

Department of Humanities Program Efficiency and Enhancement Review (PEER)

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Summary

Since the Program Prioritization and Enhancement initiated by President Joseph Shepard in 2014, the various programs of the Department of Humanities have undergone significant alteration in order to better meet the needs of our students, the exigencies of a changing educational culture, and the constraints of budgetary modifications. These alterations include the development of two new minors, communication and philosophy, the folding of developmental reading and developmental writing into the English program, reduction in faculty, and improved use of faculty resources through increased use of hybrid and cross-listed classes. All of this was done while keeping our high level of credit hour production relatively stable and maintaining a viable student-to-teacher ratio.

Department of Humanities Program Efficiency and Enhancement Review (PEER)

Introduction

The Department of Humanities at Western New Mexico University (WNMU) primarily teaches courses in under three prefixes COMM, ENGL, PHIL, and WRTG standing for communication, English, philosophy, and writing. The courses taught under these prefixes teach students to communicate, write, and think well. In that way, they are the central to all that the university is and does. The three traditional liberal arts that made up the classical trivium of rhetoric, grammar, and logic are woven through the heart of our department's disciplines catching them up in a tradition of thinking and learning that goes back thousands of years to the great thinkers of the Mediterranean even as it threads its way through global cultures.

Of course, just because something is old does not necessarily mean that it is good, useful, or efficient. In this program enhancement and efficiency review, we will demonstrate that the Humanities department is efficient, is useful, and we hope we can also show that we are, in fact, not just useful to the university, but that we are good for the university. To accomplish this, we will be examining each of our programs. We will be proceeding alphabetically through each our central programs, communication, developmental English, literature, philosophy, and writing. In each case, we will examine and explain current data provided by the Office of Academic Affairs and explain that the data demonstrate how the department has been enhanced and grown more efficient since the 2014 Program Prioritization and Enhancement initiative. The current state of our peripheral programs in languages, pre-law, and teacher licensure are also going to be addressed in a final section.

Communication

History

The discipline we now call “communication” has similar roots to our writing program in classical antiquity and was referred to as “rhetoric.” During the 19th century “matters rhetorical were being



divided into writing, literature, and speaking” (Golden, Berquist, Coleman, & Sproule, 2011, p. 215). The first two came to be placed in English programs and the latter became known as “elocution.” When what was to become WNMU was first chartered as a normal school in 1897, the students were taught reading, grammar, rhetoric, literature, elocution, and spelling. Over the next 100 years the discipline changed.

Perhaps one of the most important events was the publication of the article, “The Literary Criticism of Oratory” (Wichelns, 1925) which began to collapse the study of rhetoric and public speaking again. Taking on the name “speech,” various departments emerged throughout the country, including at New Mexico State College, as WNMU was known at the time. As the discipline developed, it became clear that what we were studying was actually much bigger than the spoken word and in 1997 the largest of the “speech” associations, the National Speech Association, became the National Communication Association, a path also followed at WNMU.

A history of staffing difficulties, budget constraints, pressures from the state, accreditation requirements, and a probable lack of vision seemed to have deviated the Communication Program at Western New Mexico University from its lofty origins. It has moved

more to the background and functions as a service to the larger university. The communication program at WNMU by the turn of the century served two important functions for a university, as a general education course and preparing language arts teachers, but could hardly be called a “program” of any real kind when the first program prioritization and enhancement took place in 2014.

Developments

The communication program has undergone significant change since the program prioritization in 2014. At that time, the prioritization narrative provided to the Office of Academic Affairs by the Department of Humanities recognized that the communication program served the university by allowing “the students to meet their Area 1 Core Competencies specifically in the areas that require oral and presentation skills” and by providing “a number of competencies in non-print media and oral rhetorical skills required specifically for entry-level Language-Arts teachers to receive their teaching licensure in the state of New Mexico” (Cline, 2014, p. 2).

While we recognized that these were necessary functions that needed to be accomplished, we also recognized that the program was not meeting the obligations for which it had been brought into being nor was it fulfilling its potential. At that time, we provided three options, one was to expand the program by developing a minor in communication, dissolving the program and reassigning the faculty to another program in which the same services could be provided, or to continue as it was as merely a service program to the greater university. We were encouraged by the administration writing that “it has good potential to become a minor and to create cross-discipline collaboration with other programs” (Shepard, 2014, p. 2). We have developed in both these areas.

Growth

Pilot classes toward the development of the minor immediately went into effect the next semester and showed strong promise that a viable minor could grow the communication program in a direction that is useful to the university. A minor was developed using vestigial classes that had not been removed from the catalog from a time when communication had a major on this campus and the addition of four new classes to fulfill the programs mission which was derived from the National Communication Association's mission to teach "all forms, modes, media and consequences of communication through humanistic, social scientific and aesthetic inquiry" (National Communication Association, 2014). In keeping with the general observations presented by President Shepard This minor and the additional new classes were accepted by the Curriculum and Instruction Committee in September of 2015 and while it went into effect Spring of 2016 it was listed as an official minor in the university catalog (Western New Mexico University, 2016, p. 151) and on the extended university's list of online minors (Western New Mexico University, 2017) fall semester of 2016, this academic year. Since then, the minor has attracted 6 officially declared students and minor classes. While six students are not a sustainable number for a minor, we are confident that it will continue to grow.

Within the minor external cooperation and interdepartmental relationships referred to in President Shepard's memo were developed. While the minor was designed with the possibility and intent that a student could get the minor taking only COMM labeled classes, natural affinities electronic media classes in the art department and classes taught in the business department also became included as options.

