

Politics, Curriculum, and the Student/Teacher of English

The 2nd Conference on the Future of English Studies

A proposal for the
Strategic Academic Initiative Grant
March 2, 2009

Team Members

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Proposal Description and Goals

Introduction

This proposal seeks \$3800 to fund the 2nd biennial Conference on the Future of English Studies, scheduled for Oct. 16 & 17, 2009, on the campus of the University of Illinois at Springfield. The conference theme is "Politics, Curriculum, and the Student/Teacher of English." This theme reflects the growing concern among secondary and higher education professionals about the purposes and functions of English studies in the 21st-century. More specifically, the theme demonstrates these professionals' interests in examining and improving how literacy is taught and learned in our schools and how our next generation of teachers is trained.

This event follows the 2007 conference, "The Purpose(s) of English," which drew over 60 scholars from around the country. That conference was pitched almost exclusively at university-level educators in the field of English studies. This year's event will extend invitations to middle- and secondary-school instructors, teacher educators, and school administrators.

Statement of Purpose

The Conference on the Future of English Studies is a multi-disciplinary conference, seeking to solve problems facing secondary and higher education by initiating discussion among stakeholders at multiple levels. It looks to serve as a meeting place for scholars interested in literature, composition, linguistics, teacher training, secondary education, and school administration.

The conference organizers posit that English sits at a generational crossroad: In our classrooms we regularly encounter students who think no more of relying on websites, cell phones, iPods, Facebook, myspace, youtube, and blogs for news, information, knowledge, opinions, and pleasure than previous generations thought of relying on newspapers, magazines, journals, and books. Such increasing dependency on images and visual stimulation for information and gratification jeopardizes the traditional focus of the English class—reading and writing—and thus the humanistic enterprise. The pressures from politicians, administrators, and public experts to place more emphasis on new technologies and practical skills further undermines the traditional injunction of English Studies, as Martha Nussbaum has argued, to cultivate humanity by developing the capacities for critical self-examination and looking at the world from other points of view. All of this seems to mean that English is out-of-business-as-usual. But the question of how to adapt, or even *whether* to adapt, to changing demographics and political, technological, and social pressures has no easy answer.

Whatever answer does come will surely emerge in a dialectical, rather than hierarchical, manner. That is, responses to the present situation of English will succeed only if they evolve from the voices of practitioners, scholars, and administrators together. Witness, for example, the effects on education of the No Child Left Behind Act, which was implemented with little input from actual teachers and local administrators. Look, too, at the frustration created by the disconnect between high school education and the demands of the first year of college. In

these situations – and in many others – problems are exacerbated by breakdowns in communication among legislatures, administrators, teachers, and students.

The conference serves as a faculty development activity that addresses goals one and three of the UIS Strategic Plan: Academic Excellence and Making a Difference in the World. It seeks to advance scholarship in the areas of English and Teacher Education. It looks to improve communication between institutions of secondary and higher education. It promotes greater awareness of the effects of legislation and curriculum on student learning. It provides professional opportunities for graduate students and local education professionals. Lastly, it works in concert with the strategic plans of CLAS and CEHS.

The organizers will work to assemble the conference proceedings and create a manuscript for publication by a major academic press.

Timeline

The three conference organizers will be responsible for these activities:

- March 2009: Distribute conference call for papers
Contact local school districts
Identify and contact possible Keynote speakers
Confirm room and technology reservations
- April 2009: Confirm Keynote speakers
Advertise conference in academic journals and profession listservs
- May 2009: Arrange for travel and lodging of Keynote speakers
Collect proposals (May 15)
Continue advertising conference
Review proposals
- June 2009: Invite conference presenters (July 15)
Create conference web site on UIS English and TEP sites
Create registration form on web tools
Begin work on conference posters and program
- July 2009: Continue work on posters and program
Continue conference registration
- August 2009: Organize graduate student volunteers
Distribute conference posters
Purchase registration gifts for attendees (key chains, t-shirts, etc.)
Plan food and refreshment purchases
Print conference posters

- Sept. 2009: Finalize conference schedule
Update conference web site to include schedule
Visit local schools to discuss conference
- Oct. 2009: Print conference programs
Finalize food, technology, and material orders
Distribute invitation for conference proceedings publication
Distribute conference survey to participants
- Nov. 2009: Finalize billing
- Feb. 2010: Collect submissions for conference proceedings
- April 2010: Collect revisions of conference proceedings
Compose and send book proposal

Expected Results

- Faculty at both the secondary and college levels will engage in dialogue about their ideas concerning English curriculum and teacher training.
- Undergraduate students in English and TEP will gain professional experience attending the conference sessions.
- Graduate students will be able to present their own research and respond to the ideas of others.
- UIS will be seen as a site where cutting-edge, academically-important discussions are held. The University's profile will be raised both locally and nationally.
- The conference will produce a edited collection of essays on the topic of curriculum and teacher training.
- Teachers and administrators in the surrounding school districts will have the opportunity to present and attend, thus helping the University create connections among potential "feeder" schools.

Please see the attached conference description and call for papers.

