

English Department's Mission Statement

The Vancouver Island University English Department acknowledges that we teach and learn on the traditional territories of the Snuneymuxw, Tla'amin, and the Quw' utsun First Nations.

Our Vision

PURPOSE

Vancouver Island University's English Department offers a coherent BA curriculum based on the following strengths:

- relevance to civic engagement and career plans;
- balance between tradition and innovation in literary studies;
- recognition of cultural diversity;
- flexibility, both in constituency and programming;
- credibility, both of faculty and graduates.

Throughout our programmes, there is a commitment to reading, critical and creative thinking, inquiry and ways of knowing, and writing and speaking skills as mutually supportive and enhancing. Students are also exposed to a wide range of literatures, traditions, approaches, and theoretical issues but with an emphasis on establishing a clear grasp of major concerns in culture and literature.

CORE VALUES

Learning

Our first-year courses, which are taken by all VIU students, provide university-level skills in critical reading, academic writing, and research. These courses support the open-access policies of the university by ensuring literacy, promoting communication and the exchange of ideas, and encouraging the exploration of new thought and lifelong learning.

Overall, we have five streams of courses that reflect our approach to literary studies:

- University Writing courses engage in the practical study of academic and professional composition;
- Literature and Culture courses examine literature in relation to diverse cultural issues and contexts;
- Literature and Criticism courses introduce students to different ways of studying literature and language;
- Literature and Tradition courses study historical periods and canons;
- Word and Image courses explore the relation between literature and other media.

Literacy

The ability to read and write is central to everything we do. In a time when reading practices are changing, we assert the primacy of reading as an essential capacity for lifelong learning. When students make the transition from high school to university, they need to learn how to read difficult texts in the context of scholarly and professional discourses. Our courses offer students the opportunity to engage texts from diverse historical and cultural contexts.

We offer a range of courses in rhetoric and composition, including university or academic writing, and business, technical, and professional writing. We care about the basics and nuances of grammar and style. We teach active and clear communication. Our courses encourage students to both speak and write about their reading and research.

The study of literature is a joyful and an engaged practice. We seek to share the pleasure and animation of reading with our students.

Engagement

The English department is integrated throughout VIU: through cross-appointments with Creative Writing, Women's Studies, and Liberal Studies; through teaching with Media Studies, First Nations Studies, Film, Linguistics, and Public Speaking; and through tutoring in the Writing Centre.

We engage the community by providing a leadership role in numerous activities: the Arts and Humanities Colloquium; the Literary Theory Research Group; the VIU@Cowichan Innovation Lab; the Ralph Gustafson Distinguished Poets Lecture Series, in collaboration with the Creative Writing Department; the MeTA Digital Humanities Lab; Freedom to Read Week at VIRL, and other talks by visiting writers. Individual English Department members are active in various community organizations, sitting on boards such as those of the Nanaimo Community Archives and SD68 Advisory Committee – SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity), and working with numerous social justice and environmental groups.

Access, Achievement, and Celebration

We are committed to open-access policies that allow all learners to pursue an education. We believe in the learning potential of our students, and we aim to engage students individually and in small groups both inside and outside of the classroom. We celebrate student success through student essay prizes, scholarships, commitment to their future plans, and sincere enthusiasm.

Diversity

We believe in equity, inclusiveness, and the recognition of cultural diversity. Our courses attend to gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class; trace the influence of other literatures on English; represent the varieties of English across the world; and study literature in translation.

Sustainability

We believe that the study of literature is relevant to a sustainable community. Social and cultural sustainability require awareness of history, attention to language and communication, as well as critical and creative thinking. Environmental sustainability involves awareness and appreciation of nature and our place within it, issues that are addressed in our Environmental literature courses as well as thematically in our writing and research courses.

Experiential and Applied Learning

Our courses immerse students in a community of readers who exchange ideas, experiences, and perspectives. All of our courses are applied in the sense that they focus on the development and enhancement of reading, writing, critical and creative thinking, research, and communication skills. They also are experiential because students learn by doing: by writing, asking questions while writing, work-shopping, and revising.

Visionary Goal

By asserting the relevance of the literary arts, critical and creative thinking, and effective communication skills, we prepare our students to be flexible, able to read culture, and engage with different perspectives. By doing so, we want to empower our students to make informed decisions that benefit their communities and themselves, and to communicate these decisions effectively in written and oral contexts.

Objectives

The objective of a BA in English is a well-rounded humanities education. Graduates of our department have achieved a high level of literacy, critical thinking, and communication skills. Our English degree not only provides the groundwork for graduate studies in English, but also is an excellent preparation for any profession in which communication and critical thinking skills are emphasized.

Learning Outcomes

The following learning outcomes characterize the goals of our programmes as a whole. Specific expressions of these outcomes are developed on a course-by-course basis

Reading

Reading engages, situates, and analyzes a text in order to comprehend and make meaning. Readers learn to understand how texts are culturally and historically situated, to interpret using a range of genres, and to appreciate that there are different ways to approach a text.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is the practice of examining and analyzing something before developing a position or conclusion about it. It involves questioning the assumptions, expectations, values, and beliefs that inform one's reading of a text.