Further external cooperation emerged. Classes from within communication have been included in hemispheric studies, and Native American studies programs and have become

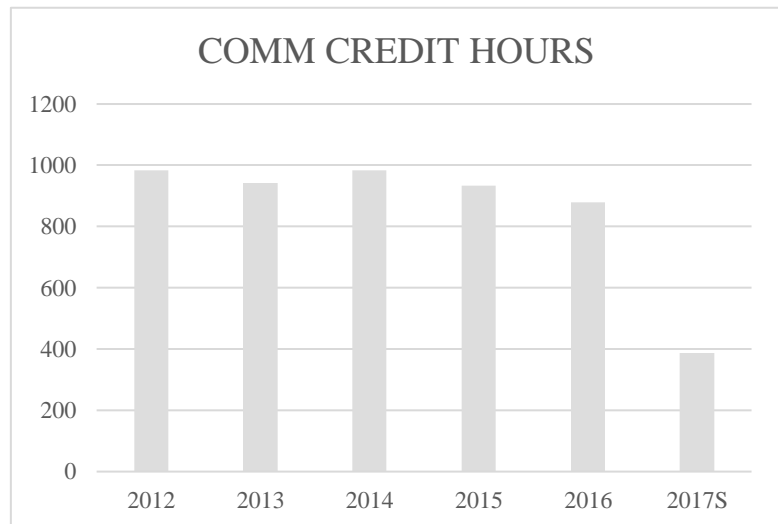
strongly recommended electives for students perusing degrees in business. Thus, the communication program is not dependent on its growing number of minors to be sustainable as a program.

Communication By The Numbers

While developing the new classes and the minor, the communication program has continued its service function to the university which has bolstered both credit hour production and has maintained a sustainable level of credit hour production.

Credit hours

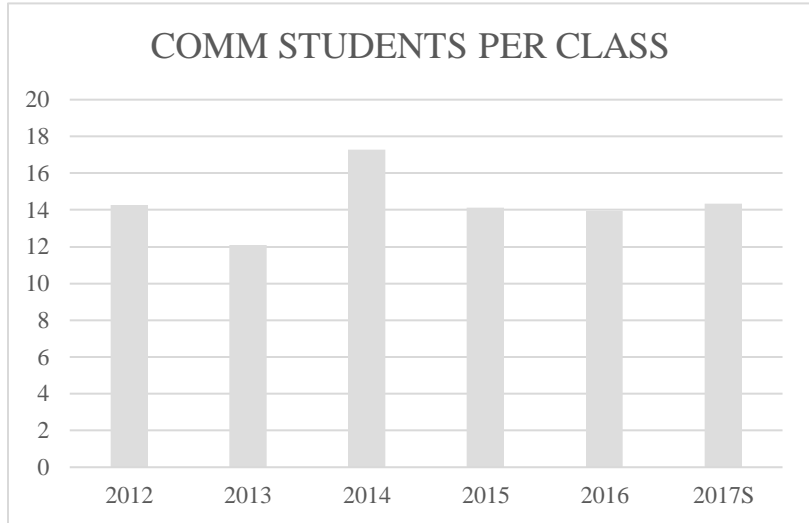
Of course, the new minor did cause an insignificant dip in credit hour production beginning in 2016 when Intercultural Communication and Mass Media were taught and fewer faculty resources were placed in general studies classes which generally fill. The difference in credit hour production of less than



6% between 2015 and 2016 can be accounted for in this. This reduction did not come at a cost to the university in that one new class, Mass Media, while under-enrolled was allowed under the university's Student Overload policy. The spring semester of 2017 looks to continue current trends and we can easily project credit hour production between 800-1000 credit hours for the foreseeable future. For a program with a single full time faculty member such numbers are quite sustainable and would even warrant additional faculty should funds become available at a future date.

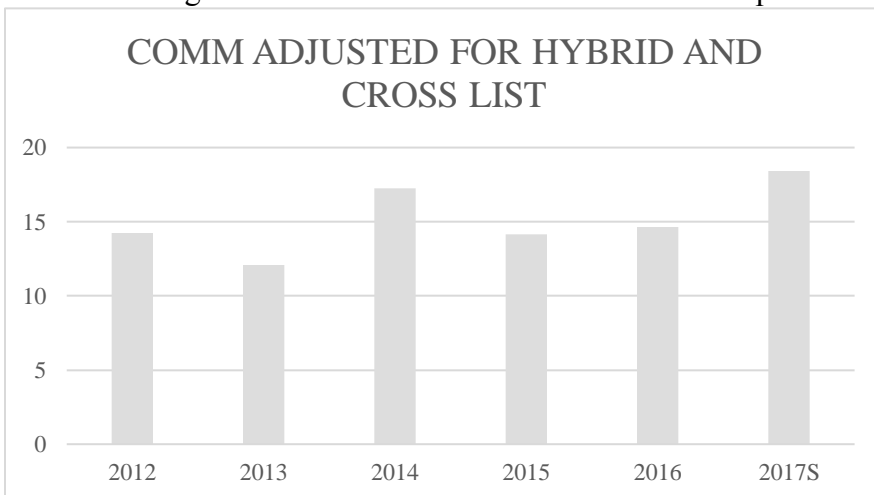
Students per class

The number of communication students per class appears to have been remaining stable at just over 14 students over the past five years. While, mathematically accurate based on CRN's, the actual numbers belie a marked increase in the number of students taught at any one time. One major advantage discovered by the Humanities Department in the past three years is the use of hybrid



online/face-to-face classes. Initially this was done in order to facilitate students who wanted face-to-face sections. Eventually, however, it became obvious that it was also a better use of faculty resources. Furthermore, we have increasingly used cross-listed classes throughout the Humanities in order with the intention expanding student offerings, but also with the side effect of improving faculty resources.

Thus, when the number of classes taught is used instead of the CRN's we can see that there is a significant increase in the number of students-per-faculty. This will be demonstrated as



an important fact throughout this report. The report will largely show that faculty to student ratios are at sustainable levels for the university when figured

using CRN's. However, when cross-listed and hybridized classes are accounted for, we will see throughout the Department of Humanities is doing even better than in previous years as we see above in communication.

