

May 15, 2007

Response to the Literature Program Consultant's Report

Professor Cynthia Ho has made two broad determinations about the Literature Program at Stockton. First, the program is badly understaffed: our class sizes are too large; our precepting load is too high; our faculty numbers are too low given our current number of majors. Second, the program should diversify, either using “a sweeping sociological definition such as ‘courses which emphasize the complex and problematic processes of identify formation’ ” or “more conventional definitions involving geography, race, religion, etc.” (12). In addition, she has made suggestions about use of program personnel and about possible modifications to the current curriculum. The program is happy for the opportunity to continue our self study, and we thank Professor Ho for her report, which has been informally discussed since its arrival. When we hold our formal summer retreat on June 16th, we will craft more detailed responses as the final portion of our year-long self study.

Professor Ho praises Stockton for having undergone a “significant transformation and [having] built a distinctive public college in a short amount of time” (1-2). She suggests that Stockton as a whole, and the Literature program in particular, is “now poised to continue deliberately and reflectively to improve on this fine foundation” (2). Stockton has indeed built a distinctive institution in a short period, and we continue to develop quickly in many directions. The literature program, however, is faced with a dilemma in part because of this rapid growth. Our growing number of majors and lagging support in terms of faculty lines do not allow us to “continue deliberately and reflectively.” Rather than making curricular decisions based on our best academic judgments, for the last several semesters we have been forced to make decisions that respond to enrollment pressures. This is not an ideal situation.

According to the Banner system, there were 328 Literature majors in Fall 2006. Despite graduating approximately 30 majors in the Fall commencement, the number of Literature majors grew to 334 in Spring 2007. Another 60 majors have graduated in the Spring commencement, yet we expect at least that many to enter the program by Fall 2007. We see no sign that our enrollment will decrease any time soon. In the Fall, with the arrival of Professor Adalaine Holton, the Literature program will have 8 full-time faculty. I am not sure how Stockton calculates its student to teacher ratio, but if the number of students is simply divided by full-time faculty, we have a ratio of approximately 41 to 1. If we divided the number of majors by the number of full-time and adjunct faculty teaching next term (adjusting to a load of 2 LITT courses per faculty), the ratio is approximately 30 to 1. Consider the following details regarding the Literature departments of the top five public liberal arts colleges in the nation. Stockton is ranked sixth.¹

1. **Virginia Military Institute.** The college has 1,300 cadets. There are 18 professors in English & Fine Arts; 14 are denoted as faculty in English, 4 as faculty in English & Fine Arts.² “The department serves the entire VMI community with its Speech and Composition courses and through The Writing Center.” We have not been able to locate VMI’s list of course offerings for past or future terms, but a 2-course sequence of writing courses is taken by all first-year students. *We doubt that VMI has as high a percentage of Literature majors as Stockton, but given its*

¹ Rankings according to *U.S. News and World Report*. All information gleaned from College web pages.

² VMI has 21 faculty in its History department.

small number of academic departments, perhaps it does. If the ratio of English faculty to students is multiplied to serve a student population of 7000 (similar in size to Stockton), the number of full-time English and writing faculty is approximately 96.

2. **New College of Florida.** The college has 750 students, all full-time. There are 13 Literature faculty serving two overlapping majors: Literature and British & American Literature. Writing is not mentioned as the purview of the Literature faculty. There is a Writing Center with staff. *If the ratio of Literature faculty to students is multiplied to serve a student population of 7000, the number of full-time literature (and writing faculty) is approximately 121.*

3. **St. Mary's College of Maryland.** The college has 1964 students. There are 16 English Faculty plus 7 additional part-time English faculty. They appear to be responsible for teaching writing courses. *If the ratio of English faculty to students is multiplied to serve a student population of 7000, the number of full-time English and writing faculty is approximately 57. The ratio of part-time faculty to students would be approximately 25.*

4. **University of Minnesota-Morris.** The college has 1,900 students. There are 11 English Faculty and 1 emeritus professor. The college writing requirement is one course which appears to be staffed by the English faculty; there are a number of ways to opt out of this course. In Fall 2005, 8 sections of ENG 1011, which fulfills the college writing requirement, were offered; 2 sections of Eng 1002, a lower-level writing course, were also offered; course caps on 1011 were 18; on 1002 were 15. *If the ratio of English faculty to students (not including the emeritus professor) is multiplied to serve a student population of 7000, the number of full-time English and writing faculty is approximately 40.*

5. **University of North Carolina-Asheville.** The college has 3300 students. There are 22 English Literature faculty. The department administers courses in the University Writing Program (LANG 101 & LANG 102). It looks like 7 or 8 of the 22 faculty cover these writing courses each term; without knowing teaching loads, it is not clear whether that's all these 7 to 8 faculty teach per term. *This is the institution at which Professor Ho, our five-year consultant, teaches. If the ratio of English faculty to students (not including the emeritus professor) is multiplied to serve a student population of 7000, the number of full-time English and writing faculty is approximately 46.*

We are fully aware that such comparisons have flaws. But we note that staffing situations in these, our peer institutions, certainly allow our colleagues a breadth of offerings and curricular flexibility that we here at Stockton can admire, but not emulate.

Our need for additional faculty is stark and colors all of our decisions. Professor Ho suggests that the program has staffing needs in the following areas: European and non-western literature, creative writing, and new media studies. In fact, expertise exists on campus that might help expand our offerings in each of these areas. A closer look at the content of our Literature courses shows more diversity than Professor Ho seems to have found, whether defined by a broad sociological standard or by "geography, race, religion, etc." Nevertheless, we have regularly discussed the need for additional faculty to teach European and world literatures. Members of the LANG program might offer a wide range of European and world literature courses if they themselves were not badly understaffed. So too, expertise in ARTV and COMM dovetails with portions of our new media studies track, but again, faculty in both programs are hard pressed to serve their own majors and can offer few, if any, seats to literature majors. To date we have not been able to craft cross-over courses that adequately serve multiple programs. Creative writing could benefit from

expertise that exists in the General Studies program, which has recently hired several faculty closely aligned with Literature program offerings, but structural impediments have made it difficult to tap this potential source of expertise. Finally, Professor Ho did not mention perhaps our most obvious ally, the Education program. We might look to our colleagues in STEP for support when teaching various education-focused courses, but once again, they are woefully understaffed.

This is a brief response to Professor Ho's report. A more detailed discussion is forthcoming in the coordinator's report. But we suggest that we have previously noted each of the areas where Professor Ho states improvement is needed. We have many ideas about ways to improve our program. The root of our difficulties remains our systemic understaffing.

In conclusion, Professor Ho states that the Literature program has "maintain[ed] a highly personalized and multifaceted approach to student development" (2), that we are committed teachers and preceptors, and that we are active scholars. All of this comes at a physical and intellectual cost. In our five-year review we requested 9 additional faculty lines. You may have smiled at the number and thought it a fine joke, but we are serious. In order to come anywhere within sight of our peer institutions, although arguably still well behind; in order to do more than simply maintain the rudiments of Literary study for our majors alone; in order to help Stockton create an authentic liberal arts experience across the campus, we need those lines.

Submitted for the Literature Faculty by

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