

Academic Program Review 2019
Department of Writing, Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Victoria

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SUMMARY

The three reviewers visited the Department of Writing and the University of Victoria on 10 and 11 April 2019, during which time they had both individual and group meetings with the following Department members (faculty and staff), students (undergraduate and graduate), and academic administrators:¹

- Academic Vice-President Academic Planning, Nancy Wright;
- Dean of Graduate Studies, David Capson;
- Dean of Fine Arts, Susan Lewis;
- Undergraduate Advisor, Faculty of Fine Arts, Sarah Riecken;
- Chair of the Writing Department, David Leach;
- Departmental Advisors (Graduate Program, Maureen Bradley; Professional Writing Minor, Deborah Campbell);
- Regular Faculty Members of the Department (Shane Book; Maureen Bradley; Deborah Campbell; Bill Gaston; Lee Henderson; Kevin Kerr; Tim Lilburn);
- Sessional Instructors (Marita Dachsel; Diane Dakers; Amanda Merritt; Devin Stark; John Threfall);
- Office and Technical Staff (Valerie Tenning and Daniel Hogg); and
- Two students, one third-year undergraduate (Rachel Enns) and one first-year graduate (Martin Bauman).

These meetings, along with the Department's excellent, comprehensive self-study document provided in advance of the visit, allowed the reviewers to hear from a wide and representative range of those with a stake in the Department's continuing success.

On the basis of the documents and the meetings, the reviewers judge this to be a first-rate academic unit with award-winning faculty and a collegial, collaborative working environment. It has regular faculty specialists in the core genres (fiction, poetry, playwriting, creative nonfiction, and screenwriting) as well as faculty and Sessional Instructors who can offer courses in a wide range of areas from journalism to digital storytelling and film production. The Department has an outstanding track record of graduating students who, as a result of its well-considered workshop-based curriculum, often publish work within about five years of completing their programs; indeed, several alumni are themselves now award-winning and widely known writers: e.g., Esi Edugyan, Eden Robinson, Yasuko Thanh, Richard Van Camp.

It is evident that the Department addressed the recommendations of the previous review effectively and efficiently, reforming its curriculum and increasing its enrolments (and EETs), while also successfully weathering a period of serious (University-wide) annual budget cuts (between 2009-10 and 2016-17, the largest being a 4% cut in 2013-14). It has for some years been active in a successful process of broad and

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strategic renewal, redefinition, and revitalization; in particular, besides hiring in fiction (Lee Henderson), poetry, (Shane Book), playwriting (Kevin Kerr), and creative nonfiction (Deborah Campbell) (writers who amongst them can also teach courses in several other areas), it has now appointed two Indigenous writers (Danielle Geller and Gregory Scofield) for 1 July 2019. These latter two appointments will not only replace retiring members and enable the Department to contribute to the University's goals of supporting Indigenous students, faculty, and ways of knowing, but also help transform the unit in exciting ways and very likely attract an even broader range of students than it has previously done.

Given its small size and limited resources, the Writing Program has commendable visibility in North America, attracting excellent students, and also in the local community, but it remains underknown and largely underappreciated within its own institution (where such worthy areas as Climate and Ocean Science and Indigenous Language Revitalization and Indigenous Law appear more prominently in the University's self-representation). Given that Creative Writing is something of a growth area in postsecondary education across North America (see below, under "Quality"), it is important for the University to maintain active support of the Department's commitment to excellence in diversity.