

Department of Language and Communication Self-Study Response  
January 21, 2008

The Department of Language and Communication has embraced the process of the self-study, and faculty members concur, in most instances, with Dr. Jones's assessment of the Department. For ease of comparison, this report will follow the structure of Dr. Jones's report.

A. Departmental Considerations

Strengths

1. Dr. Jones found that the Department is composed of faculty who are dedicated to NSU's students and work well together to share a common goal of educating the students who attend the University. The Departmental faculty have shared that they concur with Dr. Jones's assessment in this regard.
2. In the report, Dr. Jones expressed that the faculty hold the University mission in high regard. Indeed, this is correct. Faculty members work diligently to advance the mission of the University.
3. The Department provides a supportive and positive learning environment. Faculty members agree that this is one of their goals as instructors, and the Department Head has worked to maintain small class sizes which support student learning.
4. Dr. Jones praises the Department's ability to offer high-quality, unique academic programs without overextending itself. He cautions that the faculty members and Department Head should monitor the growth of curriculum and hone the catalog offerings so that courses in appropriate areas are offered.
5. Instructional technology has been embraced by faculty members. While many must work around difficult issues in terms of support from the Information Services Department, they persevere and continue to attempt to use technology as much as possible in teaching.
6. Student recruiting and outreach activities appear to be two areas in which the Department is strong; efforts to provide community interaction and support continue as do recruiting activities.
7. Student Organizations continue to provide activities and extend learning opportunities for students.
8. Salary equity remains an issue within the faculty; however, this year's raises have gone a long way toward achieving parity within the region and other departments.
9. Graduate student support has increased, and this has enabled the Department to recruit more graduate students since the amount of the assistantships is more attractive.

Challenges and areas for improvement

1. Dr. Jones praises the Department's commitment to lowering class sizes in Engl 1010, 1020. He encourages the Department to lower the Comm, Span, and Fren courses to lower numbers also. Dr. Abney concurs with this, and if there are enough faculty available to teach the sections in the Fall in these areas, she will lower class sizes in the aforementioned areas. Further, the Graduate Faculty met in January to work on the upcoming three year course rotation. In order to

- adequately balance the service course load and the upper-level and graduate courses, the rotation must be adhered to, and faculty members have been reminded of this.
2. Workload and staffing issues are two connected issues as indicated in Dr. Jones's report. Dr. Jones called attention to the high teaching load of five classes for Foreign Language (FL) and Communication (Comm) faculty. He encouraged the Department and the University to commit to lowering class sizes and course loads for FL and Comm faculty. In order to achieve this plan, the faculty size of each area must be increased. At present, the Department has been given permission to advertise for another Comm faculty member, and the Department Head will request permission to advertise for another FL member. Further faculty members in Rhetoric and Composition are needed. Searches have continued since December in order to replace lost faculty; however, the challenge to hiring faculty in these areas derives from the fact that the positions were not approved for advertisement until December. Most searches for faculty members in English begin in September and October. In the future, requests to advertise must be approved and posted in a more timely fashion. The Department Head will continue to limit the first-year writing course sizes and will try to do this in Comm and FL also; however, without additional faculty, this will prove challenging.
  3. Curriculum is another issue which addressed in the self-study report. Per SACS guidelines, the Department must split graduate and undergraduate courses and move away from offering these in cross-listed fashions as has previously occurred. The Department has committed to this, and members are in the process of re-writing courses which are offered for both graduates and undergraduates. The graduate faculty met in January to discuss the curriculum, and along with Dr. Bauman, the Director of Graduate Studies, they have begun to hone the courses offered to graduate and undergraduate students.
  4. The Department, in part because of SACS guidelines, has begun to assess ENGL 1020 and other courses. Because assessment data have traditionally been collected at the end of the semester, the Department Head entered the data on the SACS-CIP database and compared results to the previous years. Because of the timing of this activity, faculty members often forgot to ask about results and the Department Head forgot to share them. At the February faculty meeting, Dr. Abney passed out results of the Fall 1020 assessment, and the faculty, based on this information and other evidence, decided that rather than giving students a proficiency exam, students would be required to earn a C or better in ENGL 1010 before progressing to 1020, and a C or better in 1020 before enrolling in a sophomore-level course; students must earn a C or better in sophomore literature in order to enroll in junior or senior English courses. The Department Head will continue to compile and share data with the faculty. Further, a 1020 assessment committee has been established, and it will soon assist Dr. Abney with the compilation of the results and entering of the data. This will be a standing committee, and membership will rotate.
  5. Support for faculty travel and research remains a serious issue in the Department. In 2007, the Department was given only small amount of funding for faculty

travel, and there was little money available in other budget categories to revise into the travel category. Without help from Dr. Hanson's enhancement funds and the NSU Foundation, faculty would have been unable to attend conferences and to conduct research. Several faculty members have written internal funding grants and will continue to mine this source of funding, but if faculty were given at least \$700.00 per member for travel or research, morale and productivity would increase. At present, the Department is conducting a fundraising drive to accrue funds to support faculty research and student scholarships. This activity has the potential to assist the faculty short term, but a longer-term plan for faculty funding via the University is needed.

6. The current state of Kyser Hall was also an element addressed the self-study report. Dr. Jones noticed, as do faculty regularly, the deplorable state of the building. Recently, Dr. Marcus Jones, Acting Vice President of University Affairs, met with Dr. Abney about the state of the classrooms and the building in general, so Dr. Abney and other faculty remain hopeful that the building will soon be cleaner and more student and faculty friendly.

