

## **Academic Program Review**

**English for Information Systems  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Dakota State University  
Madison, SD 57042  
April 20, 2006**

### **Reviewer**

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## **Part 1: Executive summary of findings**

Meetings with both the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences indicated concern for the future of the English for Information Systems (EIS) degree. Meetings with faculty indicated commitment to the degree, as well as strong interest in updating it. All parties involved agreed that the EIS degree needed better marketing/recruitment and increased student numbers.

Although the EIS curriculum needs reconsideration, the unique interdisciplinary nature of the degree is valuable to the university and to prospective employers. Graduates of the EIS degree program are more broadly educated than graduates of many traditional programs. More and more, business and industry value broadly educated rather than narrowly trained employees. As the EIS curriculum is reconsidered, care should be taken to retain elements of the degree that serve to produce educated, not trained, graduates.

The faculty teaching in the EIS program are well-qualified and show a high degree of interest in the program and its future. Because of their expertise and local knowledge, they are best-suited to make program decisions. The process of curriculum update and development will demand faculty time and attention; the administration should be prepared to provide needed support for faculty during the update process. Also, the administration should provide faculty lines needed to support the EIS program and to avoid increasing the already substantial teaching load of current faculty.

The curriculum update process should involve setting of goals and outcomes and development of appropriate assessment procedures. The assessments needed should be locally developed and be matched with this unique degree program.

With an updated curriculum, appropriate marketing and recruitment, and adequate faculty support, the EIS degree program is more than viable; it has the potential to become a flagship program at Dakota State University.

## Part 2: Schedule of On-Site Visit

English Program Review

Thursday, April 20, 2006

Patricia Ericsson

- 8:00 – 8:30 am Meet with Vice President Cecelia Wittmayer, Heston Hall 314
- 8:30 – 9:00 am Meet with Dean Kari Forbes-Boyte, Beadle Hall 114
- 9:00 – 9:30 am Meet with Nancy Moose and John Laflin, Beadle 112
- 9:30 – 10:00 am Meet with Justin Blessinger and Scott Richardson, Beadle 112
- 10:00 – 10:30 am Meet with Deana Hueners and John Nelson, Beadle Hall 220
- 10:30 – 11:00 am Meet with Carrie Ahern, Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment
- 11:00 – 12:15 pm Visit ENGL 201, Advanced Composition, Kennedy Center 116, taught by Justin Blessinger
- 12:15 – 1:30 pm Lunch – TBA
- 1:30 – 2:30 pm Visit with English for Information Systems majors, Beadle Hall 224
- 2:30 – 3:00 pm Meet with Maureen Murphy and Dan Weinstein, Beadle Hall 222
- 3:00 – 4:00 pm Visit ENGL 467, Computer Text Analysis, Beadle Hall 113, taught by John Laflin
- 4:00 – 4:30 pm Exit interview with Vice President Wittmayer and Dr. Forbes-Boyte, Heston Hall 314

## **Part 3: Academic Program Evaluation**

### **A. Analysis of trends in discipline**

Because the EIS program is interdisciplinary, it does not fit the parameters of any one discipline. Because of its interdisciplinary nature, however, it does fit the national trend for more interdisciplinary work in higher education.<sup>i</sup> The interdisciplinary work done by both faculty and students in EIS should be highly valued and encouraged, despite the challenges that such work presents for faculty and administrators.

### **B. Analysis of academic programs and curriculum**

Evaluating the overall EIS academic program and specifically the curriculum were high on the agenda for the VP, the Dean, and all faculty members. The VP stated interest in the viability of the program given its lower enrollment and whether the EIS curriculum was up-to-date. The Dean voiced similar interests. All faculty members voiced awareness of the need to increase enrollment in EIS and indicated interest in updating the curriculum.

Because Section C deals with enrollment, this commentary is focused on the curriculum, but the curriculum is inextricably tied to the enrollment and the program's identity. These two items can be separated for purposes of this report, but are, in practice, inextricable.

