Department of English  
Georgia State University  
2014-15 ACTION PLAN

Status of Action Items from Prior Action Plan (2005-13)

1. Enhanced Graduate Student Stipend Support. Partial success: In AY 13 the average package for English Ph.D. students is $15,000, the average package for MFA students is $6000, and the average package for MA students was $6000. However, to achieve those stipends, the workload of the GTAs, on average, still remains too high.

2. Office Space. Completed (pending build-out of 22nd floor) with move to 25 PP: vastly improved office and program space, with all GTAs now housed within our department.

3. New Faculty. Partially Completed. One of two tenure-track positions (Transnational literature) has been hired; one (American ethnic literature) was not funded. The five planned lecturers plus an additional lecturer for new demand were hired.

Major Findings in Current Review

1. Foundational strengths: English is a strong unit, nationally ranked, featuring highly prolific research and creative achievements. “The English faculty are productive scholars with strong publication records,” the external reviewers report. “They are equally outstanding teachers, something every student we spoke to affirmed. In addition to their vigorous programs that intersect with many of the University’s goals, faculty offer extracurricular opportunities that also meet the University’s strategic goals ... The Dean remarks, ‘The department’s high level of research and professional productivity, the success of its faculty in tenure and promotion, the national rankings and awards for its programs, and the quality of its recent hires suggest that the program will continue to build on its strong foundation into the future.’” [See Action Step 1]

2. Graduate workload: GTAs, who teach 325 sections of our core courses per year generating 24,000 credit hours, need a reduced teaching load (to three courses per year across the board). In 2014-15, 55 GTAs in English at Georgia State taught 4 courses per year, 4 taught five courses per year, and 1 taught six per year. In addition, many of the students who have these high teaching loads also perform service for the WAC program. GTAs at four of our five peer/aspirational institutions, by contrast, teach a 2/1 or 1/1 load. Such workloads undermine timely progress to degree. Given that English’s 20 Ph.D. graduates per year amount to about one-fifth of the College’s total, reduced workload should be an urgent priority. [A.S. 2]

3. Admissions and Retention: English majors consistently have a higher Freshman Index and SAT score than the average in both A&S and the University. In Fall 2012, English majors’ Freshman Index was 50 and 60 points higher than the College and University averages respectively. English majors’ average SAT score was 27 and 35 points higher, respectively, than A&S and University averages. The English Department’s retention rates consistently track higher than the GSU average: our Fall 2010 cohort, e.g., had a 3-year total retained rate of 72 percent, compared to 64 percent for the University. English performs significantly above GSU norms. [A.S. 3, 4, 5, 6]
4. **Diversity:** Given the renowned diversity of GSU’s student body, the English Department should continue to develop an array of courses with enhanced multicultural, global, and urban focuses. The ethnic diversity of our graduate students is considerably less than that of the graduate student body of GSU as a whole, suggesting the department should do more to appeal to a wider pool of graduate students. Increasing the number of minority faculty is also crucial as opportunities arise. [A.S. 3, 4]

5. **New Media:** New Media – including digital humanities and digital pedagogies – offer strong foci of scholarship that will develop even more productively in the coming years, and our greatest grant strengths are in this field. Several strong junior faculty and some mid-career scholars work on such topics as sonic rhetorics, digital archives, broadcasts, text and data mining, and teaching and learning with technologies. These innovative engagements provide valuable undergraduate instruction and strong, marketable areas of study for graduate students. [A.S. 4, 5, 7]

6. **Mentoring:** The Department needs to develop more systematic mentorship of junior faculty to focus on assisting professional development, establishing more formal direct and personal mentoring relationships, creating colloquia for sharing work and addressing concerns about promotion. [A.S. 8]

7. **Communication/publicity:** The website and other communications should be improved to convey more effectively all the department’s activities, programs, and scholarly/creative accomplishments, and also to serve more functionally as a tool to facilitate student recruitment, enrollment, advisement, and progression. [A.S. 6, 9]

**Specific Action Steps for the Coming Cycle**

1. Extant and increasing research/creative achievements will generate increased applications for funding, with the goal of annually winning 1-2 prestigious external grants, fellowships, or other foundations awards.

2. Work with the Dean’s Office to increase funding for GTAs that will facilitate reduced teaching loads (to three courses per year) to get us closer to stipend packages at peer institutions, by continuing to normalize the department’s schedule and by meeting graduate targets to attract additional graduate funding. In every budget decision, including availability of new demand funds, strengthening graduate support will be our foremost concern. Explore and develop opportunities for GTA appointments (and hence additional funding packages) at new GSU Perimeter access campus. Our goal will be to reduce the percentage of students teaching more than three courses by at least 20%. In direct proportion to this reduction, we will see a decrease in time to degree completion and an enhancement of the quality of doctoral students’ professional accomplishments.

3. Increase the number of globalized, study abroad, and comparative courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and expand undergraduate student participation in Signature Experiences – especially international and multicultural ones. We hope to offer 5-7 study abroad
classes, 10 new classes that are globalized/comparative, and 80 or more international Signature Experiences. These classes will both enhance the appeal of our major and foster diversity.

4. Reconfigure many existing courses to foreground a curriculum more attuned to current disciplinary innovations and GSU strategic plan pillars (e.g., urban literature, postcolonial and transnational perspectives, interdisciplinary approaches, new media) and more appealing to students, in order to enhance the demographics of our students’ diversity and reverse decline in majors. Create 5 new and revised courses this year, and more as warranted.

5. For GSU’s planned Media and Entertainment Institute, Creative Writing, Technical Writing, and Digital Humanities faculty, students, and programs will situate ourselves at its core to highlight and further expand our research and instruction with emphasis on interdisciplinary and inter-arts connections. Creative Writing faculty are planning new courses in creative nonfiction and other genres (e.g., life-writing, the “literature of fact,” conventional and digital experimental nonfiction prose), and will seek a colleague with such specialization for a future hire as new or replacement lines become available. We will identify 5-10 writing, editing, and cultural courses (e.g., Theories of Popular Culture, Comics and the Graphic Novel, Writing Interactive Fiction) to offer in this Institute.

6. Advance initiatives in public scholarship and public humanities that draw more attention, more publicity, more students, and more funders to our programs. Development focuses include Five Points, SAML, and new student scholarships. Integrate the department’s scholarly and creative journals in ways that will broaden their circulation and public impact by supporting conferences and other community events, and advance other departmental initiatives such as public scholarship, urban-based creativity and scholarship, and new international connections.

7. Create workshops and programs to diffuse technological innovations throughout our curriculum, geared toward both faculty and graduate students. Any possible hires in English will foreground candidates with some facility teaching in digital environments and using digital tools (e.g., digital archives, text-mining, virtual explorations of historical periods and places, digital mapping).

8. Implement a more formal mentoring plan, involving specific assignment of mentors to each junior faculty member, codification of mentorship duties, and regular departmental forums geared toward topics of interest for assistant professors and lecturers.

9. Launch and develop extensive website renovation, app development, and other social media tools to better emphasize curricular changes and improvements, department advisement, community events, creative/research accomplishments, and public scholarship.

Randy Malamud, Chair, English
Date 1-28-15

William Long, Dean, Arts and Sciences
Date 1-28-15

Risa Palm, Provost and Senior Vice President
Date 12/8/15