The Undergraduate English Major

ADE AD HOC COMMITTEE ON
THE ENGLISH MAJOR

Occasion: Why and How We Wrote the Report

An academic field's ability to attract students affects its ability to command institutional resources. Over time the record of undergraduates who complete a course of study leading to the bachelor's degree is an especially critical determiner of claims that departments can make on an institution's allocation of faculty positions. As Carol Christ has observed, members of a faculty generally judge faculty positions "the single most important resource an institution possesses, the gold standard against which everything else is measured" (10). In the 1970s and early 1980s, a dramatic decline in the number of undergraduates who earned bachelor's degrees in English occasioned distress throughout the field, as those old enough to remember will attest. According to summary data on degree awards collected by the United States Department of Education between 1971 and 1983, while the number of bachelor's degrees awarded in all academic disciplines was increasing by 16%, the number of undergraduates completing degrees in English and literature dropped 51% (figs. 1 and 2). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the field recovered some of those losses, as the number of bachelor's degree recipients in English and literature increased 75%, from just under 32,000 or 3.2 of every 100 degree recipients in 1983 to more than 55,000 or 4.7 of every 100 degree recipients in 1993 (fig. 3). (Over the same period

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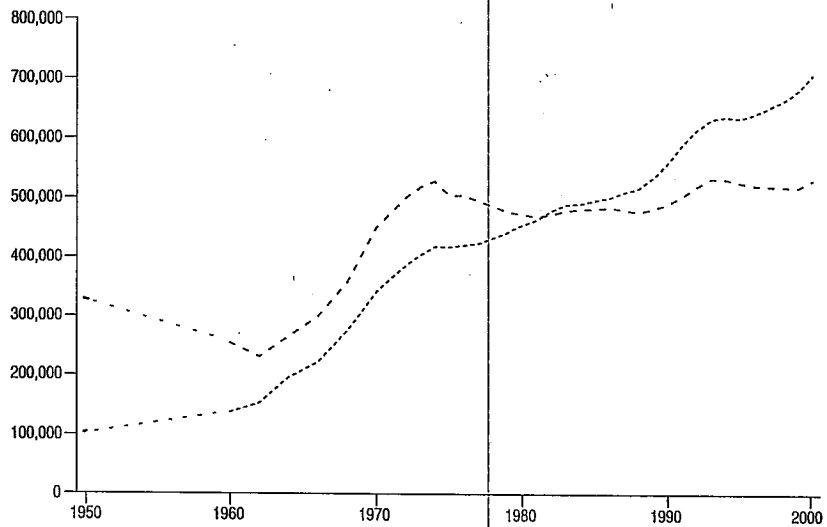
FIGURE 1
Trends in the Number of Bachelor's Degree Awards in All Fields, by Sex

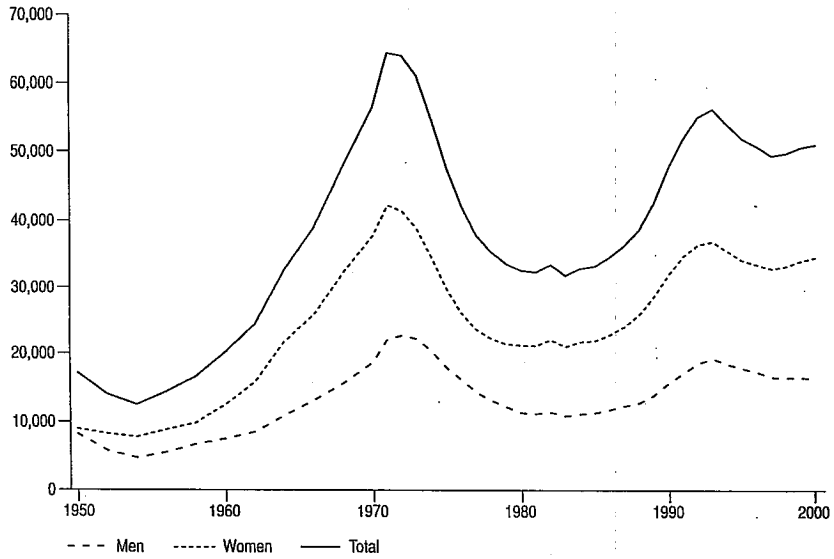


There are no data from 1951 through 1959.

the number of baccalaureate degrees awarded in all academic fields increased 20%.) Each year between 1993 and 1997, however, the number and percentage share of baccalaureate degrees in English once again declined. Fortunately, the recent declines were modest compared with those of the 1970s—a 12.6% drop between 1993 and 1997, when 48,512 baccalaureate degrees, or 4.1% of all baccalaureate degree awards, were awarded in English and literature. The most recent figures show the percentage of baccalaureate degrees awarded in English remains stable at 4%, while the number of degree recipients has increased slightly (by 3.2%) from 48,512 in 1997 to 50,049 in 2000. (Data cited above were downloaded from the National Science Foundation [NSF] *WebCASPAR* database system.)

Mindful of the wrenching experience of the 1970s, the ADE Executive Committee in 2001 charged our ad hoc committee to study "the recent decline in the number of English majors and recommend ways in which departments can address the decline and its possible underlying causes." Fulfilling this charge, the committee found it helpful to place the recent history of degree completions in the wider context of increases and declines that have occurred across all disciplines, but especially the arts and sciences, since the mid-1960s.

FIGURE 2
NUMBER OF BACHELOR'S DEGREES IN ENGLISH AWARDED TO MEN, WOMEN, AND IN TOTAL

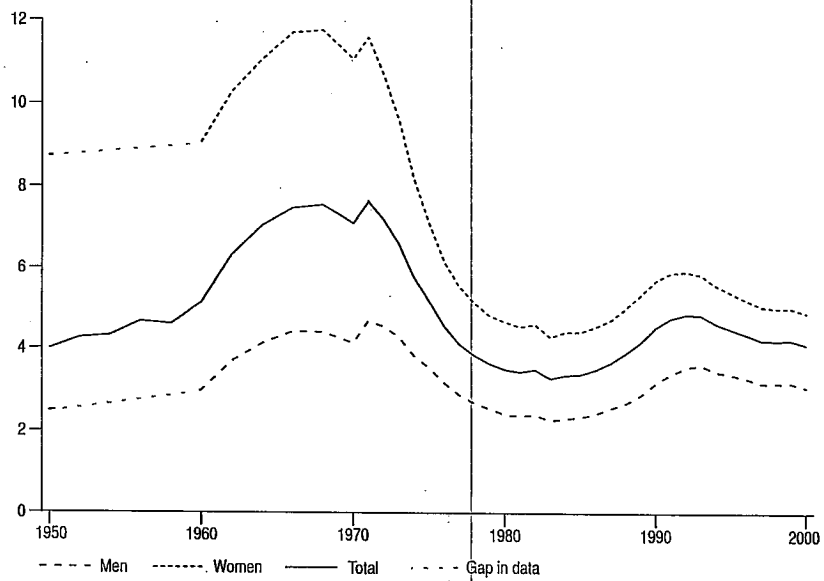


To perform this task the committee examined two sources: (1) data from the degree completions files for the years 1987 to 2000 from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) ("IPEDS Completions") and (2) information on bachelor's degrees from 1966 to 2000 collected and categorized in the less detailed but temporally deeper Department of Education data on degree awards ("Earned Degrees"). The committee accessed some information using the *WebCASPAR* (Computer-*A*ided *S*cience *P*olicy *A*nalysis and *R*esearch) site maintained by the NSF at caspar.nsf.gov. (*WebCASPAR* makes available multiyear information about individual fields in United States academic institutions drawn from a variety of sources, including the NCES.) The committee developed more detailed information directly from degree completions databases for 1989 to 1997, which were downloaded from the IPEDS Web site.

BACCALAUREATE DEGREE AWARDS: AN ANALYTIC OVERVIEW

Given the importance of the undergraduate English major to the liberal arts curriculum, it seems wise to undertake a periodic review of its status quo. What enrollment trends are discernible in data about numbers of de-

FIGURE 3
NUMBER OF BACHELOR'S DEGREES IN ENGLISH TO MEN, WOMEN, AND IN TOTAL, PER 100 BACHELOR'S DEGREES IN ALL FIELDS AWARDED TO MEN, WOMEN, AND OVERALL



Only total data exist from 1951 through 1959.

gree awards? Are they welcome or unwelcome? Can we identify the major contributing factors? Have there in fact been substantive curricular changes that affected numbers of majors?

In the mid-1980s public discussion, most often from outside the profession and from the conservative end of the political spectrum, blamed the field itself for the declines in bachelor's degrees that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s (Cheney 4–5). More recently, the data on degree completions have been a focus for concerns about what some inside the professorial community and more identified with the political left fear may be the declining fortunes of the humanities in higher education (Menand, "College" and *Marketplace*; Scholes). Such public, polemical uses of the data on degree awards add to the data's significance.

Insofar as the committee and members of the ADE community can identify substantive problems, we need to remind ourselves that changes in English occur in the context of broader trends defining what Sarah Turner and William Bowen over a decade ago identified as "the flight from the arts and sciences." Turner and Bowen write:

> Between 1968 and 1986, the number of BA degrees awarded to students who concentrated in one of the fields within the arts and sciences (humanities, social sciences, mathematics, physical sciences, biological sciences, and psychology) plummeted from 47% of all BA degrees to about 26%. (517)

They go on to observe that the decline was all the more apparent because it followed a steady—and seemingly inexorable—post–World War II increase in the liberal arts and arts and sciences share. Turner and Bowen's analysis of degree award data reveals that the institutions in which the greatest increases took place were those that had previously focused primarily on teacher education or business and other professional areas. These are also the institutions in which the most precipitous declines subsequently occurred. Turner and Bowen conclude that the systemic volatility has "run its course"; they therefore do not "expect the flight from the arts and sciences to continue" (520).

Yet, where we in the humanities may tend to see at least short-term decline, others see inexplicably healthy growth at the expense of their fields. According to a report by William Wresch, NCES data available for 1985 to 1997 point to a marked decline in the number of degrees awarded in subjects directly tied to economic growth (business, engineering, and computer science)—a decline that he believes should offset the claims academic institutions like to make about being a "resource for economic development." Wresch notes that these three majors "granted tens of thousands fewer degrees," while psychology, social sciences, health professions, education, and English all grew in the period he was reviewing. While he believes that gender may have played a role in these trends, he acknowledges that "the growing number of female college students doesn't seem sufficient to account for the changes in the popularity of various majors." He wonders about possible connections between the majors in decline and the requirement of calculus but rejects that explanation as too simplistic. In the end, he concludes (rather lamely) that "our current situation probably has multiple causes" and that "we would do well to try to understand the reasons for our students' choices of majors." But his conclusions completely ignore the relative size of the fields of business and English. Where business, at its recent low point in 1997, could claim more than 227,000 undergraduate degrees, English, although overwhelmingly the largest humanities department, could claim only a little more than 49,000. (The Department of Education maintains an elaborate Classification of Instructional Programs [CIP] containing more than nine hundred separate codes. The degree count for English derives from aggregating six-digit CIP codes in code 23, the count for business from aggregating six-digit codes in code 52,

in the IPEDS completions data file for 1996–97. See also *Digest . . . 2001* 301; table 255.)

