

During the fall of 2007, the Committee on Majors reviewed the English major. The Committee received testimony from Lawrence Manley, Director of Undergraduate Studies, and Amy Hungerford, Associate Director of Undergraduate Studies. We also heard a report from the Director of the Teaching Fellow Program and the Deputy Provost for Undergraduate Education on enrollments and staffing in the English major. We sent out a questionnaire to all current English majors and received 34 responses. Six of these students met with the committee and discussed their experiences in the English department.

The Committee on Majors recommends that the Yale College Faculty approve the revisions to the major presented by the department of English and attached to this report.

The English department at Yale remains a national leader. Despite changes introduced by the CYCE that reduced the number of distributional requirements in the humanities, the vast majority of Yale students take at least one or two English courses. The English major is one of the five largest majors in the College, graduating about 100 seniors each year. In line with national trends, however, the number of students majoring in English has fallen considerably over the last two decades.

Among English departments nationwide, Yale's distinguishes itself in part by its continued emphasis on the interpretation of English poetry of all periods of literary history. Prose fiction, drama, and criticism do, however, have an established place in the curriculum. Students spoke with great enthusiasm about their experience with the faculty of the English department, particularly about the involvement of all ranks of faculty in the department's introductory courses. They also praised the department's range of seminar offerings at the junior and senior levels.

In preparation for, and in response to, an external review last year, the department undertook a major self-study resulting in four proposed changes to the major requirements, all of which have broad support from undergraduates as well as faculty. The nature and rationale for these changes are outlined below; the details are in the attached document.

1. Distribution of coursework

The department will now require all students to take one advanced course in American literature. This change in the requirements reflects the importance of American literature to the study of English.

2. Advising

Students will be required to complete a statement about their progress in the major, to be discussed with a faculty member, by February of junior year. This change reflects the widely shared sense, among both students and faculty, that while English department faculty are active advisors, too much advising takes place at the last minute during shopping period. The new system will also allow students and faculty to discuss at greater length the structure of a student's program between the well-defined introductory courses and the senior seminars.

3. Counting one course outside the major

The major will continue to require 14 courses, of which two may be advanced courses in

literature departments outside English. One of these courses may in the future, where relevant, be taken in a field other than literature (typically, other Humanities fields). This change recognizes the interdisciplinary nature of much literary scholarship and student interest.

4. Senior Requirement

The senior requirement will be extended to two terms, to be filled in a variety of ways indicated in the attached document. This change reflects the department's sense that students need a more distinctive and rigorous experience in senior year.

Recommendations

The Committee endorses all these changes, which respond well to the concerns of students majoring in English. Students complained, sometimes vociferously, about the department's requirements in literature before 1800. However, the department's view is that it should not make further changes until it has had time to study the medium-term effects of a change made last year, allowing students to count one course in 19th-century literature towards the four required courses in earlier periods of literature. The Committee notes the high demand for courses in 20th-century literature, which the University should consider in relation to any possible expansion of the faculty.

In addition, the Committee wishes to note the high demand for writing courses. The department has wisely devised a Writing Concentration which has limited enrollment and high academic standards, and the faculty includes many distinguished writers, mainly in adjunct positions. There remains, however, much unmet student demand for instruction in creative writing.

There is also high demand for the department's introductory writing courses, which are generally staffed by recent PhD's on one-year contracts. The department has noted the need for three-year contracts to guarantee more secure employment for these lecturers and better personnel management for the department, and the Committee supports this request.

Finally, the Committee relays the view of the undergraduates that many Teaching Fellows are not effective classroom teachers (although students also noted that English department TF's seem to be better than average). Perhaps the department could consider reviewing its system for training TF's or consider interviewing candidates for admission to the PhD program with an eye to potential classroom effectiveness.

In conclusion, the Committee on Majors expresses its general sense of the strength of the English major at Yale, and congratulates the department faculty and officers on their contribution to undergraduate education at Yale.

Respectfully submitted,

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Proposed Changes to the Major in English

1. **Distributional requirement**
In addition to the existing requirements, 1 course at an advanced level (beyond English 127) in American literature.
2. **Advising**
As an addition to the usual forms of advising, each major will be required to submit, by February of junior year, a 1-2-page statement, discussed with and signed by a faculty advisor, in which the student will be asked to discuss strengths, weaknesses, and areas of interest and to identify at least four advanced courses, already taken or to be taken, that represent the student's pursuit of a particular interest -- a period, a form or genre, a theme, problem, or issue -- in literature in English. One of these courses may be in a department outside of English. The department will produce a document identifying a wide range of possible ways of combining courses to intellectual advantage.
3. **Change in the 14-course requirement**
Currently students may count toward the major 2 advanced courses in literature outside of English. That would continue to be the case, with the additional provision that, with the approval of an advisor, one of the two courses from outside English could be in a field other than literature, e.g., History, History of Art, Religious Studies, etc.
4. **Change to the senior requirement.**
A two-term senior requirement consisting of any of the following combinations:
 1. A one-term seminar in senior year and a one-term senior essay
 2. Two one-term seminars in senior year, of which one must be a senior seminar
 3. With special permission, a two-term senior essay.
 4. A one-term senior seminar or essay followed by the senior Writing Concentration project.

Seniors who wish to complete the senior requirement in the first semester of senior year may begin it in the second semester of junior year.