

**CONSULTANT REPORT:**

**THE LITERATURE PROGRAM AT RICHARD STOCKTON COLLEGE**

Cynthia Ho

Professor of Literature and Director of the Humanities Program

University of North Carolina, Asheville

12 April 2007

**Organization of the Report**

*Introduction*

**Observations: Program Strengths and Challenges**

*Faculty Commitment and Expertise*

*Faculty Teaching Load and Class Size*

*Faculty Work Load*

*Literature Program Curriculum*

*Creative Writing and New Media Studies*

*Innovative Teaching*

*Program Goals*

*Assessing Program Goals*

*Institutional Support and College Organization*

**Specific Recommendations**

*Increased Faculty*

*Curriculum Change*



**► Introduction**

Thank you very much for the opportunity to review your self study and visit with the students, faculty and administration at Richard Stockton College. As the outside consultant, I gained a great deal from the experience. For, just as you hope for fresh perspectives to open up new views and possibilities, I also gathered new ideas which I can take back to my own university. Richard Stockton College has undergone significant transformation and built a distinctive

public college in a short amount of time. You are now poised to continue  
deliberately and reflectively to improve on this fine foundation.

I visited Richard Stockton College on March 20, 2007. Before my visit I examined the following materials:

Literature Program Self-Study 2007  
Literature Program Self-Study 2002  
Consultant's Report from 2002  
Coordinator's Reports from 2001-2006  
The pamphlet "Classroom Etiquette"  
*The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey Bulletin, 2006-2008.*

During my visit I met with the following:

Robert Gregg, Dean of Arts and Humanities  
Jan Colijn, Dean of General Studies  
All of the full time faculty members  
Students enrolled in an upper-level course

In 2006-2007 the Literature Program has seven full-time faculty members:

Deborah Gussman, (American Literature)  
Lisa Honaker (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century British Literature)  
Kristin Jacobson (American Literature)  
Thomas Kinsella (17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century British Literature)  
Nathan Long (Creative Writing)  
Brian Stefans (New Media Studies)  
Kenneth Tompkins (Medieval and Renaissance British Literature).

In the next school year, 2007-2008 Brian Stefans will become tenure track and a new faculty member, Adalain Holton (Multi-Ethnic American Literature), will be added, making eight full time members.

On the whole, I observed that the Program and its faculty demonstrate excellent performance in teaching, scholarship and service. They maintain a highly personalized and multifaceted approach to student development. They contribute substantially to the College's General Studies as well as their own Literature Program. Student learning and program effectiveness are rigorously assessed. Through its courses, support of student endeavors, concentrated effort

in preceptorship (advising), and interdisciplinary activities, the Program maintains an integrative and effective approach to student development. When asked, faculty speak passionately about their role in helping students mature; this commitment is exemplified in the personal attention they provide to students.

In addition, I would like to particularly praise the thorough Literature Program Self Study. It is well-researched and convincing in the arguments it presents. I found all of the information extremely helpful.

### ► Observations: Program Strengths and Challenges

#### *Faculty commitment and expertise*

All faculty members do an excellent job of teaching a variety of classes and sharing in the teaching of all levels of the curriculum. In addition, all are significantly involved in service to the department, the university, and to the community at large. Despite the teaching load, the members of the department also evidence commitment to the scholarly communities of their respective expertise. This continued engagement in one's academic area is important in maintaining a vibrant faculty.

Faculty expertise is clustered around American and British literature from the modern era to the twentieth century. In 2007-2208, of the non-creative writing faculty, there will be three American and three British Literature Professors. There is a striking lack of faculty trained in European and non-Western literatures. The new hire makes some inroads in this lapse, but is nevertheless still focused on American Literature. One faculty member, Kenneth Tompkins, teaches all of the pre-modern and early modern courses as well as generating technological innovation and providing substantial computer support .

#### *Faculty Teaching Load and Class Size*

Faculty workload in course hours is within the guidelines of the Association of Departments of English. However, the size of classes is consistently and dangerously large. The "Statement of Policy" of the Association of Departments of English, ([http://www.ade.org/policy/policy\\_guidelines.htm](http://www.ade.org/policy/policy_guidelines.htm)) includes the following:

In the light of these circumstances, the Association of Departments of English presents the following guidelines for maximum class size and workload in English. These guidelines are a revision of ADE's 1974 and 1980 statements, and they reaffirm policy statements of the National Council of Teachers of English (1966), the National Junior College Committee (1968), and the American Association of University Professors (1969).

