

REVIEW OF THE M.A., M.S. IN ENGLISH

Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code: 23.0101
English Language and Literature, General

OVERVIEW

The M.A., M.S. in English program at Illinois State University is housed in the Department of English within the College of Arts and Sciences. The department also offers undergraduate minors in English, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, and Writing; a B.A. in English; graduate certificate programs in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages and Teaching of Writing in High School/Middle School; and a Ph.D. in English Studies. The last review of the M.A., M.S. in English program occurred in 2010-2011.

The M.A., M.S. in English program is designed to expose students to multiple subfields of English studies while providing students flexibility to design a plan of study in one of five emphases: creative writing, children's literature, literary and cultural studies, integrative English studies, or teaching English to speakers of other languages. The program prepares students for careers as technical writers and communicators, creative writers, bloggers and social media experts, teachers and educators, and trainers and consultants. Graduates work in a wide variety of settings, such as publishing houses and presses, schools, corporate offices, industry, government, and community-based organizations. The program also prepares students for further education. Graduates of the program have pursued doctoral degrees in English studies and related fields, law degrees, and graduate degrees in library and information science.

Since the 2010-2011 review of the M.A., M.S. in English program, the Department of English has opted to disestablish its M.A., M.S. in Writing program in part because of low program enrollment. Content taught in the M.A., M.S. in Writing program has been integrated into the M.A., M.S. in English program.

Students in the M.A., M.S. in English program serve the university community through their work as graduate assistants. Graduate teaching assistants instruct students in the English course required of all first-time-in-college students at the University regardless of major. Graduate editorial assistants work in the Publications Unit sponsored by the department.

Enrollment and Degrees Conferred, 2011-2018

M.A., M.S. in English, Illinois State University

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Enrollment, fall census day	40	32	36	27	28	22	29	32
Degrees conferred, graduating fiscal year	17	15	18	17	11	10	10	9

Table note:

Graduating Fiscal Year consists of summer, fall, and spring terms, in that order. For example, Graduating Fiscal Year 2018 consists of the following terms: summer 2017, fall 2017, and spring 2018.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY PROGRAM REVIEW SELF-STUDY REPORT

Program goals

- The program seeks to develop students' abilities to read a variety of difficult texts critically.
- The program seeks to develop students' abilities to synthesize ideas and information from a range of sources and use that knowledge as the context for exploring new ideas.
- The program seeks to develop students' abilities to speak and write thoughtfully, creatively, and persuasively in a variety of rhetorical situations.
- The program seeks to develop students' abilities to progress from acquiring received knowledge to critically thinking about knowledge and then to creating knowledge.

- The program seeks to enable students to understand the social effects of language and to be able to use language for particular social effects.

Students learning outcomes

Students completing a **creative writing** plan of study should be able to demonstrate an understanding of several critical theories about literature, advanced knowledge of writers of achievement in selected genres, and an understanding of achievements by established and non-established writers in a selected genre. Student should be able to write literature and write a creative thesis demonstrating high merit that includes a critical/theoretical preface and/or afterword.

Students completing a **children's literature** plan of study should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the historical and theoretical foundations of children's and adolescent literature, an ability to integrate appropriate children's and adolescent texts into a course whose primary focus is not children's or adolescent literature, an understanding of the principles of children's and adolescent literature book selection and a familiarity with the issues involved with book challenges and censorship, familiarity with the ways in which children's and adolescent texts are produced and used, familiarity with a wide range of genres of children's and adolescent texts, ability to place a wide range of children's and adolescent texts in appropriate generic, national, historical, and aesthetic contexts, and ability to bring appropriate and effective interpretative strategies to a wide range of children's and adolescent texts. Students should be able to read and demonstrate familiarity with a variety of children's and adolescent texts from a culturally diverse range of historic periods and national origins, use a wide range of critical and cultural theory to engage and respond to a variety of children's and adolescent texts, and create written and verbal arguments supporting interpretations of a wide range of children's and adolescent texts using appropriate critical reading and research.

