AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Brittney Renee Paulsen for the degree of Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in English presented on May 27th, 2009. Title: What is an English Major?: A Comparative Exploration of Perceptions of English Studies at OSU.

Abstract approved: __________________________________________________________

Dr. Laura Rice

My project is designed to determine how the English major and English Studies exist at OSU, through the collection of perceptions and opinions about English Studies at OSU from students and faculty (both inside and outside of the English department) via email surveys. I used secondary research to determine how the English major and English Studies exist nationally, with a full discussion of the sources of crisis and hope that attend the profession generally. I also researched how English studies exist locally through the collection of relevant statistics concerning university financing, salaries, enrollment, student credit hours, and faculty tenure status, in order to contextualize, explain, and analyze the opinions presented by my survey respondents. Overall, through my surveys, I found that English studies and students face many of the same situations as English departments nationally. This means that English studies are deeply integral to and appreciated by the OSU community, particularly by English majors, while English majors and faculty face the perceptual and material crises that go along with a lack of publicity and visibility, a disassociation between English studies and research, low faculty pay, rising service course loads, the decline in tenure-track faculty, a lack of outside funding, and negative perceptions about what English majors study and the material benefits of English studies. My conclusion is that the department, along with the OSU administration and students, should focus on continuing tenure track hires; strengthening ties to outside donors in the private sector; creating more visible department events; publicizing its goals, benefits, and research orientation; creating a visible alumni network or advisory board for faculty and student needs; and increasing the awareness of career trends and possibilities stemming from English studies among English majors and the university at large.

Key Words: English studies, English major, Oregon State University
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What is an English Major?: A Comparative Exploration of
Perceptions of English Studies at OSU

by

Brittney Renee Paulsen

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, University Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

Brittney Renee Paulsen, Author
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What is an English Major?:
A Comparative Exploration of Perceptions of English Studies at OSU

Introduction

As an English major at OSU, I have encountered many conflicting reports and perceptions about my major – about what I study, what skills I should have, the difficulty of my studies, what I will go on to do, my role within the university, and what materials I use to study. I have also seen and lived with deep material inequalities between majors in the English department and students pursuing other major programs in other departments.

My project is designed around my own wish to determine if and in what way these conflicts and inequalities manifest themselves within the wider OSU community through the administration of email surveys to students and faculty/staff members inside and outside of the English department.

The title “What is an English Major” means I am determining what an English major at OSU is, through the collection of opinions and perceptions about the English major and English studies at OSU, as well as researched information about the material realities of English majors and English studies at OSU. I provide the data from my email surveys and discussions of the significance of the responses in the section of this document called “Local Discussions.”

In determining what an English major is at OSU, I also conducted extensive secondary research to identify structural, historical, and cultural causes of the variety of
conflicts and inequalities that attend English studies at OSU. This identification involved extensive database research and discussion of literature published by English professionals about the state of English departments and English studies nationally. Additionally, identification of the structural causes of conflicts and inequalities at OSU necessitated secondary research of statistical information regarding university budgeting, financing by college, faculty salaries, enrollment numbers, student credit hours, and faculty numbers and tenure status, as well as a collection of senior exit surveys and information from a panel review from the English department in 2006. The research conducted regarding the situations of English departments, professionals, and students nationally is presented in the largest section of this document, called “National Discussions,” which immediately precedes the “Local Discussions” section. The secondary statistical and review information from OSU is included as reinforcement information for the opinions and perspectives from my survey respondents discussed in the “Local Discussions” section.
Significance

In determining how the English major and English studies exist at OSU, it is my goal to provide for myself and for people inside and outside of the department a transparent and understandable view of the English major and the department at OSU—a view from which some of the conflicts and inequalities I and others have experienced can be addressed, understood, and amended if need be.

I also aim to promote understanding of my major and English studies within the OSU community through research and discussion, including knowledge of the history of English studies in the U.S., the specific careers of English majors, and the scholarship conducted by a wide variety of English professionals.

Further, my study will provide any OSU student with a deeper understanding of the material realities and priorities of the university, both through statistics and through testimony.
National Discussions

My question “What is an English major” is a question of definition – of asking how the English major and the studies it involves are conceptualized, what people think English majors do, what they do do, and the circumstances that develop these existences – the perceived and real existences of English majors. My questions is likewise “How is an English major” because the existential reality of the English major and English majors (as people) are grounded in the contexts being described, at length, in these sections (the “National Discussions”). The title question for my thesis belies not only my own feeling of confusion over what exactly I study and the skills I am meant to acquire but also the confusions I have felt from others upon explaining my major and the confusions that a wide variety of professional sources express over the state of their discipline and their professional direction.

To work toward my goal of definition, this “National Discussions” section is presented as a structural framework of situations in which to ground the “Local Discussions” about the English major and English Studies at OSU. This section should be seen as extensive contextualization for the discussions of my survey research that follow, which are intentionally shorter and more focused. The survey research is more important in its emphasis on which situations are most important and/or problematic at OSU, with less emphasis on why those situations are problematic, which is the subject of this section. This section involves longer explanations, but it should not be seen as the focal point of my research project.
Verbal Acknowledgements of Crisis

The way that people talk about their discipline seems a good indication of the way that they experience their discipline, their perspective on their discipline, and also how they believe others may perceive their discipline. Among the various sources I have consulted, there is almost a standardized language to talk about the various crises, as though the problems facing the humanities and English studies are so well known as to be part of a wider public consciousness – public in this case including those within and also outside of academia. I make note of the testimony of various professionals within English and humanities departments of a variety of crises as proof of a public consciousness of crisis, beyond and above what analysts point to as “real” sources of crisis. The great variety of problems and situations facing the humanities and English studies will be discussed in the pages following to provide a clearer picture of what the professionals may mean when they speak of “crisis” and also to provide a wider semi-categorical framework into which I may profitably place the wide variety of opinions I have gathered about English and humanities studies at OSU specifically.

Humanities Crisis

The language of choice humanities professionals use to talk about the variety of problems facing their disciplines is “the crisis in the humanities” (Cohen 10). More correctly, however, the Modern Language Association (MLA) makes reference to “the crises in the humanities” (Howard, “The Talk” para. 1) because, as I will demonstrate in
the following pages, the challenges facing the humanities have many sources and manifestations. One pair of professionals sum up this multiplicity of problems, saying that “few observers of higher education would deny that support for the humanities is declining in an environment in which universities are increasingly ordered according to the material interests, conditions, and designs of the sciences, technology, and the professions” (Davidson and Goldberg para. 2). There is widespread consensus among these professionals about some sort of humanities decline as well as the acknowledgement that the causes behind such a decline are myriad.

**English Crisis**

The general presumption of crisis in the humanities reflects directly upon and is conceptually connected to a general crisis in English departments and English studies. In the words of one professional, “for many Americans but also for a number of public and private institutions of higher learning, the humanities and English have lost some of their luster” (Cohen 10). The state of English studies, as can be seen from this reference, is by and large less a “crisis” than a perceived fall from grace into chaos. One scholar writes that “in the vortices of the culture wars, it was commonplace to read articles in both the popular and scholarly press noting the demise of literary studies” (Schwartz 16). This expert conceives of a decline in English studies located in the recent past, while another professional indicates that “for decades…English perennially conceived of itself in a state of dissolution and decline” (Stroupe 612). Fenton, another professional, seems to agree, saying that English studies “are always placed among the chronically
ailing…Departments of English are being cited as on their last legs” (Fenton 203). He situates the decline as both perennial and current. Peterson concurs with the historical situation of decline, in that English “has been imagining its own demise for almost as long as it has been around” (Peterson para. 1), and Rosenblatt reiterates Fenton’s leg metaphor, telling us that “what is being said of the study of literature generally these days – [is] that it cannot stand on its own as an intellectual endeavor” (Rosenblatt 62). Rohan Maitzen, of Dalhousie University, says outright that “English as a discipline seems particularly prone to self-doubt, internal convulsions, and obsessive self-scrutiny and metacriticism (Goldstein para. 8). He indicates that the decline figured within English studies is endemic to the discipline and perhaps a function of its practices. This point cannot be overlooked, as it posits the willingness of those within English studies to engage in self-reflexive, deconstructive criticism as one reason for a perpetual sense of “decline” – whether it be an impending decline or a decline from which to be resurrected.

