.** This solution will be monitored in the coming years to assesses and evaluate its effectiveness.

3. **Data Indicating Problem/Issue:** An increased number of students applying to do "Directed Studies." Data shows that in the 2017-2018 year, the committee saw 6 requests by students to do directed studies.

**Discussion:** The Committee discussed this issue. Since six students can make up a graduate class, the committee thought that having so many students doing Directed Studies has, or likely has, negative impacts on the enrollment in classes, especially graduate literature classes. Since Directed Studies can serve individual student needs, the Committee saw no wisdom in eliminating this option altogether. At the same time, the Committee felt that it must consider the health of the overall program and so find a balance between allowing Directed Studies in certain cases while protecting the enrollment in graduate courses and the overall health of the program. Our program is not intended to create research specialists, but high achieving generalists who can become successful teachers of literature and writing.

**Proposed Solution:** The Committee met and created a new application form and a more rigorous application process so that the Committee can better assess the actual needs of the applicant and better evaluate the wisdom of granting permission. Whether the currently offered graduate courses have “made,” will be taken into account in granting such a petition.

**Evaluation of Solution.** Recent data reveals that since the implementation of the new application procedures and form, two students have applied to do Directed Studies for the Spring 2019 semester. Both graduate courses offered in Spring 2019 have “made.” Both of these students are enrolled in two regular graduate courses each. The Committee voted to approve both application, with the proviso that the students remain enrolled in the graduate courses in which they are currently enrolled.

The new procedure seems to be working.

However, the Committee will take up this issue again in the Spring semester.

#### 4. **Data Indicating Problem/Issue:**

The Literature and Writing Graduate Committee continues to monitor the issue of all students not achieving as high a mastery as they might achieve, as reflected on Course Assessment outcomes. The academic year 2017-2018 showed a marked increase in student performance. During the last academic year, 90% of students scored as “high” or “medium” on their mastery of learning objectives, with the great majority of those scoring in the “high” category.

**Discussion:** Despite the increase in student performance, the topic has been an ongoing discussion at faculty meetings and within the committee. As noted previously, Graduate Instructors are poorly paid for the amount of work they do; they are the sole instructors of record for about 46 students each semester; and they must take their classes and write their theses on top of this work. The college of CHaSS has typically not offered our second-year students tuition awards, so students are forced to pay back at least half their salaries in tuition and fees while they are undertaking their thesis work. For this reason, many students also moonlight by teaching online for other universities, or by holding second jobs in the community. Faculty see this stress on the students and in their performance, and they would like to do something to help them.

**Proposed Solution:** The Committee continues to advocate for higher Graduate Instructor salaries and better working conditions for students (including a one-two teaching load instead of a two-two load as well as tuition waivers). In the last year, the department’s Faculty Scholarship Fund has raised over \$3,000 dollars and the Graduate Advisory Council (GAC) was able to award to three students over \$1000 to help with tuition for 2016-2017. The department’s business manager has reported that this money has made a difference in terms of student retention.

**Evaluation of Solution:** Faculty are please at the increased performance by our graduate students. Nevertheless, faculty are continuing to advocate for better working conditions for Graduate Instructors, including tuition waivers. Until this happens, however, faculty have agreed to continue their efforts to donate scholarship money for second-year students. The department’s business manager has also suggested that rather than a faculty member writing a check for one lump sum, she/he could sign up for automatic withdrawal (for example, \$10/month) in order to keep the fund going.

All student assessment data is shared with the Department Head, Graduate Advisory Committee (comprised of directors of all five graduate programs in English and the Director of Graduate Studies, and the Literature and Writing Graduate Committee. The following are four important data-based decisions that the Literature and Writing Graduate Committee has undertaken or initiated in order to improve student experience and mastery of learning objectives. Please note that individual dates of meetings in which discussion occurred are not included in this assessment because the head of the program, the keeper of the minutes, has left for sabbatical. In future the program will make certain that all data is up-to-date before retirements and sabbaticals.