Students completing a **literacy and cultural studies** plan of study should be able to read and demonstrate advanced knowledge of a variety of texts from a culturally-diverse range of historic periods and national origins, demonstrate familiarity with the ways in which texts are produced, use a wide range of critical and cultural theory to engage and respond to texts verbally and in writing, engage texts from a wide variety of genres through advanced research, bring to bear on a range of texts appropriate and effective interpretative strategies, and, through critical reading and research, create written and verbal arguments supporting interpretations of a range of texts.

Students completing an **integrative English studies** plan of study should be able to demonstrate verbally and in writing connections among the various areas of English studies, demonstrate verbally and in writing an advanced knowledge of the similarities and differences among the areas of English studies, read and demonstrate advanced knowledge of a variety of texts from a culturally diverse range of historic periods and national origins, use a wide range of critical and cultural theory to engage and respond to texts verbally and in writing, engage texts from a wide variety of genres through advanced research, place of variety of texts in appropriate generic, national, historical, and aesthetic contexts through advanced research, bring to bear on a range of texts appropriate and effective interpretative strategies, and, through critical reading and research, create written and verbal arguments supporting interpretations of a range of texts.

Students successfully completing a plan of study in **teaching English to speakers of other languages** will have mastered learning objectives related to language and linguistics, second language learning theories, and second language instruction and assessment.

With respect to languages and linguistics, students should become familiar with the field of linguistics, its subfields, and the importance/role of linguistics in matters of language education; will learn and practice linguistic description at the levels of phonetics/phonology, morphology, and syntax for the purpose of developing an understanding of language structure beyond one's native language or the narrow range of foreign languages offered in most U.S. high schools and colleges; will demonstrate knowledge of language variation and language change in terms of what those areas of study tell us about the way humans use language and how that language use comes to be structured in human communication; will gain an understanding that successful language use has social as well as cognitive aspects; will become knowledgeable about cultural factors in language use and in second language acquisition; and will become aware of social and institutional barriers to successful second language acquisition that immigrants and other language learners may face.

With respect to second language learning theories, students will demonstrate an understanding of fundamental concepts and principles of the knowledge base pertaining to the learning of English as a second or foreign language, will be able to critically evaluate second language learning theories and engage in a systematic investigation of the knowledge base to inform their own or others' teaching practices; and will demonstrate that they know how to plan and manage a second language class effectively and how to evaluate and selectively apply a range of teaching strategies as appropriate to their students' needs and characteristics.

With respect to second language instruction and assessment, students will be able to understand and critically evaluate different theories, hypotheses, models, and research findings in second language learning; identify and understand the linguistic and cognitive developmental stages English language learners pass through in various learning contexts; create and develop instructional techniques and materials to accommodate the linguistic and cognitive developmental stages of English language learners, drawing upon their understanding of the theories and approaches to second language learning; demonstrate an advanced understanding of the terminology and fundamental concepts of language testing and test construction; and select and construct test items, tasks, and test types that are appropriate for a given situation and to use alternative forms of assessment in the classroom in addition to (or in place of) traditional achievement tests. Students will be able to demonstrate advanced knowledge of identification, placement, exiting, and monitoring of English language learners and of supporting them both in and outside of the schools.

Program curriculum (2018-2019)

Students work with their faculty advisor to design a plan of study in one of five emphases: creative writing, children's literature, literary and cultural studies, integrative English studies, or teaching English to speakers of other languages. Students select a thesis or non-thesis capstone experience.

Graduation requirements:

Students selecting the thesis capstone are required to complete 10 courses and a thesis, typically totaling 34 credit hours. Students selecting a non-thesis capstone are required to complete 11 courses, typically totaling 33 credit hours, and either a comprehensive examination or a portfolio.

Program delivery

The program is offered on the Normal campus.

The program is delivered primarily through face-to-face or blended face-to-face/online instruction.

The Department of English sponsors summer study abroad opportunities in England, subject to student interest and availability of funds for instructor stipends.

Department faculty (Fall 2018)

33 tenure track faculty members (18 Professors, 12 Associate Professors, and 3 Assistant Professors)

20 non-tenure track faculty members (8 full-time and 12 part-time, totaling 10.9 FTE)

Undergraduate student to faculty ratio: 8.6 to 1

Undergraduate student to tenure-line faculty ratio: 11.1 to 1

The 33 tenure track faculty members in the department contribute to instructing and mentoring students in the M.A., M.S. in English program.

