

February 16, 2011

To: Members of the University Senate

**From: Susan E. Hawkins, Chair, Department of English, in response to Dean Sudol's memo below
My comments are in bold.**

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.

Four years ago the dean's office strongly urged the department to propose a BA in creative writing. The dean did not express his opposition until the morning of April 13th, the day on which the CAS Assembly was voting on the second reading. The Assembly passed it unanimously.

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.

Two points: W&GS is a BA program; neither of the other two is a major. Second, the dean on numerous occasions has canceled and or refused to meet with members of the proposal committee. If senate members would like days and occasions, I can supply those.

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.

Please read the proposal. Quite a few new courses have been proposed. This is not "business as usual."

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.

The AWP, the professional organization for writing programs, keeps national data. There are currently 155 BA programs in creative writing, 33 BFA's. The department considered and rejected the BFA; it is not primarily a creative writing degree but rather a professional writing degree. Please note the appendix in the proposal that speaks to job opportunities for BA's in creative writing.

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.

Oakland would be the only university in southeast Michigan with a BA in creative writing. The English department sees this an opportunity to do something that the University of Michigan doesn't. The implication that the department's creative writers are neither successful nor published is utterly unwarranted. They are all established writers. Ed Haworth Hoepfner, for example, just won the Ohio State University Journal Award for his manuscript, *Blood Prism*. His manuscript was chosen from over 700 submissions. Not only does his book get published but he also received the Wheeler Prize (\$3,000). Please look at the CV's of the faculty.

4. The budget is totally unworkable. 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.

Jeff Chapman, in his second year, is the first creative writer hired as a creative writer.

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.

For winter semester the English major is up 10% over last year, 14% over five years. There are 385 English majors, 56 Cinema studies majors.

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.**

Apparently our proposal is neither bold nor in-line with standard practice. The model of creative writing exhibited here is the model used in the finest programs in the country: Miami University of Ohio; Johns Hopkins; Purdue; Emory; Beloit. There are 155 such programs in the country. Only two in Michigan.

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