1. **Data Indicating Problem/issue:** The department was permitting student to bypass particular seminars and workshops by offering directed studies/readings (ENGL 6920), as indicated by Program of Study evaluations from students graduating in 2014-2015. For example, see Students K & R in the Course Assessment section; both these students took ENGL 6920.

**Discussion:** In Spring 2015, the Literature and Writing Graduate Committee met to discuss this issue. The committee decided that by students taking directed studies, they were missing out on the robust class experience of workshops and seminars. In addition, since all students must do a thesis, they essentially already have a 3 or 6 credit independent study as a required part of their program.

**Proposed Solution:** The Literature and Writing Graduate Committee agreed to limit the number of directed studies/readings (ENGL 6920) an English graduate student may take. Students are now told that they need to enroll in seminars and not take directed readings unless otherwise necessary. For example, in the case that an offered class that is needed for a particular thesis topic is cancelled at the last minute because of low enrollment, the student may petition the Literature and Writing Graduate Committee to be allowed to take this class as an independent study. In Spring 2015 the committee also agreed to limit the amount of credits that can be earned through internship (see, for example, student S, who took 9 credits in internship).

**Evaluation of Solution:** As the Program of Study assessment outcomes from 2015-2016 graduates indicate, none of these students took ENGL 6920 (directed readings/studies). The Literature and Writing Graduate Committee is pleased that the students are taking more seminars/workshops, and they will discuss this issue with graduate students when they institute exit interviews in April 2017.

2. **Data Indicating Problem/Issue:** As evident in the Course Assessment section, as well as the Program of Study assessment outcomes, we recently stopped offering summer seminars in English. No English seminars or workshops were offered in Summer 2015, and only one class was offered in Summer 2016 (McLaughlin's ENGL 6890). This lack of summer offerings is in response to new policies developed by the university regarding

face-to-face summer workshop enrollments as well as online education payment structures. In the past, students have used summertime as a way to catch up on credits, allowing them to take only six credits a semester during fall and spring and still graduate within two years. By not offering summer workshops/classes, students may be forced to take longer to graduate.

**Discussion:** As the Literature and Writing Graduate Committee discussed on several occasions during the 2015-2016 academic year, there are many facets to this problem. Many students often prefer to take 6 credits (rather than 9) a semester because of their heavy graduate teaching load (they are the instructor of record for two composition classes every semester). Students in the American Studies Program are encouraged to take the summer interdisciplinary Bennion Teacher's Workshop at USU, but there has been some concern that the topics of the Bennion in the previous years don't necessarily serve the students in English well. (In the past few years, the Bennion has been offered by Political Science and History.) Moreover, one of the requirements of the English program states that students must take all their courses within the English Department unless specifically required for their research. The Literature and Writing Graduate Committee has been allowing students to enroll the on a case by case basis. As noted in the Program of Study assessment outcomes, three English students took the Bennion and were allowed to count the workshop toward their English degrees. It is not known how many students petitioned to have the Bennion count toward their Programs of Study.

**Proposed Solution:** The English Department will seek to host the Bennion Workshop in Summer 2017, which will mean a) our English students can take the workshop and count it toward their Programs of Study without seeking prior approval from the Literature and Writing Graduate Committee, and b) the topic will no doubt be more applicable for the English students' degrees. Offering three summer credits next year will allow students to take two classes instead of three in the fall or spring.

**Evaluation of Solution:** If the English Department is indeed chosen to host the Bennion Workshop next summer, after the workshop is completed we will interview English students who completed the course for their assessment of how the workshop applies to their degree and career interests. We will also continue to evaluate time to graduating to see if any other courses can be offered during the summer. One long-term solution would be to allow one Bennion workshop, no matter which department it is offered in, to count for the English degree without students needing prior approval.