A variety of professionals posit an idea as to what English studies is declining into, and most generally the destination is figured as a puzzle – be it “the puzzle of the English major” (Laurence, “Notes” 3) or “the jigsaw puzzle of English” (Freedman para. 15). English is figured as declining from coherent, identifiable discipline into an internally fragmented area of study. Tatum also points to a sense of external fragmentation, in that “we exist in and share a general culture largely puzzled about what we do, suspicious about devoting resources to the teaching not only of critical reading and thinking but also of creative writing” (Tatum 33). According to these professionals, English studies faces a fundamental identity crisis on a number of fronts, and the pages that follow here explore the areas that contribute to this version of crisis.
Clayton brings up the student perspective of crisis as based less in decline than a more general sense of uselessness, likely because students enter a discipline at singular historical moments often for short periods of time, making it harder for them to grasp, and much less experience, the full history of their chosen field. From the perspective of an advisor, Clayton says “students come to my office…to tell me, bravely, that though they know English is ‘useless,’…they’ll take their chances as an English major” (Clayton 122). The students’ sense of uselessness speaks to the deep public consciousness of crisis in English studies. Students (including myself) are unlikely in their undergraduate education to have read the internal journals of English studies (the ADE Bulletin, the Chronicle of Higher Education, College English, PMLA, CEA Critic, College Composition and Communication, for example) in which professionals document their own history and sense of decline, yet they acknowledge the same sense of crisis.

Higher Education Crisis

The general crisis in higher education (colleges and universities) is likely the most publically acknowledged, declared, and understood of all the versions of crisis I will discuss. This crisis seems to cut across and affect all departments and colleges within a variety of institutions. As one professional puts it, “the one thing most institutions have in common is a sense of impending doom. One has only to look at the Chronicle of Higher Education to get the idea that Armageddon is just around the corner” (Bowen 14). This crisis seems more clearly and narrowly material than the crises within English studies and the humanities, and this perhaps has given it more force and weight in the
public consciousness – especially this year, in 2009, with widespread media coverage of
the current U.S. financial crisis. In the analysis of one humanities professional,
“declining federal and state dollars combined with weak revenues from even the
healthiest endowments have left school reeling…presidents and provosts are scrambling
to refashion their schools as quasi-private institutions” (Kolodny 153). This analysis is
from 2005, the year I entered college, not far removed from the current moment, except
that there is more talk within the current Presidential administration of stimulus money
for education. The public and widespread sense of material crisis in higher education has
an immense impact on how professionals configure the various sources of crisis within
English studies and the humanities – including how they decide which sources count
most and which can and must be addressed first and foremost. Reduction of hefty
governmental support for higher education seems to have also greatly changed how
professionals view their field and their responsibilities to students, which unexpectedly
contributes to less-material sources of crisis.

**Sources of Crisis**

This section is expansive and many of the following subsections are
interconnected and explain one another. I have included three main section headings –
Degree Awards, Institutional Situations, and Public Situations. These headings are
interrelated and overlap, and as such should not be taken as clear-cut categories.
Degree Awards

Numbers of Degrees Awarded – Humanities

According to one source, “‘the absolute numbers of bachelor’s and doctoral degrees in the humanities have increased slightly in the last thirty years,’ but they ‘have lost ground at both levels as a percentage of the total number of degrees conferred in a time of maximum growth’” (Cohen 10). In other words, more students than ever are receiving humanities educations, but other fields and disciplines are growing faster than the humanities, and it is fair to say that the degrees available to graduates are becoming increasingly diverse.

It is difficult, given this analysis, to say that humanities departments (as a whole) are quantitatively shrinking within themselves. It is more possible to conclude that humanities departments are growing at a slower rate than other departments, or rather that other departments are growing up faster around them and making them comparatively small. As should be clear in later pages, the ways that the humanities are growing differently than other departments are more indicative of a sort of crisis than the numbers of degrees awarded seem to indicate. I conclude that, in general, the numbers of degrees awarded nationally in the humanities in the recent past is not actually decreasing substantially. However, the fast growth of non-humanities disciplines has caused a real crisis for the humanities, as the humanities are becoming less visible. This issue of
visibility – tied in a small way to the numbers of degrees awarded – is discussed more fully in a later section.

**Numbers of Degrees Awarded - English**

Is the English degree in decline? Even in the most narrowly quantitative analysis, sources conflict. Taking a long term view, according to Department of Education data, “from 1987 to 2005, the number of annual degrees awarded increased from 36,353 to 55,265, and the number [of English degrees] per 100 degrees increased from 3.62 to 3.79, with ups and downs in between” (Laurence, “Undergraduate Degrees” 3). The absolute number of degrees have increased, meaning that the departments themselves are still growing in a quantitative sense. Additionally, over the long term English departments have not lost ground in the percentage of all undergraduate degrees awarded, meaning that the growth of English departments is not merely a function of population growth. English departments seem to have grown enough (in class size, physical size, and/or faculty size) to keep up with a growing population, and these departments are even producing a slightly higher percentage of graduates overall.

The conflicting sources report a smaller set of the data, which is still valid because even small declines in degree numbers can have a quick and profound impact on institutional perception of the health of a department and subsequently where it focuses attention and efforts. If a decline in undergraduate English degrees has occurred, it is in the short term. One source reports that “between 1993 and 1997, Department of Education data show, the number of bachelor’s degrees granted in English declined by
A report released in December 2006 by the Department of Education shows that “even as the absolute number of bachelor’s degree awards in English has grown, the number of bachelor’s degrees in English per 100 bachelor’s degrees in all fields has continued the slow decline that began in 1993” (Laurence, “Undergraduate Degrees” 4). Combined, these sources indicate that English degrees have experienced recent periods of decline and subsequent recovery in absolute numbers, while in the shorter term, English degrees make up a slightly smaller percentage of the total numbers of degrees awarded overall.

From these conflicting reports, I conclude that there is no significant decline in numbers or percentages of English undergraduate degrees that would contribute to a “real” crisis in English studies. At the same time, the fact that the numbers of English degrees have not significantly increased may contribute to a perception of crisis, in that other areas of study have likely increased their numbers of degrees awarded or experienced more expansive growth than English studies. American popular consciousness views areas of visible growth more favorably than areas of relative stability and slow growth. I will talk more about this situation at OSU particularly in later sections.
Institutional Situations

Lack of Administrative and Public Financial Support

Many of the various sources I consulted spoke of a general disconnect between administrative priorities at universities and the priorities of humanities departments. As an English department Chair, Annette Kolodny says, after consulting with a wide variety of institutional administrations, that “the humanities disciplines in general and English in particular were not any administrator’s priority. For most, the humanities weren’t even on the radar screen” when budgetary decisions were being made and priorities being set (Kolodny 155). She also reports that rising student enrollments in programs were less-than-influential in these decisions (Kolodny 155). The areas of highest priority for administrators were “those areas that consistently bring in overhead, indirect cost recovery, and big donors. A program in planetary sciences or a cancer center in the medical school can do all of the above. English departments, like most of the humanities, cannot” (Kolodny 159). To summarize, Kolodny found that administrative priorities are determined by the potential for departments to make money for the institution or for departments to support themselves without state dollars. This type of prioritization should be seen as a “real” source of crisis, in that the policy of administrative support for financially lucrative departments privileges departments and colleges already able to receive more-than-adequate support from external sources. More importantly, this sort of policy categorically excludes support for those departments most reliant on, in service of, and tied to the institution. In essence, the free market has a large pull on administrative
priorities, over and above student interest in and need for certain programs and departments. This is not necessarily self-interest on the part of administrators; the turn of administration toward monetary/material concerns is partially a function of the “crisis of higher education,” both real and perceived, which influences and even dictates priorities.