Specialized accreditation

The M.A., M.S. in English program is not affiliated with a specialized accreditation association.

Changes in the academic discipline, field, societal need, and program demand

The Department of English notes a nationwide trend over the past decade of declining applications for and enrollments in master's-level English programs, exacerbated by the economic crisis of 2008. However, the department is encouraged by positive trends in national news venues touting the need for broad training in the humanities for numerous professions. Indeed, career opportunities for those who hold a master's degree in English are more varied than ever before. Graduates of the M.A., M.S. in English program go on to successful careers as technical writers and communicators, creative writers, bloggers and social media experts, lawyers, educators and administrators at all levels, translators, programmers, usability specialists, project managers, copy editors, librarians, information architects, public relations experts, and trainers and consultants at a wide range of businesses. While the difficult economic climate in Illinois is also thought to have negatively impacted enrollment in the program, enrollment has increased over the past few years. Replacement in fall 2018 of the graduate admissions portal that had garnered numerous user complaints should help with student recruitment.

Responses to previous program review recommendations

In response to previous program review recommendations, the Department of English has broadened the range of collaborations with Milner Library subject specialists, played a larger role in reviewing library collections, and increased instructional use of Milner facilities. Planning is underway for additional engagement with the Special Collections unit of Milner Library, including collaborative programming in connection with the Illinois Shakespeare Festival sponsored by the College of Fine Arts.

Major findings

The M.A., M.S. in English program continues to model an innovative approach to English studies that is unique in its ability to offer a diverse yet integrative plan of study. Since the last self-study, the program has benefitted from an assessment plan that effectively guides programmatic change; research productivity from M.A., M.S. students and graduate faculty; enhanced relationships with alumni; active measures taken to improve the climate of inclusivity in the department; implementation of recruiting campaigns that involve faculty across the department; and creation of the English Studies Commons, a physical space near the department office intended to foster community-building and intellectual connections among students and faculty. Alumni survey results suggest broad satisfaction with the program. Although application numbers have decreased in recent years, enrollment numbers have rebounded and several initiatives intended to enhance recruitment are being pursued. The program has a demonstrated commitment to diversity and inclusion, though the ability of the department to recruit international students and students from traditionally underrepresented racial/ethnic groups has been negatively impacted by assistantship funding levels that are not highly competitive with programs at other universities.

Initiatives and plans

- Publicize, revise, and sustain the program.
- Connect with more program alumni.
- Expand professional development and career preparation opportunities for students.
- Further develop the student learning outcomes assessment plan, particularly with respect to digital, cultural, and global literacies and critical socio-cultural approaches to reading and composing.
- Explore expanding master's level enrollment in the department through establishment of new programs such as select online master's programs, a five-year bachelor's/master's program in English teacher education, and a graduate certificate program in technical communication.

PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Review Outcome. The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the M.A., M.S. in English program to be in Good Standing.

The Academic Planning Committee thanks the program for a thorough, critical, and forward-looking self-study report that describes a program unique among comparator programs in Illinois in its diverse yet integrative approach

to English studies. The committee recognizes the high levels of student satisfaction with their experiences in the program and with the professional preparation the program provides them. The self-study report evidences ongoing faculty efforts to monitor placement rates among program graduates. Noteworthy are the numerous successes of graduates in pursuing doctoral studies and subsequently obtaining post-secondary teaching positions.

The committee recognizes Department of English faculty members for their work since the prior English program reviews to evaluate the viability of the other master's program in the department, the M.A., M.S. in Writing, as the Academic Planning Committee at that time strongly encouraged. The department has since disestablished the program and has incorporated aspects of its curriculum into the M.A., M.S. in English program. The committee thanks faculty members for their work with students remaining in the M.A., M.S. in Writing program at the time of its dissolution to ensure their ability to complete the program.

