March 25th, 2016
Department Meeting
ML 410, 2pm

**Attendance:** Dwight Atkinson, Damián Baca, Meg Lota Brown, Maritza Cardenas, Roger Dahood, Alison Deming, Jerry Hogle, Julie Iromuanya, Daniel Kasper, Hayriye Kayi-Aydar, Geta LeSeur, Adela Licona, Lee Medovoi, Sharonne Meyerson, Tom Miller, Susan Miller-Cochran, Tenney Nathanson, Madelyn Pawlowski, Stephanie Pearmain, Shelley Rodrigo, Scott Selisker, Racheal Shertzer, Marcia Simon, Johanna Skibsrud, Nick Smith, Chris Tardy, Joshua Wilson, Lynda Zwinger

**Welcome:** Lee welcomed the Department for our March meeting. He prefaced the meeting with a series of discussion items and announcements.

The minutes from our February 26 Department meeting were approved.

**Discussion: Graduate Student work conditions and the “Pink Hotel”**

Lee: He started the conversation by noting that negotiations are happening with SBS and Dean JP Jones to help out department with transition costs. Lee stated that there may already be plans in the college to make additional investments in graduate student support, across the college. He mentioned that SBS is often pushed to the very end of the Spring semester to see if they can do anything strategically. At the moment, we’re waiting to see enrollments, paying off deficits, etc. Lee noted that as of now, we’ll most likely wait for the Fall to implement anything else because more time is needed.

There was discussion about different issues affecting graduate students: Workload and work environment issues at the Pink Hotel.

There was discussion about the background to the Pink Hotel. Lee stated that the college approached us last Fall about security issues, and let us know that there is going to be a building opening up. He noted that it is currently occupied by the School of Information. He said the location is on 2nd avenue, north of Speedway. It’s an old motel that U of A has appropriated over the years. It has a courtyard, picnic tables, and foliage. Lee mentioned it would be nice to have a welcome event in the Fall for the Pink Hotel, so that is something we’ll keep in mind over the summer.

**Development in the Department: Prison Teaching Initiative**

Lee moved on to the next agenda item to discuss a new donor for the Department. He stated that the idea is a project to do educational work in the prison system. Lee mentioned that this donor has done work for many years in New York and now she’s getting this started at UA. Lee reminded the faculty that he sent an email letting everyone know they can get involved with Erec Toso and the prison creative writing project—their journal (that is eventually published) is called *Rainshadow*.

Tom Miller: He noted that some faculty might not want to be directly involved, but may serve on a board of faculty/community leaders. He emphasized that folks should think about re-entry programs. Tom noted that the recidivism rate for people after they leave prisons is horrible—engagement with community writing programs could support people dealing with substance or other sorts of abuse, and may be a footprint to attract other development support.
Alison Deming: She noted that the poetry center has a workshop for ex cons.

There was discussion about needing really experienced people who have street smarts and creds so as not to put academics into situations where it won’t end well. Folks talked about whether this was just for prisons or detainment centers as well.

Lee: He noted that collective brainstorming is good for this topic, and one doesn’t have to commit to doing the workshops in the prison but rather, folks can just be interested in being involved and help think it through.

**Awards Ceremony and other Prospective Donors**

Lee: He stated that one of the reasons we have the Awards Ceremony is to invite people back and showcase the community of the Department, and express appreciation for folks if they’ve supported or done something important for us. Lee asked if anyone knows someone who is interested in supporting the Department, then we can bring them to the awards Ceremony, have them network with folks, etc. In other words, if there’s a project that someone’s interested in pursuing, it’s really good to discuss and announce it to each other to connect potential donors.

**Update on World Literature Major and other Interdisciplinary initiatives/forming a faculty group**

Lee: He stated that there is lots of interdisciplinary stuff going on, and sometimes we’re not on the uptake as soon as these things begin. For example, Lee noted that there’s human rights work going on and work going on to develop border studies, and even the GIDP at the graduate level. Lee suggested it might be smart for us to try to be a little more pro-active and maybe try to get some kind of faculty group going that’s understood as a group of faculty who are interested in either developing or helping to coordinate various kinds of engagements between English and these various interdisciplinary projects. Lee noted that this is something he brought up to council and they were supportive of that.

Lee proposed that maybe later this semester before everyone leaves, we’d look into convening and having the group look at this, and also see what we might want to initiate ourselves. Lee noted that having a designated faculty group would be really helpful.

Tom Miller: Tom noted that we may have something more specific like Global Studies, something this group can identify with intellectually, as opposed to institutionally. He stated that interdisciplinary studies is something everyone in principal is in favor of. Where, if you talk about global Studies, or something with more substantive engagement with peoples’ intellectual work, it could help.

There was discussion about other ideas, and the example of American Studies. It’s something that interests faculty from across the graduate programs. It was noted that this is probably something that would happen on the undergraduate level. Lee noted that it seems like people who have certain kinds of affiliations, certain kinds of intellectual commitments that are not fully captured by what program they’re in, would need a space for those things to get explored. He emphasized that there are people in different programs that share interests but never get a chance to talk to each other. He stated that we’re trying to tap some of the energy that is latent in the Department but our structure makes it harder for this to be achieved.
Tom added that he’s been here since 1988, and a majority of people here are Assistant Professors, hired within the last 5 years. He suggested that maybe a futures group to actively and constructively build the future of this Department would be a good idea. With interdisciplinary studies, Tom noted that it’s an incredibly exciting moment to be here.

Dwight Atkinson: Dwight asked is it too little to think interdisciplinary just within the Department? Would there be a way of having this involving other Departments?

Lee responded that maybe we can find folks who want to prioritize this at a service level.

Alison Deming: She noted that we’ve been talking for years about wanting team-taught interdisciplinary courses—for example, faculty from Creative Writing, SBS, Climate Science, etc…this requires breaking down some walls and money, but she is interested in conversations to brainstorm this. She emphasized that we need focus and will to get this done.

Jerry Hogle: He asked if the setting is more and more right since RCM began for this kind of thinking. He noted that if you try and become too interdisciplinary, it creates fear as well.

Tom stated that a lot of people want to blame RCM for their own limitations. He suggested that if you teach a course, 75% is coming back to your own department. He noted that people are afraid of RCM with interdisciplinary studies.

Lee mentioned that just to give an example, the major in human rights may be SBS, or GWS, but it’s being put together with courses from a number of different Departments. He followed up that even from an RCM point of view considering social justice, literature and genres of human rights, which if we have folks interested in these things like political rhetorics, it behooves us to think of courses we can develop to enrich our own curriculum.

Adela Licona: She mentioned that she likes the idea of doing brainstorming sessions, but she wonders if we did them some kind of regularity (once a month, etc) to also highlight work that’s already happening, so we can show how we’re getting it done to build these initiatives/projects and possibly inspire others. She mentioned that we acknowledge there’s many of us doing exactly what this thing is right now and that it’s already present. She concluded that we need time to think out loud together, but to also see how it’s already working out together.

There was discussion about exploring these ideas, and that Lee would try to assemble something to get a call out but we have to think about it from a workload perspective too.

Tom Miller noted that for the future, what this Department will look like in 10 years, and asked how we want this to look. He suggested to construct a strategic plan outside the institutional parameters that can really stifle this kind of activity. He explored the possibility of inviting graduate assistants, and staging conversations with a retreat, and engaging Department council.

Tenney Nathanson: He noted that a bunch of people now are not very far past tenure, and they can be part of these conversations as well.

**Happy Hour Planning**
There was discussion about a Thursday happy hour for just faculty to start with.

Daniel Kasper made an announcement about New Directions and invited the Department to attend.

Lynda Zwinger announced the AZ Quarterly Symposium, and Racheal Shertzer said folks can send her events/conferences that she forward to undergraduate students.

The meeting was adjourned.