3. **Data Indicating Problem/Issue:** The English program has long practiced (and advertised) that every semester we offer two literature classes (usually British/World and American) and one creative writing class. However, as evident in the "Course Assessment Outcomes" tables, numbers in literature classes have been very low (for example, see Graham, Fall 2014, with two students, and Cooper-Rompato, Spring 2016, with six students, [link here](#)). Whereas enrollments in literature classes have declined, enrollments in creative writing classes remain consistently high. Declining graduate enrollment in the program overall has also affected class enrollments. Since classes now

need a minimum of six students to not be cancelled, how can the Literature and Writing Graduate Committee still offer two graduate classes a semester in literature?

**Discussion:** In January, 2015, the Literature and Writing Graduate Committee met and discussed the possibility of allowing (on a trial basis) a 5000-level senior literature seminar to be cross-listed as a 6000-level graduate literature seminar. The committee discussed at length the pros and cons of this proposal, including details such as limiting grad enrollment to second-year students, assignment differentiation between grads and undergrads, extra meetings for grads, etc. It was a lively discussion with many opinions voiced.

**Proposed Solution:** The Literature and Writing Graduate Committee agreed to cross-list ENGL 5300 with ENGL 6330 for Fall 2016 as a trial class. The committee agreed it would give graduate students more options for literature classes. This will only be done on a semester-by semester basis, with faculty making presentations to the Literature and Writing Graduate Committee if they wish to offer a class.

**Evaluation of Solution:** During Fall 2016, the instructor of this particular class will report to the Literature and Writing Graduate Committee on the state of the class and how the cross-listing is working. After the class is finished, the instructor will write up a formal assessment. Second-year graduate students in the class will also be asked their opinions about the cross-listing in exit interviews conducted in spring.

4. **Data Indicating Problem/Issue:** In general, the Literature and Writing Graduate Committee has noted that students are not achieving as high a mastery as they could be on Course Assessment outcomes. For example, see Fall 2015, in which Sinor's ENGL 6884 class had 11 students who scored "medium" or "low" on their mastery of the learning objectives. In addition, at least two students graduating in 2014-2015 turned in their thesis revisions after the deadline, thereby delaying their graduating and incurring extra fees. Faculty are concerned that students may be working too much (either with their teaching assignments or with jobs outside the university) and may not be putting the necessary time in to their classes and thesis writing.

**Discussion:** This topic been an ongoing discussion at faculty meetings and with the Literature and Writing Graduate Committee. Faculty have acknowledged the difficulties our graduate students face. Graduate Instructors are poorly paid for the amount of work they do; they are the sole instructors of record for about 46 students each semester, and they must take their classes/write their theses on top of this work. The college of CHaSS has typically not offered our second-year students any tuition awards, so students are forced to pay back at least half their salaries in tuition and fees while they are undertaking their thesis work. For this reason, many students also moonlight by teaching online for other universities, or by holding second jobs in the community. Faculty see this stress on the students and in their performance, and they would like to do something to help them.

**Proposed Solution:** In addition to advocating for higher Graduate Instructor salaries and better working conditions for students (including a one-two teaching load instead of

a two-two load as well as tuition waivers), in June, 2015 Michael Sowder (chair of the Literature and Writing Graduate Committee) suggested that the department's faculty donate to a scholarship and award the money to second-year students as a way to help them with their tuition costs and hopefully cut down on loans/taking out second jobs. The faculty raised over \$3,000 dollars during the 2015-2016 school year, and students applied for scholarships in March, 2016. The Graduate Advisory Council (GAC) gathered in March to decide scholarships; three students received award over \$1000 to help with tuition for 2016-2017.

**Evaluation of Solution:** Faculty are continuing to advocate for better working conditions for Graduate Instructors, including tuition waivers. Until this happens, however, faculty have agreed to continue their efforts to donate scholarship money for second-year students. The department's business manager has also suggested that rather than a faculty member writing a check for one lump sum, she/he could sign up for automatic withdrawal (for example, \$10/month) in order to keep the fund going.