The committee recognizes the Department of English for expanding its efforts to recruit students to the M.A., M.S. in English program since the prior program review. Those efforts have included more frequent communication with prospective students and promoting the program at conferences and job fairs. Recruitment efforts have resulted in an enrollment rebound, from a nine-year low of 22 students in fall 2016 to 32 students in fall 2018. The committee commends the Department of English for its commitment to diversity and inclusion among its students and faculty as evidenced by actions the department has taken to recruit for diversity and to promote an inclusive learning environment for a more diverse student population. The percentage of students from traditionally underrepresented racial/ethnic groups enrolling in the program has increased from 7.7 percent in fall 2015 to 14.8 percent in fall 2017. Actions taken to create a more inclusive learning environment include efforts by faculty to infuse equity and diversity issues throughout the curriculum as well as into co-curricular activities. Examples of the latter include the African American Read-In and the Diverse Writers project. Through its Equity and Diversity Committee, the department has infrastructure in place to continue assessing needs and making recommendations regarding diversity and inclusion in the coming years.

The committee recognizes the program for the numerous and varied professional development opportunities it provides students through co-curricular activities and through multiple capstone experiences. Examples include assistance arranging internships for students, opportunities to learn about the publishing industry through work in the Publications Unit of the department, travel awards that make possible student attendance at conferences to present scholarship, numerous presentations and workshops offered through the long-standing Graduate Forum series, the opportunity to publish in *Euphemism* (a department-sponsored journal), opportunities to gain leadership experience through service on department committees, and programs offered by the two registered student organizations supported by the department (Sigma Tau Delta and a graduate student chapter of the Rhetoric Society of America).

The committee commends contributions teaching assistants in the program make to undergraduate education at the University through their teaching of General Education courses. Department support of its teaching assistants through training and mentoring is exemplary. That support includes a week-long orientation in August to acquaint new teaching assistants with best practices in writing pedagogy and a semester-long pedagogy course taken by all teaching assistants (ENG 402: Teaching Composition). The instructional quality resulting from this support is evidenced by teaching and mentoring awards earned by teaching assistants enrolled in the M.A., M.S. in English program.

Recommendations. The Academic Planning Committee makes the following recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle. In the next program review self-study report, tentatively due October 1, 2026, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

Explore using curricular innovations to grow program enrollment. Recognizing success the program has had since 2016 in reversing enrollment decline, the committee encourages the program to continue its efforts to stabilize and increase enrollment within the constraints of faculty resources. The committee supports faculty in its exploration of curricular innovations that could meet the specialized needs of students who might not otherwise enroll in the program. Among the innovations identified in the self-study report are an accelerated master's program through which highly-prepared students could earn a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in the discipline in less than six years and offering more courses using non-traditional delivery methods.

Monitor effectiveness of the program in achieving its goal of exposing students to multiple subdisciplines of English studies. The committee notes that the M.A., M.S. in English program, as described in the Graduate Catalog, affords students flexibility in selecting courses that best fit their professional interests and goals. Although the program has advising emphases, students could select courses related to just one sub-discipline of English studies and technically meet catalog requirements. However, if the program is committed to “offering students best practices in pedagogy across all areas of English studies,” as is stated in the self-study report, the committee recommends that faculty members periodically review students’ plans of study to determine whether that goal is being achieved. If it is not, the committee recommends that faculty consider modifications to the program. Those might include, but are not limited to, designating core courses required of all students in the program, modifying co-curricular opportunities, or altering student advisement policies or practices.

Consider clarifying program requirements with respect to courses that may count toward the degree. Also regarding the Graduate Catalog description of the program, the committee observes that a literal application of the description permits a student to earn most or all credits needed to complete the program through courses offered by units other than the Department of English. Although the committee does not have information regarding courses actually taken by students in the program, committee members surmise that department faculty members would not likely favor a plan of study that lacks English courses. If that is the case, the committee recommends that faculty revisit the program requirements and consider setting forth parameters for courses students are permitted to count toward the degree.

