

Humanities Program Review

In 08-09, faculty in the Humanities Division conducted Program Review in the following program areas: English, English and Study Skills Center, English as a Second Language, Humanities, Linguistics, Philosophy, Reading Center, Speech Communication /Communication, and World Languages.

Support team members who participated in these reviews include John Anderson, Tracie Catania, and Susan Steele.

Program Strengths and Support Team Commendations

The Program Review highlights the commitment of the Division's faculty, both full-time and adjunct, to serving students of all types – from basic skills students to students preparing for transfer and from students seeking career development to students interested in lifelong learning. The depth of this commitment is evidenced not only by the breadth of disciplinary offerings but also by the individualized instruction offered in the English and Study Skills Center, the English as a Second Language Laboratory and the Reading Center. The disciplinary breadth is worthy of further comment, because certain aspects of it are rarely found at a community college: Instruction in eight languages is available through World Languages; there is a robust linguistics curriculum; the English Department offers a rich selection of literature courses, as well as a creative writing program

The Support Team also notes that the Division has made a Herculean effort to update all of its courses and to develop student learning objectives for the entire inventory. (The review of the World Languages courses will be completed by the fall semester; the rest of the curriculum is done.)

Challenges

The demands of English composition and language instruction (both ESL and World Languages) require a large cadre of adjunct faculty. The effort that must be put into keeping the programs healthy under these circumstances – hiring, evaluating and overseeing – is a heavy burden for the programs themselves and for the Division more generally. The situation in World Languages is made more complex by the fact that five of the languages taught (Arabic, German, Italian, Japanese, and Mandarin) are entirely dependent on adjunct faculty.

Enrollments in the Humanities Division overall have increased in the last three years, but the growth has been largely localized to English composition, with smaller increases in Linguistics and Philosophy. With the exception of the Humanities Program, where enrollments have declined, enrollments in other programs have held steady. The lack of growth in English as a Second Language is a concern, since the need for ESL would appear to be on the rise.

The World Languages curriculum has been a long-term source of difficulty. In addition to the fact that instruction in some languages depends entirely on adjuncts, the structure of the curriculum requires students to spend two hours a week in the World Languages Laboratory. While a faculty member is always present in the Lab to provide oversight, no faculty member is charged with providing the kind of direction it requires to be fully effective.

Support Team Recommendations

1. Most programs in the Humanities Divisions are heavily subscribed. In some areas, like English composition, Speech, and American Sign Language, student demand appears to be almost inexhaustible. The contrast with the Humanities Program is, therefore, striking. Overall enrollment in Humanities courses has fallen from 129 in Fall, 2005, to 81 in Spring, 2008. This drop may be a result of the fact that the program lacks a full-time faculty member who can attend to its development; it may also reflect a shift in student interest. Given the other demands on the College and on the Humanities Division, it seems unlikely that resources will be committed to this position. Furthermore, it is unclear whether the differences between courses offered by Humanities and those offered by Gentrain are significant enough to argue that the College needs both programs. The Support Team recommends that the College study the overlap between the Humanities Program and Gentrain and what the College could gain by consolidating the two.
2. English as a Second Language offers six course levels, from the lowest English proficiency (level 1) to the highest English proficiency (level 6). Enrollments in these levels vary considerably, as do the changes in these enrollments over the last few years. Enrollments in levels 1 and 6 are consistently the lowest and enrollments in level 1 have declined. Enrollments in levels 2 and 3 are consistently the highest and enrollments in level 3 have grown. In light of the relatively flat enrollment picture in English as a Second Language more generally, these patterns raise serious questions about the structure of the program relative to student needs. The Support Team recommends a study of the relationship between enrollments in English as a Second Language and its programmatic structure, with the expectation that enrollments could be increased if the program were restructured.
3. The Humanities Division has been working on a resolution of the World Languages issues, involving a change in the curriculum to remove the obligatory laboratory component and consolidating the Lab with the ESL Laboratory. The Support Team is encouraged by these developments and recommends that they be supported.
4. The Humanities Division is the locus of one instructional laboratory (the World Languages Laboratory) and three learning support centers (the English and Study Skills Center, the English as a Second Language Center, and the Reading Center). In spite of the fact that the latter three are co-located on the first floor of the Library and Technology Center and that moving the first to the same location is under consideration, these are all independent entities, with different hours of operation and different levels of technical and administrative support. However, each of their program reviews notes staffing and funding levels that are inadequate to growing

student demand. The Support Team recommends a tighter organizational structure among these entities. The economies of scale afforded by such a change could improve the staffing levels and would also make it easier for the College to consider how to address the funding difficulties.

Overarching Issues

A number of the issues identified in this self-study are not division-specific.

1. The instructional resources noted in the third recommendation above (i.e. the World Languages Laboratory, the English and Study Skills Center, the English as a Second Language Center, and the Reading Center) are only part of the College's inventory of instructional resources. The need for tighter organization generalizes to the other members of this inventory. The College should consider how to better coordinate these resources to serve student needs.

2. Although MPC employs a large number of adjunct faculty, some over many years, the College has not afforded them regular office space. If they lack a campus office, office hours and meetings with students are difficult and, thus, students may lack the kind of accessibility to their instructors that they need. The Support Team is encouraged by the fact that discussions are underway for creating dedicated office space for adjunct faculty.

3. Two of the three programs in the Humanities Division with three or more full-time faculty members are without department heads. The English Department has a department head; ESL and World Languages do not. The absence of department leadership adds to the Division Chair's responsibilities and almost ensures that programs lack forward momentum. The Support Team is hopeful that a survey of the duties of division chairs and department heads being conducted by the Union will provide a solution to the problem.

4. Like many areas across campus, English literature and English as a Second Language are searching for an effective marketing strategy in order to grow their programs. While MPC has made progress towards a timely and professional institutional marketing plan, the Support Team emphasizes the need for more strategic market research and implementation of its results.