Inevitably, there will be observers who regard changes to the English curriculum as directly responsible for declines in the number of undergraduates majoring and receiving degrees in English and, as such observers are determined to conclude, a decline in the quality of the education English departments offer. We believe that the information presented in this report provides a useful corrective to assumptions that characterize negatively, as curricular fragmentation, developments more accurately understood as a healthy curricular diversification that serves students well.

It seems clear that the summary total number of degree awards in English does not represent the same activity or collectivity in 2000 that it did in 1966. Dianne Sadoff notes that "many of us now work in departments characterized by intellectual and programmatic diversity" (27). English is no longer homogeneous—if it ever was—or perhaps the nature of its heterogeneity has altered. On the one hand, in some institutions, areas once deemed an integral part of English have broken away. Speech, communications, and speech communications are prime examples. The overall impact of such moves requires closer study. Frequently the formal study of the language itself (grammar, philology-linguistics) has been abandoned or ceded to another unit, so that many English departments have come to view themselves exclusively as departments of literature, whether English or English and American. Programs in composition and communication are common; departments are not unknown. Where such changes have occurred, a precipitating factor is as likely to be the sheer size of the parent department as ideological or other differences.

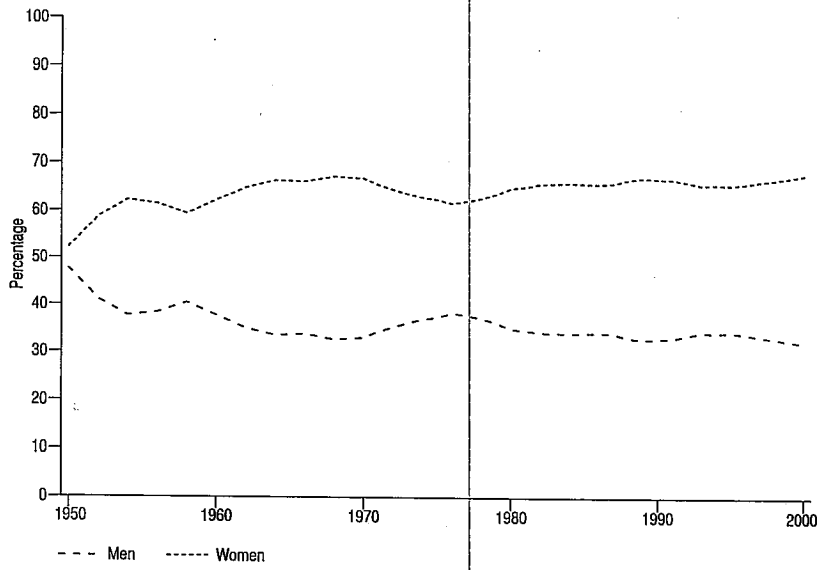
On the other hand, by some measures, English departments must be seen as markedly more inclusive than ever. English studies may now embrace a more catholic interpretation of what constitutes a literary text or even claim the right to comment on or otherwise embrace texts apparently sub-, supra-, extra-, or nonliterary (Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Derrida's *Of Grammatology*). Long ago, we invaded the territory of our colleagues in modern languages and annexed world literature; more recently, under the banner of globalization, we have begun to venture beyond the traditional focus on English and American literature into Canadian literature, Commonwealth literature, Caribbean literature (anglophone at least), postcolonial literature, or, most comprehensively, literature in English. Creative writing courses and programs have become increasingly popular and in some cases even compete with traditional English programs for students. At times, that competition can become a source of tension. Yet there is at least anecdotal

evidence to suggest that when creative writing is an option or track within English, it often contributes significantly to the success of the English major. Arguably, the extent to which faculty members feel that they are in control of the process of change crucially affects how they regard the change under way.

There are, then, good reasons not to attempt a comprehensive definition of what English ought to be or to chart a single passage for its future. A key strength of English as a centerpiece of liberal education has surely been its breadth and adaptability. English departments have been a traditional locus of curricular experimentation, nurturing and then sending out into the world such former fledglings as American studies, African American studies, and women's studies. As John Gerber, a longtime chair at Iowa, wisely observed more than twenty-five years ago: "English is not a neat, discrete discipline, but a congeries of subject matters that varies from place to place and time to time" (21).

Because English can be conceptualized both as a discipline or subject and as an administrative unit—often of a noticeably heterogeneous nature—it is by no means easy to draw inferences or offer generalizations that will have universal application. For the same reason, summary data from across the country and the whole range of English departments, large and small, homogeneous and heterogeneous, may in the aggregate suggest historical developments that have only a kind of statistical validity. Nonetheless, especially when disaggregated by sex, the summary history of undergraduate degree award data over the period 1966–2000 illuminates an important complex of changes. In 1966, there were 39,165 baccalaureate degrees awarded in English and literature (25,919 female, 13,246 male recipients), constituting 7.5% of all baccalaureate degrees awarded that year. By 2000, the numbers had grown to 50,049 baccalaureate degrees (33,922 female, 16,127 male recipients), but the market share had shrunk almost in half, to 4.0% of all baccalaureate degrees awarded—4.7% of all degrees awarded to women and 3.0% of the degrees awarded to men (figs. 2 and 3). The gender balance remained essentially stable over the thirty-five years, with women earning some two-thirds of all English BAs in 2000, just as they had in 1966 (fig. 4). But participation in higher education had increased markedly over this period, which saw a 139% increase in the number of baccalaureate degree awards overall. The largest segment of the increase by far was made up of the degree awards to women—these grew by 222% versus 45% for men. Had the gender demographics of English baccalaureates in 2000 matched those prevailing in 1966—11.6% of all the baccalaureate degrees awarded to women and 4.4% of those awarded to men—over 100,000 baccalaureate degrees in English would have been awarded in 2000.

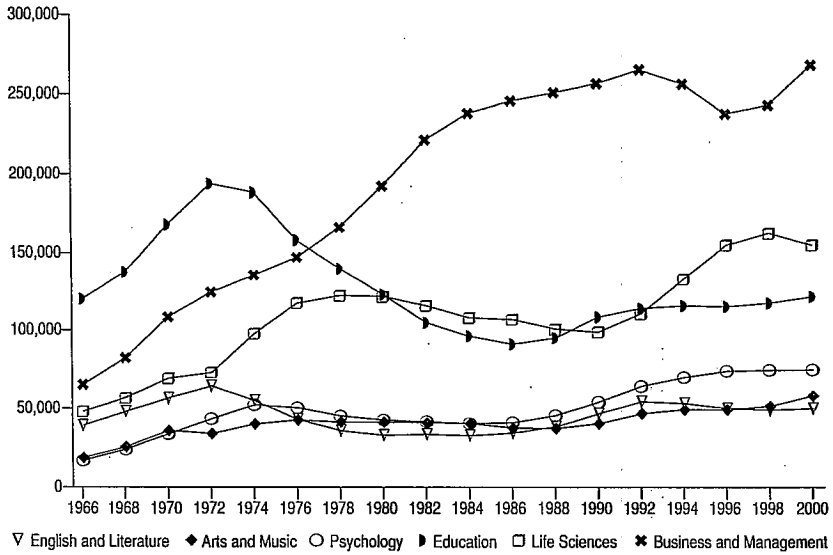
FIGURE 4
TRENDS IN THE PERCENTAGE OF BACHELOR'S DEGREES IN ENGLISH AWARDED TO MEN AND TO WOMEN



So where have all the majors gone? To people in the arts and sciences and liberal arts disciplines (AS/LA), it is evident that students have migrated into business, psychology, and the biological sciences in very large numbers (fig. 5). For example, psychology produced 16,966 baccalaureate degrees in 1966, a mere 43% of the English total. But in 2000, the 74,654 psychology baccalaureates easily outstripped those in English, which at 50,049 had slipped to 67% of the psychology output. In the biological sciences, baccalaureate output has increased from 23,477 in 1966 to 64,904 in 2000. Business, however, may provide the most striking example. In 1966, the Department of Education recorded 65,264 undergraduate degrees in business and management—1.66 times the 39,165 recorded for English. In 2000, business degrees outnumbered English degrees by a ratio of more than 5 to 1: 267,655 to 50,049.

Even more telling than the summary numbers are the considerable changes in gender distribution in many of the key AS/LA disciplines other than English. As noted above, women now outnumber men in the undergraduate population as a whole; in 2000, 57.2% of all baccalaureate degrees were awarded to women, almost the reverse of the distribution in 1966, when 57.4% of all baccalaureate degrees were awarded to men (fig. 6). In

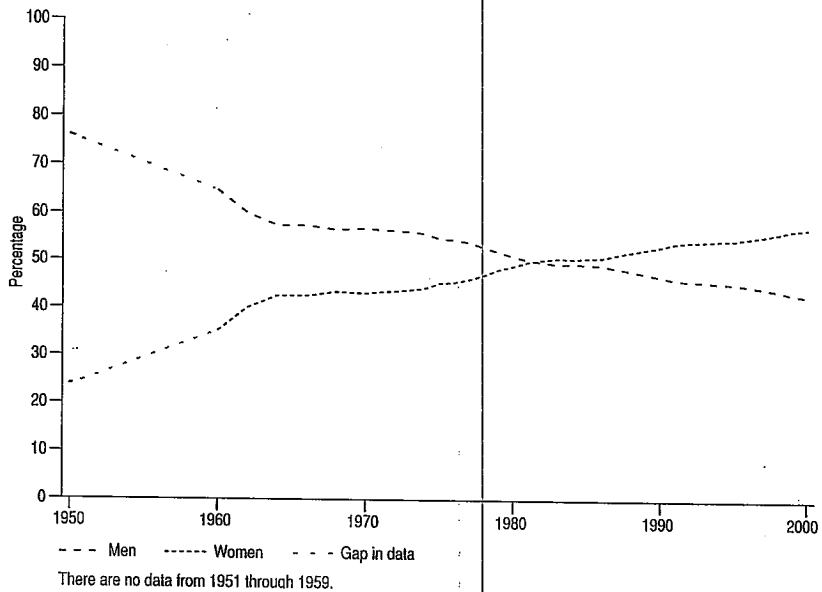
FIGURE 5
TRENDS IN SIX FIELDS IN THE NUMBER OF BACHELOR'S DEGREES AWARDED



2000, women were the dominant baccalaureate degree recipients even more decisively in psychology (76.5% in 2000 vs. 40.8% in 1966) than in English (67.8% in 2000 vs. 66.2% in 1966). They constitute the majority in the biological sciences (58.5% in 2000 vs. 31.2% in 1966). And they have achieved or come within striking distance of parity in such traditional bastions of male dominance as chemistry (47.2% in 2000 vs. 18.5% in 1966), mathematics and statistics (47.8% in 2000 vs. 33.3% in 1966), and political science (50.3% in 2000 vs. 22.1% in 1966). When we venture outside the liberal arts, business offers the clearest example of how student choices reflect the much-widened array of life and career options that have become available to women. In 1966, the gender distribution of undergraduate business degrees was 91.6% male to 8.4% female; in 2000, it was 50.2% male to 49.8% female. It seems hard to regard such change in any other light than social progress, even if one consequence of this progress has been the loss for English of a population of women undergraduates who made a semicaptive audience for the English major.

