

External Review of the Department of English

October, 2025

External Review Committee

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Executive Summary

The external review of the University of Victoria's Department of English was conducted October 6-8, 2025. During this time the review committee met with 38 people associated with the Department, both individually and in groups. Among the people with whom we met were: the interim chair, departmental advisors, faculty members, sessionals, undergraduate and graduate students, alumni, and departmental staff. We also met with senior university administrators including the Dean of Humanities, the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies, and the Associate Vice-President Academic Programs. The Review Committee is offering a thorough assessment and a set of thirteen recommendations. These documents are centered around two key findings, which are summarized here.

The first key finding, around which all others array themselves, is that the UVic English Department took to heart the curricular recommendations of the 2018 program review and "revised its ENGL offerings, implementing its new ENSH curriculum in fall 2023. The new curriculum was collegially developed over a three-year period and offers a more innovative, flexible, and scaffolded program that reflects recent developments in English literary studies." The imaginative rigour with which the new curriculum was developed is impressive and the results have been transformative, at least to date. The novelty of the curriculum—in only its third year after launch—leads the assessors to their leading recommendation, which is patience. We are wholly persuaded that the new curriculum needs to be allowed to graduate a cohort or two before any major reconsiderations are considered. We recommend during this vigil of patience that the Department consider and prepare the instruments by which the successes and foibles, strengths and weaknesses of the new curriculum may be appropriately assessed.

This is not to say that some of the collateral effects of instituting the new curriculum should not be addressed as soon as possible. One of the new curriculum's central innovations is the development of popular large-section courses designed to draw students from across the

campus. Courses on erotic literature, coming-of-age-fiction, and Taylor Swift have been highly successful in attracting large student enrolments. Such large classes do, however, open questions about how best to support them. Given that UVic's English Department lacks a tradition--which is to say institutional structure--of tutorial sections led by graduate students attached to large lectures, support has mainly come in the form of TAs who serve as marker-graders. Because the doctoral program has so few students, most of these TAs are Masters students. The Department needs to develop systems to train and support, both materially and pedagogically, these students to maximize undergraduate educational benefit.

We are also concerned that the effect on instructor workload of designing and managing these large classes has not been duly considered. In a rough parallel, it is not clear to us that instructors developing and/or vetting such popular courses have sufficient guidance from the Department. And, while we recognize a certain irony in recommending that the Department work on workload, we noted a general sense that there is more committee work than is strictly necessary and that this glut is not so evenly apportioned as it should be.

The second key finding concerns faculty renewal. Given the commitment of the university as a whole and of the Department to Indigenization, the appointment of Indigenous faculty is essential. The Department has created curricular spaces for such scholars and should be availed of the opportunity to fill them. Adjacent to this particular concern is the Department's awareness of its lack of diversity. This is where the opening up of the curriculum to popular genres and to a more inclusive sense of the contemporary discipline allows for the crafting of positions (and the postings that advertise them) that are more likely than more traditional positions to attract diverse candidates.

Attendant to issues of hiring are those around the support for new faculty, especially new faculty from equity-deserving groups. Retention of diverse faculty has been an issue for the English Department (and perhaps for UVic as a whole). Structures of support for the newly appointed are essential and ought not to be left solely to the unit level. Whether these supports assume and/or include formal mentorship, they require broader support themselves than an individual unit can provide.

Key Recommendations

1. **New Program Evaluation.** We recommend that at least two cohorts of students be allowed to move from entry into the curriculum to graduation before anything beyond tidying is attempted. We also advise setting up some mechanism—perhaps a combination of surveys and exit interviews—to assess the students' sense of what has worked and what maybe needs work.

2. **Large-class Issues.** We recommend the establishment of a Faculty-level working group to examine how best large courses can be supported in units where the essay and its cognates remain essential assessment tools. The Faculty should consider standardizing TA support based on class size, rather than placing the burden of this responsibility on faculty members with administrative roles.
3. **Graduate Funding.** We recommend that the Department continue to collaborate with FGS to recognize the particularities of the way that graduate research is conducted in the humanities and how these processes differ from those of other faculties.
4. **Appointments.** We recommend that the Department focus further diversification efforts in future hires and craft positions that are more likely to yield diverse applicants than traditional period searches.
5. **Mentorship.** We recommend that the Department work with the Office of the Dean to develop a mentorship program that is not limited to the Department.
6. **ProComm.** We recommend conducting a market survey in the greater Victoria area for online, micro-credentials before developmental labour is expended.
7. **Courseload Transparency.** We recommend that the Department should engage in a Department-wide conversation about courseload.
8. **Workload Allocation.** We recommend that the Department, perhaps the Department's Committee on Committees, examines its committee structure, with an eye to winnowing, and making service allocation more equitable.
9. **Administrative Standardization.** We recommend that the Department and the Faculty work together to create standard job descriptions of all academic administrative positions.
10. **Community Building.** We recommend that the Department continue with its efforts to create community among faculty, especially when there are going to be new hires for whom retention will be a pressing issue.
11. **AI Concerns.** We recommend that English Department look carefully at what might distinguish AI's effect on teaching, from its effects writ large so that it can contribute gainfully to the pan-University discussion that needs to happen.
12. **Alumni Development.** We recommend the Department work with the advancement office to create channels whereby alumni can connect with each other and establish connections with the program.
13. **Public Profile.** We recommend that the Department consider ways in which the public profile of its research and researchers may be raised.