Goals:

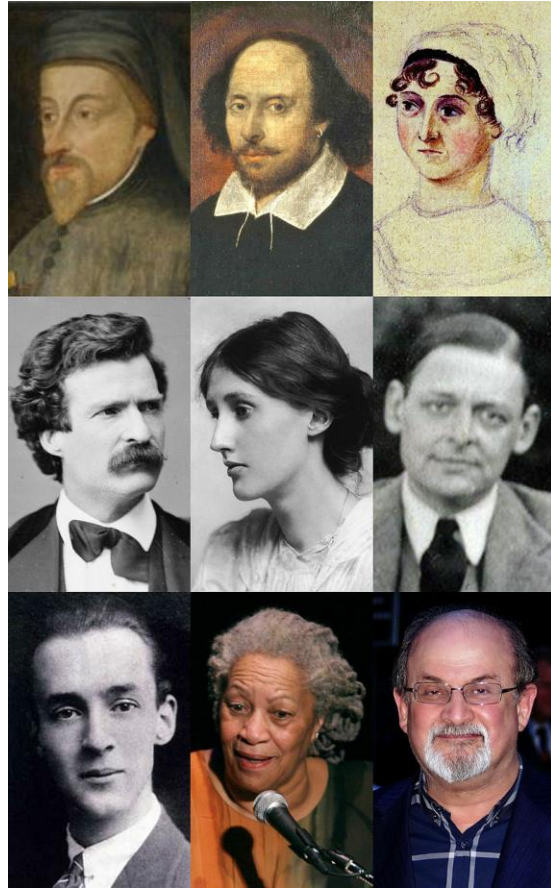
Communication has begun to develop its potential at WNMU and will continue to do so. Over the course of the next two years the program will continue to grow and recruit minors. As general education changes, we hope more of our communication classes can be considered for students besides the public speaking classes to give students the required communication competency. While speech is and always will be at the heart of the discipline, we recognize that some students might be more aided in a class in mediated, group, or interpersonal communication. We also hope to grow the program by offering a concentration in communication for the MAIS (Masters of Interdisciplinary Studies) program. An interpersonal class at the master's level has been piloted as an independent study and an organizational communication class is going to be tried as well.

English

History

Much like the communication program, mentioned first because it comes first alphabetically, what we now refer to as the English program began as rhetoric in the Greek colonies and city-states of the Mediterranean. Probably the main separation from communication came during what scholars call the “belles lettres” period of rhetorical study when students of rhetoric moved from the study of speech as paramount to study “poetry, drama, historical and philosophical writing. . . and polite literature” (Golden, Berquist, Coleman, & Sproule, 2011, pp. 127-128). This move to the study of writing and scholarship from British luminaries like Edmund Burke, Hugh Blair, and Richard Whately made the 18th century a time when English could come into being not just as a language, but as an academic discipline. Thus, we have records of an English Department in 1897, when WNMU was the Normal School at Silver City. At that time, students studied reading, grammar, rhetoric, literature, elocution, and spelling. Our program has traditionally emphasized historical knowledge of literary periods, literary analysis, and composition in order to prepare future secondary educators for their field. English has often been a popular major for those wishing to pursue a career in law or those wishing to go on to graduate school in English.

The English program, by far, is the largest program in the humanities at WNMU. English offers major and minor undergraduate degrees and two disciplines, English and Writing (dealt with under writing, see page WHATEVER), for the Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies Program (MAIS). The majors by themselves, however, don't tell the entire story. Because students who are majoring in Secondary Education or Elementary Education with concentrations in the language arts also take several classes in English.



In addition, the English program provides a significant component of the General Education curriculum. All students seeking a baccalaureate degree are required to take English 101 and English 102 (Area I: Communications), and they may take literature classes to fulfill the 9-12 credit General requirement in Area V: Humanities and Fine Arts. The English program also plays a vital role in the Education Program, for education majors in general and in particular for students in the elementary and secondary Language Arts Endorsement areas.

Developments

The English program has undergone extensive improvements since the last program prioritization and enhancement. While we recognized our viability regarding class structures and sizes, due to our service function to other disciplines, we were concerned about both retention

and recruitment of our under graduate students through to graduation. The year previous to the report, we had only had one graduate. Although English was marked in the green “safe” zone among programs, we knew that this was not sustainable and would need to be rectified.

In order to do this, the report recommended a number of important changes. We recommended an increasing focus on writing rather than criticism, especially technical and professional writing. We recommended raising the profile of the undergraduate student literary club, ΣΤΑ, and through the club recruiting more majors. We did both of these. We hired two new faculty members who focused on writing and were able to maintain one of them. That faculty member was able to develop classes aiming toward a professional writing program, which is still in the process of development. The ΣΤΑ club was able to become an integrated part of student life and to a certain extent made it “cool” to be an English major. As we will show in the next section, those developments paid off. Furthermore, we adjusted the numbering system of our upper level classes to leverage hybridization between graduate and undergraduate classes, making better use of faculty resources.

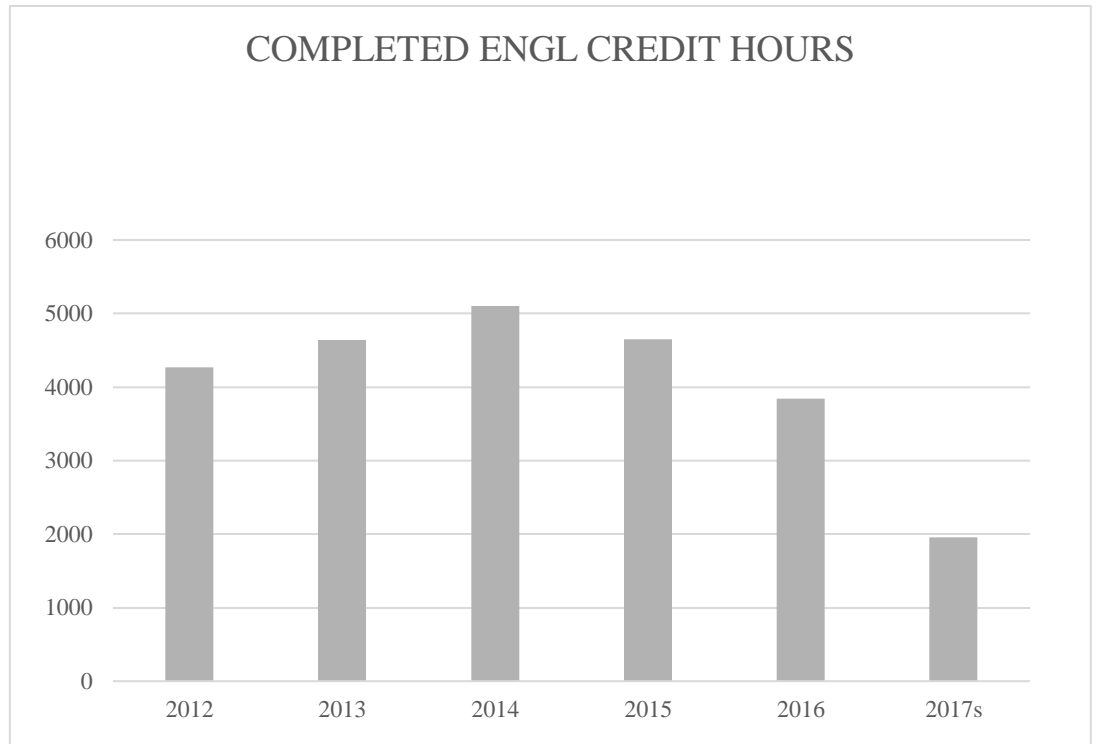
A third development that has occurred is the decision to eliminate the Developmental Reading and Developmental Writing programs into the English Program. While this was partially done to aid in statewide common course numbering, it will allow better use of faculty resources, allow better bridging between the developmental programs and the introductory English classes as well as removing an unnecessary bureaucratic layers by creating a single program.