How does a lack of administrative support produce problems and crisis for English studies? One professional references the “financial constraints that have been with us for almost a generation” (Knapp 54), the “us” referring to English departments. Another professional states that financial support has made certain types of work fundamentally impossible within current English departments (giving the example of literary theory, which Williams views as having fewer current “innovators” than in the recent past); that literary theorists currently focus their attention on past theory, rather than present literary theory, “fits our time of shrunken support for the humanities… the current generation subsists on pinched diets” (Williams para. 23). Certainly 20 years of financial constraints will limit the growth of a department (especially in the amounts of scholarships it can offer, how it can hire and pay professors, and what services it can offer to students), and a department incapable of growth (defined broadly) is unlikely to catch the attention of administrators.

The market-value policy of administrative support can lead to cyclical neglect of English departments (and other humanities departments) which have been historically disassociated from the market economy and the private sector (an issue I discuss in later sections). Administrative financial neglect of English departments makes it even harder for English departments to connect with outside donors, who would help English departments become more independent and financially lucrative. I spend so much time
here discussing the results of administrative neglect because many of the sources I encountered in doing this project (within published works and within the surveys I conducted) pointed to administrative decisions as a primary cause of funding problems within English departments – with the implicit assumption that financial problems are at the core of a variety of crises within English studies.

In fact, some professionals view any lack of administrative support for the humanities (including English studies) as simply another way to contribute to the “crisis in higher education,” because “the distinctive underpinning of the modern research university (as well as of the liberal-arts college) is the humanities. If all we want is expertise, industry is a far better place to learn science and technology than a university” (Davidson and Goldberg para. 13). If a University administration is increasingly focused on the wants and needs of industry (which can be identified reasonably with the market) at the expense of the humanities, it will simply undermine its own claims to prestige and unique knowledge – and it would likely be replaced by or become industry itself, separated from a sense of public benefit in anything but the most narrow monetary terms.

A variety of professionals believe that the humanities themselves (and English studies) have not done a good enough job of justifying and explaining their programs and subsequent benefits to administrators or society at large. If administrative support (financial or otherwise) is somewhat withheld from humanities and English studies based on the perception that these studies do not benefit the administration or the institution in specific and tangible ways, then the professionals within these studies can try to reshape this perception and reclaim their right of self-definition. In the words of two humanities professionals, “we must face the challenge and assume the social responsibility of
translating our specialized knowledge in ways that might inform the public, contribute to policy discussions, and, in the process, show students, faculty members, university administrators, and state legislators the importance of the humanities” (Davidson and Goldberg para. 28). Another professional recommends that other humanities professionals “justify your existence in language that a high school graduate, a scientist, or even a university president can understand…come up with clear answers to questions such as, What roles can the humanities play in an increasingly globalized and interdependent world?” (Kolodny 162). These calls to action indicate that the lack of administrative support and financing (a real source of crisis) is fueled by a crisis of perception, particularly the perception that English and humanities studies are not beneficial to the administration.

One English department chair warns of the real problems behind this crisis of perception: “not to know one’s department well and communicate it well, inside and outside the college, seemed to me an actual danger: an invitation to be shaped in unforgiving ways by market pressures with the new administration and beyond” (Moffat 25). These “unforgiving ways” are made more concrete by another professional: English departments have become perceived “as narrowly ideological sites; as sites at which only rarified, rather silly discussions occur; or as sites in which only such skills as writing and document production are taught, with no realization that those skills are grounded in theoretical constructs” (Gutierrez 1274). The need for active and clear assertion of identity, benefit, depth, and importance on the part of the humanities is a common thread throughout the analyses of many humanities professionals I have consulted, and will be carried through and expanded upon in later sections.
The Tenure-Track Decline

There is widespread acknowledgement of the declining numbers of tenure-track teachers in higher education, especially in the humanities and English studies. According to one source, instead of hiring adequate numbers of tenure-track professors, “many research universities have opted instead to staff [composition and sophomore literature courses] with full-time, non-tenure-track faculty members, TAs, and adjunct instructors” (Cohen 11). This is not only a standard practice within English studies but reflective of “a University practice (reflecting nationwide practice) of hiring contract faculty instead of tenure line faculty” (Stroupe 623).

There are many critics of the tenure system, but it has an important purpose for professors and practitioners of a discipline, helping them to be responsible to, supportive of, and invested in the well being of an institution. Tenure-line faculty can also lead more stable and potentially productive lives within the tenure system. In the words of one professional, “we are all troubled by the number of old grad-school friends who, Joadlike, must uproot their lives every two or three years to pick up temporary adjunct positions or instructorships whenever those positions arise” (McKelly 2). Tenure directly challenges the logic of the free market in promoting community identification and mutual support rather than endless competition and alienation. Because the students within a university are constantly rotating and changing, the tenure track helps to provide at least a basic sense of direction and purpose to any given department, separate from the needs and wants of the central administration.

The most troubling aspects of the real decline of the tenure track within the university is that it appears involuntary and mostly a function of diminishing budgets.
rather than a belief that tenure is bad for professionals and students alike. A reliance on non-tenure-track faculty (TAs, adjuncts, and instructors) may have roots in a deeper penetration of market logic into university policy, but it may also have a root in the “crisis of higher education” (material crisis) – or be a root of that crisis. Non-tenure-track faculty are generally paid less than tenure track faculty, are contracted for shorter periods of time, and are less eligible for the types of promotion and prestige offered on the tenure track. While there is monetary prosperity at stake for the non-tenure-track faculty, there is also power at stake. As one professional comments, “instructors perform few of the essential department governance and other service activities, including curriculum design, supervision, and review, activities that are left to a shrinking pool of tenure-line faculty members already hard pressed” (Cohen 16).

Not only do tenured faculty become overburdened, non-tenure-track faculty are somewhat distanced from the power structures within a department and have less opportunity to advocate for their needs and interests – as well as salaries. The rise of non-tenure-track faculty within universities is a movement toward an exploited, uncertain, often ill-paid workforce, not as a function of declining talents on the part of professionals but as a byproduct of financial crisis and market logic. The tenure crisis is a real source of crisis in that it undermines the identity of English studies as part of the humanities (as exploitation doesn’t accord well with humanistic endeavors). Additionally, the members of English departments are subjected to rising levels of financial crisis as average pay decreases with every additional non-tenure-track hire. Non-tenure-track faculty are hit the hardest in receiving less power and a smaller salary
while performing equal if not more work for the department without an extensive role in departmental governance.

Given the lesser status imposed upon non-tenure-track faculty (association with substantial work, less pay, less prestige, shorter-term employment), a perceptual crisis is probable with increases in non-tenure-track faculty. A department is more likely to see itself in a state of crisis with a rise in non-tenure-track faculty, and exterior perception of the value of the department will likely also decline. There is also a stereotype that associates lower pay with lower skill, and without active promotion of the considerable skills and equal needs of non-tenure-track faculty, the rise of the non-tenure track can lead to a crisis of perception based on “declining skill” instead of declining budgets. This perception can erode the credibility of a department, which only further feeds a declining budget. As a side note, this discussion should not be mistaken as an invective against non-tenure-track faculty; in fact, I am advocating for elimination of the “class” associations that go along with the rise in non-tenure-track faculty, incorporation of these faculty into the tenure line, and increased budgets for hirings to help with these movements.

**Restrictive Qualifications for Tenure, Promotion, and Prestige**

The relatively slim definition of what counts as prestigious “work” and subsequent qualification for promotion and prestige within English departments has contributed considerably to both real and perceived crises in English studies. Books and articles (with variations) are the main venues of promotion and prestige within English
departments, and other forms of work or scholarly endeavors (like community actions and outreach) seem either devalued in this system or at least less valued and less prominent, something which has become a major problem for English studies particularly. Not only the work itself but its citation by others becomes important for prestige, which is also problematic for English studies and the humanities for a variety of reasons.