Disaggregated to reveal the history of degree awards to women, the data collected over the past four decades suggest how little the declines in the number and share of college graduates majoring in English resulted from developments internal to the field and how much they resulted from

FIGURE 6
TRENDS IN THE PERCENTAGE OF BACHELOR'S DEGREES IN ALL FIELDS AWARDED TO WOMEN AND TO MEN



There are no data from 1951 through 1959.

the changing demographics of higher education, especially the success women achieved fighting for significantly greater equity of opportunity, in both higher education and the wider society. Once opportunities to attend college enlarged for women, women enrolled and graduated in increasing numbers. And as college-going women gained the freedom to make the same choices as college-going men, they in significant measure exercised that freedom in their choices of college majors no less than in their choices of careers.

There are some noticeable differences among various sectors of the AS/LA community, as these are distinguished by institutional groupings of the Carnegie classification system. Liberal Arts I colleges have long been distinguished by the high proportion of BAs they award in English. Throughout the 1990s, they awarded more than 9 degrees in English and literature out of every 100 BA degrees they granted. This rate is more than twice the aggregate average for all institutions, which is just over 4 out of every 100 BA degrees. According to the most recent figures, in 2000 the Liberal Arts I institutions continued to award 9.1 degrees in English and literature for every 100 degrees they conferred. In other institutional sectors, however,

the share of degrees in English was significantly higher in 2000 than it was in 1987. The two most important sectors, because they grant such large numbers of degrees, are the Research I institutions and the Comprehensive I institutions. Together, these two grant over half of all baccalaureate degrees—the figure for 2000, 55.5%, is typical—and just under three-fifths of all degrees granted in English (57.4%). In Research I institutions the number of baccalaureate degrees granted in English was 35.0% greater in 2000 than in 1987 (14,034 vs. 10,395), and the number of degrees in English per 100 degree awards was 16.8% greater (4.7 vs. 4.1). The picture is similar in the Comprehensive I institutions, where the number of BA degrees granted in English was 46.0% greater in 2000 than in 1987 (14,671 vs. 10,048), and the number of degrees per 100 granted was 16.9% greater (3.7 vs. 3.1). In the Liberal Arts I institutions, by contrast, the number of degrees in English per 100 granted was actually almost .4 of a percentage point lower in 2000 than it was in 1987 (9.09 vs. 9.44), although the number of degree awards in English was 9.0% greater (5,127 vs. 4,702).

One question these sectoral data prompt is how much of the growth evident in the Research I and Comprehensive I institutions (most of which are public) can be attributed to the mandatory reclassification of English education majors as English majors, because states are now implementing legislation that requires the next generation of teachers to complete a major in the academic subject they plan to teach rather than in education. One hypothesis about the increases and declines in English baccalaureate degrees reported between 1987 and 1997 is that they are connected to the numbers of baccalaureate degrees in education and the waxing and waning of student interest in secondary school teaching. Thus, in many public and some private institutions, elementary or secondary education majors represent an increasing proportion of all English majors. This shift has been gradually, if sometimes reluctantly, reflected in the curricula of schools most affected (see the special supplement to the *MLA Newsletter*, "Teacher Preparation"). The curricular changes can be seen as direct, and on the whole healthy, responses to the challenge of improving the academic preparation of secondary school teachers and, thereby, the quality of the secondary schools. Improving the academic preparation of high school graduates ranks high on the agenda of many governors and state governments. As Margaret Cozzens, vice-chancellor for academic affairs at the University of Colorado, Denver, has observed, "The quality of the institution is now, and increasingly will be, judged by the quality of its teacher education, more so even than by its research or scholarship, because teacher education is and will continue to be a high-profile topic" (qtd. in Basinger).

Attracting Students to the Department's Undergraduate Programs: Some Issues to Bear in Mind

Popularity versus Selectivity

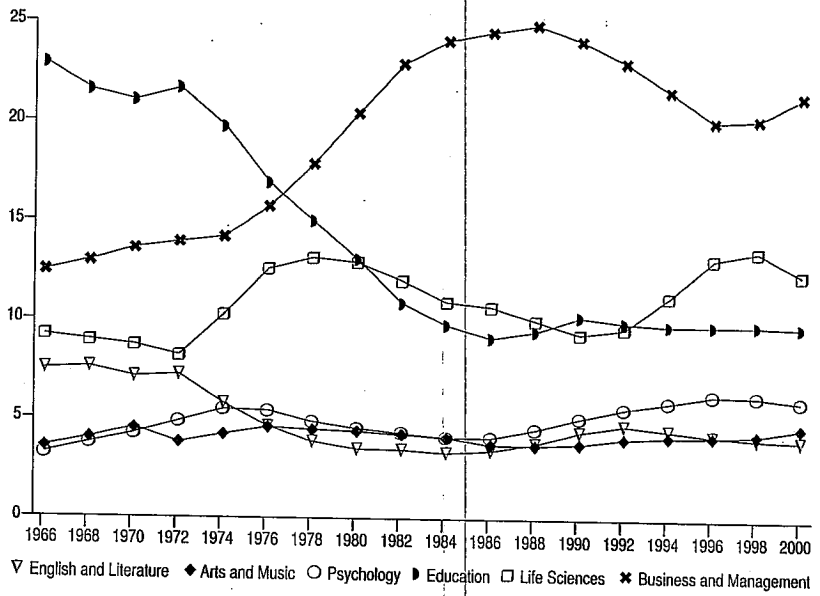
Larger numbers may not always signal a stronger major or a program where student interests make a good match with a faculty's strengths. If numbers count too formulaically in a department or among administrators as the measure of success, issues of quality may be neglected. On the whole, we like to believe that an increase in majors demonstrates the quality of teaching in our departments. But what if an increase occurs because other majors have been capped in some way so that we gather students who have been blocked elsewhere? What if the new majors opt for the English education track or for creative writing, when the expertise and central interests of most faculty members lie in literary theory and criticism, the history of rhetoric, or historical studies of literature and cultural production? Or what if an increase in majors results in a heavier teaching load rather than in—the most desirable outcome—more faculty lines? It can be misleading to discuss the history of the English profession simply in terms of the expansion or contraction of majors. Yet the kind of systematic information that would allow us to distinguish changes at the level of programs or tracks inside specific departments is not readily available, and it would be difficult for us to collect it and make it comparable. Even if we had such data, assessing their significance would likely turn out to be an exercise in ambiguity. Generalizations about the relative success of particular departmental configurations may not be possible to achieve, the specificity of one department's contingent context not applying to another's. Most institutions use student credit hours per full-time-equivalent enrollments (SCHs per FTE) as a measure of relative workload, but this statistic does not necessarily rise and fall in tandem with changes in a major. A typical pattern in large state institutions is to have large-enrollment survey classes open to nonmajors and much smaller classes for majors. Thus an increase in majors of sufficient size to warrant more sections for majors could shift faculty members out of large classes and result in a decrease in the total number of students served—that is, in a shrinkage in SCH per FTE. From an administrative perspective such a change is likely to be regarded as undesirable. The alternative—increasing the size of classes for majors—is equally undesirable from the departmental point of view, because it threatens the conditions that work best for the pedagogy that faculty members for good reason favor, such as class discussion and extensive writing assignments.

The Demand for Vocationalism

One reads or hears with some frequency statements to the effect that students who would once have majored in English now opt for other, purportedly more practical, majors like communications, speech, and journalism. Examining the recent history (since 1987) of degree awards indicates that this generalization has at best limited validity. (Data in this paragraph derive from the IPEDS degree completions files on *WebCASPAR*.) Of the liberal arts disciplines that granted more than 2 of every 100 bachelor's degrees awarded in 1987, the following fields showed the largest increases in percentage share of degrees awarded in 2000: psychology (an increase of 1.7 percentage points, from 4.3 to 6.0 of every 100 degrees), the biological sciences (an increase of 1.3 percentage points, from 3.9 to 5.2 of every 100 degrees), and arts and music (an increase of just under 1 percentage point, from 3.7 to 4.6 of every 100 degrees) (fig. 7). Communications—categorized as communications and librarianship—had a barely increased share of .1 of a percentage point (4.5 in 2000 vs. 4.4 in 1987), while in 2000 the English share of 4.0 was .4 of a percentage point greater than the 3.6 of every 100 degrees the field claimed in 1987. By this accounting, English has clearly held its own with communications in the last decade. It is worth noting that the category showing the largest increase in the period 1987 to 2000 is the catch-all "Other Non-Sciences or Unknown Disciplines." Degree awards in this category grew by more than 32,000, from 4.3 to 6.0 of every 100 degree awards. Of those 32,000 degrees, 12,588 degree awards are categorized as multi- or interdisciplinary and account for almost 39% of that growth; 9,076 degree awards in liberal studies account for 28% more. It does not seem that any new vocationalism has seriously undermined the English major. The field's most direct competitors for students, rather, are psychology, the arts, and certain of the interdisciplinary programs that members of English departments may have promoted and are providing part of the faculty for.

The figures suggest that development of interdisciplinary programs on local campuses affects the national statistics on degree awards. In the committee's view, this consequence does not and should not constitute a reason to oppose such programs, which should stand on their merits. But when weighing the advantages and disadvantages of various administrative arrangements for such programs, departments may find it prudent to inform themselves about who on campus has been assigned to provide degree information to the Department of Education and what decisions are being made about the categories to which degrees will be assigned.

FIGURE 7
TRENDS IN SIX FIELDS IN THE NUMBER OF BACHELOR'S DEGREES AWARDED PER 100 BACHELOR'S DEGREES



The Challenge of Underprepared First-Year Students

Almost all the age-group cohorts in the upper two quartiles of family income already attend college. So future expansion can come only from lower-income families, whose children are most likely to have suffered from inferior educational opportunities and least likely to be well prepared for college. At the same time, faculty members know that even students who score well on standardized tests may show quite limited capacities for reading books and writing essays. Open-admissions colleges have seen a staggering increase in the need for remedial writing classes; but all colleges and universities have become painfully aware of the escalating demand for the kind of basic classes in English, whose teachers are neither well respected nor well paid. For some administrators and legislators, distance education and Web-based instruction are seen as low-cost alternatives that will save us from being overwhelmed. But ill-prepared students are those least likely to have access to appropriate technology; they are least prepared to benefit from distance education, because they lack the study skills and capacity for self-motivated independent learning that distance education depends on for success. Some institutions,

recognizing that they cannot simply exclude a growing segment of the age-group cohort, are taking steps to develop a series of backup systems that will make the transition from high school to college less stressful and reduce first-year attrition. Needless to say, English departments are already playing a crucial role in such plans—through the provision of writing centers, placement and testing instruments, and a range of targeted courses.

The creation of admissions policies designed to overcome the perceived shortcomings of affirmative action programs are beginning to have an impact too. Along with Florida and California, Texas anticipates extraordinary growth in higher education. In the light of court-ordered restrictions on affirmative action, Texas has implemented a policy that provides automatic admission to all students in the top 10% of their graduating class. This policy is, of course, transparently populist and egalitarian, since even a valedictorian in a small rural community school might not make the top 25% in a large Houston or Dallas school. Texas A&M University has now taken an additional step, offering admission to the top 20% of some 260 schools selected precisely because they have been traditionally underrepresented at the university. At the same time, it has created a university-level writing center to provide the kind of support that first-year students who are less well prepared will surely require.

Public Funding Not Keeping Up with Costs

Public education in the United States is a real bargain, the best evidence of which is the number of international students willing to pay far higher tuition than our own students to take their degrees here. It is true that tuition and fees have increased substantially in the last decade, but this increase corresponds directly to the unwillingness of state legislatures to fund institutions adequately. The greater the proportion of the age-group cohort admitted to a college or university is, the greater the investment in support services must be if significant student attrition is to be avoided. Rapidly escalating infrastructure and technology costs are more a factor in cost increases than faculty salaries. In fact, the gap in faculty salaries between research universities in the private and public sectors widens each year. In an opinion piece in the 11 January 2002 *Chronicle of Higher Education* entitled "Is the Public Research University Dead?," Mark Yudof, formerly president of the University of Minnesota and now chancellor of the University of Texas system, summarized very well the dilemma of large public research universities and regarded institutions like his own as an endangered species.

Outsourcing of First-Year and Sophomore General Education Courses and Overreliance on Non-Tenure-Track and Part-Time Faculty Members

Given the cost of education and the student demographics projected for the future, it is little wonder that many states are seeking to improve the "efficiency" of the system and to secure new modes of "delivery" that will reduce unit costs. Some states focus on retention, for example, as measured by the percentage of students graduating within some specified period (four, five, or six years); other states, such as Florida and Texas, are working to develop a "seamless pipeline." The aim is to make credits granted in one institution comparable with and transferable to institutions throughout the state. A common course numbering system, as it is called, can have a significant impact on departments like English and mathematics that offer core or required courses. Under an articulated or seamless system, course credits must be accepted; that acceptance allows significant numbers of students to bypass entirely the courses that introduce not just a subject matter but also a department's faculty and teaching. Offering a department broad access to an institution's students in their first and second years, introductory courses serve important gathering and recruiting functions for a department's major. A more recent phenomenon has been the rise in popularity of so-called dual enrollment courses, whereby high school students are coenrolled in classes for which they get both high school and college credit. In some areas, such courses are adversely affecting AP classes, which are typically more demanding and for which college credit depends on passing an examination. The issues raised by a seamless system and dual enrollment courses go beyond the scope of this report, but we call attention to these arrangements for the effect they may have on student interest in our undergraduate programs.

Because state governments control licensure requirements, they also influence curriculum, albeit indirectly. Recent efforts to increase the number of certified teachers have sometimes brought about changes in licensure requirements that reduce the number of courses in English—for example, by reconfiguring certification in English as combined certification in language arts and social studies. In addition, pedagogical and methodological issues are being incorporated into subject matter examinations, thereby reducing the importance of subject matter knowledge and threatening to undermine the success of English majors in liberal arts colleges who have traditionally scored well on licensure examinations. Mandated changes of this sort may lessen the motivation of some students to consider middle or secondary school teaching as a career option, and even to consider English as a viable major.

The proliferation of non-tenure-track and part-time faculty members in the introductory courses from which departments recruit majors may also hamper a department's ability to gather students to the major. An MLA survey of 673 English departments revealed that in the fall of 1999 "undergraduate sections that tenured and tenure-track faculty members taught ranged from a high of 59% in bachelor's-granting to a low of 31% in doctorate-granting institutions" (Laurence 55). The percentage of first-year writing sections taught by tenured and tenure-track faculty members ranged from 44.8% in the AA-granting departments surveyed to 42.2% in the BA-granting departments, 20.0% in the MA-granting departments, and 5.9% in the doctorate-granting departments. This situation will remain intractable as long as institutions fail to fund the number of full-time faculty positions needed to meet the growth in undergraduate enrollments and as long as the assistantship teaching of first-year composition remains the field's chief means of providing graduate students financial support (57).

Though part-timers are often excellent teachers, their classes may function less successfully as gatherer courses for the English major if these faculty members have no long-term commitment to the department and its overall program; minimal experience in academic advising; and limited knowledge of requirements, curriculum, internships, and career opportunities. Particularly if they are piecing together income by teaching at multiple institutions, part-timers often lack the time and incentives to engage in research that enriches pedagogy and builds the reputation of an institution and department. In subtle and incalculable ways, escalating use of non-tenure-track and part-time faculty members can erode an English department's strength. Therefore, the committee concurs with the recommendation of the ADE Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing that "institutions . . . halt and, if possible, reverse the conversion of tenure-track lines to full-time and part-time adjunct appointments" and that departments "adopt staffing policies that ensure that professorial rank faculty members teach as well as design and evaluate courses at all levels of undergraduate education" ("Report" 14). The committee also endorses the standards of good practice defined by the "Statement from the Conference on the Growing Use of Part-Time and Adjunct Faculty" (*Statement*).

Some departments report success in reconverting part-time lines to tenure-track positions. A notable example is the English department at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, where the chair, William L. Andrews, writes that his department gained two tenure-track positions by participating in a college-wide initiative to commit tenured or tenure-track faculty members to teach in first-year seminars each year. According to Andrews, the willingness of the UNCC faculty to adopt this change affirmed its commitment to high-quality undergraduate education and its resolve to limit graduate admissions to, on average, twenty-five students per year (41–42). Moving full-time English professors into first-year courses may not be popular with a faculty, as Beth A. Boehm suggests in an article based on a survey conducted at the University of Louisville. Faculty members who, for the first time in years, taught lower-level courses expressed frustration and a sense of inadequacy when teaching composition and regretted time lost for scholarly research. Yet they also noted significant benefits: a new appreciation of the labor-intensive efforts by composition instructors in the past; more departmental conversations about pedagogy, curriculum, and a mission; a bridging of the gap between literature and composition; and greater coherence and vigor in the curriculum (50–51). Perhaps the greatest obstacle to moving tenured and tenure-track faculty members to lower-level courses is a pervasive reward-and-status system in higher education that accords research precedence over such teaching in ways both overt and subtle.

The Appeal, and Some Possible Drawbacks, of Digital Technology

It is debatable whether computer technology is an asset or a liability to an undergraduate English department. Do we lose majors to departments where computers have transformed teaching? Do undergraduates who regard computer literacy as a marketable skill gravitate toward a major because it successfully integrates computer technology into its pedagogy and curriculum? Should a department, in a time of budget constraints and onerous workloads, invest in computer technology? One member of our committee captured the ambivalence of many faculty members regarding such questions: "Computer technology is expensive, distracting, and unreliable, but we can't do without it." Our committee lacks data on the impact of technology on undergraduate English departments, but given that online application is now provided at 98% of all institutions ("Online Admissions"), we know that the potential of a Web page to attract majors should not be underestimated. A prospective student's first glimpse of an English department is likely to be on its Web page. A clear, attractive, and informative page may draw majors not just because of its content but also because it implies computer-smart faculty members who model the effective use of computer technology in the classroom. A Web page that effectively presents a department's mission, curriculum, programs, and faculty research interests may bring serious students into the major.

Some chairs contend that investment in computer technology revitalizes their departments, that students welcome opportunities to become proficient in desktop publishing and Web-site design, construction, and

maintenance. Philip Cohen argues that the infusion of technology into the English curriculum enhances learning, attracts funding for facilities and pedagogy, and prepares majors for careers that demand computer skills (13). Cohen's colleagues use computer technology to enrich traditional literature classes on Emily Dickinson, Anglo-Saxon poetry, and medieval literature, and they use chat rooms, electronic discussion lists, multimedia publishing, and MOO in their classes. His department received funds to hire "faculty members with a pedagogical interest in technology" and to offer "incentives to persuade current faculty members who are not technologically savvy to integrate technology into their classes" (15). Departments without such funding may find, however, that the costs in time and energy of teaching with computers outweigh the gains. Even when funding is available, some faculty members may be daunted by the complexity of computer technology and the time required to use it in teaching. Minor problems multiply when an institution skimps on support staff; assistance for grant writing; training classes; and equipment upgrading, repair, and maintenance. Faculty skepticism is heightened when administrative incentives for technology use seem driven more by a concern for cost-effectiveness than by educational goals. One of our committee members reports that her college library staffs a support center dedicated to assisting faculty members who develop and use curricular technology in pedagogy. The center also sponsors demonstrations by internal and outside speakers on approaches to enhancing learning through technology. But how many colleges offer such resources?

In composition, software programs can teach grammar and mechanics, freeing class time in writing courses for discussion of more sophisticated elements of style, but substantial funds are necessary to test, purchase, and implement such programs. Web sites and chat rooms can enrich literature courses and help engage students in active learning. But technology can also drain time needed for research and course preparation.

Pressure for Outcomes Assessment Driven by States, Accrediting Agencies, or Private Foundations

One of the real strengths of the traditional liberal arts curriculum has been its flexibility. It has never been assumed that studying English implies a specific course of study and a prescribed set of outcomes, whether *outcome* is defined as a standard body of knowledge or a standard display of skills. Local departments and faculty members have thrived in a context of broad freedom to determine curricula and course design in the light of local knowledge informed by participation in the wider scholarly community, whose activity continually shapes and reshapes the arguments directing development of the discipline at large. One expects a major in English to acquire

and refine skills of analytic reading, writing, and communication, but these skills are largely a by-product of the formal study of language and literature. Now, in the context of calls for greater accountability and performance funding, pressure is emerging to institutionalize the assessment of learning outcomes in various forms. The kind of broad course goals that appear on most syllabi will seem inappropriately vague to proponents of outcomes assessment, who wish to specify and standardize what a college graduate who has majored in English should know and be able to do. The pursuit of outcomes becomes especially reductive when the knowledge and skills in question are framed to accommodate what a standardized test can validly and reliably certify—especially when the goal is easy comparability among graduates from programs of different colleges and universities, regions, or states. Programs are affected negatively wherever teachers feel they have little choice but to focus largely, or even exclusively, on the standard outcomes and the standardized ways these can most cheaply and efficiently be certified for mass populations of students. Teachers will teach to the test, because a school's performance and their own efficacy are judged by test results that are widely publicized. In English, certain obvious elements (spelling and punctuation, knowledge of grammatical terminology, names and dates of authors and their works) are easily incorporated as features of an outcomes system. But little more than functional literacy can be tested in this way—and we insist that baccalaureate education amount to a great deal more. Critical judgment, intellectual inventiveness, perspicacity of observation, depth of research, the capacity to draw on a broad range of relevant materials, analytic shrewdness, and originality in making sound connections and distinctions—all are far less amenable to standardized measures.

As far as our committee has been able to determine, few if any departments have yet experienced formal outcomes assessment as a force that affects enrollments, programming in the major, or graduation rates. Yet, chairs from a good many baccalaureate institutions comment on measures they are planning or using to address outcomes assessment. Of particular concern for chairs in baccalaureate college departments is how many majors gain admission to graduate and professional schools (and how many seek admission to such programs rather than exercise other options). Chairs also want information on student satisfaction with the preparation received in the undergraduate program. Such outcome measures may come into consideration as departments vie for budget increases, staffing, technological support, and program maintenance-enhancement. In addition, departments may face questions about the effectiveness of the core courses that build skills that students need to acquire or solidify if they are to remain in good academic standing and go on to graduate.

Strategies and Solutions: Ensuring the Vitality of the English Major

The vitality of the English major depends chiefly on departments' retaining control of the substance and administration of their curricula and cultivating their faculties' enthusiasm for teaching those curricula as well as students' enthusiasm for undertaking them. Achieving these goals entails energetic commitment on three fronts:

- strong faculty involvement in student advising
- deliberate departmental efforts at student recruitment
- continual faculty review and refreshment of courses and curricula

An advocate of continual curricular reform and goal setting, Anna K. Nardo points out the benefits that her department at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, reaps from "perpetual reformation" of the curriculum. The department stays focused on student needs; faculty members are more apt to develop courses and syllabi consonant with department values; and the department can more readily communicate its mission to students, parents, deans, and the public (32). Defining how narrow or expansive the curriculum is may also ensure healthy numbers of majors and curricular integrity. If a faculty allows issues of definition and scope to go neglected and enrollments drop, an aggressive administration can more easily increase its control over a department's curriculum.

Advising

Undergraduates receive information on majors, careers, and the relation between majors and careers from a variety of informal sources: parents, teachers, siblings, friends, and the informational and entertainment media. However innate the desire to study a particular subject may be in a student, it is influenced by cultural attitudes, anecdotes, popular jokes, characters in books and films, offhand references in newspaper articles, family discussions, and student gossip. Forms of the joke "'How do you get the attention of an English major?' 'Waiter!'" circulate internationally. Articles on the employment prospects for new graduates regularly single out the liberal arts for particular pity and terror.

First-generation college students, students from less comfortable backgrounds, students from ethnic minorities, and students from recent immigrant families may be particularly susceptible to the perception of risk that a major in the humanities represents. A humanities degree does not point to an immediately definable career in the way that a business or engineering major, or one described as prelaw or premed, seems to. These students and their families, often without earlier generations of humanities majors to identify with, can see majoring in English as a youthful indulgence, a sacrifice of practicality to whim, a cultural luxury of the elite. The English major may carry prestige in a small liberal arts institution, but in comprehensive and doctoral institutions with large professional, technical, scientific, and social scientific programs English is one of a wide variety of choices, and legend attributes to it uncertain job prospects and low earnings.

An organized academic advising system can provide departments a way to monitor and counter such personal fears and cultural biases. Every English department should have one. The shape of such a system will vary, depending on the size and resources of the department. Larger departments might have one or more full-time nonfaculty undergraduate advisers who oversee student course plans in order to make sure each student is fulfilling requirements; proceeding through the major in a timely manner; and, ideally, taking advantage of the variety of offerings available in a department yet focusing course choice in an intellectually rigorous way. Whether advising is done by faculty members or staff members, advisers should also be prepared to provide students access to information on scholarships, grants, and study opportunities. In smaller departments, these activities are likely to be taken on by faculty members and come under the rubric of service. But in no department, regardless of size, should these activities be allowed to migrate entirely to a central institutional advising office whose sense of the English major is neutral or even negative and whose knowledge of individual students is cursory and bureaucratic rather than personal. Where institutional offices of advising and career placement exist, the English department should communicate and articulate activities with them, so that the department's students are seen as competitive individuals with particular talents and skills that are demanding and in demand.

Even in departments large enough to employ full-time English advisers, faculty members should not be exempt from advising, because they have the most developed understanding of the intellectual possibilities in their subject for students. Advising is not just a way to attract students to a major; it is a necessary component of effective teaching, connecting the discipline to a broader world at once more quotidian and more teeming with possibilities than the world of the classroom. Advising can take place in offices and libraries, in formal and informal settings, with individuals and in groups. It can take the form of discussions that are regularly scheduled or that are focused on particular opportunities or crises in a student's intellectual and vocational life. It need not and should not always put the faculty member at center stage. Inviting back alumni to describe their lives

and careers; inviting members of businesses, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations to describe the nature of the work done in their fields and the opportunities for English majors in them; making recruiters from the range of professional schools available are all forms of advising. So are arranging internships; creating a physical or virtual file of relevant articles or books; and creating occasions, such as departmental publications or competitions, where students can gain practical experience or highlight particular talents (whether for their résumés or for their own growth). Such activities vary in the amount of work they involve, but some of that work can be shared with graduate or undergraduate students seeking experience and a sense of community with the department. (Advising is the form of service most often mentioned by hiring committees at small colleges and the area with which doctoral students tend to have the least acquaintance.) Contact with departmental alumni and others in the community can also pay dividends when such people go back into the community and speak positively about the department's general reputation or become donors who contribute money enabling the department to develop programs or facilities.

Two important conditions underlie good advising. First, it should not be meted out only to those students who aggressively seek it or who strike a faculty member as especially worthy of it. A departmental advising system ought to formalize student contact with at least one faculty member, so that students who are less forward or more doubtful will have a basis on which to build enthusiasm for, and success in, the study of English. Students who are possible recruits for doctoral programs in English should not be the only ones rewarded with extensive attention from their professors, especially while far more PhDs are produced in English than tenure-track hiring can accommodate.

A second condition for good advising is that it integrate students' academic discipline with their lives and careers. Undergraduates should study English because they find it irresistibly interesting and fulfilling, but unless English contributes to the interest and fulfillment of their lives long after they leave college, it will have served only as a pro forma gateway to the higher earnings that college degrees produce. Few careers involve literature as directly as teaching. But many careers involve reading, writing, research, and textual analysis; cultural and psychological understanding; communication of message and analysis of audience; and creativity, logical acuity, and rhetorical alertness in ways that make study in English such excellent academic preparation for so many students. Every life can be enriched by learning something of the intellectually and culturally sophisticated ways of reading and writing that English departments sustain and

make available to students. Advising needs to address how English can contribute to a fuller life for those whose profession will not be teaching English. Literature clearly resonates intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually in people's lives in ways that go beyond its usual treatment in the classroom. Advising can help point to that resonance.

In large departments that rely on graduate students for individual contact with undergraduates, faculty advising of all undergraduates may be particularly difficult. It should focus on areas where faculty members have specialized knowledge—such as building a concentration, seeking background knowledge, or pursuing new areas of inquiry—leaving other areas to nonfaculty departmental advisers. But a department where, after four or five years, undergraduates need to seek out their former TAs or adjunct lecturers for recommendation letters because no one on the faculty ladder is familiar with them or their work will have difficulty attracting and retaining students (and will have difficulty arguing to administrators that only ladder faculty members create the continuity that students need).

Deliberate Recruitment

Faculty members are not accustomed to taking conscious and deliberate steps aimed at promoting their department's academic programs. One reason they customarily give for not promoting the English major more actively is that they didn't enter the profession to be salespeople. In addition, being the self-selected group most dedicated to the study of English, they may not readily identify with less confident undergraduates or speak in the particular voice of experience to provide the particular kinds of information such students need most. Faculty members point out that they don't advise undergraduates on careers because, having always been academics themselves, they know little about nonacademic career opportunities for majors. These reasons may explain what has been common practice, but they are no excuse for refusing change that would be helpful.

It is important to recognize lower-division classes that are taken by broad samples of first- and second-year undergraduates as recruiting opportunities—and also as points of contact where students may reject a department and its programs if their experience is negative. Beyond using contact with students in courses, departments can hold information sessions for prospective majors and send recruiting letters to students, for example, identified as having won writing contests. Collecting and publicizing information about the career paths of a department's graduates takes time and resources but yields information all the more valuable because the department controls it and its uses. Another strategy is to feature alumni in programs and publications. Consider inviting alumni to campus to speak with

prospective majors, to contribute to scholarships, and to participate in career panels. Alumni can also offer internships and even immediate employment opportunities to committed majors, as well as practical advice about connections between course work in English and life after graduation.

Senior seminars and student-run organizations such as literary clubs can provide opportunities to forge and strengthen a department's relations with its alumni and with well-placed parents of current students. Knowledge of local and regional programs such as charter schools (a growing option for parents and communities) leads to collaboration through which a department can acquire the kind of publicity that attracts prospective and entering students. Just as some institutions recruit students from published listings of contest winners, all departments can tap into advanced placement programs and international baccalaureate listings by recruiting at high schools that have these programs. Departments can become more attractive by making sure that the exemption credits they offer are competitive with those of other institutions.

Departments should apply for a charter to develop a chapter of an honor society that recognizes outstanding students in English and in the other disciplines under the umbrella of the department. Once established, such chapters will bring visibility that aids recruitment. Showcasing majors who compete for and earn prestigious national and international scholarships also helps. Even highlighting majors' presence on dean's lists, on honor rolls, in community service programs, and in campus organizations that involve leadership or academic prowess yields dividends. A departmental newsletter, brochure, and literary journal certainly are means of announcing the activities, talents, and achievements of majors, alumni, and faculty members. Special display cases can promote department activities and showcase copies of faculty and alumni publications. Regular contributions to in-house publications—produced by the institution's development, public relations, or communications office—are less labor-intensive but effective means of publicity. These initiatives can address the challenges all departments face as the economic and professional climate changes.

A savvy department can exploit institutional units outside itself. By publicizing a major through the institution's admissions literature, print and electronic, the departmental budget is spared. Similar collaboration can be sought with the alumni affairs office as a source of data, thereby economizing and maximizing the department's efforts in that area. As noted above, tracking alumni is useful as a means of identifying experts, sources of internships, speakers, and sponsors for current majors and recent graduates, as well as of building bridges to graduate and professional schools, foundations, or corporations.

Curriculum Review: Some Local Examples and Results

To discover what impact curricular revision may have had on numbers of majors at institutions across the nation, our committee invited comments from chairs of ADE-member departments on this question: "Have there been curricular changes in the department or college that have affected the number of students majoring in English?" We conclude our report with answers colleagues offered. Many chairs spoke of dips in numbers of students majoring in English that were attributable to some of the trends discussed above. Three main approaches to attract students have proved successful: the addition of topics courses, the development of courses related to students' employment concerns, and a restructuring that increased curricular cohesiveness or offered concentrations.

New topics courses were cited by several chairs as the reason for a growth in numbers of majors. One department's pool of majors grew when the department created courses like The Trickster; Race, Class, and Cultural Critics; Impostors; Rebellion; Magic Realism; and The Beat Generation. Another department diversified its offerings with courses on film, literature of war, women writers, and African American literature.

A number of chairs associated a resurgence in majors with curricular changes that addressed students' employment concerns. In a typical response to the survey, a chair said that growth in majors was generated by a new curriculum designed "to prepare for the professional and economic decisions they will confront upon graduation." Some departments have found responsible ways to satisfy the pragmatic impulses of parents and students without radically reconfiguring the English major. Many survey responses validate Cy Knoblauch's claim that curricular integrity can be maintained and students' vocational needs met with only minor additions to a curriculum, such as courses in technical writing, grant writing, service learning, ESL theory, and pedagogy (23). Other respondents to our survey attested to the popularity of new writing courses directly related to careers for English majors, courses with titles like Editing or Careers in Writing. One member of our committee says that his department's professional writing certificate, which students earn by completing a cluster of writing courses, gives graduates a competitive edge in the job market by convincing prospective employers of their writing proficiency. One chair wrote that students elected to major in English after the creation of a public relations major in the English curriculum. Another pointed to a multimedia focus as generating majors. An exception to the popularity of vocationally oriented courses was a survey response about a department's phasing out a publishing arts major in English "because of low enrollments."

Majors often increased after the faculty completed a review and reworking of the department's curriculum. The most dramatic claim was made by a chair at a large research university, where the move to a more flexible English curriculum seems to have produced more majors even though institutional enrollments fell. Another university English department attracted majors by "a restructuring of the curriculum and, with that, [the establishment of] a logical set of expectations for student outcomes at each level of the major." Several chairs pointed to new concentrations and tracks that appeared to have increased majors because, as one chair said, students welcome flexibility and "the opportunity to build on special interests." Among the tracks or majors mentioned were film studies, technical communication, women's studies, cultural studies, Irish studies, medieval studies, Jewish studies, and gay and lesbian studies. That such additions reinvigorate not only the curriculum but also individual faculty members was put well by a chair who concluded that new interdisciplinary courses "work NOT as a diminution or dilution of but as an energizer of [the department's] intellectual power at its fullest."

According to respondents, creative writing is a close second to literature as the most popular new English concentration. Nearly half (49.3%) the chairs who responded to our committee's request for information identified creative writing as second only to literature as the focus chosen by English majors. One college enlarged its cadre of majors by offering students the option of selecting one of four writing tracks: technical-professional writing, journalism, environmental writing, and creative writing. Sometimes the new options were added in traditional fields. For example, one department began offering concentrations in American literature, English literature, and writing and linguistics, which the chair believes may account for a 30% hike in majors between 1997 and 2000.

Not all departments can staff new courses or concentrations. And a decline in the number of majors may actually represent a healthy correction following a period of excessive growth without added positions. Some departments flourish with fewer majors and earn a reputation for being selective. One chair explained how his department increased curricular rigor and produced a welcome reduction in majors, a drop "below 400 for the first time in living memory." The department started requiring "a first-year course and four sophomore-level courses, in addition to six other courses above the first-year level." Honors requirements now include a literary theory course, a senior seminar, and a senior thesis. The chair predicted that the numbers would rise eventually because of the popular new writing concentration. Another department reported wrestling—successfully, it would appear—with the dual problem of "the overwhelming number of

English majors and the poor quality of many of them." It created a year-long sophomore-level sequence required of all majors, which served as a gateway course and has resulted in a much desired reduction in the number of majors.

A Last Word about Technology

There is mounting evidence in support of the perception of an increasing confluence of writing with technology. When the early-twentieth-century technology of writing by typewriter first gave way to word processing, the change seemed more evolutionary than revolutionary—the easy correction of errors, the ability to reorder paragraphs, renumber pages, reformat text, and so on. But over the last fifteen to twenty years, the tremendous increases in storage capacity and the advent of the Internet have made it possible to create sophisticated documents through desktop publishing. The advance of digital technology has also fostered an expectation among some potential employers that graduates who claim writing skills can move effortlessly between PC and Macintosh platforms; have already used such programs as *Pagemaker*; and are familiar with HTML and SGML as well as concordances, databases, spreadsheets, and the fundamentals of graphic design. In addition, English majors are increasingly likely to be asked to demonstrate their research skills on the World Wide Web—for example, by demonstrating familiarity with a variety of free and commercial online resources and large-scale archives such as *Lexis-Nexis*.

The guidelines proposed by the MLA Committee on Information Technology recommend universal access to and infrastructure support for information technology. In practical terms, these guidelines say that departments need to find and fund technical support staff—not at all easy even for large departments or well-funded institutions. Yet we believe that the provision of significant technical support must be a high priority if English is to maintain its current high reputation and its recognition as a major relevant to contemporary modes of communication and analysis of information and ideas.

Our committee, examining the data on baccalaureate degree awards in English as described above along with informal information provided by ADE-member departments, recognized at the outset that numbers alone do not reflect the quality of an institution's English major. We also realized that our study could not measure the impact, either locally or at the level of national statistics, of certain variables, like the reclassification of English education majors as English majors at Research I and Comprehensive I institutions.

Data on degree completions for the ten years to 2000 suggest that the number of baccalaureate English degrees awarded annually has settled into a stable range of about 50,000 (plus or minus 5,000), or approximately 4 of every 100 degree awards. These recent numbers represent a considerable improvement over those of the 1970s and early 1980s, when the number dropped to less than 32,000 or a little over 3 of every 100 baccalaureate degrees. Our review of the data confirmed the commonplace observation that many undergraduates have chosen to major in business, the life sciences, and psychology, perhaps because they perceive study in these fields to be more directly linked than English to well-remunerated job opportunities. Such trends suggest that curricular changes inside English departments are not, as some would claim, a primary factor responsible for the flight of students from English—a flight that can seem an educational disaster, especially if the extraordinary numbers of degree awards in English in the late 1960s and early 1970s are taken as a norm rather than as the anomaly they historically were. As we observe in our report, the cultural heterogeneity of the English major has enhanced its appeal and confirms its centrality in a contemporary liberal arts education.

The most significant conclusion emerging from our study is the recommendation that departments address trends, circumstances, and challenges inimical to the appeal of an undergraduate English major. While the major's health depends, in part, on demographic and economic forces beyond the faculty's control, the faculty asserts its fullest measure of control when it informs itself systematically about national trends, assesses their local impact, and engages in discussions aimed at reaching well-considered decisions about how energies and resources can be channeled most effectively. The committee believes that local discussions informed by a sound understanding of available data rather than by rumor or polemic will put departments in the best position to strengthen their programs and increase both student and faculty satisfaction with the major. Knowledge of local and national trends can also help us communicate the continuing value of study in English, whether to college administrations and boards, prospective students and parents, or government and private funding agencies. Departments need to be aware of forces that may threaten the English major's vitality in the near future, such as new education requirements, pressures for outcomes assessment, and further cuts in public funding.

Current demographic trends point to increased numbers of English majors concentrating on education and a higher percentage of the entire undergraduate population needing remedial writing courses. These projections suggest that in the future it will be even more imperative for English faculty members to affirm their control over curriculum and mission, lest both be redefined in terms of service to the institution, with literature relegated to second or third place. Though we offer no formulas for defining the character of the major, our study shows that its appeal has been related to its flexibility and capaciousness, as many chairs who responded to our survey attest. On the basis of their anecdotal reports, we have identified six strategies that have proved successful in increasing funding and numbers of majors:

- performing periodic curricular review and reform that balance faculty specializations with the interests and needs of undergraduates
- strengthening curricular cohesiveness; adding attractive topics courses, including courses that enhance students' vocational preparedness; and developing popular concentrations, such as creative writing
- ensuring that teaching by tenured and tenure-track faculty members occurs at all levels of the curriculum, especially in first-year writing and literature courses that serve in part as gatherers of majors
- enhancing departmental visibility through publications, Web sites, active recruitment, and programs that involve collaboration with alumni, student clubs, admissions offices, secondary schools, local businesses, and career planning and placement offices
- structuring advising so that it is an integral part of teaching and affords students current information about scholarships and employment opportunities related to the study of English
- integrating computer technology into pedagogy and curriculum to promote learning and prepare students for careers in which technological proficiency is expected

These strategies come without a guarantee of success in every academic culture. The committee recognizes that changes based on them may initially increase faculty and chair workloads. Nevertheless, chairs have reported that the strategies listed above can attract majors and lead to substantial increases in budgets and positions. Our committee hopes that this report will spark discussions about the problems it raises and the solutions it suggests. Our wish is to refocus the profession's attention on the undergraduate major, for only if it is robust can opportunities expand for PhDs in English to have academic careers and can our graduate as well as undergraduate programs flourish.

Margaret Schramm (Hartwick Coll., chair)
J. Lawrence Mitchell (Texas A&M Univ.)
Delores Stephen (Morehouse Coll.)
David Laurence (ADE)

NOTE

Because different data sets and Department of Education publications aggregate information about degree awards in English in somewhat different ways, summary totals do not always match. The discrepancies are small and do not materially affect trends. The appendix explains the categorizations of the different data sets our committee drew on and our approach to extracting and presenting information on bachelor's degree awards from the available sources.

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APPENDIX

Understanding the United States Department of Education Data on Bachelor's Degree Completions

The report of the ADE Ad Hoc Committee on the English Major refers principally to information on bachelor's degree completions that the National Science Foundation makes available through the *WebCASPAR* online database system (caspar.nsf.gov). This system offers a convenient way to create reports showing trends through time based on degree completions data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). *WebCASPAR* users can request information on degree awards across a range of years, specifying parameters such as the level of the degree, the gender of degree recipients, in some cases their race and ethnicity, and the Carnegie classification of degree-granting institutions. Reports can be created in several formats, including *Excel* or *Lotus* spreadsheets.

WebCASPAR offers two sources of information on bachelor's degrees. One draws from the NCES Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), which as of this writing offers a highly detailed accounting of degree completions from 1987 to 2001. A chief virtue of IPEDS is the way it breaks out degree awards in English for nine subfields, each of which is assigned a numerical code in the Department of Education's Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP). The classification contains more than nine hundred six-digit CIP codes; the six-digit codes for English are in the group 23.xxxx. Extending back only to 1987, however, IPEDS covers a span too short to reveal critical historical patterns. The Earned Degrees file, the second source *WebCASPAR* makes available, offers an accounting of degree completions providing information for thirty-five years, back to 1966. The Earned Degrees file, however, is much less detailed than IPEDS in its specification of fields and subfields. The summary totals for "English and Literature/Letters" include degrees in programs such as classics and comparative literature, and the totals cannot be disaggregated to show the numbers of degrees for the component subfields.

In the ad hoc committee's view, the historical perspective that the Earned Degrees file makes available outweighs the limitations in the way its data are compiled. The committee noted as well that the summary totals from the *WebCASPAR* Earned Degrees file correspond closely to those published in the Department of Education's annual *Digest of Education Statistics*. Table 1 (p. 213) compares bachelor's degree–award totals in English from 1966 to 2001 as retrieved from the file and as printed in the *Digest of Education Statistics*. Table 2 (p. 214) presents the summary totals for the years 1987 to 2001 as published in all three sources: the IPEDS and Earned Degrees databases available online through *WebCASPAR* and the summary totals for "English Language and Literature/Letters" as printed in table 286 of the *Digest of Education Statistics, 2002*.

The figures downloaded from the IPEDS file on *WebCASPAR* have a formal basis identical to the figures published in the 2002 *Digest of Education Statistics* (both summarize degree completions assigned to one of the nine subfields grouped under CIP code 23). As noted above, the totals downloaded from the Earned Degrees file include degrees in classics, which are no longer aggregated with English in IPEDS. They also exclude degrees in creative writing, rhetoric and composition, and business and technical writing, which are now summarized under CIP code 23. Because of changes both

in degree-granting programs and in the way the NCES aggregates data about degre awards, the summary numbers are not exactly equal across all years for which data ar available. Corrections and adjustments also become apparent as differences, generall small, in the summary totals that the NCES publishes in different volumes of its an nual *Digest of Education Statistics*.

A *WebCASPAR* user can create a spreadsheet showing degree completions reporte for each of the nine six-digit CIP codes that IPEDS groups under code 23. The syster also includes a field containing codes that aggregate the line items making up the sum mary totals according to the older procedure used for the Earned Degrees file. Table (p. 215) shows the IPEDS line items for English (CIP code 23.xxxx) and how the item were formerly summarized in the Earned Degrees file. (Classics falls in CIP cod 16.xxxx, foreign languages and literatures, in IPEDS.)

Table 4 (p. 215) shows the totals that result when the subfields listed in table 3 ar reordered so that English includes composition, creative writing, and technical an business writing and excludes comparative literature, speech, and classics.

The two *WebCASPAR* online sources can be supplemented back to 1949–50 usin information the NCES has printed in the *Digest of Education Statistics*. To develo these data the ADE draws on information printed in table 122 of the volume fo 1985–86. From these data, the ADE has created a historical profile of bachelor's de gree awards in English and all fields for the half century 1950 to 2001. Presented i table 5 (pp. 216-17), the profile shows the total numbers of bachelor's degrees awarded the percentage distribution of degrees to men and to women in English and all field of study, and the number of degrees in English for every 100 bachelor's degree awarded in all fields. The table also shows the number of English degrees awarded t men and to women for every 100 degrees awarded to men and to women.

The temporally deeper perspective is worth examining. The figures are particularl revealing when considered in the context of the steady increase over the past fifty year in the number and proportion of bachelor's degrees awarded to women. These dat show clearly how during the past half century the proportion of women recipients of bachelor's degree in English has moved much closer to the counterpart figure for mer Extending the view back to 1950 also shows how the appeal of the major, as measure by the proportion of all undergraduates electing to complete degree programs in th field, is about as great today as it was then. Then as now, degrees in English repre sented about 4 or 5 of every 100 bachelor's degree awards. Does the decline in degre recipients completing bachelor's degrees in English that occurred in the 1970s repre sent a decline from the norm or a return to it? The decline is often cited in publi polemic in ways that tacitly assume that the levels of degree awards in English durin the mid-1960s and early 1970s—well over 7 of every 100 bachelor's degrees granted– can be regarded as a norm. A temporally deeper perspective suggests that the decad of the 1960s was an anomaly rather than a standard against which subsequent develop ments should be measured.

At the same time, extending the view back to 1950 makes apparent how over th past half century continuing increases in the number of women completing bachelor degree programs provided English with a population of students numerically larg enough to sustain programs in the face of the markedly more equitable redistributio of women across undergraduate fields of study that occurred during the period. Th point becomes apparent when figures 1 and 2 are examined in relation to each othe

Figure 1 shows trends in the number of bachelor's degrees granted to men and to women in all fields of study. Figure 2 shows trends in the number of bachelor's degrees awarded in English from 1950 to 2000, broken out by the sex of degree recipients. Together the two figures show how initially the overall growth in degree completions was paralleled by a sharp increase in degree completions in English. Degree completions in English then suffered a sharp decline while overall degree completions, especially by women, continued their upward trend. Over the period, increases in the number of women pursuing and completing bachelor's degrees consistently outpaced increases in the number of men. As figure 1 shows, women surpassed men in the percentage of bachelor's degrees earned in the early 1980s, and they have claimed an increasing share of degree awards ever since. In contrast, as shown in figure 4, the shares of degrees in English earned by men and women remained remarkably steady at about two-thirds women and one-third men from the mid-1960s to the mid-1990s.

The columns titled "All Fields, Percentage of Men" and "All Fields, Percentage of Women" in table 5 show how over time the number of degrees women earned in English per 100 degrees earned by women in all fields has come much closer to the figure for men. That is, over the past forty years women's behavior choosing English as a field of study has converged with men's. Figure 3 shows this convergence graphically as a marked narrowing of the gap between the trend lines for women and men. English departments were able to maintain their undergraduate student population because of the remarkable growth in the absolute numbers of women pursuing and completing degrees and also because women degree recipients came to outnumber men. That is, the proportion of women undergraduates among degree recipients in all fields (somewhat more than two-fifths forty years ago and somewhat less than three-fifths today) moved much closer to the proportion of women earning degrees in English—about two-thirds from the 1960s to the mid-1990s. The overrepresentation of women among degree recipients in English, as measured by the difference between the percentage of English degrees awarded to women and the percentage of all bachelor's degrees awarded to women, shrank from well over twenty percentage points in 1970 to under eleven percentage points in the mid-1990s. Since 1998 the apportionment of English degrees by sex has edged closer to 70% women and 30% men. The most recent data show a slight increase in the difference between the percentage of English degrees awarded to women and the percentage of all bachelor's degrees awarded to women, from 10.6 percentage points in 1999 to 11.1 percentage points in 2001. It remains to be seen, however, whether this recent change indicates movement to a new pattern. Since 1970, increases of similar size have been absorbed into the prevailing trend of narrowing the gap between the percentage of women completing degrees in English and the percentage of women completing bachelor's degrees in all fields.

TABLE 1
NUMBER OF BACHELOR'S DEGREES IN ENGLISH, BY SEX, 1966–2001

	Digest of Education Statistics			*WebCASPAR* Earned Degrees File		
Year	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
1966	39,015	13,196	25,819	39,165	13,246	25,919
1968	47,977	15,700	32,277	48,127	15,736	32,391
1970	56,410	18,650	37,760	56,518	18,681	37,837
1971	64,342	22,155	42,187	64,627	22,280	42,347
1972	63,976	22,657	41,319	64,372	22,812	41,560
1973	61,003	22,156	38,847	61,370	22,324	39,046
1974	54,590	20,214	34,376	55,005	20,407	34,598
1975	47,619	17,880	29,739	47,940	18,039	29,901
1976	42,006	16,073	25,933	42,993	16,296	26,697
1977	37,794	14,295	23,499	38,411	14,456	23,955
1978	35,328	13,137	22,191	35,889	13,322	22,567
1979	33,561	12,198	21,363	33,943	12,342	21,601
1980	32,541	11,380	21,161	32,869	11,496	21,373
1981	32,254	11,198	21,056	32,469	11,320	21,149
1982	33,419	11,414	22,005	33,504	11,469	22,035
1983	31,829	10,859	20,970	31,728	10,876	20,852
1984	32,834	11,170	21,664	32,736	11,160	21,576
1985	33,218	11,334	21,884	33,039	11,280	21,759
1986	34,552	11,819	22,733	34,395	11,807	22,588
1987	36,284	12,353	23,931	35,970	12,248	23,722
1988	38,661	12,836	25,825	38,308	12,749	25,559
1989	42,470	13,927	28,543	42,044	13,781	28,263
1990	47,519	15,662	31,857	46,629	15,363	31,266
1991	51,841	17,146	34,695	51,364	16,983	34,381
1992	54,951	18,536	36,415	54,351	18,297	36,054
1993	56,133	19,247	36,886	55,493	19,001	36,492
1994	53,924	18,425	35,499	53,195	18,115	35,080
1995	51,901	17,810	34,091	51,131	17,540	33,591
1996	50,698	17,253	33,445	49,985	17,043	32,942
1997	49,345	16,531	32,814	48,512	16,250	32,262
1998	49,708	16,477	33,231	48,836	16,223	32,613
1999	50,535	16,490	34,045	*	*	*
2000	50,920	16,341	34,579	50,049	16,127	33,922
2001	51,419	16,257	35,162	50,406	15,913	34,493

Sources: Table 122, *Digest of Education Statistics, 1985–86*; table 286, *Digest of Education Statistics 2002*; *WebCASPAR*.

