English Program, School of Cultural Inquiry

Submission to RSHA Change Management Steering Committee

The English Program welcomes the opportunity to outline a response to the change management proposal for RSHA restructure.

Background

As a discipline, English has undergone significant generational and gender renewal in the last 5 years. We have a strong band of early-mid career researchers and our research has national and international impact and recognition (reflected in the 2012 ERA rating of 4 for Literary Studies to which English staff made a major contribution, ARC grants, and the editorship of an important journal in the humanities, Australian Humanities Review).

English makes a major contribution to the BA at the ANU – according to the BA review papers, it is the fourth largest major in the BA (behind the International Relations and Political Science majors and only just behind History). Our teaching across the English program has been consistently recognised as outstanding relative to other CASS disciplines (see recent SELT results), and it is a priority for us to maintain and build on this strength. Our curriculum is clearly focused, reflecting key areas of research in the discipline and staff expertise, and we would like to maintain and develop the work we have undertaken in renewing our offerings. For example, we have recently revised our first year courses to ensure a clear pedagogical framework, pathways to future courses, including graduate work, and attractiveness to students within and beyond the major.

We are currently in the process of restructuring our honours offerings, creating modular courses that involve collaborative teaching, a high degree of access to academic staff and which will be able to be badged across AQF8. The changes we have made are appreciated by a cohort of talented students who represent prospects for graduate research – for example, 35 students attended an honours information lunch on July 31 2013, part of our plan for fostering interest in the discipline. We would hope that any merger would enable us to maintain and build on our areas of strength, and minimize disruption for students. The uncertainty around the future of SCI, since the review in 2010, has had an ongoing negative impact for both staff and students – we would like to provide our students with some confidence about the future of their studies and of the English program.

It is our view that a strong and dynamic English program is essential to a strong and dynamic BA and to the broader mission of the ANU to be ‘both responsive to student needs and to the requirements
of the nation’. The study of literature is a fundamental Humanities discipline, as emphasized in the recent report of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences ‘The Heart of the Matter’. Our courses introduce students to a range of critical approaches to literary texts, to considerations of historical change, cultural difference and the history of ideas, and to works of literature that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. English provides students with the skills to be strong and confident communicators and critical, engaged and empathetic citizens, essential for 21st century Australian culture and society.

Opportunities

We welcome the opportunity for further visibility for the English program as part of a restructure, on the basis that English is recognised as a ‘broad church’. English is the global brand name for literary studies in the English language, and the discipline has a global focus examining works not just from the British archipelago, but from around the world. English is innately interdisciplinary and can include Film and Drama courses, as well as Creative Writing. We identify opportunities for the following:

- **Building and developing our film and drama offerings** after a period of some uncertainty around the future of these disciplines. Staff members Clifford, Flaherty and Russell are committed to reinvigorating Drama within the framework of the discipline of English, in terms of both pedagogical innovation and research projects. As the Ethel Tory Endowment supports the activities of both SLS and SCI, amalgamation might enable more effective utilization of these funds for the mutual benefit of drama and languages. The fostering of creative Writing would be part of this aim, as Lucy Neave teaches script writing and there are natural synergies between drama and creative writing. In relation to film, the English program has had a number of film and literature courses for many years – it was the first in Australia to have a Shakespeare and film course – and some of our staff e.g. Monique Rooney have research interests in film. We believe that there is significant student interest in film related courses which could be developed in conjunction with colleagues in SCI and those in SLS such as Leslie Barnes. **Part of the implementation process should entail**

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1. ANU by 2020, p. 4.
2. ‘Emphasizing critical perspective and imaginative response, the humanities—including the study of languages, literature, history, film, civics, philosophy, religion, and the arts—foster creativity, appreciation of our commonalities and our differences, and knowledge of all kinds’: The Heart of the Matter: The Humanities and Social Sciences for a vibrant, competitive and secure nation. (June 2013)

planning a review of the curriculum in order to identify possibilities of collaboration and innovation.

- **Developing postgraduate offerings**, e.g. in creative writing. Currently in S2 2013, enrolments for ‘Advanced Fiction Writing’ are strong (75) and there is potential for development in creative writing PhDs. Publications in creative writing have the potential to raise the profile of the new school, and the Humanities generally, as indicated by national media attention for Lucy Neave’s new novel and for that of a current PhD, Christie Thompson's novel, recently published by Allen and Unwin. There is potential for collaboration with staff teaching in languages who wish to use creative writing as a pedagogical strategy for language teaching.