English By The Numbers

Credit Hours

The English program, when considered in terms of credit hours generated, is clearly a viable program. Generating thousands of credit hours per semester, the English program is vital not only to the academic, but also the financial sustainability of the university. Reaching over

5000 credit hours in 2014, a number too high to be sustainable with current faculty, we leveled off a bit. While here was a slight dip in 2016, current 2017 trends show

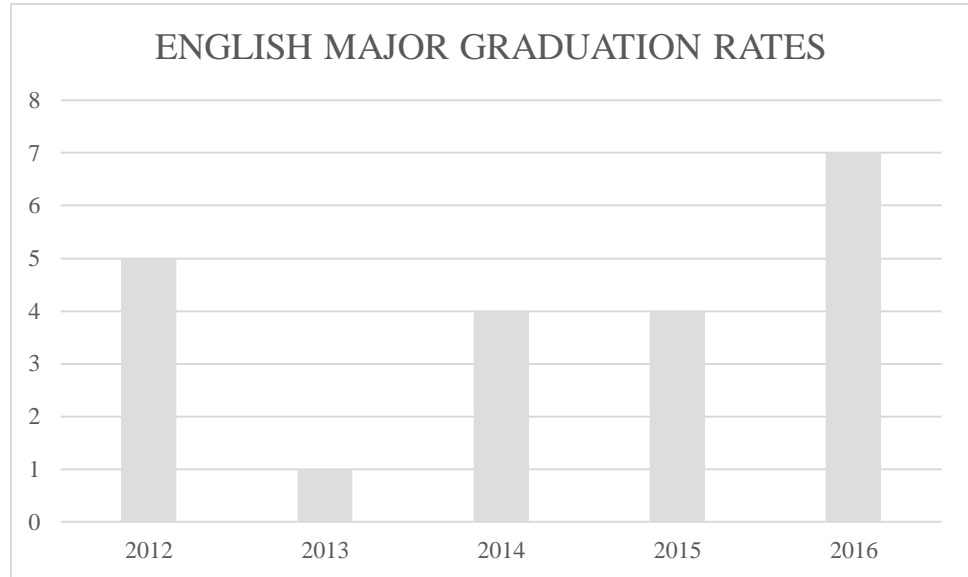


that we can expect 2017 to produce credit hours in the average range above 4000.

Graduation Rates

The embarrassing level of graduation rate in the last year of data before the last program prioritization report seems to have been an anomaly, but even figuring averages for the years

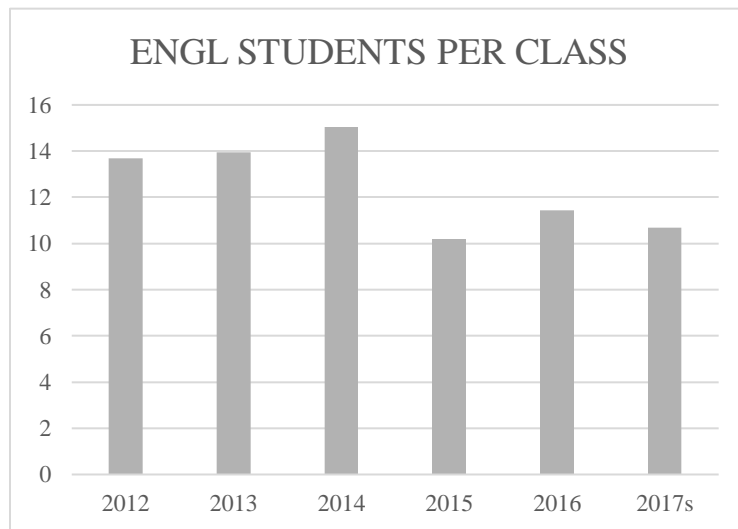
preceding and following 2013, we can see that we have experienced significant growth. While continuing to generate hours as a service to other



disciplines, we graduated seniors at a level 40% higher than our five year average in 2016

Students per class.

At first glance, it might appear looking at some data that the number of students per course has fallen off. Indeed, after the spike of credit hours in 2014, when nearly every class was filled to capacity, there was a slight decline which has been

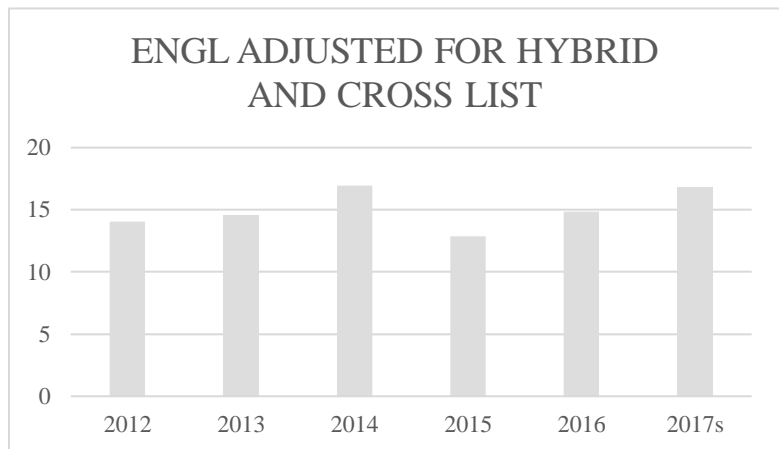


rectified. However, raw data would tell a different story. Taking the number of classes offered

and dividing it by the number of students serviced creates an image that our class sizes are getting smaller.