Budget: Fiscal Year 2010

	SAIG	Unit	Total
<u>Facilities:</u>			
Parking		\$40	\$40
UHB Classroom and registration services		\$500	\$500
PAC C/D and Brookens Aud.		\$325	\$325
<u>Technology:</u>			
UHB Classroom Tech		\$300	\$300
PAC C/D Tech		\$45	\$45
PAC Restaurant Tech		\$15	\$15
<u>Food (60 Attendees):</u>			
A.M. Refreshments 10/16	\$280		\$280
Buffet Lunch 10/16	\$841		\$841
P.M. Refreshments 10/16	\$280		\$280
Sit down Dinner (with cash bar) 10/16	\$1160		\$1160
Appetizers 10/16	\$117		\$117
A.M. Refreshments 10/17	\$280		\$280
Buffet Lunch 10/17	\$842		\$842
<u>Speaker Fees:</u>			
Keynote Stipends	\$2000		\$2000
Keynote Travel and Lodging	\$1000		\$1000
<u>Conference Costs:</u>			
Programs, Posters, Advertising, Copies	\$500	\$300	\$500
Attendee Gifts	\$400		\$400
<u>Registration Fees (60 Attendees):</u>			
\$65 per person	-\$3900		-\$3900
TOTALS:	\$3800	\$1525	\$5025

"Unit" budget is secured funds from CLAS (\$1000) and CEHS (\$525).

Curriculum, Politics and the Student/Teacher of English: A Conference on the Future of English Studies

University of Illinois @ Springfield

October 16-17 2009

Keynote Presenters TBA

According to Terry Eagleton, English as a discipline was installed in England's universities to take up the slack when, in the 19th-century, religion stopped providing the ideological glue required for social cohesion. Today there are increasing signs that, with its traditional emphasis on literature, English is going the way of religion as an agent of cohesion and unity. The question, not only of the future of English, but of the humanities as well, looms large. Michael Berubé has asked why we should expect "the aesthetic" to lead us to "some larger sense of community," Simon During and Louis Menand have sounded the death knell of English literature as a discipline, and Stanley Fish has baldly stated that the humanities are of no use "whatsoever." Indeed, the status of English Studies has been precarious from its inception and perhaps never more so than today. For in addition to failing to provide the ideological cement for competing constituencies to get along—witness the culture wars and the red states/blue states divide—English studies seems destined to fail as a site for honing language skills, acquiring knowledge, and seeking intellectual stimulus and aesthetic pleasure.

In our classrooms we regularly encounter students who think no more of relying on websites, cell phones, iPods, Facebook, Myspace, YouTube, and blogs for news, information, knowledge, opinions, and pleasure than previous generations thought of relying on newspapers, magazines, journals, and books. Such increasing dependency on images and visual stimulation for information and gratification jeopardizes the traditional focus of English Studies—reading and writing—and thus the humanistic enterprise. The pressures from politicians, administrators, and public experts to place more emphasis on new technologies and practical skills further undermines the traditional injunction of English Studies, as Martha Nussbaum has argued, to cultivate humanity by developing the capacities for critical self-examination and looking at the world from other points of view. All of this seems to mean that English Studies is out-of-business-as-usual. But the question of how to adapt, or even *whether* to adapt, to changing demographics and political, technological, and social pressures has no easy answer.

We invite proposals on any topic related to the pressures that English Studies, from the secondary to the university level, face from technological, political, economic, and other spheres of influence. We especially welcome proposals that address the following questions:

- What is English's purpose?
- Should English Studies be a site for humanization and social transformation?
- Should English Studies become Cultural Studies?
- Should it "teach the conflicts?"
- What is the value of teaching English in the secondary schools?
- What is or should be the focus of English at the secondary level?
- How can English teachers at secondary schools and universities work together?
- How are schools of education preparing new teachers to address the relationship between language skills and politics and ideology?
- Should they prepare new teachers to do so?
- What needs to change in teacher training?
- What is the function of the language arts in an age which increasingly relies on the image as a source of knowledge and information?
- How does an economic recession affect what English Studies does or represents?
- What are English teachers to do in the face of rhetoric and public policy that emphasizes green technology, job re-training, and scientific research over and above liberating the mind from custom, habit, and routine?
- How can English teachers affect real change in public policy and educational practices?
- How do we in the profession explain to those outside of it what we do and why if we ourselves are no longer sure?
- How can we argue for the relevance of English Studies in a world that, increasingly, seems to get along quite well without it?

Please submit 500-word abstracts for individual papers or panels to Sara Cordell (scord1@uis.edu) or William Carpenter (wcarp2@uis.edu) by **May 15, 2009**.

Email submissions preferred.

Acceptances will be sent by July 15, 2009.

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Travel to Springfield

The city of Springfield, IL, is accessible via Interstates 55 and 72. It is located approximately 90 miles northeast of St. Louis, MO and 80 miles south of Bloomington/Normal, IL. If flying to the area, check flights to and from St. Louis, Bloomington, Peoria, and Springfield. Chicago's airports are all over 200 miles away.

Hotels

Hotels within a short driving distance to campus range from \$59 to \$99 a night. Participants looking to stay downtown near the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum can choose from several bed and breakfasts and hotels.

Registration fees and procedures

Registration fees are \$75 for full-time college and university instructors and \$65 for secondary, middle-school, part-time, adjunct, and graduate instructors. Fees can be paid by credit card or check.

Registration fees include all meals.

If you have any questions about the conference, please contact Dr. Bill Carpenter, (217) 206-8332, or Dr. Sara Cordell, (217) 206-7213.