

Response to External Review Report
7th Cycle Program Review
Liberal Studies program
School of Humanities and Liberal Studies

1.0 Overview of the Program

We appreciate deeply the perspective on our program offered by our two external reviewers, whose respective expertise and insight proved ideally suited to gauging the strengths and challenges of our Liberal Studies program, and to understanding the implications of recent changes in our relationship to teacher credentialing.

Given that the reviewers visited while we were still in the midst of preparing both our ESMR and ITEP programs (now both completed), it was energizing and inspiring to learn of their confidence that, given our faculty's commitment to high-impact, innovative courses and inventive pedagogies, we are well situated to become a "groundbreaking teacher preparation program that could easily become a flagship program" for our college and university.

We agree that this is a pivotal and exciting moment in the program's history, and we want to make sure that we seize and steer this moment toward goals that will best utilize our strengths and serve our students. We also agree that doing so will require some additional resources and support from the university.

2.0 Evaluation of Program Quality

2.1 Program Planning

The most difficult challenge of developing ESMR and ITEP programs has been finding ways to meet the demanding California subject matter (CSET) requirements by utilizing and occasionally revising existing courses within the LS program and across campus. A significant amount of work has been put into meeting this challenge, which resulted in a revised LS core curriculum, and Elementary Subject Matter advising path.

The reviewers note, and we heartily agree, that the next step should be developing more of our own multidisciplinary courses that will satisfy CSET requirements. This curriculum development would allow us to offer our students a more integrated program, with courses that explicitly address their needs and goals as credential-bound LS majors.

The reviewers also note that we are in the midst of considering a broader revision of our school's curriculum that would result in a LS program entirely devoted to teacher preparation, and a revised Humanities program that might accommodate those LS majors choosing a broad and interdisciplinary liberal arts program.

The school faculty (including those in Humanities, not part of this program review) have agreed to begin considering this direction over the course of 2018-19. Given the degree to which the Humanities and LS programs remain distinct in curriculum and sense of purpose, this conversation must not be rushed, but also must not be delayed.

2.2 Student Learning and Achievement

The reviewers note that LS graduation rates are comparable to those of the university; that the LS major includes a rising percentage of Latinx students; and that the passing rates in our GWAR and senior seminar courses demonstrate minimal gaps by ethnicity.

We emphasize their positive recognition of our several high-impact pedagogical practices – collaborative learning, e-portfolio, study abroad opportunities, pedagogy of the oppressed, and visual/comics making. We intend to make these practices the cornerstone of our program going forward as we continue to work on innovating in our own pedagogical methods and approaches.

The reviewers also note the degree to which LS students report satisfaction with the major, with 85% of surveyed alumni “being satisfied or very satisfied” while nonetheless expressing the desire for more courses focused on teaching, which we agree we need to start providing ourselves.

2.3 The Curriculum

We strongly agree with the reviewers’ claim that “Liberal Studies exemplifies what an undergraduate education should be,” as “critical training for ... the complexities of a twenty-first century world.” We also agree that we are already offering a range of core courses that effectively “teach and model ‘interdisciplinarity’” by putting “different intellectual, scholarly, and artistic traditions in conversation with each other.”

We hope that, going forward, we can work with the college and university to, as they recommend, “increase [the program’s] presence and reach on campus” and beyond, and take to heart their particular suggestions that we:

- mount lower division GE courses (already underway with LS 200, being offered for the first time Fall 2018, and slated for consideration as a first-year experience course, as well as with LS 209);
- incorporate service learning into our curriculum (beyond what Professor Ferreira is already doing in LS 403, particularly to provide future teachers with classroom field experience);
- make more ESMR courses count for the major (which we’ve already begun to do by revising the LS core and emphasis, and revisiting articulation

agreements for some of the lower division ESMR courses) or GE (which we will work on with our partner departments going forward);

- replace the current array of “emphasis patterns” with a more focused set of concentrations or new interdisciplinary major that incorporates or builds on the existing Humanities and Americans Studies programs within the school. (This, as mentioned, is a serious conversation that is already underway.)

Importantly, the reviewers note that the LS program requires increased support for the work it is already doing and particularly for what lies ahead. We agree with their recommendations that:

- the director of the School of Humanities and LS (who serves as chair of both Humanities and Liberal Studies) be given additional support (beyond .40, which was in fact what the chair of Humanities received before the merger);
- we institute (revive) a Liberal Studies council to facilitate scheduling and curriculum planning. The Graduate College of Education is currently working on creating an all-university committee focused on ITEP programs and teacher preparation at the undergrad level. We will have to discuss whether we need, in addition, a council specifically focused on Liberal Studies.

2.4 Faculty

The external reviewers note, at some length, the scholarly productivity, national and international visibility, and significantly innovative pedagogy of our Liberal Studies faculty.

