Department of English

Report on Diversity Initiatives

Summary

There are at present only informal programs in the English Department to address diversity the seven areas identified in the President’s memo requesting this report. Neither student body, faculty, nor staff is as diverse as the University as a whole nor as the city of Seattle. The Department realizes the need to improve its efforts to build its diversity. Significant work is under way by individual faculty who make race and racism, gender, sexuality, national identity and related issues central to their scholarship and teaching. The department needs to increase diversity in the curriculum, among its undergraduate and graduate students, and in its staffing.

Student Access and Engagement with the Community

Programs

Improved access to English undergraduate courses for students of color was the objective of a two-year outreach effort undertaken by the Advising Office in 2000-2002. Undergraduate volunteers visited two local high schools with majority-minority populations (Rainier Beach and Cleveland) and promote college enrollment through a program of tutoring, information sharing and relationship building, enhanced by guest speakers and visits to campus. The program had mixed success, and was discontinued for several reasons: the decision of the OMA-based Student Ambassadors to begin a similar program at Rainier Beach (our main focus); increasing work load in the Advising office, making it difficult to maintain staff involvement; and declining interest among both UW volunteers and high school participants. Since then there has been little outreach work, although the department participates in certain outreach events as Essence of Success and does still send tutors to Rainier Beach from time to time.

To increase diversity in the graduate program, the Department has utilized minority student recruitment resources whenever possible, recruitment and retention of students of color is a continuing challenge to the English graduate degree programs.
Current Picture (Spring 2003)  
_from Registrar’s Office, “Scholarship Summary by Major, Ethnic Origin” for Spring Quarter 2003_

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* Exceeds 100% due to rounding

No data are readily available on disability, sexual orientation, age or veteran status.

**Student Development and Retention**

Beginning in Winter 2003 the English Advising Office began regularly publicizing courses in which writers of color are to be studied, producing lists of such courses that are sent each quarter to majors, the all-advisers email list and two diversity-related email lists (UW Mosaic and MTT). As part of the same effort advisors produced a 3x4-foot poster featuring “Some Notable Writers of Color” who have been studied in the department in recent years, which is on display in the Advising Office (another copy was given to the EOP counselors), and a “Short Guide to Writers of Color,” which explains how to identify courses with such content despite titles that may not suggest it. A description of the poster, information about each author on it, the “Short Guide” and the quarterly course lists are all now on the department’s newly redesigned web site, in a new Diversity section.

Discussions are underway about how best to initiate informal socializing and academic enrichment (talks by faculty, meetings with graduate students, and so on) geared to the interests of undergraduate students of color.

English Advising staff have attended the Safe Zone training session for making the Advising office a visibly safe space for LGBT students, and placards are posted to this effect.

**Staff and Administrative Diversity**

**Programs**

There is no program addressing issues of diversity among the staff.
Current Picture

There are 9 classified staff in the department. Professional staff in the department is comprised of 6 positions. Three staff people (two classified, one professional) identify publicly as gay/lesbian. Statistics for disabilities are not provided.

The Computer Integrated Classrooms program reports that its Assistant Directors are women graduate students working in technical fields, in which women historically have been significantly underrepresented. In addition, the undergraduate staff in the CIC labs are anywhere from half to three-quarters women, and one-quarter to one-half Asian American.

Faculty Diversity

Programs

The increasingly multicultural and multinational nature of English studies today makes racial diversity today as crucial an issue as was gender diversity a generation ago. Thus as the undergraduate curriculum evolves (there is a significant revision underway) and as new hiring opportunities permit the department to fill present and new program needs, searches for new faculty should attract increasing numbers of candidates of color. Even so, in the field of English there will be keen competition for the candidates unless there is a major change in the demography of graduate programs across the country.

Gender imbalance remains in the senior faculty ranks where there are roughly fifty percent more men than women. While faculty of color continue to be underrepresented. Faculty represent the following ethnicities: African-American, Asian-American, Asian, Chicano and European-American

Curriculum and Research

. Several interdisciplinary colloquia, organized informally by interested faculty and/or graduate students in English and other departments, engage explicitly with issues that fall under the diversity rubric in various ways (quoted language is from the groups’ self-descriptions):

- The Asian American studies colloquium seeks to keep issues of race and racism within both domestic and international contexts central to Asian American studies.
- The Modern Girl Around the World “undertakes an interdisciplinary investigation of … modern processes of gender, racial, and national formation.”
- Thinking Sex in Transnational Times “is a collaborative research project focused on the study and production of ‘sex’ across different spaces, regions, epochs, epistemologies, and disciplines. The goal of this project is to chart new ground in Lesbian and Gay Studies, Area Studies (including American Studies), and Ethnic and Gender Studies.”
• The American Studies colloquium frequently addresses issues of nation/national identity in its annual conferences and other projects.

Current Picture
The institutionalization of studies of race, gender and sexuality has fundamentally reshaped the field of English Studies. These changes are reflected much more in actual course content than in catalog course descriptions, which is why the Advising office publishes its quarterly “Writers of Color” course lists. Since Winter 2003, when the Advising office began compiling its lists (see above, under “Student Development and Retention”), roughly one quarter to one third of courses offered in any given quarter have included at least one or a few works written by writers of color.

At the same time, one faculty member reports that, teaching works by writers of color is not the same thing teaching about race, racism and anti-racism and questions of cultural production and literary representation. Some faculty do a tremendous amount with race, racism, and racial formation in their teaching, and would like to see more widespread departmental attention to these issues. Students need to see necessary connections among classes where this kind of critical theoretical work is being done, and to become acquainted with a critical mass of scholarship in these areas. As things stand it is left to a few individuals to raise questions of race and racism in their classes and make whatever connections are going to be made with other curricular topics and issues.

The Department is engaged in a multi-year restructuring of the undergraduate major. Existing requirements will be replaced with ones that more accurately reflect the current state of the discipline, including re-thinkings of race, gender, sexuality and national identity. At least one of a few proposed concentrations for advanced majors will be a cluster in race and/or nationalism. In short, “diversity,” as a term that signals specific areas of concern and social and cultural debates, is an integral part of the rethinking of the major and will be much more pervasive and visible as a logic structuring many lines of study.

A listing of faculty research and teaching interests reveals the following twelve diversity-related categories, with the number of faculty identifying each listed in parentheses (faculty typically list more than one category): African-American Literature (7), Age Studies (1), AIDS Discourses (2), Chicano Literature (2), Gay/Lesbian/Diversity Literature (5), Gender Studies (2), Jewish Studies (1), Jewish Literature in Translation (2), Language Minority Education (1), Slave Narratives (1), Third World Literature (1), Women's Literature/Women Writers (12).

Climate
Diversity is a term that characterizes the scope of research and teaching subject fields for English as the writers, texts, theories and practices of literary and linguistic enquiry have themselves so multiplied and diversified over the past half century. That said, diversity in
practice, of making it and explicit objective and an achieved reality in departmental work and life needs better articulation, for in the process of completing this survey, only a few faculty and staff responded to requests for input. However, the completed report has become an agenda item as the Department continues work with curriculum revision and engages in plans for other program development and, especially, future hiring.