Students in developmental (remedial) composition need considerable individual help and more detailed responses. Students in advanced composition, business and technical writing, or creative writing are likely to produce a greater volume of more complex writing; thus a greater proportion of a teacher's time is required to respond to what they have written.

College English teachers should teach no more than **thirty-five** students in a literature course and no more than **twenty-five** in a writing-intensive course. For each additional thirty-five students, a teacher should have a qualified assistant to help with the evaluations of written assignments.

One essential objective is to transmit the sense of discovery and pleasure associated with reading imaginative literature. The acquisition of corollary skills in analysis and expression should accompany the emphasis on reading. Classroom discussions and substantial written assignments are essential features of such courses, but they are feasible only with classes of fewer than **thirty-five** students.

Certain general and advanced literature courses that include historical and biographical background and critical surveys may be conducted by lecture for larger classes. For example, departments may schedule these courses in order to give students access to distinguished scholars and lecturers. In such courses, examinations rather than frequent essays provide an adequate, though not ideal, measure of student performance.



Honors courses and seminars that require students to conduct research and to produce sustained critical essays should be restricted to **fifteen students** because close individual guidance is essential.

The Stockton Literature Program report of 2005-2006 records that in Literature courses offered Spring 2006, caps for W1 and W2 courses were set at 30, but the average enrollment was 32. This exceeds the maximum recommended number by 7 students. The senior seminar LITT 4610 which has a cap of 30, enrolled an average of 23, well over the prescribed 15. The number of students in each class, especially in writing courses, has reached unacceptable levels, and this heavy load of teaching writing could lead to faculty burn out.

The heavy demand these large classes make on the time of faculty is excellently charted by the Literature Program's Self Study. For example, Table 27 (pg. 52 of the self study) estimates 112 reading hours for Prof. Thompson in the fall of 2006. And this is a conservative estimate, because it allows 3.5 minutes per page, a feat I have not been able to achieve.

#### *Faculty Work Load*

The Literature Program demonstrates a clear awareness that exemplary advising of majors is critical to both retention and student success. All of the faculty go to great lengths to meet with students one on one, offering not only a critical extension of the classroom, but also valuable advising that cannot take place in the normal classroom setting. "Preceptorship" as it is named at Stockton is one of the program's best elements, and clearly one of the most draining duties. The *official* number of preceptees per Literature Program Faculty Member was 37 in 2005-2007. The College average is 29, itself unmanageably high. Faculty members reported that they advised other students not included in their official lists. This burden clearly has an effect on faculty ability to attend to teaching and other duties.

Opportunities for Student faculty interactions and extracurricular events are very good: Literary readings, the Day of Scholarship, work on the *Stockpot*, and "The *Bash*" are such examples.

### *Literature Program Curriculum*

The Literary Studies Track is unusually constructed, in that it places so few restrictions on students beyond the three core courses, Shakespeare, and the requirement for one American and one British course.

While I agree with the rationalization that "students need a curriculum of breadth over all types and periods of literature and depth in various periods, authors or theoretical approaches" I am not convinced this much freedom encourages all students to create for themselves a well balanced course of study in which they encounter both the familiar and the unfamiliar. However, I do not have a specific recommendation here, since I am acutely aware that the Program does not want to create yet another bottleneck to impede student progress.

A recent change in the Literature Major includes the addition of a foreign language component. And although the Program recently expanded their education tracks, changing situations have compelled them to combine the three tracks: Elementary Education, Secondary Education and Graduate tracks into a single "Literary Studies." Both of these changes seem appropriate for the best learning environment of the students.

The Program faces multiple challenges concerning curriculum and course scheduling, all of which stem essentially from a faculty that is too small to handle the demand. Classes are too large, students express difficulty in getting the classes they need in a reasonable time frame, the choice of non-core courses is too limited, and faculty are monopolized by the covering the Literature Core: "Literary Methodologies," "Literary Research," and "Senior Seminar." All of these issues are well documented in the self study. In addition, when I spoke to students, the problem of finding classes to take was a THE recurring theme. This is a particular problem for students who transfer as juniors and must make up two courses in the sequence.

### *Creative Writing and New Media Studies*

Creative writing's number of students in relationship to the courses offered has caused special problems there as well. To alleviate the deficiency of creative writing course offerings, the program allows WI courses to count toward degree requirements. This seems less than ideal. First, this does not lead to a well rounded progression in the curriculum. Second, it removes substantial numbers of creative writing courses from the supervision and quality control of the

creative writing faculty. On the other hand, it does allow students to work under a wider range of mentors than the creative writing faculty (of one and a half) allows.