Develop and implement a plan for recruiting for diversity, including both domestic and international students. Recognizing success the program has had since the last program review in increasing the percentage of students from traditionally underrepresented racial/ethnic groups, the committee encourages the program to continue its efforts to recruit for racial/ethnic and gender diversity. The committee supports the recommendation in the self-study report that faculty develop an action plan to recruit for diversity and for addressing issues of diversity and inclusion in the curriculum (although extensive work in that area is already underway). The committee supports faculty plans to expand its targeted recruitment efforts to students enrolled at historically Black colleges and universities, tribal institutions, and Latinx serving institutions. Although the self-study report indicates that international graduate student enrollment in the U.S. has declined in 2016 and 2017, the INTO partnership initiated at Illinois State University in 2017-2018 could offer extensive support to the department with its efforts to recruit students internationally. The TESOL specialization in the M.A., M.S. in English program might be particularly attractive to international students.

Enhance career mentoring and support for students pursuing non-academic careers. According to the self-study report, analyses conducted by Department of English faculty in connection with review of the M.A., M.S. in English program included careful review of feedback provided by program alumni and graduating students. According to the report, that feedback is highly positive with regard to overall program quality and to almost all aspects of the program probed through surveys and interviews. One opportunity for program improvement cited by alumni through their feedback is career mentoring for students pursuing non-academic careers, including organization of a job group for those students. The committee encourages faculty to pursue this opportunity to further enhance the program.

Expand efforts to track and involve program alumni. The committee recognizes the numerous efforts underway in the department to track alumni of the M.A., M.S. in English program. Among those efforts are sending an annual department newsletter to alumni, inviting alumni to campus to participate in department events and student mentoring, and involving alumni in program planning through participation in the department advisory board. The committee supports plans articulated in the self-study report to expand alumni tracking efforts, such as upgrading the alumni database, documenting information about alumni gleaned from social media channels, developing a low-maintenance mechanism for capturing alumni information obtained through informal faculty-alumni contacts, and more systematically administering student surveys and exit interviews.

Nurture a strong connection between student learning outcomes assessment and program planning. The committee recognizes the many changes made by faculty to the program since the 2010-2011 program review, such as creating, revising, and deleting courses in response to changes in the discipline and changing student interests. Examples of such changes are described in the self-study report narrative and are documented in the annual assessment update included in an appendix to the self-study report. However, the student learning outcomes

assessment section of the report indicates that no changes have been made to the program based on assessment findings. While that statement in the report may be in error, the committee is concerned about a possible disconnect between student learning outcomes assessment and program planning. The committee encourages faculty to review the assessment plan for the program to ensure that assessment methods being implemented by faculty are incorporated into the plan and to ensure that processes are being implemented to use assessment findings to inform discussions regarding program changes. The committee encourages faculty to document those discussions, changes made, and the rationale for them in assessment records maintained by the department.

Revisit the comparator and aspirational programs analyses and use findings to help guide program planning.

The committee recognizes efforts described in the self-study report to identify and analyze comparator and aspirational programs. The report sets forth quality indicators, identifies other universities whose comparable programs excel relative to each quality indicator, and briefly describes how those programs excel. However, the self-study report does not indicate the changes faculty intends to pursue in the coming years based on the comparator and aspirational programs analyses and how faculty plans to do so. Nor are those changes cited in the list of initiatives for the next program review cycle. Accordingly, the committee encourages faculty to revisit and expand its analyses of comparator and aspirational programs by further contextualizing findings and prioritizing program changes faculty intends to pursue based on those findings.

Continue collaboration with Milner Library and assess effectiveness of graduate students serving as department liaisons.

The committee recognizes faculty efforts since the last program review in working with Milner Library to develop greater degree-specific integration of library resources with the M.A., M.S. in English program. Among the outcomes of those efforts are expanded use of Milner Library Special Collections in English courses and in co-curricular programming such as Shakespearience (workshops held in 2017 and 2018 in conjunction with the Illinois Shakespeare Festival). The committee commends and encourages continuation of such collaboration. The committee notes mention in the self-study report of English graduate students serving as department liaisons to Milner Library to provide input regarding library collections and instruction that support the master's and doctoral English programs. Recognizing the unique nature of that liaison model, the committee encourages faculty to collaborate with the Milner Library subject specialist to assess its effectiveness in furthering department-library collaboration.