Clearly an average class size of around eleven is not truly sustainable. However, when the data was shown to faculty members, it became clear that it was also not accurate. Few faculty

members were experiencing classes that small. Eventually, the error was discovered and also applied in the other humanities programs to adjust the numbers. Increasingly, our faculty are making use of different kinds of hybridizations: between graduate and



undergraduate, between face-to-face and online, between programs. Each of these hybrid sections were showing up in the raw data a single class and were lowering the apparent number of people in each course to something smaller than was actually true. After the adjustments were made, it was obvious that English classes are continuing with sustainable numbers.

While unadjusted data made it appear that our classes are declining in the number of students per class, data adjusted so that one class means one class yields more accurate data and shows that classes are filling at approximately the same rate as our 2014 high.

Goals

While we have seen excellent growth in most areas since the data covered in the last Program Prioritization and Enhancement, we also recognize that we have to continue to work. The discovery of hybridizing classes, so that we don't have to offer one section for online and one section for offline classes will continue to yield excellent results. Hybridization between

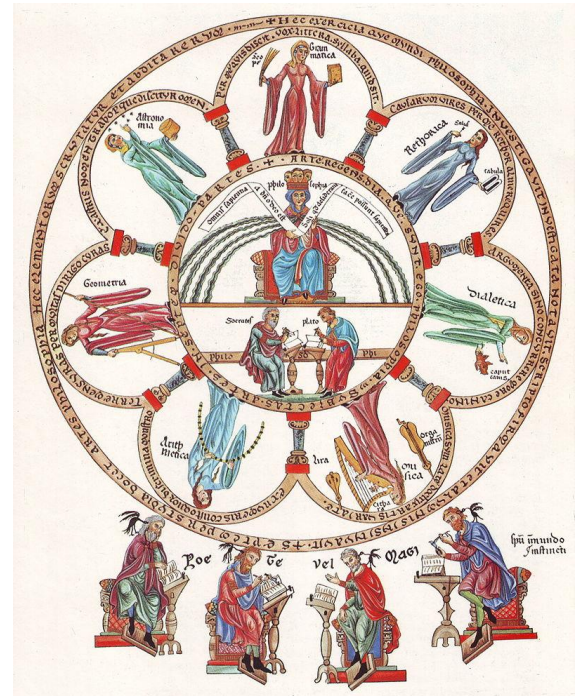
undergraduate and graduate classes will also increase the extent to which offerings can be made on a recurring basis that will allow more students to graduate in a timely manner. We believe that we can continue our growth and development with these processes.

Philosophy

History

The history of philosophy probably begins with the rise of consciousness and self-awareness and so likely coincides with the coming of humans. As soon as people began to write we have tangible evidence people coming to grips with the questions of ultimacy that still trouble and excite us today. As early as the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (The Epic of Gilgamesh, 1960), the oldest known work of literature, we see questions about what it is to be human as Enkidu is tamed to civilization with sex, food, and a conception of morality. The wisdom books, such as the *Maxims of Ptahhotep*, the Biblical book of *Proverbs*, or Confucius' *Analects*, all contain a proto-philosophy that shows that people have always considered the great questions of being, knowing, valuing, beauty, truth, and goodness.

Still, it has been noted that most western philosophy is in many ways a response to the work of Plato and his protagonist Socrates (Whitehead, 1979). So, perhaps we can place the advent of philosophy in the Mediterranean at the same place and time as the rest of the humanities listed in this document. As the study of philosophy moved into the mediaeval era, it was seen as the most important part of the university education, seen in the image to the right as the center of all the other liberal arts. In fact the notion of a “university” is that it is not just a collection of a few disciplines, but of many disciplines all coming together to engage in different ways in philosophy.



As a university education began to take on an increasingly vocational function in the wake of the second world war, philosophy was one of the disciplines that was hardest hit. It does not train a person to pursue any particular career. It does not lead to any particular license. Rather it teaches a person skills that should be useful in any career, an ability to think critically, an ability to behave ethically, and an ability to reason. That was a hard sell to people who wanted a job to move into the middle class.

Philosophy was especially struggling at WNMU when the last program prioritization occurred in 2014. To say we had a program in place would be a stretch. Classes were being offered when instructors, especially Prof. John Gist, could work them in around schedules teaching in other disciplines, but it was noticed that a sea change had taken place in the minds of students. When the classes were offered for general education credit or to help with outside programs, they were doing very well. It was apparent that philosophy was something that would become an excellent program at WNMU.

Prof. John Gist recommended in that prioritization that a change was possible, envisioning the philosophy program as “as a foundation for the new Applied Liberal Arts focus at WNMU” (Gist, 2014, p. 1). He also recommended that the philosophy program be expanded to include a minor, an associate’s degree, and an MAIS concentration.

Developments

Philosophy has taken immense steps toward the goals established in the program prioritization documents in 2014. Continued growth in general classes allowed, both in terms of the number of classes and in terms of the students in the classes provided a solid base to create a minor in philosophy. A minor was developed for C&I and officially went into the catalog this

academic year (2016). Officially, philosophy had two students sign up immediately and more have continued to declare in 2017, although official numbers are not yet available.