#### B. University-wide considerations

1. Competition for academic enhancement funds has proven greater than usual this year due to the purchase of Banner software. While faculty have been told about this expenditure, they still have needs for travel support and enhancement of computers along with other requests for funding; however, even with the Banner purchase, most items needed by the Department have been financed by the enhancement funds.
2. Dr. Jones praises the open lines of communication between the Department and upper administration. Indeed, the Department works closely with administration to achieve the mission of the University.
3. Technology and technology support are two areas which need to be augmented University wide. Often, student labs are upgraded through lab fee monies; however, no money exists to upgrade faculty computers. In the past, IT support has been inconsistent and difficult to obtain; however, with the restructuring of divisions, IT's new place within the University may help with this issue.
4. Campus Corner's continued inability to provide appropriate service has become a major issue in student retention and the ability of faculty to teach. Often books are missing or not enough are ordered. Students frequently cite voucher problems and Campus Corner's high prices, poor service, and stringent and inflexible return policies. At present, the University bookstore is up for bid, so this problem may soon be alleviated.
5. Library support appears to be another issue of concern for faculty and students. More and newer books must be purchased in order to enable students to conduct research. Many faculty have begun to purchase books for their personal libraries and then loan these books to students to augment and supplement research.
6. Dr. Jones also addressed the need for a serious examination of the elimination or reduction of foreign language courses and Communication courses from the curricula outside of English. Further, he urged Departments who had done so to re-examine this decision since a greater need for the understanding of and communication with other cultures and language groups exists.

### C. Conclusions and Recommendations

In his report, Dr. Jones praised the collegiality of the Department and commented upon the pride that faculty members take in working with students. He asked that the Department form a technology committee which will assist faculty in articulating needs, assessing strengths, and improving technology use in classrooms and in research. This committee will be a standing committee, and membership will rotate. Dr. Jones urged the University to fund travel at a higher amount for faculty members who wish to attend conferences or conduct research off campus. He singled this out as one of the easiest ways to boost faculty morale, and the Department concurs with this statement. Dr. Jones encouraged the Department to create an assessment committee, and in early February, this was done. Members include, Heidi Norwood, Jon Croghan, Jim Cruise, Lisa Rougeou, and Rocky Colavito. Lisa Abney will chair this committee initially, and then another chair will be chosen.

Dr. Jones indicated in the report that clear goals and objectives for ENGL 1010 and 1020 need to be enumerated. In fact, the Department has these, but members of the First-Year Writing Committee will work to ensure that all faculty members have copies of these and understand them. Additionally, the committee will work on honing these goals and objectives as needed. Strides have been made to ensure that faculty understand the goals and objectives, and to that end, the Department has held essay-norming training and 1020 assessment training throughout this academic year. Further, Dr. Jones commented upon the need for the faculty to examine the curriculum in the undergraduate and graduate programs and to eliminate or add courses as needed. He encouraged the Department to move away from offering cross-listed graduate courses, and faculty members concur with this. He cautioned the Departmental faculty to be careful in eliminating courses from the rotation so as not to hinder students who are in need of certain courses. Departmental faculty members are working on a new graduate rotation currently, and this will be posted within the semester.

A critical issue in the Department is staffing. Due to attrition and the Department's inability to replace faculty members in the areas of rhetoric and composition, communication, foreign language, linguistics, and folklore, existing faculty must work diligently and more than they should to assist students. One hindrance to the Department's ability to recruit new faculty is the length of time for approval of requests to advertise. A second problem in recruitment derives from the relatively low salaries and high teaching load that NSU offers. Once these issues are resolved, the Department will likely be able to attract an appropriate number of faculty.

Library holdings continue to be an issue in the Department. Many faculty members need specialized databases and books to conduct research and to teach. During the past ten years, library funding for book and journal purchases have declined, and this creates a hardship for students and faculty who wish to pursue research in several areas of English.

Finally, Dr. Jones addressed the issue of the cleanliness and infrastructure of Kyser Hall. He encouraged faculty and the Department Head to continue to communicate with administration about this issue. Since Dr. Marcus Jones assumed the role of Acting Vice President of University Affairs, more effort does appear to be made to clean and maintain the building.

#### D. Next Steps

Dr. Jones enumerated a series of tasks for the Department to undertake; many of these have been completed already, but some are in progress. The list is as follows:

- Establishment of Assessment Committee—completed
- Establishment of Technology Advisory Committee—completed
- Development of measurable learning objectives for first-year writing sequence—done, but honing continues
- Inclusion of faculty development in CIP—will be incorporated in Spring update in mid-May
- Inclusion of library funding in CIP—will be incorporated in Spring update
- Development of qualitative and quantitative justifications for new faculty lines in FL, Comm, and Engl—partially completed more data are currently being compiled to support need in these areas
- Review curriculum in order to balance needs of majors with offerings for each semester. A task force has been appointed for this; members include Lisa Abney, Helaine Razovsky, Allen Bauman, Rocky Colavito, Sarah McFarland, Andy Crank, Ramey Prince, Charlene LeBrun. This committee has begun work on reviewing the curriculum and on creating a five-year course rotation.

#### E. Next Steps for NSU Administration

Dr. Jones also submitted a list of actions for the administration. The Department concurs with his compilation of activities which will augment the Department's activities.

- Evaluation of library funds and increase as necessary
- Survey of campus bookstore needs—allow faculty and students to share input
- Renovation and cleaning of Kyser Hall
- Incorporation of funds for professional development in Language and Communication budget
- Funding of new faculty lines in Comm, FL, and Engl.

#### Final comments

After carefully reviewing Dr. Jones's response, the faculty submitted suggestions and shared input regarding the development of the Departmental response. Indeed, the enhancement of faculty travel funds and recruitment and retention of new faculty are two major issues with which the Department is concerned. The faculty welcomed Dr. Jones's suggestions about the Assessment committee, Technology committee, and Curriculum

task force. The faculty and I look forward to working with Dr. Hanson as we move toward implementing and discussing Dr. Jones's suggestions.