The New Media Studies track offers a way for the Program to stay abreast of current trends in education as well. But both of these new programs add considerable demands on a program already stretched too thin.

### *Innovative Teaching*

One of most outstanding initiatives of the Literature Program is the use of technology. The effective and creative uses in the program and in specific classes goes a long way in compensating for some other resource deficiencies. The web page <http://caxton.stockton.edu/classroomblogs> reflects a plethora of clever and interesting uses of on-line technology including blogs, podcasts, student generated hypertexts, postings of good papers, etc. While offering creative outlets to students, Stockton's Literature Program contributes in this way to the academic community. I have used Ken Tompkins' "Wikipedia" in my own classes at UNCA.

Of course, there are always glitches when using technology, and now there is the added problem of saboteurs. But the students to whom I talked generally were happy with the ways computer use opened up the classroom. A few would like more refreshers in how to use the technology. My study of the postings and projects on-line showed, however, a substantial and successful use by students.

### *Program Goals*

The eight program goals listed on Page 6 of the Program Self-study are based on student learning outcomes. They are comprehensive and provide a good basis for assessing program goals. The inclusion of "values" on Page 7 is especially interesting, and I would suggest that #4 "we would like our student to have inquiring and critical minds so that they will not accept anyone's opinions until they have thoroughly read a work and researched its meaning" could and should be combined in some way with Program Goal #7, "They will learn to think independently." For, it is incumbent on the liberally educated to take their skills beyond the world of literature.

### *Assessing Program Goals*

The Literature Program has done an especially fine job of assessment by using a wide range of assessment tools to study multiple indicators. The webpage of Stockton's Institute for Faculty Development (<http://loki.stockton.edu/~teaching/arhu.htm#literature>) provides an excellent way to showcase and share the methods of the Literature Program as seen in this report of Dr. Gussman's efforts:

- **Outcomes Identified:** Student satisfaction with instruction and perception of learning. Several cognitive outcomes
- **Data Collected:** Pedagogy survey completed for all literature classes; senior projects; discussions to evaluate rubrics; prior knowledge quiz in one class
- **Methods Employed:** Assessment office conducted and scored surveys; portfolio assessment/rubric; participated in a pilot program using Waypoint, an on-line service that allows teachers to create interactive rubrics for essay commentary and grading.

Many of the assessment tools used in individual classes are intentionally created and yield valuable insights into the achievement of the above stated goals. For example, the creation of a grading rubric used to maintain consistency for the Senior Papers which was assessed by an outside evaluator seems to be an especially well constructed tool. Faculty report that they have year-end assessment meetings to close the loop between assessment and implementation.

A helpful addition would be the institution of regular peer evaluation. Class visits by other department members and the coordinator can function as both pedagogical learning sessions (for both teacher and visitor) and as another assessment viewpoint.

### *Institutional Support and College Organization*

The physical plant of the school is pleasing, and the Library is well equipped. It provides adequate support for most faculty and student needs. The literary studies study room in the library is welcoming and convenient.

In the area of financial support of faculty research, faculty development, and conference attendance, however, the College's financial support is inadequate.



One of the strengths of Richard Stockton College also leads to a weakness in some areas of leadership. This is the tradition of a non-restrictive, non-hierarchical environment. The lack of a traditional "Chair," and the rule by collaborative consensus usually works well. However, with all of the real power residing further up the chain of command, long range planning seems more difficult to achieve.

### ► Specific Recommendations

The Program has already identified the critical need to change the curriculum in order to open bottlenecks and relieve the overburdened system. Obviously this can be alleviated in two ways--by providing more faculty and streamlining the core.

#### *Increased Faculty*

The faculty teaching load, which allows for release time and research support, is adequate for tenure and promotion requirements. However, large classes and other duties, most especially preceptorships, create a different reality than the 3/3 load suggests.

More hires are essential to the department, for clearly eight full-time faculty cannot serve over three hundred majors, and make contributions to other areas of campus life. Continuing high enrollments and the backlog of student needs will lead to an ongoing demand for more and varied courses.