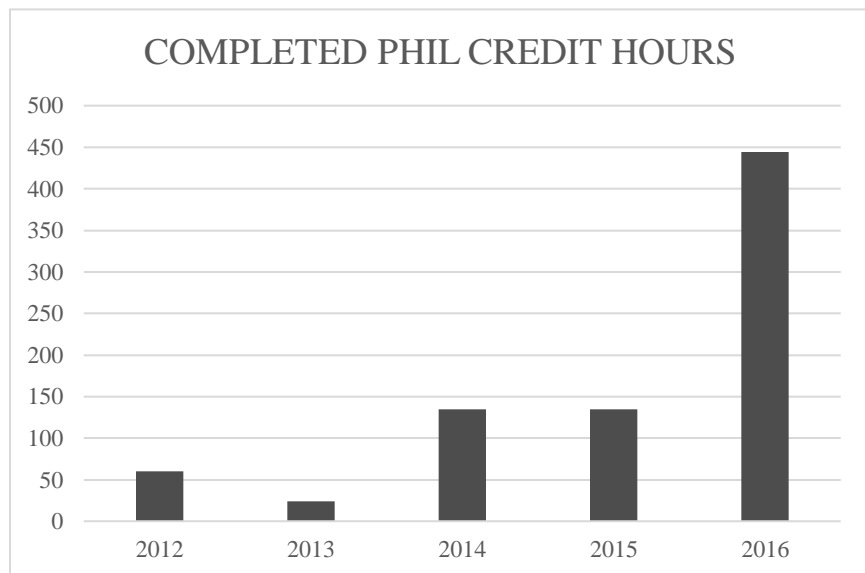
Furthermore, Gist's vision of an applied liberal arts program with philosophy at its core was prophetic. Philosophy and philosophical thinking are at the core of the curriculum being developed to turn WNMU into a solid applied liberal arts university. Because of that work within this program and beyond it, the New Mexico state Senate recently passed a memorial designating WNMU as an applied liberal arts university (WNMU As The Applied Liberal Arts College in NM, 2017). Thus, the role of philosophy is cemented into the fabric of what WNMU is.

Philosophy By The Numbers

Credit Hours

While philosophy has continued to develop new classes to create its minor, it has also continued to expand both the number of classes offered and the number of students per class.

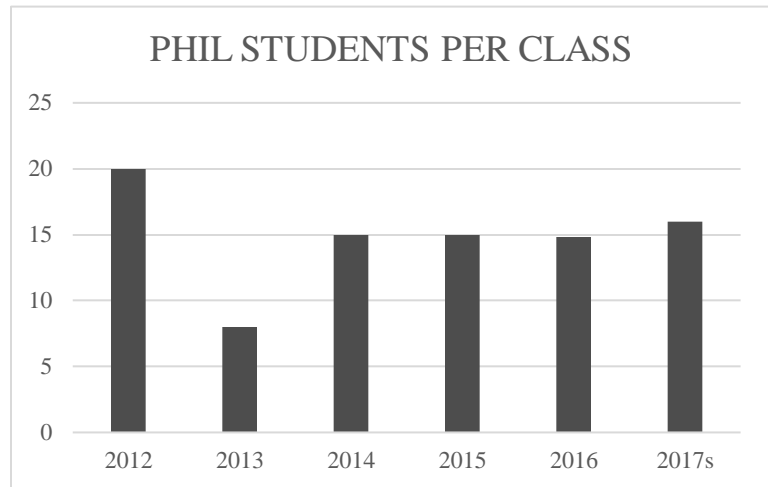
Despite being a program with no administratively dedicated faculty, those faculty who have been willing to teach philosophy have been able to generate a continually increasing number of credit hours.



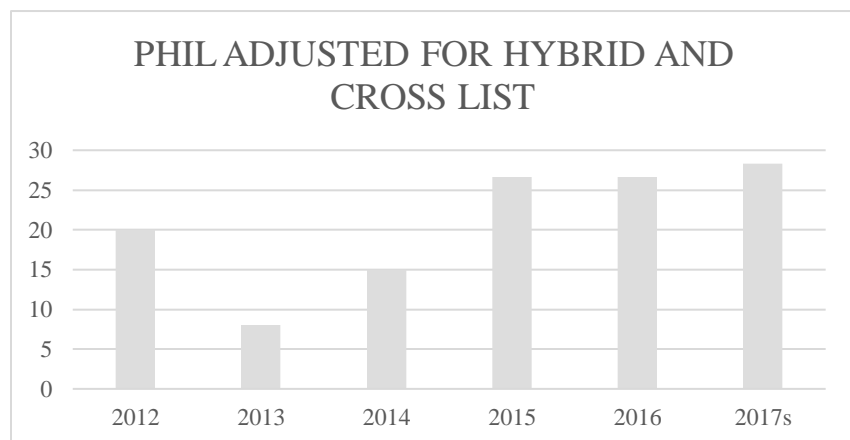
Considering that no faculty members have been specifically assigned with creating or teaching philosophy classes, we can see a generation of hundreds of credit hours as a testament to the increasing viability of a program.

Students Per Class

These classes generally fill and the value of these classes to the university, above and beyond the fact that philosophy is now central to WNMU's mission, becomes obvious in terms of sheer economic productivity of the discipline. As we have already seen in the disciplines of communication and English, it appears that the numbers, while completely sustainable and stable, seem to exist somewhere below the rate of a full classroom.



As with the previous disciplines discussed in this document, this is an innaccuracy because it merely takes into consideration the average number of students per CRN. It is in the philosophy program where we have made the most use of combining online and hybrid models to develop classes that use at least two CRN's to create a single class.



Because of this, it is clear once the data is adjusted to actual classes taught rather than CRN's that we can see that class sizes in philosophy are skyrocketing beyond what we see in any of the other disciplines in humanities, and likely at the entire university. This represents a faculty/student ratio that is more with growth that will likely continue.

While the most recent data from the office of academic affairs lists only two minors, actually, an acceptable number for us when we consider that this is the first academic year that the program has been in existence, we know anecdotally that there are more students minoring in philosophy than that. We see the Philosophy program as one experiencing growth.

Goals

This growing program needs faculty and professionals to teach it. While classes have been taught by people with a strong interest in philosophy and some academic preparation for it, we have not had an person with a PhD. in philosophy teaching at WNMU in some time. This is a problem that must be immediately rectified and that we are rectifying through recent hires.

While at this time, the program has not grown to the point of requiring a full-time faculty member, a recent hiring search has yeilded a candidate with a PhD. in philosophy who can teach a couple classes in both the philosophy and English discipline. He should begin teaching fall of 2017. The faculty members in the English program and communication program who are currently teaching some philsofhy classes will likely continue to bolster this new faculty member in creating a program that is not just viable, but useful.