They recommend support, at all institutional levels, of faculty efforts to develop and expand innovative teaching strategies, including co-developing and team-teaching multidisciplinary curriculum, developing new opportunities for service and community-based learning and study abroad, and focusing our pedagogies on social justice and social transformation. LS faculty remain committed to this vision of innovative pedagogy and agree that it has the potential to define LS as “a distinctive and truly transformative major.”

They also reiterate concern that the current over-taxed and under-compensated role of director may be unsustainable for the school. In particular, we would highlight the reviewers concluding statement in this section: “the position seems quite unattractive for a newly promoted full professor with an active research agenda or creative program.” We also agree that some investment in leadership development is warranted to ensure smooth succession and shared governance within the school going forward.

2.5 Resources

Given the pivotal moment we find ourselves in with the introduction of ITEP and ESM programs in Liberal Studies, and the number of faculty at the full professor status, the reviewers emphasize that any investment in staff and FTE faculty would bring, in their words, “dramatic pay-offs.”

Staff: In addition to the aforementioned increase in director’s compensation, the reviewers recommend either a new staff member or an Associate Director for the school, who would be able to coordinate the ITEP and ESMR programs, which involve complex relationships across campus programs and colleges. We heartily agree with this recommendation. Indeed, we believe there needs to be someone whose full administrative focus is Liberal Studies, so that the other programs in our school do not suffer from the neglect that has been inevitable in the last year.

Our current staff/advisor set up will be unsustainable as we roll out the new ITEP and ESM programs. Starting this summer, we’ve been relying on a new advisor assigned part-time to the College of Education (and brand new to the position, with no prior knowledge of or relationship to Liberal Studies) to advise students wanting to enter the ESM or ITEP programs, and also to do preliminary transcript evaluations for students seeking an ESM waiver. This position advises all undergraduates seeking credentials (including all of those seeking single subject credentials). The LS advising component alone will be increasingly time-consuming, and will require a much bigger staff commitment than this stop-gap measure can provide. Our own advisor is currently working long hours to accommodate all of the student demand, and could not possibly add these new tasks to her job description, particularly at her current level of SSP 1, which we agree is too low for the responsibility she bears.

Faculty: The reviewers recommend two new faculty lines, with one in an education-related field, and the other able to contribute to the school’s core curriculum. We will be making requests for these positions (one in community-based educational research, with an emphasis on literacies, the other, someone who could integrate courses in comics studies with one of several fields currently understaffed in our school, including Asian cultures).

In addition, the reviewers stressed the need to equitably support our pre-tenure faculty, both of whom have active and impressive research/publication agendas. We have dipped into our own funds to begin to equalize the initial course load of our most recent hire, who received only 1 year at a reduced load versus the 3 years offered to his immediate predecessor. We cannot afford, however, to fund more than one semester of this.

The reviewers also mentioned faculty concern about basic equipment (bookshelves and computer monitors), which was a bit surprising to the director, who had not been alerted to these concerns, and would have made sure faculty had the equipment they needed.

As noted, we are also struggling to find space for student workers (which we hope to be able to hire next year), and for an expanded advising program. Our offices are spread out in such a way that the staff do not have any extra space in their immediate vicinity. We hope that the college can work with us to find a solution to this problem, even if only in helping us imagine how we can reconfigure our existing space.

2.6 Conclusions, Goals, Plans

As already noted, but in the section with more detail, the reviewers clearly understand (perhaps even better than we do, given that one of them directs an already-existing ITEP program) the challenges in store for the LS program as we move to accommodate student demand for ESM and ITEP.

Our discussions with them made clear our movement toward revising LS so that it is entirely devoted to meeting this demand, and thus entirely devoted to the task of preparing future teachers. Such a structural change would not only make our role in teacher training clearer to prospective students, but also make it easier to construct a curriculum that truly integrates subject matter preparation with pedagogical training.

This vision of LS depends, however, on our ability to hire new FTE faculty who are firmly rooted in the world of education, and who would be able to assume leadership in curriculum development and who could serve as a liaison with the community and with the GCOE.

It also depends on the LS faculty joining the rest of the faculty in the school to rethink the core curriculum of our Humanities program, such that it encompasses a broader interdisciplinary focus, building on recent curriculum development in science studies, performance studies, and visual studies while maintaining a commitment to approaching knowledge, culture and ideas with diverse, global perspectives.

3.0 Commendations of Strengths and Achievements

We appreciate their highlighting our faculty's cutting-edge, inter- and multi-disciplinary research and their community-engagement as public intellectuals; our innovative and high-impact curriculum; and last but not least, our excellent advisor, Andrea Olson. (We concur that her work warrants an SSP 2 classification.)

4.0 Recommendations and Strategies for Program Improvement

In addition to the recommendations made in the sections above, the reviewers suggest (and we agree) that we pursue two additional strategies for improving our advising. First, we should research the graduation rates of FTF versus those coming

to LS from other majors so that we can have a better sense of how we can best help our students; and second, we should pursue more collaboration with GCOE of faculty and staff advisors, to ensure full understanding of the relationship between our programs.