Information Literacy

Information literacy includes the ability to undertake research, to find and critically evaluate relevant information and its sources, and to synthesize the information with existing knowledge.

Creative Thinking

Creative thinking occurs when established approaches are recombined or changed through innovation to produce a new way to represent or understand a subject. Creative thinking is characterized by a solid grasp of established practices within a field of study, imagination and synthesis, and risk taking.

Historical Understanding

Historical understanding is the capacity to see how texts, ideas, and events are informed by the past and situated in their own contexts. The ability to trace change or continuity over time

extends to the historical basis of disciplines and knowledge, including how these relate to other social and cultural developments.

Our courses encourage students to understand the historical background and context of what they are studying. Our Literature and Culture and Literature and Traditions streams cover main periods, movements, and authors in the annals of national literatures and literary history, and they contextualize the study of writing and of literature within cultural and literary historical perspectives.

We strive to convey to students traditions in writing and literature, including an examination of rhetorical developments and models, changes in the English language, influences of intellectual and artistic movements, impact of ideologies and worldviews, and changing approaches to critical theory and praxis.

Inquiry and Ways of Knowing

Inquiry is the process of posing questions and trying to methodically answer those questions. Questions arise in relation to past inquiry within a field of study, emerging issues, and individual curiosity. Just as there are different ways of knowing that are historical, cultural, and disciplinary, there are different critical and theoretical approaches to the study of literature and language.

Written Communication

Written communication is the use of writing to organize information and present it in a clear and effective manner. Adept writers are able to negotiate different genres and situations, and they convey a sense of a person behind the words, an individual voice.

Oral Communication

Oral communication is the use of speech to present information in a clear and effective manner.

Collaboration

Collaboration is the ability to work productively with others.

Independence of Thought

Independence of thought begins with the understanding and questioning of orthodoxies and established ways of seeing the world. A foundation for lifelong learning, independence of thought is characterized by self-directed study and the ability to formulate meaningful questions.

Local and Intercultural Knowledge: including indigenous

We teach diverse literatures with an emphasis on Canadian and local B.C. writers, First Nations, and International literature in translation from countries around the world. Our courses involve recognizing, respecting, and accommodating different kinds of knowledge and different ways of knowing, while integrating them into academic discourse.

Ethical Reasoning and Practices

Our classes bring students from different backgrounds together to discuss literature. Students negotiate differences in worldview and engage difficult ethical issues involving race and ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, class, disability, and so on. Issues regarding rights and respect, including animals and the environment, emerge constantly from the texts we discuss. Ethical reasoning is central to teaching citizenship to our students.

Foundations for Lifelong Learning

Joy of reading drives renewed education. Literacy and critical thinking are important skills for education as a continued lifelong practice. The study of literature appeals to all ages.

Integrative Learning

The study of literature and writing is a holistic practice that integrates different disciplines and relates academic study to lived experience. This integrative aspect is especially present in our first-year courses, which engage and bring together students from across the university.

Civic engagement

The attempt to produce positive change in the civic life of one's community requires awareness and motivation. It involves an understanding of history, the ability to read and analyze cultural texts, and the ability to mobilize knowledge to produce change. Such engagement can occur in many different ways, both political and non-political, including how we understand ourselves and our agency, and our capacity to question the status quo and imagine alternatives.

CAREERS

A BA in English is an excellent preparation for a number of professional schools (e.g. law, secondary school teaching, library science), as well as for graduate studies in the discipline. Moreover, a degree in English gives students many of the skills most highly valued in today's job market: oral and written communication skills, critical thinking/problem-solving skills, research skills, and organizational skills. Also, our pedagogical practices emphasize and promote teamwork and the development of interpersonal skills.

There are many opportunities for students with English degrees in the fields of communications, business, service professions and public relations. BC Job Futures identifies writing, publishing, communications, and public relations as fields in which job growth will be above the provincial average.

Into Action

The Department is currently undertaking or discussing plans for expansion on several levels:

Revised curriculum: we have substantively revised our first- and second-year curricula; we are currently making substantive changes to our third-year courses; and we are beginning to re-assess our fourth-year courses.

Honours: We are beginning to develop a proposal for an Honours in English.

Public speaking: We are enhancing the role of public speaking and oral communication in our curricula by way of collaborating with Theatre to offer new courses at the second- and fourth-year.

Online, blended, and video-conferencing courses: We are expanding our offerings and innovating with teaching and learning approaches.

Interdisciplinary Studies courses: We are expanding our collaboration with Media Studies and other departments to create more Interdisciplinary Studies courses.

Master of Arts Degree: We are collaborating with Creative Writing to develop an interdisciplinary MA.

Digital Humanities: We are developing a course in Digital Humanities, and faculty members are actively engaged in Digital Humanities research and community initiatives.

Post-Degree Diploma: We are developing a Post-Degree Diploma in English.

Professional writing: We are exploring new possibilities for the instruction of professional writing through new upper-level courses and the development of a post-degree diploma in Professional Writing.

Ongoing recruitment: We are beginning the process of identifying areas where we will need expertise.