First, the promotion and prestige system values a perceived status over and above more concrete or localized versions of improvement and good work. In the words of one professional, “much of what goes on in and around English departments concerns status rather than concrete well-being, or improvement of one’s work” (Ohmann 583). Though I don’t have solid criteria for what constitutes “good work,” it seems problematic to say that citation of work is the mark of good work. There are power and prestige structures within citation also. The politics of a journal will determine what articles are acceptable or unacceptable, and some institutions are better able to afford scholars the time, space, and resources to publish and travel, independent of the endeavors and skills of the scholar her or himself. The privileging of traditional publishing and citation can cause a crisis for smaller institutions on slim budgets who require their professionals to teach, prepare, and grade as actively and as often as they research, read, and write. Within these departments and institutions, professionals have the obligation “to secure professional privilege and status” (Ohmann 584) through publication and citation, but they also have the separate and interfering need to teach and prepare students for careers. Professionals within English departments on tight budgets are not likely to have the luxury of separate
research faculty or assistants and face tough and ongoing decisions about where to place and distribute their time and resources.

This is not to say that publication and citation are not vital and necessary to English studies as a discipline, but rather that the ways that the lives of English studies professionals and their students can be improved reach far and wide beyond the traditional, prestigious forms of literary scholarship. According to one professional, “despite contemporary culture’s deification of the fungible, ‘productivity’ is not necessarily a material phenomenon, mensurable in pages and stored on shelves” (McKelly 8). The qualifications for tenure and promotion to which English studies has been committed (mainly published books and articles, along with citation) have kept our definitions of productivity – and even success – severely narrow, leaving little room for other forms of work and professional advocacy to become valuable and valued in society. The real crisis here is in the choice (in terms of time and focus) that overburdened professors are forced to make between teaching and prestige (research), and the crisis of perception lies most strongly in the way that “success” within English studies has been divorced from public considerations and needs. Scholars are compelled to focus on the status and perhaps originality of their ideas within the discipline to receive promotion and tenure, not on how their ideas connect to, reach, and directly benefit the larger public that they ostensibly serve. Members outside English studies can pick up on this deferred focus, and a crisis ensues when the public begins to view English studies as irrelevant to their material existence and immediate concerns. I discuss this crisis further in later sections, but in this section I want to emphasize particularly the connections between
promotional practices (what counts as prestigious) and the problematic perception that English studies are divorced from public, immediate concerns.

Additionally, the limited portfolio of “valuable” work authorized within literary studies tends to hold back new and emerging disciplines within English studies that are interdisciplinary and/or relevant to contemporary concerns and technologies. The best example of this is the digital humanities, an emerging field creating links between contemporary technologies and traditional discourses and practices within the humanities, especially English studies. Professionals engaging in this new and lively subfield will likely be marginalized by traditional promotional practices because, for example, “the English department at the University of Victoria still puts journal articles and monographs front and center in its tenure and promotion guidelines” (Howard, “Literary Geospaces” para. 25). Digital humanities professionals may choose to perform traditional sorts of scholarship, but these guidelines don’t necessarily promote creative thought and innovation in this field, and it doesn’t follow the spirit of the subfield, toward integration and conversation with contemporary practices (Howard, “Literary Geospaces” para. 25). On top of this, the requirements of citation produce a crisis because “the most prominent humanities scholar in a small or emerging subfield may, for some time, be cited only within limited circles, even though the profession as a whole recognizes the value of that scholar’s work” (Kolodny 158). Citation seems to favor the older or more traditional fields with larger numbers of established scholars able to make citations, which further separates literary studies from contemporary and emerging concerns which hold the attentions of society. This is by no means an inevitable situation or one endemic only to literary studies but one produced by institutional decisions and material realities.
**Reliance on Service Classes**

In this section, I distinguish service classes from other English classes offered by English departments primarily based on the enrollment in these courses by non-majors and non-minors. Professionals use a diverse array of terms to talk about these sorts of courses, including service courses, freshman composition, writing courses (a connotation I explain in a later section), and general education courses. At OSU, we would most generally call them “Baccalaureate (Bacc) Core Courses” or BCC. I choose the label “service” courses to reflect the usefulness of these classes to a University institution and to students – and to English departments receiving some money for them, and to reflect the history of “servility” associated with these sorts of courses.

First of all, the case for the unique relationship between service courses and English must be made clear. English is fundamental and common to most students at OSU – either because they speak in it and write it inside and/or outside of class or because English “is the only subject taught from grammar to graduate school” (Miller and Jackson 685). In other words, English (reading, writing, and speaking it) is integral to life experience, and therefore in-depth encounters with it are required by a wide range of disciplines. Also, English classes – in the name at least – seem familiar to students and seem a popular choice to fill general education requirements. In this vein, the huge percentage of non-majors taking English courses should not be surprising. One English department professional reports that “40.7% of the average department’s total teaching load is devoted to freshman English. Another 10.7% is devoted to such service courses as journalism, technical writing, and English for foreign students” (Wilcox 445), which is similar to the numbers reported for other (non-freshman) English courses: “the average
percentage of non-majors enrolled in undergraduate English courses above the freshman level is 55.8” (Wilcox 444).

This high percentage of service courses, according to one group of professionals, came to historical fruition alongside several other historical moments – namely a mass exodus from English studies in the 1970s, the growth and rebirth of composition within literary studies (the crisis which I cover in the next section), and the rise of non-tenure-track faculty between the 1970s and 1990s (arguably into the current moment), which I have already discussed (Miller and Jackson 683). The perceptual and real crises that attend the rise of service courses in English studies have to do partly with the implicit connections between service courses and a decline in devoted English majors and the rise of the non-tenure track. The connection is palpable in this professional’s call to action: “English faculty members at research universities like mine need to seek new ways to save what we value most about the humanities and our discipline before we become service units composed primarily of poorly paid workers” (Cohen 12).

The rises of the non-tenure track and of service courses are historically connected and also materially connected. In the face of a decline in solid majors (with them, solid income, solid support and justification for English professors), departments opened themselves up for service courses and the income and justification it offered them in the face of temporary decline, and the budget decline accompanying the reduction of solid majors left departments in need of less-expensive and more expendable labor – the non-tenure-track faculty. The crisis that goes along with this historical coincidence is real in the sense of the material reduction represented by the rise of service courses and perceptual in the connection between less-prestigious employment (the non-tenure-track)
and service courses, “which are already marked by their history of part-time staffing as dangerous to one’s cultural capital” (Knapp 57).

Another crisis stemming from the rise of service courses is that of real and perceived identity. In the widespread acceptance of and responsibility for non-majors, English found a different sort of justification for itself – not the professional development of methods of literary analysis and literary theory to pass on to future practitioners and teachers of English but rather the training of the general public in reading and writing, ubiquitous and necessary to most disciplines. This had been part of English studies all along, but it had been suppressed historically in the first half of the 20th century as English developed itself into a discipline – perhaps the antithesis of a service unit. According to Ohmann, English professionals “perform certain services at society’s behest to earn a livelihood, but these are not the parts of our work that accord best with professional dignity, or with what we think society ought to want from us” (Ohmann 580). In other words, the departmental missions that English had developed in order to earn itself the “hereditary title and rank” (Ohmann 583) of a discipline, including the creation of theoretical frameworks, did not include service courses for the University due to a necessary desire to claim some degree of authority and independence as a field of study (a necessity I discuss in a later section about the birth of English in American colleges). The material need behind service courses was in direct conflict with the missions and training of English professionals generally, which produced a real (material) identity crisis – where to put one’s effort and how to adapt resources to a new reality – and also a perceptual identity crisis based in the contradictions between professional aspirations and material restrictions.
There is a lingering perception among English professionals that further increases in and/or continued reliance on and acceptance of service course duties will materially erode English departments. According to Kolodny, “the department budget has been cut to the bone…class sizes have ballooned because of increasing student enrollments and the lack of funding to hire additional faculty members…Departments that house multiple programs-like literature, rhetoric and composition, and film studies-are finding it almost impossible to meet the many competing demands of their freshman composition or general education service courses and still maintain quality undergraduate majors” (Kolodny 155). This analysis makes the important connections between monetary strain and ever-increasing class loads, particularly service class loads. English departments seem to have originally used service courses to supplement funds from declining English major enrollments, but Kolodny makes the next step to say that the English major enrollments will only continue to decline with the rise of service classes through displacement of funds that can be directed specifically towards majors. The major program suffers with the rise of service courses, in that the time of English professors is increasingly devoted to the needs and realities of non-majors.

It is easy to assert that service courses and major courses are indistinguishable in terms of funding – they are all credit hours after all – except that the funding for service courses isn’t enough to provide for the material needs of majors – advising, scholarships, materials, buildings, technologies, programs, clubs, etc. Service course funding generally pays for those providing services – the professors themselves and some of their material needs. Top-notch major programs have the power and prestige (and perhaps time) to pull in donors or outside funding sources, and these sources seem more likely to go to the
material needs of students – the majors. An English department without a solid major program is going to have a harder time attracting professionals also, something also tied to a lack of donors. A real crisis exists in the serious potential for decline within English major programs due to the rise of service classes (which reduces donor potential), and the perceived crisis exists, not in a decreasing need for English classes, but in the perception that administration is not looking out for the needs of English professionals and English majors in its implementation of service courses. Kolodny puts this perception succinctly in saying that service courses are “simply taken for granted by senior administrators” (Kolodny 159), as the assumed purpose of English departments, without regard to vital major programs for English majors.

Service courses – as being by definition offered to the vast and diverse population of non-English majors – promote the sense that English is less than a distinct and independent discipline. Moffat says that the “very willingness to stretch ourselves – may have eroded our sense of departmental identity” (Moffat 26). In the attempt of English to make itself relevant to and necessary for all disciplines through service courses (a practice supported by University administrations), “English lost much of its authentic, defining particularity in reaching its amorphous universality” (Freedman para. 4-5). I will discuss the crisis of definition in a later section, but it is important to note here the direct relationship between the rise of service courses and our current sense that English can provide basic life skills – reading, writing, speaking, communication, cultural intelligence, etc – to all students, over and above the more specific skills (like the identification of complex narrators and the fact that silly meant blessed in Middle English) that English professionals intentionally teach. I characterize this crisis as one of
perception, of a conflict between professional with self-identities and personal purposes and the rising perception of English as vague, malleable, and universal.

**English Bias against Writing Classes**

As I mentioned, some English professionals draw a historical parallel between the rise of service courses and the rise / rebirth of composition (writing) as part of the English department identity and purpose. The suppression of composition and writing as the purpose of English studies seems to have been tied to the desire to claim professional status, or to posit English studies as an area of specialized and hard-won knowledge rather than a mere vocation or skill. Professional status thus necessitated partial elimination of the mechanical associations of writing. Methods of interpretation were encouraged over methods of composition. The categorical exclusion of composition from literary studies is a real and lasting phenomenon within English departments, however much the two practices are perceptually connected in the public sphere. The crisis of this situation is summed up in this professional’s question about “whether or not a profession which is so heavily dependent on the subsidy it receives for performing tasks it often disparages is actually in a state of robust health” (Wilcox 445). As before, the material reality of English departments – the financial requirement to provide service courses – was in direct opposition to professional priorities – to maintain the status and independent viability of the department for professionals and students alike.

In the past, within English departments, “composition faculties were calling for secession from English departments controlled by literature faculties” (Selfe 67) due to
the categorical separation and disparagement of composition as relegated to the realm of service courses (without “discipline” status). One analysis exposes the two main biases against writing in the more literature-based programs in English studies: “rhetoric and composition; the ontological status of these skills on the academy’s great chain of being is still perceived as overly earthbound (practical rather than theoretical); and…the increasing employment of highly educated adjuncts to teach these courses is routinely lamented as feckless outsourcing” (Travis 53). Some English professionals may feel materially threatened by the rise of composition classes due to the problems they associate with these classes, particularly the practice of non-tenure-track hiring and heavier reliance on service courses.

The problems that service courses can present to literary professionals (the demise of the English major and the crisis of professional identity) are likewise potentially presented by writing within the English department. Writing, as a skill potentially even more universal and central to all disciplines than reading, further erodes the particularity and independent value of literary studies and the English department. Literary interpretation and theory – which first helped confirm the independent power and status of English studies – are made much less central to English studies with the rise and popularity of composition. Writing, configured as less than a discipline and yet universally useful, when associated with English studies, firmly cemented English in the realm of service, a problematic place for English departments as I have already indicated. In a 2005 article, one professional reports that “in the past two decades more and more sections of first-year writing courses are being taught by adjuncts, the Review notes, and this year the college established a writing program no longer directed by a member of the
English department” (Travis 53). The separation of literature and writing continues in the modern university.

As Ohmann notes, however, society seems less aware of this separation. He says that “much of what we do with society’s full sanction is work demeaning to professional egos…freshman composition, responsible according to William Riley Parker for the very existence of English departments, is certainly the subject for which most of our colleagues in other departments and (so far as they care) the general public hold us primarily accountable” (Ohmann 578). The historical separation of literary studies and writing doesn’t exist in popular culture, likely a function of the popularity of service courses and the fact that society only faintly acknowledged English as a discipline at all, given that the reading and writing of English are part and parcel of standard existence. Unfortunately, with the simultaneous rise of composition and service courses, English professionals with a literary focus likely become alienated from half of their discipline and vice versa for writing professionals. Writing professionals would stand to benefit from consideration of their profession as a profession in the wider consciousness, but they are tragically held off from working with their literary fellows within English departments to reassert some independence from the negative aspects of service courses that plague both camps.

Essentially, the real crisis here is that “writing studies have been cut in half by the disabling dualism of literary and vocational writing” (Miller and Jackson 702), and writerly and readerly acts (historically interconnected) have been separated, producing problems in both camps in terms of self-justification. Literary Studies is forced to abdicate its essential usefulness to society and students in the fear of service courses, and
Writing Studies is forced to accept the assumption that it offers merely worldly skills, with less sense of inspiration and intellectual analysis and engagement (read technical writing). One professional proposition suggests that “we do many different kinds of work in English departments, but all our work is connected, so let’s stop imagining ourselves as independent entrepreneurs and begin to work collectively” (Knapp 57). The idea of collectivity here indicates a sort of closing of the ranks against shared enemies: declining budgets, the low pay on the non-tenure track, and the negative aspects of status as a service department.

Though the opposition of Writing and Literary Studies is real and enduring, the popular obliteration of these realms as separate and disconnected will likely also help to obliterate the negative divisions between the departments, whether or not the departments believe such an obliteration is positive or negative. Freedman offers as evidence the history of American studies within English studies: “Few traditional English departments have willingly, let alone eagerly, admitted new bodies of literature into the curriculum. American literature was barred for long periods as was British writing itself by still living authors” (Freedman para. 11). Even as English professionals have a history of self-criticism and the perpetual feeling of decline, English as a discipline has afforded room for adaptation and change to its professionals, who strive to account for and understand the historical and institutional changes that redetermine their priorities.
Rise of Research / Decline of Teaching

I have already brought up the crises that attend the rise of research over and above teaching as criteria for prestige in the modern university. I have stated, perhaps with inadequate testimony, that structures of promotion and prestige force a crisis on department professionals in opposing teaching to research. The rise of research is not benign, because “teaching clearly has been given a subordinate role…the familiar lament: ‘I can’t get any work done when I’m teaching’ – as if teaching were somehow merely ancillary to the real business of an English professor at a major university” (McKelly 3).

I provide this as verbal testimony of the real choices that English professionals are forced to make between teaching and research, more realistic than the ideal balance proposed by the research institution’s job descriptions.

I have indicated already the unique rise of theory in the mid-to-late 20th century and the rise of the “profession” of English studies during this era, and one analyst points to rise of the research institution as central to the directions of English studies toward theory and professionalization. In William’s view, with “the enacting of the National Defense Education Act of 1958…academe received unprecedented support…and its charge tipped from teaching to producing research to bolster America’s position as a leader in the world” (Williams para. 19). Apparently feeding the National Defense needs and priorities, “the American higher education market developed structural disincentives that undermined teacher education…land-grant institutions distanced themselves from normal schools and teachers colleges by taking up research missions” (Miller and Jackson 685-686). This source provides the important assertion that the opposition of research goals to teaching goals was perhaps an intentional byproduct of the land-grant
university’s research mission. Research was perhaps meant to provide technologies to the nation, while teaching is an investment in people with a less clear-cut “material” gain. Overall, the rise of research as the pinnacle of scholarly accomplishment may seem natural and inevitable in the perceptions of current students, born into the research-oriented world, yet the research priority seems to be grounded in our nation’s particular history and governmental priorities and decisions.

The problem with the separation and historical opposition of research and teaching is that it undermines the deep connections between the practical lives of professors – the material realities of teaching – and their scholarly pursuits in English studies. The crisis here is in the real and perceived separations between lived life (what I term real life) and an intellectual life of ideas. The lived lives of professors (as teachers) become undervalued through the publication/citation mantra of tenure and promotion, as well as the prioritization of research instead of teaching (rather than a true synthesis of these realms – not merely a split existence). Miller and Jackson propose an alternative to the real and perceived separations of teaching and research, positing that, “if we can learn to see the local communities and institutions where we work as part of what we study, we might be able to make more strategic use of our discipline’s imaginative and practical capabilities” (Miller and Jackson 703). Miller and Jackson imply that any but the most traditional manifestations of research are discouraged by traditional conceptions of prestige.

As one example of what the synthesis of literary and teacherly/community goals would look like, Miller and Jackson suggest new versions of literary prestige as “not just publishing specialized scholarship but writing for popular audiences, leading community
reading and writing groups, and working with teachers” (Miller and Jackson 702). The real crisis in the opposition between research and teaching is in the lack of material institutional support for a reconciliation between these priorities, especially in the latitude to pursue multiple and diverse public projects that financial support could provide. A synthesis of public and disciplinary projects would expand the prestige and usefulness of literary studies beyond the confines of either service courses or the discipline as it is narrowly defined. Interestingly enough, Williams notes, as of 2008, “one of the few distinctive new strands in recent criticism focuses on academic labor” (Williams para. 24). In analyzing their own labor practices, English professionals are coming to recognize the deep connections between their research and teaching despite the material and institutional constraints that separate these realms.

Public Situations

Lack of Visibility / Publicity

Kolodny points out a bizarre sort of crisis facing English departments, what she terms an irony: “[English] departments are all but invisible on their home campuses…English departments are often among the most connected and indispensable departments on any campus; and yet, just as often, they are the most isolated and least understood” (Kolodny 158). She posits as one cause the differences in national and administrative responses to achievement in the sciences versus English studies, largely based on the amount of influence the individual achievers potentially wield in the realm
of public policy -- and the potential, therefore, to receive grants (Kolodny 159). This analysis suggests an institutional and public bias toward publicizing those achievements with the most governmental or market ties and the potential for institutional prestige and financial support.

The fundamental disconnect between administrative publicity and the lived presence of a department and its members within a campus seems to have caused a crisis of perceptions for members within and outside of English studies, in that those within English view their own work as invisible just as outsiders view it (or do not view it). Administrative decisions about publicity don’t seem guided by the deep mutual connections between the departments and the institution or even by an equitable sense of the value of achievements in a wide variety of disciplines. Instead, publicity is guided by the potential for donors, prestige narrowly defined, and donors. It is also likely that administrators would prefer English studies would bring in its own big donors, but it seems unwilling to put in the publicity work required to attract said donors and to exercise influence in public policy. The crisis of perception between how English departments exist in institutions (which seems to be lively, connected, and changing) and how they appear in publicity has a fundamental effect on the material circumstances of the department, contributing to a real material crisis through a lack of donors who may understand the invisibility of English studies as lack of involvement or general stagnation.

The administrators are careful about their publicity choices because they know what effect publicity and visibility have on financial contributions, and many professionals within English studies locate the crisis of invisibility in the material
circumstances of English departments as well as the methods and practices central to literary studies. Clearly, slim budgets within English departments do not allow faculty and staff large tracts of time, opportunity, and incentive to publicize their own endeavors, aims, and accomplishments. Of course, English departments do engage in self-promotion, advocacy, and publicity, but English departments are likely much more limited in their abilities to bring famous speakers to campus, to hold and publicize large conferences, to hire devoted web developers to take advantage of widespread online promotional opportunities, to publish pamphlets and promotional materials for the departments, to offer orientation and recruitment services to a wide range of students, to sponsor promotional tours and announcements about the program to a variety of other communities, etc – activities which departments with large grants and donations can take the time to formulate, adequately staff, fund, and eventually accomplish.

Professionals propose a variety of solutions to the crisis of invisibility. Kolodny points out the importance of national advocates and lobbyists, calling on humanities departments “to join the National Humanities Alliance with the $550 sponsor’s fee...plan events to mark National Humanities Advocacy Day on your campus” (Kolodny 161). She advocates more widespread use of community projects to engage the general public, but what she doesn’t address is the material support needed to do these sorts of projects. This approach takes on the public and governmental perception of invisibility as well as the campus-wide perception of invisibility encouraged by slim humanities budgets and minimal administrative publicity. Moffat encourages changes to department newsletters to include wider audiences, including alumni and current students (Moffat 28). These
projects would improve the visible presence of English Studies within the campuses where it seems to play a vital – and not declining – role.

Beyond improvement of literal visibility, many professionals advocate a simultaneous revitalization of the ways that English professionals (and eventually their students) talk about and justify English studies to the public. Rosenblatt comments on the unpopularity of English Studies, where “popular [is understood] in the sense of a study that has conveyed its merit and meaning to the citizens at large” (Rosenblatt 61). He locates the invisibility of English Studies within the communicational disconnect between English professionals and the general public. In this view, English studies suffers from a crisis of invisibility due to its categorical inability to develop a coherent narrative to justify and make itself understandable to a wide variety of citizens. This narrative would not only explain what English professionals do on a regular basis but also how English studies concretely benefits specific sectors of society rather than just “society.”

One configuration of how English benefits society can be found in the ways that English promotes beneficial criticism and activism. One professional, “Bérubé argues that it is our duty to go public in arguing for social, cultural, and political change, thus employing English in service to society” (Corkin and Frus 309), and this is a legitimate societal benefit that literary studies provides in a myriad of ways. However, the benefits to society will likely have to be more concrete to win broad approval and understanding. Another professional, Stroupe, speaks extensively about the lost island of English Studies, a positive way to configure the small size of English departments as local places from which intellectuals can engage in alternative and activist actions against the
dominant and consuming capitalist marketplace (Stroupe 630-631). This is a more grassroots narrative that is both valid and relevant to the material circumstances and ideals of newer configurations of English Studies. In the current financial crisis, narratives which propose alternatives to the problems symptomatic of the current capitalist structure and also the environmental crisis are likely to be both coherently understandable to a wide audience as well as true to the material and idealized realities of English professionals.

In developing a coherent and persuasive narrative (or, as it will likely manifest itself, narratives), English Studies must address the crisis of the apparent invisibility not only of English departments themselves but of the tangible products of English Studies. Public conceptions of usefulness center largely around material products, hence the widespread association of English with writing and reading (the most physical manifestations of literary studies) and the location of literary prestige in publication and citation – material products. The products of English studies go beyond clear and detailed writing, reading, and the ability to research. English studies also traffics heavily in the intangible. In the words of Rosenblatt, “teachers of literature have as their task to teach invisible things” (Rosenblatt 64), and these invisible things – social structures, historical events long past and well worth considering, distant and influential cultures, mental processes, institutional processes unseen, assumptions – are misconstrued as unreal rather than hidden or forgotten and still exerting powerful influence over every life. The crisis of invisibility is tied to the perception of the invisible as materially useless, but it is the job of English professionals, their students, and administrators to focus more attention on advocating for and making publically viable, intelligible,
concrete, and materially valuable the invisible products – manifested over the courses of lives – that are often called the special province of the humanities and English Studies in particular.

*Lack of Connections to Private Sector and Employment*

I have already discussed some causes of the disconnect between English and humanities studies and the private sector, including a lack of extended administrative financial support which would provide humanities and English departments the financial latitude to build their own roads to the private sector. Likewise, English as a discipline has disassociated itself from the mechanical aspects of writing that seem most germane to the private sector, and the narrow definition within society of products as tangible goods perpetuates the stereotype that humanities and English studies have nothing to offer to the private sector and are not interested in building those bridges.

First of all, what evidence do professionals give of this disconnect? Beidler provides a tragic-comic story of responses to the common question “What can you do with an English major”: “The question is usually a rhetorical one… ‘Nothing’ or ‘Frame it’ or ‘Starve’ or ‘Marry her.’ After the 927th time I was asked that question, and had mumbled the usual smiley-faced things like ‘Teach’ and ‘Write’ and ‘Publish,’ it occurred to me that I really did not know (Beidler, “What Can You Do” 39). Beidler, a professional in the field, points out the lack of concrete connections between English and the private sector. Colavito, Abney, and Green say that English majors “hear their colleagues and their professors making statements such as ‘Only writing majors get jobs,’
and, understandably, traditional English majors question their choice of a major” (Colavito, Abney, and Green 26). This speaks back to the rupture between literary studies and writing within English studies as one source disconnection between English majors specifically and the private sector. English majors may be outright told or at least assume that their skills are different from those of a writing major and thus less valuable in the private sector. Further, students have a general feeling that “they will be unable to find jobs if they decide to pursue a degree in English. We perpetuate this fallacy by telling students that the study of literature, linguistics, or writing is suitable only as a prerequisite to an advanced degree” (Colavito, Abney, and Green 32). The disconnection from the private sector here is extended to include the concept of employment overall, as though English majors feel categorically divorced from practicality altogether.

One reason for the private sector disconnect referenced in this source is the promotion of graduate school by advisers and English professionals generally, perhaps at times to the exclusion of employment. It seems natural and important for professionals within English departments to advocate for graduate programs, as they are heavily invested in them and know the deep benefits they can provide students. At the same time, the promotion of graduate programs as the end places of English education may leave English majors who seek undergraduate degrees for use in the private sector feeling as though they are in a program built for teachers and scholars of English rather than students attempting to prepare for a working-class career within the confines of the free market. The crisis here can be seen between professional priorities and the priorities and realities of students. Students are constrained by job market realities while the views of professionals in the field have much to do with their residence inside the academy.
English programs which recognize and plan for the students who envision potential jobs in the private sector as well as academia would help to alleviate the disconnect apparent between English studies and the private sector.

One way to integrate student priorities into English studies and potentially rebuild the connections with the private sector is to provide students with clear answers to questions like “‘What companies do English graduates work for?’ ‘What kind of money are these people making?’ ‘How did they get these jobs?’” (Colavito, Abney, and Green 24). Actively publicizing answers to these questions within English departments would help to challenge assumptions that English students are unemployable and/or undesirable in the private sector. On the other hand, according to one professional, “our students continue to major in English not with directly related vocational goals in mind, but because it represents something enjoyable, exciting, possibly even a means of maintaining academic sanity” (Cook, “Response” 223).

This may be the truth – students may not have vocational goals in mind – but students do end up going places after their undergraduate degrees are completed and need to have an accurate picture of the full range of options available to them – not simply “platitudes…about the need for good communicators in the private sector…that not all companies look for business majors, and that, in fact, industry often hires English majors because they are more well-rounded than their peers in the sciences” (Colavito, Abney, and Green 24). English majors deserve more concrete and accurate pictures about where their peers have gone and are going, as well as concrete pictures and descriptions about the paths to those places of employment – because English majors do get jobs, as I will discuss in a later section. The perception among students that they don’t (both inside and
outside the major) is a real crisis for English studies, in that students are likely to shy away from English based on material constraints rather than actually deciding that such studies are not interesting to them. The real crisis is having to choose between interests and material resources. The perceptual crisis is the same, and plays itself out in a generalized feeling of uselessness among majors.

This sense may reappear as a real crisis when students eventually make it onto the job market and are ill equipped to market themselves conceptually within the private sector. In the words of one professional, “English and other graduate programs in the humanities usually do not receive the tenure lines, resources, grants, and support that a number of other programs do, because the private sector ostensibly needs more graduates from these other programs” (Cohen 11). There is a disconnect between the skills that English majors feel they have acquired in their studies and the skills the those in the private sector say they need. I will show in a later section that the private sector really does want and need English majors, but for now suffice it to say that the link from English studies to the private sector is actually quite strong, but money from the private sector does not flow to English studies to support undergraduates.

What is missing is the coherent narrative of concrete skills and abilities provided to English majors that are universal but also specifically meaningful to the wide range of opportunities in the private sector. And “writing” is not specific nor broad nor clear enough, given that all majors learn to write. One problem may be the name of the major – English. There is no way for a prospective employer within the private sector unfamiliar with English studies to immediately grasp what relevance an English degree has in the private sector – hence the need for a concrete narrative. This is different for
other majors, even within other humanities departments. It would be much easier for economics majors to be easily recognizable as relevant to the business world. Same with the variety of business majors, obviously, but also any major with the word “management” (of which there are many inside and outside business schools) would be recognizable. Also, majors associated with verbs (Engineering, Managing, Designing, Writing) rather than nouns (English) will likely seem more relevant to the private sector, which would be looking for people able to do things, not the things themselves. English majors do learn how to do things and practice certain skills – beyond reading and writing in the simplest sense – but it is not reflected in the name, which appears more as a thing or noun.

The crisis in this case is between what professionals know students can do and what students and employers think English majors can do, which of course can lead to a real employment crisis and especially a crisis for English departments in need of private donors and grant money. Changing the name of the major might help, but it is not necessary as long as English majors and professionals are actively equipped with a variety of concrete, relevant, and coherent narratives and explanations of their skills and abilities to take to the private sector (for those wanting to head there). It is too easy to push off this responsibility to students, who enter into the major for a short period of time and have to focus much of their attention on the studies themselves. A coherent departmental narrative addressing the private sector specifically should be widely and readily available to students from which they may make their own variations. The private sector does need and use English majors, and it is high time they (both students and employers) were made aware of this fact. The perceptual crisis on the part of English
majors as well employers within the private sector can be combated by helping English majors develop more concretely “the self-concept of a professional capable of several jobs in the field” (Clayton 127), a self-concept that will be directly communicated to the private sector during a job search. Professionals can create an easier job-search process for their majors by communicating departmental “career” narratives to employers beforehand through public media and direct outreach.

The feeling of uselessness on the part of English majors may also stem from a wider societal perception (beyond the perceptions of professionals within the private sector) that English studies don’t lead a student directly to employment. According to Cohen, “parents, taxpayers, and legislators need actively to be persuaded that the humanities too can prepare students well for gainful employment immediately after they receive their BA or BS” (Cohen 11). These parties aren’t convinced that humanities majors (including English majors) can go directly into the workforce without graduate school. Add to this “the most recent ‘national poll of public opinion…conducted for The Chronicle’…[which found] that fully ninety-two percent of respondents judged as either important or very important a college’s role in preparing ‘its undergraduate students for a career’” (Kolodny 159-160), and you have a serious crisis for humanities and English studies. The public expects college to prepare students for careers, while the English major seeking a baccalaureate is not viewed by the public as immediately ready for gainful employment.

To address this crisis, English professionals “should assist [students] in preparing a résumé and organizing a portfolio to present to potential employers” (Colavito, Abney, and Green 29). Surely these actions do take place within English studies, but these sorts
of career preparation should be actively explained not only to potential and current majors and their parents/guardians but to the general public and the administration. Of course many English departments may leave this job to the University, but this abdication of responsibility (perhaps having roots in a financial problem) does not bring home to students or the public the value of the English major specifically in regard to employment. Moreover, students spend much of their everyday experience within the department, so the individual departments have the most power to inform and assist students in planning for and finding jobs. I will give concrete examples of how English departments go about addressing this specific area of crisis in later sections under “Sources of Hope.”