1. The department must hire new faculty, most preferably two new faculty tenure track hires in the upcoming year.

a. Most pressing is the need for a faculty member to teach outside the fields of American and British Literature. I was surprised that the last hire was an Americanist who somewhat overlaps expertise of others in the program. An Asian, African, or Middle Eastern scholar would add depth to the Program. This lack of "so few literary specialty areas" was noted by the previous reviewer as well.

b. Also very important is the hire of a specialist from among the fields of Middle English, Shakespeare, or early modern Literature. Indeed, for one person to cover this enormous spread is quite daunting, and the Program's long-range plan should include hiring both a medievalist and a Shakespearean.

c. In the Self-Study, the first requested line is for a poet to serve Creative Writing. Clearly, this is important since the one full time Creative Writing member is not a poet. This need is somewhat alleviated by Brian Stefans of the New Media Studies. I suggest that to deal with the need for diversity and the need for expansion of the Creative Writing Program, that Literature make a hire with dual purpose: a poet who also teaches a non-American, non-British literature. There is such a candidate pool. For example, UNCA hired a Korean-American novelist who teaches fiction writing and Asian literature.

2. More Literature Program full-time faculty should be temporarily reassigned from their duties teaching outside the Program. This is not a desirable long term solution, because the strength of the institution as a whole relies on true interdisciplinary contribution to the curriculum of the university. But it appears to be necessary as a short term fix in this situation. Last year, Literature Program faculty taught seven General Studies classes. Some of those converted to Literature, would make a substantial difference in courses offered and in class size.

3. The burden of preceptorship should be more evenly shared throughout the faculty population. Statistics show this is an unevenly shared burden. In terms of sheer hours, individual Literature faculty cannot be expected to meet this demand.

4. Increase Summer School offerings

5. Creative Writing and New Media Studies both will need another faculty member in the future in order to make them truly viable programs.

## Curriculum Change

The sequence of three core courses required of all majors is *theoretically* sound, but in practice is not the best use of resources. Literary Research LITT 2123 and Senior Seminar LITT4610 are both well designed courses with clearly stated student outcomes. LITT 2123 is cleverly designed to give students extensive skills to use throughout their careers and beyond. Alumni and current students give especially good reports on the research class. LITT 4610 engages students in a long term writing project which acts as a culminating experience. Both are demonstrably valuable components of the Literature core. However, "Literary Methodologies" LITT 1101 which teaches "techniques for analyzing literature" is the weakest link.

1. "Literary Methodologies" LITT 1101 should be eliminated. The skills which it teaches can most easily and naturally be absorbed in other Literature courses. This course drew the strongest criticism from students who felt that it duplicated material from other courses. It is especially onerous to transfer students who in essence have to back-track. But this elimination will have consequences which need to be addressed. Controls will not be in place to assure that students have adequate exposure to the three major genres: fiction, drama, and poetry (and this is Program Goal #1). The "gatekeeping" function of the course, which identifies students who are unprepared for the major, would be lost.

I suggest these possible options:

a. Craft "Literary Research" LITT 2123 so that all three genres are the base texts used to learn research methods. It could then take on the gatekeeper function.

b. Create guidelines for the survey courses, LITT 2100- LITT 2105, to include certain skills and genres which should be taught in those classes.

2. "Senior Seminar" LITT 4610 suffers from large classes which puts a tremendous burden on the professor. In terms of sheer hours involved in guiding each individual student project and the importance of varied professional input into the projects, the Program should consider second readers from among Program faculty. Alternately, they could consider using outside readers.

3. The "Literary Studies Track" should diversify its offerings. There are, of course, many ways in which "Diversity" can be defined from a sweeping sociological definition such as "courses which emphasize the complex and problematic processes of identity formation" to more conventional definitions involving geography, race, religion, etc. That is something to be determined by the faculty themselves. In part, a diversification of literature is required simply because the field has moved in this direction, and the program, naturally, would want to stay current. Especially with the new requirement of a foreign language, the department should serve students studying those languages.

a. Such broadening could come in the form of a single course—a world literature that is updated for the 21<sup>st</sup> century or any number of other course.

b. To encourage and implement more diversity in the Program, current courses could be reconfigured to allow more diverse contextualization of American and English works. Inclusion of such approaches into more canonical courses has already happened in LITT 2117 "Literature and the Empire."

c. In order to accomplish a wider horizon in established classes, faculty should be rewarded for developing beyond their training and expertise. In order for faculty to have the time and opportunity to re-conceptualize their courses or add new courses, significant faculty development must be provided. This can come in the form of stipends, course releases, or support for participation in faculty development programs. There are a number of excellent avenues for faculty development, such as those offered by the East-West Center at the Univ. of Hawaii, Manoa.