

February 16, 2011

To: Members of the University Senate

From: Ronald A. Sudol, Dean College of Arts and Sciences

Re: Proposal for a B. A. in Creative Writing from the Department of English

I am communicating with members of the University Senate so that I can make a clear declaration that I do **not** support the proposed BA in Creative Writing from the English Department. The proposal as submitted cannot be funded or implemented.

I strongly support the further development of creative writing at OU. Three years ago I urged the department to take steps in this direction. Indeed, in anticipation of their doing so, I authorized an additional faculty position in creative writing. That position is now filled by an Assistant Professor.

But a **program** in creative writing does not need to be a **degree** program. We have in the College many vibrant programs that have curriculum codes of their own but do not exist as separate degrees such as Women and Gender Studies, American Studies, Judaic Studies, etc. Such programs have a clear identity, brochures, external support, and recognition. The attempt to create a separate degree program for creative writing has become a point of contention between me and the English department. The department has refused to work with me in developing a creative writing program I can support and get funding for.

Specifically, I do not support this proposal for the following reasons:

1. The proposal does not qualify as a new program. With very minor exceptions, it simply describes the *status quo* but puts the label of BA in Creative Writing on it.
2. The claim that this proposed degree program will attract hordes of new students is not credible and is not backed up by data or effective argument. This claim might be credible for a small number of students as applied to a BFA in creative writing, but the department has chosen not to propose a BFA. A BA in creative writing is not an established credential. This is not a ticket to get any kind of job. **A BA in English with a creative writing track would be a much more effective credential. The proposal should be reconfigured accordingly. A BA in English is a well-established credential.**
3. The BA in Creative Writing is an oddball degree and extremely rare across the country. Creative Writing programs are typically tracks or concentrations within an English major or BFAs. Even the University of Michigan, with its small army of successful and published creative writers, does not offer a separate BA in creative writing. The proposal contains no credible justification for offering a degree so out-of-synch with standard practice.
4. The budget is totally unsupportable. There is no way we can finance a *fifth* and a *sixth* creative writer. In these times of scarce resources, we cannot justify financial support for the administrative structure of a program that duplicates what we are already doing.
5. The proposal would permit the English Department to offer what would be, in effect, two competing English majors. The BA in Creative Writing overlaps 60% the existing English major. Enrollments in that major are flat at best. **The English major could be made more attractive by developing a creative writing track within it.**
6. Even on its own terms, the proposal is not well written or argued. The model of creative writing exhibited there is quite old fashioned. This is not necessarily a bad thing. There is a

good market for antiques, for example. **But our strategic plan in the College is for new programs that are bold and innovative.**

7. **I strongly support having a robust program in creative writing.** I have recommended that the English Department reconfigure the English major to accommodate a creative writing track. Doing this would take it out of the “new program” category. I have offered financial assistance to launch and promote such a track. The department has declined the offer. The offer has been withdrawn.

Ronald A. Sudol
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences