

Title: Lecturers
Dept: English
College: Humanities

English 412 Re-design

A. Student learning problem or issue: For more than half a century, English 412: The Literary Magazine, has served as a vital component of CSUN's English program, its Creative Writing Option, and CSUN's larger literary community with its biannual publication of *The Northridge Review*. However, ENGL 412, as presently conceived, is woefully inadequate. The catalogue course description promises an expansive, multi-focal approach that includes "a theoretical overview of literary publishing; practice in close reading and in the exercise of literary and aesthetic judgment; and editing and publishing of *The Northridge Review*, a literary magazine." Firstly, the outcomes promised in the course description are unobtainable in one semester. Secondly, the class model reflects an earlier era when Creative Writing in America, still in its nascent stages, boasted only a handful of academic programs and a very small number of literary outlets. Today, the Associated Writing Programs (AWP) lists 987 academic writing programs, and venues for literary publishing number in the 1000's. In addition, technological shifts and changes in the industry have transformed both the production and the dissemination of the literary arts. Meantime, the rich proliferation of literary voices in America and beyond has transformed and complicated matters relating to "literary and aesthetic judgement," their requisite multi-cultural proficiencies, and the ever-evolving ethical issues students now face in the realm of social justice and the arts.

B. Problem Data Cues: Some indicators of a problem include: 1) perpetually late releases that require senior student staff to work well beyond the end of the term to see the project through to completion; 2) the failure of the magazine to appear at all for an entire year following a recent,

post-retirement faculty change; 3) an overloaded course curriculum that results in a frenzied classroom pace counterproductive to effective student learning; and 4) erratic course enrollments due to negative perceptions such chaos is prone to produce. Required course content, for example, includes: close reading, aesthetics, editorial judgement, book design, art design, typesetting, proofreading, material production, business, and managerial tactics.

As the current professor of the course—who last taught it in the 90’s—has observed, “with so much more to cover now, it’s impossible to cover any of it as it was originally designed.”

C. Attempts at Solving Issues: In Fall 2016, *NR* attempted to transition into the present by moving entirely online. It was thought that the transition would systematize the production schedule, save time, ease distribution, and reduce expenses. However, this attempt proved unsuccessful and underscored problems with the structure of the course rather than the medium of publication. Returning to print via new state-of-the-art, print-on-demand technologies has solved some problems of both time and cost, but the trade-off has been a marked diminishment in the hands-on experience of design and production that once earned the *NR* First Place in the AWP undergraduate literary magazine competition in the category of Design.

D. Assessment of Project Success: Methods for assessment include renewed interest in and vitality of the *NR* as evidenced by increased numbers of submissions and/or participation in *NR*-related activities, such as number of books produced and sold, and number of participants and attendees at the bi-annual launch reading. In addition, we could track ongoing student involvement with professional literary activities, including subsequent publication and/or involvement with area presses, festivals, community resources, and so forth (see F below). Finally, we could track professionalization through the number of students who attend graduate school or receive job offers that utilize their publishing skills.

E. Proposed Solution: This proposal seeks to re-design ENGL 412 as a two-semester course at the 500-level, available to both undergraduate and graduate students. The first semester would introduce students to the theoretical concerns of both writer and publisher in the world today, preparing them to do the kind of close analytical, editorial, design-focused, and business-related work essential to successful publication. It would also serve as a prerequisite for the second, optional semester in which students would curate, design, and publish a now-annual edition of the *NR* produced entirely in-house in a new book-making lab the department is developing for the joint use of several programs. Such a lab will include equipment for printing and binding books, along with, in time, a working letter press, and will enable a hands-on immersion in actual production that promises to add a whole new level of experience for students involved in this class.

F. Benefits and impact: This award would enable us to modernize ENGL 412 and better prepare its students with job skills suitable for wide range of career options. It would also enable us to make optimal use of the proposed publishing lab and further enhance the already intensive learning-centered focus of ENGL 412. It would also benefit the department at large by preparing *NR* students to run workshops for related English programs, including comics, popular culture, and a course in development on the history of the book. Already, the impact of ENGL 412 far exceeds its actual class enrollment, as the magazine serves a host of other students by providing a forum for the diverse body of literary and visual art produced here at CSUN. In the past five years alone, CSUN students have published more than 11 books or chapbooks, 10 essays, 18 stories, 26 poems, and 12 reviews in nationally recognized journals; staged and/or produced more than 12 plays; given more than 21 public readings; and founded more than six new presses, national journals, and/or nationally recognized blogs. The proposed course redesign restores our

ability to provide a strong foundation for students develop lifelong autonomous reading and writing practices and, should they so choose, to flourish as full-fledged entrepreneurs of the literary arts.