- **Incorporating relevant strengths of IHuG into the new School’s work** e.g. in literary digital humanities. Critical mass is essential if the new configuration is to develop and prosper and it would be useful if all staff and graduate students working in literary studies were grouped together in the same AOU. This would provide opportunities to support and build the interdisciplinary research already undertaken in English. (See also later comments on the role of the HRC).

- **Maintaining the profile of gender** The interdisciplinary focus of English means that issues relating to gender are an important aspect of our research and teaching and English would like ensure that the profile of gender studies is maintained and enhanced within the new School, not least because it attracts the kind of high achieving students (at both undergraduate and postgraduate level) that enhance the quality of our offerings as a whole.

**Challenges**

- **Staffing** – as the core element of ‘Literature’ in the new configuration it is important English’s strength be maintained and developed, not eroded, particularly if our ERA ranking of 4 in Literary studies is to be sustained and hopefully improved. It is also essential that we continue to be able to teach a viable English major.

- **Naming the school** -- It needs to have a name that is credible, reflects what we actually do and gives the disciplines within it effective visibility, though we recognise that it is impossible to include all the disciplines in the title of the School. We would accept School of Languages and Literature. **It is essential in our view that Literature (or something similar) is included in the title of the School.**

- **Morale** -- It is important that staff and students in English and Classics regard themselves as having a positive investment in change and that SCI and SLS are equal partners in the
restructure, rather than SCI staff being continued to be identified as the main problem. It would be unfortunate if there were a perceived ‘takeover’ or absorption of SCI by SLS with English and Classics as ‘junior’ partners, or as a rump of the SCI. The effect of this would be to militate against the kind of synergies, collaborative approaches and collegiality which a successful restructure requires.

- **Physical co-location** -- for the foreseeable future, it is likely that the School would cross the Baldessin Precinct and A. D. Hope buildings. Teaching facilities, particularly proximity to the Arts Centre for drama and other kinds of teaching (which we would like to develop) and other considerations such as the location of the Classics Museum, mean that staying in A. D. Hope is the preferable option. Because of the likelihood of continuing to occupy separate buildings, it is essential that SLS and SCI develop from the beginning of the amalgamation lines of communication in order to foster mutual understanding, cooperation and collaboration. Once the proposal is approved, we would suggest the desirability of an early ‘retreat’ for both Schools to discuss how to manage the change.

- **Location of administration** -- If the elements of the School are not to be physically co-located, it is important that some administrative support is maintained in both buildings.

- **Budget** – in order to foster cooperation and mutual trust between the entities of the new School we recommend a transition period of 2-3 years in which the budgets are kept separate before a whole of School budget comes into operation. If possible we recommend a policy of budget transparency and the development of a workloads model, taking into consideration significant differences in pedagogical practice across disciplines. In the transition period the dual budget model could be managed by a Head and Deputy head from SLS and SCI. Consideration should also be given to how communication with the staff body as a whole is structured and managed in order to foster collegiality and cooperation in the vital early stages of the amalgamation.

**The role of the Humanities Research Centre**

In addition we would like to comment on the prospective role of the Humanities Research Centre as a result of the disestablishment of IHuG. Historically, English has had close ties to the HRC – indeed it was from the English Department that that HRC was developed in the 1970s. The HRC contributes to the ANU’s profile in the Humanities globally and enhances the ANU ‘brand’: its reputation overseas is likely to be a contributing factor in ANU’s rankings in the Humanities. Its future should therefore be a very important consideration for the steering committee as it is relevant to CASS and ANU as a whole. We value the existing connections with the HRC and see potential for collaboration into the
future as a means of strengthening existing research in English and the broader humanities, augmenting the global and interdisciplinary nature of English at ANU. Deeper connections may enable more collaboration in terms of research and HDR supervision, and richer programs for HDR students. The English program would therefore welcome the HRC’s location in a School of Languages and Literature but would also like to see a proper review of the its current and future role in the College separate from this change management process. We would like to reiterate one of the suggestions of the Informal Consultation Committee on SCI and SLS amalgamation:

‘a reconception of the place of IHuG within CASS as a whole provides opportunities for rethinking the role of interdisciplinary research and teaching in the Humanities in ways that would allow it to function better as a college-based entity rather than as an element of a single Research School [or indeed a school within a Research School].’

**Conclusion:**

The succession of restructures affecting the School of Cultural Inquiry has had a detrimental effect on the morale of both staff and students, and has contributed to a perception among some students that Humanities at ANU is in decline. This can only have a detrimental effect on recruitment, not only for the disciplines taught in SCI, but for others in the College. We in English are strongly committed to countering this perception of decline, and would very much like to move on to a position of medium to long term structural stability within the RSHA and the College that would enable us to consolidate and strengthen the discipline.

Prof. Gillian Russell (in consultation with staff in the English Program, SCI).