The program must continue to develop, creating a rotation of courses that meet faculty skills and student needs. It must increase the number of minors to viable levels. We think that the immediate growth and interest that we have seen in the discipline make this likely.

The philosophy program will likely develop an MAIS concentration within the next three to five years, assuming that the numbers call for it. We can probably do this, as the English and Writing programs have done through extensive use of hybridization of 400 level and 500 level courses.

Writing

History

The earliest examples of writing about which we know were cuneiform tablets found in ancient Sumeria. Academic study of writing came later but it is difficult to know exactly when it occurred. Plato discusses the value of writing in the *Phaedrus* and implies that it had been studied in a serious way for some time. While the original study of writing lies in antiquity, the belle lettre movement which coincided with the 15th century developments of pulp paper and the printing press certainly was a central aspect in the creation of writing as the academic discipline as we know it today. Rhetorical study was expanded into not just the study of literary and polite texts, but also into literature and poetry and what we would now call “creative writing.” Developments in what was known as faculty psychology at this time also played an important role as creativity, taste, and genius were increasingly seen as skills that could be developed in a determined student instead of merely a gift from the gods.

At WNMU writing was created as a separate program from the English program specifically as a graduate level concentration at the master’s level for MAIS students in 2009. The classes were extremely popular, growing geometrically for the first several years of the program, until 2013 when we were produced 594 credit hours. The value of this concentration to the MAIS program, where the bulk of WNMU’s growth has been in the past decade, cannot be overstated. Indeed, the fortunes of WNMU can be seen as tied to the MAIS program, and the fortunes of MAIS to writing.

Developments

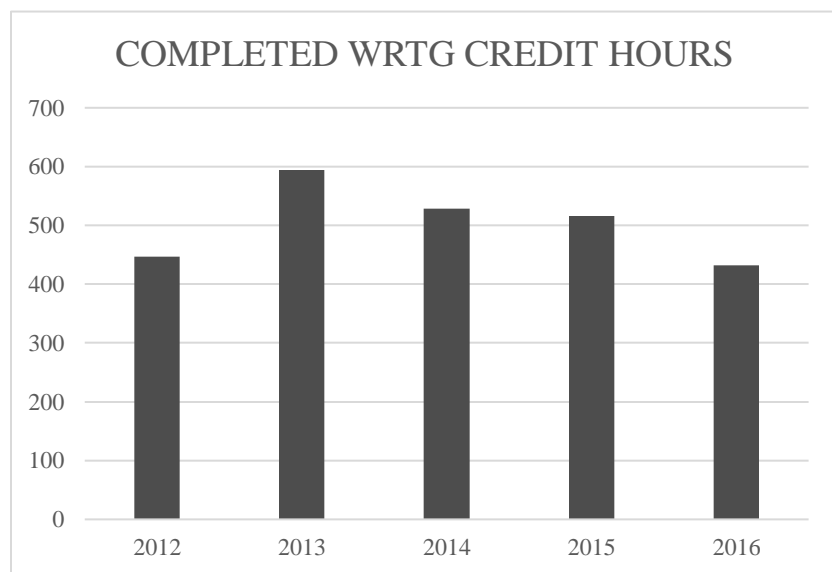
In the 2014 prioritization report it was predicted that the program would level off. A program growing at half-again its previous semester numbers cannot continue without massive

investment that would have fundamentally changed WNMU. Furthermore, it was warned in that document that the writing program was “severely understaffed” and that if needed faculty were not hired and retained it “will have lost faculty diversity and reduced program viability” (Gist, Program Enhancement Report: Writing, 2014). When both the factors of levelling and the administrative constraints which have not allowed us to continue to have the faculty we need are taken into consideration, the program has hardly been reduced at all, as we shall see in the following section

Writing By The Numbers

Credit Hours

There has been, as predicted, some drop off in credit hour production. While the drop from our high of 594 credit hours in 2014 to our current level of 432 hours in 2016 may look precipitous, it is still a pretty good credit



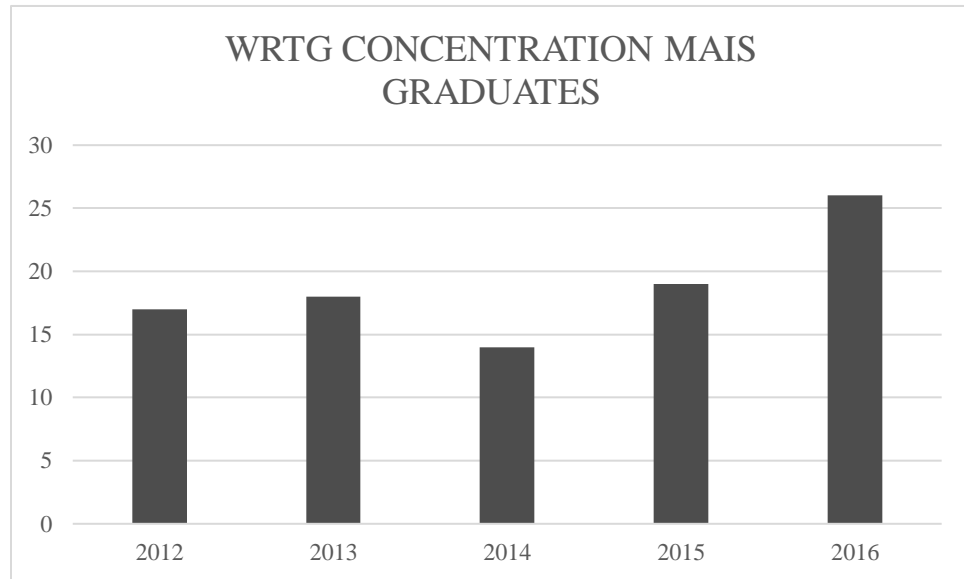
hour production. Nonetheless we would like to see it get back up to the levels we experienced at the top of our production levels again. This can happen when hiring freezes pass and WNMU can once again invest in expanding faculty. We recognize that some of the decrease is the department’s choice in that we decided to divide our resources in order to bring a person in who can develop our philosophy program. However, it must be recognized that we are significantly

down in terms of faculty members since our last prioritization with the loss of three faculty members we are replacing with one who will be split with philosophy.