The main strength of the EIS degree is its versatility. Because of the options available in the major, it can be used to prepare students for a range of futures—from jobs in technical communication to graduate school and multiple careers in between. Although the curriculum needs to be revisited (a step supported by everyone with whom I spoke), care must be taken to preserve the versatility and unique nature of the EIS degree. The area of English Studies is experiencing a trend toward incorporation of more technology and interdisciplinarity in degree programs. The EIS degree puts DSU far ahead of this trend—as it has been for almost 20 years. The rest of English Studies is just catching up with DSU's EIS degree program.<sup>ii</sup>

Despite being trend-setting, two areas of the degree need to be revisited: the name and the overall curriculum. Several people with whom I spoke questioned the name of the degree. Although a name-change is not a “silver bullet” for the program, there appeared to be agreement that many students and employers did not understand the degree. Any move to rename it should be carefully considered in consultation with faculty, administration, current

students, and employers (both those currently employing EIS graduates and prospective employers). Any name-change that would narrow the interdisciplinary possibilities of the degree would be a disservice to the program and DSU. However, a name that provided a strong, easily communicated identity for the program might be a benefit.

Without exception, every person with whom I spoke believes that the EIS curriculum needs to be revisited. Faculty suggestions on changing the program ranged from minor adjustments to wholesale revamping. Since placement statistics and employer satisfaction ratings for EIS graduates are excellent, a wholesale revamping of the degree might be unwise. Whether tweaking is enough to update the degree is questionable. The right path probably lies somewhere in the middle ground. Specific advice on what needs to be done should not come from an outside reviewer. However, I can strongly suggest that the curriculum be reconsidered.

After meeting with the faculty, I have no doubt that they are up to the task suggested here. Because of their commitment to DSU and the EIS degree, their knowledge of DSU students, and their awareness of the overall DSU curriculum, they are the experts best-suited for the task. As the curriculum is revisited, care must be taken to keep EIS ahead of the curve, especially in the technological area. There may be a temptation to recreate EIS as a technical communication degree, but a typical technical communication degree would not make DSU unique nor would it serve DSU's mission well.

I also strongly suggest that the faculty be well-supported in their efforts to update the curriculum. Curriculum revision is one of the most important tasks faculty are asked to facilitate, but this kind of work is rarely given the support (in time, money, or other types of support) that it requires. A sound curriculum is the foundation of any educational enterprise. Curriculum that is developed in snippets of found-time, sandwiched between preparation, teaching, evaluation, scholarship, and service responsibilities is rarely as carefully considered as it should be. As faculty move to develop curriculum, the administration has a responsibility to see that they are allowed time to work and are compensated for that time.

It is also my recommendation that the EIS curriculum update be overseen by an English faculty who has sufficient institutional history. The person assigned this responsibility should be well acquainted with the current curriculum, have a balanced sense of how the EIS degree might move into the future, and be able to foster collegial relationships while the revision is taking

place. Judicious selection of this leader will undoubtedly have a substantial effect on the update's success and the future success of the degree.

### **C. Analysis of program enrollment and student placement**

Program numbers have fallen in recent years. Most faculty attribute this decline to weaknesses in recruitment efforts. I was told that one faculty member is quite dedicated to recruiting and has been successful in his efforts, thus the EIS program has gained enrollment in the past year. However, the responsibility for a recruitment program should not rest on the shoulders of one person, nor can one person's approach be considered the best way for everyone to recruit. Working with the administration and marketing staff, the EIS faculty are best-suited to map out a recruitment plan. Again, this plan must be supported by the administration. An unsupported or weakly-supported recruitment plan is likely to be unsuccessful in the long run.

The EIS faculty and Assessment Director indicated that student placement is not a problem. In fact, I was told by at least one person that there are businesses in the area that would hire more EIS graduates if such were available.

### **D. Analysis of academic and financial support**

The Dean indicated that more staffing is needed in the English Department to meet existing enrollment needs. That need may impact the EIS program. If those now teaching in the EIS degree program are asked to teach more courses or classes with larger enrollments, then growing the degree will be hindered. A viable degree program needs financial support in the form of full-time faculty lines.

Research supporting the addition of full-time hires rather than adjuncts will soon appear in *The Journal of Higher Education*. In this research, Dan Jacoby, professor of economics and chair of the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies at the University of Washington, presents data indicating that, in a selected subset of colleges, graduation rates rose from 26 percent to 34.6 percent when more full-timers were used in instruction. According to Jacoby, "Schools that seek to stretch their instructional dollars by increasing their part-time faculty ratio will find this counterproductive if they are held accountable for higher graduation rates (19).<sup>iii</sup>

In addition, class size is an issue for the quality delivery of a degree program. Because many of those teaching in EIS have heavy composition teaching loads, the enrollment cap on composition courses is directly related to the success of

the EIS program. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) standards for postsecondary composition class size include caps between 15 and 20 for 101-level composition classes and not more than 15 for remedial classes. In addition, the NCTE standards hold that no teacher should be assigned more than 60 writing students in a semester. These standards, plus additional standards concerning load variation, literature class size, and more, can be found on the NCTE Web site.<sup>iv</sup>