*No data reported.

TABLE 2
NUMBER OF BACHELOR'S DEGREES IN ENGLISH, 1987–2001

YEAR	*WEBCASPAR* EARNED DEGREES 1966–2000, ENGLISH AND LITERATURE	*WEBCASPAR* IPEDS SUM OF CIP CODE 23	TABLE 286, *DIGEST OF EDUCATION STATISTICS, 2002* ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE/LETTERS
1987	35,970	36,353	36,284
1988	38,308	38,676	38,661
1989	42,044	42,470	42,470
1990	46,629	47,144	47,519
1991	51,364	51,878	51,841
1992	54,351	54,993	54,951
1993	55,493	56,180	56,133
1994	53,195	53,968	53,924
1995	51,131	51,950	51,901
1996	49,985	50,759	50,698
1997	48,512	49,399	49,345
1998	48,836	49,757	49,708
1999	*	*	50,535
2000	50,049	50,990	50,920
2001	50,406	51,475	51,419

*No data reported.

TABLE 3
BACHELOR'S DEGREES IN ENGLISH, 1987, 1993, 1997, 2000, AND 2001, BY FIEL

FIELD	6-DIGIT CIP CODE	CIP LABEL	1987	1993	1997	2000	2001
B2	23.0101	English Language and Literature, General	25,795	41,595	37,598	37,726	37,67
	23.0801	English Literature (British and Commonwealth)	1,319	1,494	1,165	1,161	1,14
	23.9999	English Language and Literature / Letters, Other	1,031	1,215	1,201	1,194	1,22
	23.0701	American Literature (US)	26	135	25	33	5
	23.0301	Comparative Literature	620	851	710	832	86
	23.1001	Speech and Rhetorical Studies	6,817	9,605	7,164	8,340	8,57
	16.1201	Classics and Classical Languages and Literatures	362	598	613	738	81
	Total		35,970	55,493	48,476	50,024	50,34
Z9	23.0401	English Composition	147	307	293	317	37
	23.0501	English Creative Writing	468	872	1,044	1,109	1,25
	23.1101	English Technical and Business Writing	130	106	199	278	31

Source: *WebCASPAR* Earned Degrees file, 1966–98, 2000, and 2001.
CIP = US Dept. of Educ. Classification of Instructional Programs
B2 and Z9 = *CASPAR* academic discipline codes

TABLE 4
BACHELOR'S DEGREES IN ENGLISH, 1987, 1993, 1997, 2000, AND 2001, BY FIELD REGROUPED

6-DIGIT CIP CODE	CIP LABEL	1987	1993	1997	2000	2001
23.0101	English Language and Literature, General	25,795	41,595	37,598	37,726	37,67
23.0701	American Literature (US)	26	135	25	33	5
23.0801	English Literature (British and Commonwealth)	1,319	1,494	1,165	1,161	1,14
23.0401	English Composition	147	307	293	317	37
23.1101	English Technical and Business Writing	130	106	199	278	31
23.0501	English Creative Writing	468	872	1,044	1,109	1,25
23.9999	English Language and Literature / Letters, Other	1,031	1,215	1,201	1,194	1,22
Total		28,916	45,724	41,525	41,818	42,03
23.0301	Comparative Literature	620	851	710	832	86
23.1001	Speech and Rhetorical Studies	6,817	9,605	7,164	8,340	8,57
Grand total		36,353	56,180	49,399	50,990	51,47

Source: *WebCASPAR*.

TABLE 5

A Statistical Profile of Bachelor's Degree Awards in English and All Fields, 1950–2001 (*TABLE READS ACROSS NEXT PAGE*)

Year	English Total	English, Men	English, Women	English, Percentage of Men	English, Percentage of Women	English Degrees per 100 Degrees
1950	17,240	8,221	9,019	47.7	52.3	3.99
1952	14,058	5,798	8,260	41.2	58.8	4.26
1954	12,545	4,726	7,819	37.7	62.3	4.31
1956	14,385	5,526	8,859	38.4	61.6	4.66
1958	16,631	6,733	9,898	40.5	59.5	4.59
1960	20,128	7,580	12,548	37.7	62.3	5.13
1962	24,334	8,531	15,803	35.1	64.9	6.34
1964	32,614	10,943	21,671	33.6	66.4	7.07
1966	39,015	13,196	25,819	33.8	66.2	7.50
1968	47,977	15,700	32,277	32.7	67.3	7.59
1970	56,410	18,650	37,760	33.1	66.9	7.12
1971	64,342	22,155	42,187	34.4	65.6	7.66
1972	63,976	22,657	41,319	35.4	64.6	7.21
1973	61,003	22,156	38,847	36.3	63.7	6.61
1974	54,590	20,214	34,376	37.0	63.0	5.77
1975	47,619	17,880	29,739	37.5	62.5	5.16
1976	42,006	16,073	25,933	38.3	61.7	4.54
1977	37,794	14,295	23,499	37.8	62.2	4.11
1978	35,328	13,137	22,191	37.2	62.8	3.83
1979	33,561	12,198	21,363	36.3	63.7	3.64
1980	32,541	11,380	21,161	35.0	65.0	3.50
1981	32,254	11,198	21,056	34.7	65.3	3.45
1982	33,419	11,414	22,005	34.2	65.8	3.51
1983	31,829	10,859	20,970	34.1	65.9	3.28
1984	32,834	11,170	21,664	34.0	66.0	3.37
1985	33,218	11,334	21,884	34.1	65.9	3.39
1986	34,552	11,819	22,733	34.2	65.8	3.50
1987	36,284	12,353	23,931	34.0	66.0	3.66
1988	38,661	12,836	25,825	33.2	66.8	3.89
1989	42,470	13,927	28,543	32.8	67.2	4.17
1990	47,519	15,662	31,857	33.0	67.0	4.52
1991	51,841	17,146	34,695	33.1	66.9	4.74
1992	54,951	18,536	36,415	33.7	66.3	4.83
1993	56,133	19,247	36,886	34.3	65.7	4.82
1994	53,924	18,425	35,499	34.2	65.8	4.61
1995	51,901	17,810	34,091	34.3	65.7	4.47
1996	50,698	17,253	33,445	34.0	66.0	4.35
1997	49,345	16,531	32,814	33.5	66.5	4.21
1998	49,708	16,477	33,231	33.1	66.9	4.20
1999	50,535	16,490	34,045	32.6	67.4	4.21
2000	50,920	16,341	34,579	32.1	67.9	4.11
2001	51,419	16,257	35,162	31.6	68.4	4.13

Source for 1950 to 1968: *Digest of Education Statistics, 1985–86*, table 122, p. 142.
Source for 1970 to 2001: *Digest of Education Statistics, 2002*, table 286, p. 338.

Year	English, Men, per 100 Degrees to Men	English, Women, per 100 Degrees to Women	All Fields, Men	All Fields, Women	All Fields, Percentage of Men	All Fields, Percentage of Women	All Field Tota
1950	2.50	8.74	328,841	103,217	76.1	23.9	432,0
1952							329,9
1954							290,8
1956							308,8
1958							362,5
1960	2.98	9.07	254,063	138,377	64.7	35.3	392,4
1962	3.70	10.29	230,456	153,505	60.0	40.0	383,9
1964	4.12	11.06	265,349	195,917	57.5	42.5	461,2
1966	4.41	11.69	299,287	220,828	57.5	42.5	520,1
1968	4.39	11.75	357,682	274,607	56.6	43.4	632,2
1970	4.13	11.07	451,097	341,219	56.9	43.1	792,3
1971	4.66	11.59	475,594	364,136	56.6	43.4	839,7
1972	4.53	10.69	500,590	386,683	56.4	43.6	887,2
1973	4.28	9.61	518,191	404,171	56.2	43.8	922,3
1974	3.83	8.21	527,313	418,463	55.8	44.2	945,7
1975	3.54	7.11	504,841	418,092	54.7	45.3	922,9
1976	3.18	6.16	504,925	420,821	54.5	45.5	925,7
1977	2.88	5.54	495,545	424,004	53.9	46.1	919,5
1978	2.70	5.11	487,347	433,857	52.9	47.1	921,2
1979	2.56	4.81	477,344	444,046	51.8	48.2	921,3
1980	2.40	4.64	473,611	455,806	51.0	49.0	929,4
1981	2.38	4.53	469,833	465,257	50.2	49.8	935,0
1982	2.41	4.59	473,364	479,634	49.7	50.3	952,9
1983	2.27	4.28	479,140	490,370	49.4	50.6	969,5
1984	2.32	4.40	482,319	491,990	49.5	50.5	974,3
1985	2.35	4.40	482,528	496,949	49.3	50.7	979,4
1986	2.43	4.53	485,923	501,900	49.2	50.8	987,8
1987	2.57	4.69	480,782	510,482	48.5	51.5	991,2
1988	2.69	4.99	477,203	517,626	48.0	52.0	994,8
1989	2.88	5.33	483,346	535,409	47.4	52.6	1,018,7
1990	3.19	5.69	491,696	559,648	46.8	53.2	1,051,3
1991	3.40	5.88	504,045	590,493	46.1	53.9	1,094,5
1992	3.56	5.91	520,811	615,742	45.8	54.2	1,136,5
1993	3.61	5.83	532,881	632,297	45.7	54.3	1,165,1
1994	3.46	5.57	532,422	636,853	45.5	54.5	1,169,2
1995	3.39	5.38	526,131	634,003	45.4	54.6	1,160,1
1996	3.30	5.21	522,454	642,338	44.9	55.1	1,164,7
1997	3.18	5.03	520,515	652,364	44.4	55.6	1,172,8
1998	3.17	5.00	519,956	664,450	43.9	56.1	1,184,4
1999	3.18	5.00	518,746	681,557	43.2	56.8	1,200,3
2000	3.08	4.89	530,367	707,508	42.8	57.2	1,237,8
2001	3.06	4.94	531,840	712,331	42.7	57.3	1,244,1