Graduation Rates

The writing program has continued to increase our number of graduates who leave our program with this concentration for the MAIS program. With 26 graduates with writing

concentrations in 2016, the most ever. The ability to increase graduation without increasing credit hours is a feat that cannot continue

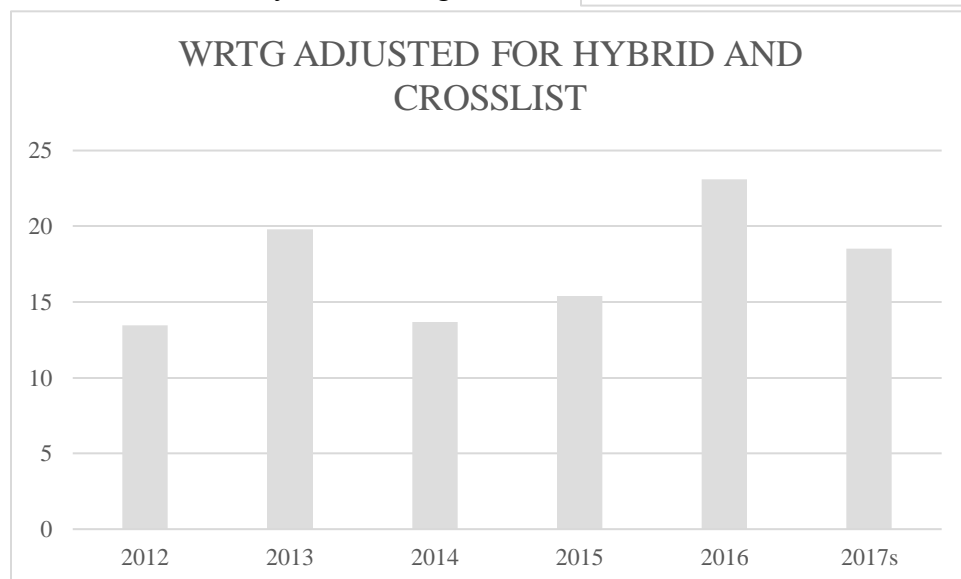
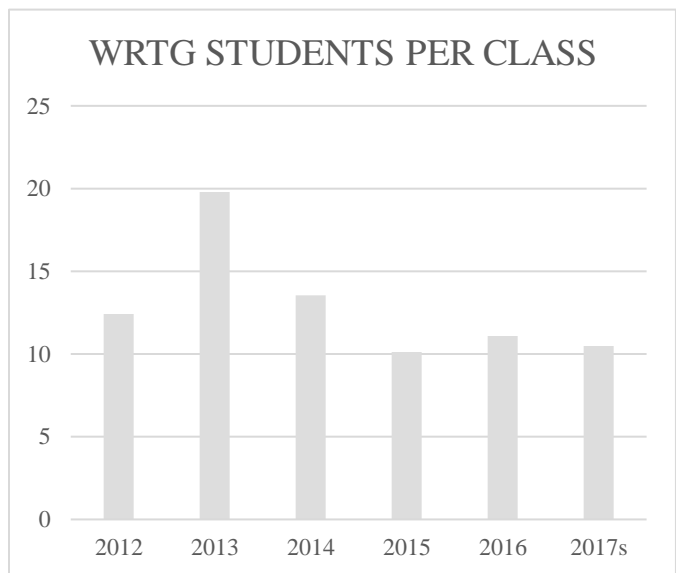


indefinitely, but certainly shows that our faculty have been dedicated to the students with whom they are working and doing everything they can to get the students through. This creativity is paying off as we become and leaner and stronger program.

Part of the reason for our program's success is that we have become increasingly flexible in the offerings to students as we will show as we discuss the number of students per class. This has allowed us to offer the classes our graduates need in a timely manner despite lacking the resources to devote entirely to a single class.

Students Per Class

Our current faculty are working at capacity in order to give our students the opportunities they deserve. While credit hours have gone down, the number of students per class has gone up. The raw data would not show this. It actually looks like we are teaching fewer students per class than we once were. Even looking at the raw data however, the classes are holding at sustainable levels for graduate classes and could continue at that rate. However, as we have seen in all of the previous programs in Humanities, the raw data merely take the number of students and divide them by the number of classes. Once again, that does not tell the entire story. While hybridization of online and face-to-face classes have not been as thoroughly explored in writing as they have in communication and philosophy, another kind of hybridization has been in place. Recently we moved many of our 300 level classes in the English program to 400 level classes which allows us to hybridize our graduate



and undergraduate classes. While adjusted data in this case is not one to one, cutting each hybrid class in half in which students

are also taking classes in another prefix and keeping the credit hours stable shows massive growth in the number of students taught. This is not a perfect representation either, but is a more clear picture of how our faculty are adjusting their course loads to maintain the program under increasing constraints. It explains how it is possible to lower credit hour production and increase graduation rates.

Goals

The writing program at WNMU is strong and the loss of key faculty have forced us to also become creative in our ability to teach our students. While recognizing the constraints of tightening budgets and pressure to expand class sizes, we can continue to be strong. Right now our writing team is functioning at capacity. However, we would not have believed we could reach even this capacity had we not come up with the creative solution of cross-listing. With the creative minds at work on this team it is possible for further creative ideas to develop which can increase our ability to serve students. Barring such innovation, however, it is likely that the writing program will continue to produce master's level credit hours in the 400 range for the foreseeable future.

Of course, easier growth could occur with increase in faculty diversity. The administration will have to carefully weigh such considerations and think about whether that is an investment worth making. Of course, from our perspective it seems obvious that this has been and can continue to be a growth area for the university and is therefore worth the time and money for further investment.

Conclusion

The time between the last program prioritization has been an era of increasingly leaner times as money from the legislature dried up, enrollments remained flat, and many programs experienced steep declines. This has not been the case in the humanities department however. We have had to deal with a decrease in faculty, but we have done so with an increase in creativity. Furthermore, something else increased that is less tangible and cannot be seen by merely looking at the numbers. There has been an increase in the humanities department of unity, fidelity, and resolve. In more prosperous times, perhaps there has been room for infighting and disagreement. Now, however, we have come together and are producing and expanding excellent programs for our students.

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