Research done by Richard Haswell and others on work load in composition classes provides strong support for the NCTE Standards. Haswell's calculations show that a composition teacher with two sections of composition (25 students each) would be working at least 402 hours of a typical 600 hour teaching semester. Anyone teaching three sections would be working overtime (633 hours).<sup>v</sup>

#### **E. Analysis of facilities and equipment**

Following the degree update, faculty may find need for more facilities and/or equipment. At the point of my visit, facilities and equipment did not arise as an issue.

#### **F. Analysis of major field assessment**

Assessment for the EIS degree was brought up by several people during my visit. The current portfolio system is considered by some to have “no teeth” and takes place too late in the process to be of much help. Several people I spoke to noted the differences between evaluative and professional portfolios. This difference needs to be fully explored to see what kinds of portfolios EIS students should be producing. Also noted was the difference between an evaluative portfolio that is used to assess student work and a portfolio designed to assess the EIS curriculum.

As the EIS curriculum is updated, the assessment that will be used to evaluate it must be revisited as well. Carefully crafted assessments that support both students and faculty should be tied to the goals and outcomes set up in the revised curriculum. The curriculum development and assessment processes should proceed “hand in glove.” Assessment that is locally developed and controlled is undoubtedly the best assessment for the EIS degree. Because of the unique nature of the degree, use of any outside assessment tool(s) would not be advisable.

### **G. Analysis of strategic planning**

Based in my experience, updating the EIS program will probably take one year. If the faculty is well-supported in their efforts, one year should be enough time. However, this single year may not be enough time to get the entire program through all the required administrative/bureaucratic steps.

Once the EIS degree is updated, then developing a five-year plan would be advisable. Any long-range plan needs to be based on reconsideration of the curriculum and therefore must wait until such reconsideration is complete. Because of the unique nature of the EIS degree, frequent considerations of the major may be necessary. The core concepts of the degree and offerings probably will not change much, but the specific course content and technologies needed to deliver the degree may change more rapidly.

### **H. Overall evaluation of the strengths and limitations of the academic program being reviewed**

Both placement and employer surveys indicate that the EIS degree is valuable. Faculty are committed to the future of the degree. Based on these positive factors, the EIS degree is a viable one. The degree's under-enrollment seems to be the result of some name/identity issues, the need for an updated curriculum, and a lack of marketing.



## **Part 4: Recommendations for Change**

### **A. General comments**

Most recommendations are included in Part 2. The general comments applicable to this item can be found in Part 3H.

### **B. Specific recommendations, including accreditation**

- 1) Update curriculum
- 2) Reconsider degree name
- 3) Provide support for faculty in update process
- 4) Add full-time faculty positions to support growth of program

### **C. Specific comments/recommendations relative to issues identified by the university**

The degree is viable and can grow if the appropriate steps to assure its currency are taken.

### **D. Student enrollment and completion**

Student enrollment is low, but items above suggest ways in which that issue can be remedied. No data about completion was provided, nor was this an issue identified for consideration in this review.

### **E. Anatomy and physiology background needed to be admitted to the program**

NA

### **F. Technology integration**

This element is excellent. As the degree is updated, even more technological integration may be considered.

### **G. Faculty numbers and background**

Faculty backgrounds are excellent. Faculty numbers need to be increased to support the program.

### **H. Student support**

NA

### **I. Laboratory facilities**

Computing lab facilities appear to be adequate. Software needs may change and require updates, especially as the degree is updated.

### **J. Advising**

NA

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<sup>i</sup> See recent articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* including Wasserstrom (Jan. 20, 2005), Pfirman, Collins, Lowes, and Michaels (Feb. 11, 2005), and Gidjunis (Dec. 3, 2004).

<sup>ii</sup> In the last five years degrees somewhat similar to DSU's EIS program have begun at Washington State University, Michigan State University, and North Carolina State University.

<sup>iii</sup> Dan Jacoby, "The effects of part-time employment on community college graduation rates." *The Journal of Higher Education* (In press 2006).

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.ncte.org/about/over/positions/category/class/107626.htm>

<sup>v</sup> Details of Haswell's research and that of others can be found at <http://compile.tamucc.edu/compworkload.htm>