There is also a need to integrate classroom experience with work experience and career planning. Student perceptions of the uselessness of their major to their careers is only exacerbated by exclusion of career planning from the classroom. Ohmann points out that “about students’ existential needs and about the relationship of their education to the work they are preparing to do there is surprisingly little” (Ohmann 575). This does not mean reducing classroom experience to vocational training but rather the occasional inclusion of questions like “what connections does this have to the real world” or “why might this matter to you outside of this classroom or in a job” in the normal discussions that go on in classrooms already. English programs would likely benefit from this integration in untold ways, not least in the new ways for students to make a more intimate connection with their studies – something which would feed discussion of other, less practical questions which must be asked of texts.
There are professionals skeptical of creating direct ties between the private sector and English studies, likely because the radical separation of English studies from industry would seem to allow English departments the freedom to develop programs that adhere to the values of English professionals rather than the often unpleasant values of the free market. At the same time, most students don’t have the luxury of remaining free from the “free” market for long. Also, departments must pay for professional salaries and a wide variety of materials, not to mention scholarships and other services beneficial for students, making it impossible to actually operate “independently” without adequate cash flow from the private sector. It might be preferable to receive money from another source, but given the “crisis in higher education” and the steady reduction of government funds, English Studies faces a real crisis of independence if it insists on remaining conceptually disconnected from the private sector. To allay fears, one professional points out that “humanistic training has been in one form or another “job training as well as a noble enterprise of disinterested learning for its own sake” (Shepard 26) for eons, from the very beginnings of education for the priestly castes. Connection to the private sector does not mean an end to English studies as currently practiced (a perceptual crisis English professors may face) but rather a reinvigoration of communication lines with both the private sector and students.
Traditional Employment Areas Limited and Full

I present this section as a corollary to the previous section, as a crisis in itself and also a contributor to the lack of perceptual connection between English studies and employment.

Among professionals, there is widespread consensus and historical proof that the “most” traditional area of employment for English majors is teaching, as problematic as this fact is at the current moment. As Miller and Jackson indicate, “up until the rise of the research university in the 1960s, English was one of the largest majors in many institutions, often because of the demand for teachers” (Miller and Jackson 686). The link between English and teaching is historical as well as perceptual, given the large presence of English or literature/language studies within K-12 schooling in the U.S. The original popularity of the English major seems due to shortages in American teachers, as “during World War I the supply of teachers in training and on the job dropped” and this demand for English majors became a crisis when, “by 1928 there was one student in teacher training for every teacher employed…teachers, struggled through an employer’s market in the thirties…English majors had to find alternative careers simply to survive” (Evans 200). This process seems to have repeated in the war and post-war conditions of the forties, fifties, and sixties (the sixties particularly when “seventy per cent entered teaching each year”) – an increased demand for teachers, a market flood, and an eventual need for alternative careers for English majors (Evans 200-202). This boom and bust cycle in English studies has lead to two perceptual problems for English majors. The perceptions are that English majors are meant to be teachers (and fit only for teaching), which is largely untrue, and the perception that teaching job markets are tight and less-
than-lucrative (which may also cause a real material crisis for teachers and English majors alike).

The boom part of the historical job market cycles within English studies seems to have popularized the connections between English and teaching, which would be less problematic if not for the bust cycles which seem to have irrevocably ruptured the absolute and actual ties between English and teaching. I will discuss in the “sources of hope” section the actual numbers of English majors likely to be pursuing careers in traditional teaching jobs, but I will say for now that there are large numbers of English majors not entering the teaching field (narrowly defined as primary/secondary school and college teaching) and likely not interested in that field. The traditional association of English majors with teaching causes a real crisis when English majors seeking other jobs face the public perception that they are applying for jobs they aren’t meant for – and potentially are turned away from said jobs. The perceptual crisis occurs when English majors (those not interested in teaching) begin to feel that they are in the “wrong” major for their goals, even though advisors and professionals likely tell them they can do “anything” with their degree. There is a perplexing contradiction English majors face between English popularized as mostly a “teaching” major and also the “anything” major, something which I personally believe leaves English majors (those not interested in teaching) with no concrete ties to link themselves to – a real and perceptual “nothing” crisis.

The bust part of the job market cycles for English majors and teachers seems to have perpetuated the stereotype that the teaching job market is overstocked and underpaid – and underpaid it does seem to be, as I will give evidence of when I discuss salaries at
OSU in later sections. I call this a stereotype, despite the real material crisis that educators face, not only because it has been inordinately generalized to English majors not planning to enter teaching but also because the conditions for teachers seem largely determined by governmental priorities and decisions rather than societal needs or even a subjective “market condition.” Parents want their children well-educated, and pay taxes toward that end, but government funds for teachers are publicly acknowledged to be slim and ever-shrinking. The teaching job market may indeed be overstocked and underpaid, but given the lamentation of ever-increasing class sizes and poor student performance on standardized tests (when compared globally) which permeates popular media, it is hard to conclude that the market for teaching jobs is actually decreasing – as though teaching is becoming actually less important. This seems illogical in a globalized society actually requiring a wider and wider array of skills and understandings. The job market may be decreasing only as a function of reduced governmental support, and certainly this seems to be the case historically.

The stereotype of the overstocked and underpaid teaching market is problematic for all English majors, as this stereotype gets tied directly to a major historically associated and affected by the “teaching market” – however problematic that concept actually is. As one professional reports, “friends laugh and parents groan. ‘What are you going to do with English? There aren’t any teaching jobs’” (Clayton 122). That some English majors do go very successfully into teaching jobs is only the first crisis presented by this report. There is both the perceptual crisis that English majors pursuing teaching will not get jobs, and the related perceptual crisis that English majors not pursuing teaching are, again, unable to do anything at all or somehow nonexistent. In this
perceptual crisis, English majors of all types receive a double blow: you can’t teach (or will make no money at it) and you are not recognizable as a trained professional anywhere else.

The real crisis here has to do, again, with the private sector. When English majors look into careers, they are set up to feel as though they don’t “belong” in any area at all, including teaching (because it is “full,” unwelcoming), and perhaps willing to take lower pay or less likely to be recognized as budding “experts” in fields beyond teaching – and therefore able to expect respectable pay. This goes both ways, as employers may fall into the same logic. That one scholar vociferously asks English professionals to “do whatever seems necessary to break the myth that most English majors should or will go into secondary school teaching” (Evans 205) may seem degrading to English majors actively pursuing a teaching career, and yet the perpetuation of this myth seems damaging to all English majors with its roots more in stereotype than current reality. English as a teaching major has only served English departments in short bursts and doesn’t allow English majors to survive variability in labor markets.

I should also note here that although the traditional employment areas do seem to have expanded within the public imagination in recent years – to include, especially, writing careers – they have not expanded very far and remain (in popular perception) relatively narrow. English professionals have tried to dispel this narrow imagination at least since the sixties: “The most extensive data on the careers of English majors in the fifties was reported by Elizabeth Berry in 1966” in order to “dispel the stereotype of the English major as one equipped for only a few kinds of positions in the career world, namely those having to do with teaching and writing” (Evans 202), and yet, as I will
discuss when talking about the opinions at OSU most specifically, the stereotype of narrow career choices – teaching and writing – persists to the current moment, despite all promotion of the “anything” that English majors are capable of. I belabor the narrow stereotyped categories for English major professions because even the newer stereotype career – that of writing – has become problematic for writers. According to Tatum, “most students, even the gifted ones, will not succeed either as writers in the marketplace or as writer-teachers in academia” (Tatum 31). Careers involving writing exclusively are not substantially on the rise, whereas, according to a “survey, conducted by a Boston company…job offers to some grads are up from last year in industries such as finance and banking, engineering, technology, and healthcare (Copeland para. 5). English majors are well equipped to enter these rising industries, but there is a perceptual barrier raised by the narrow conception of “traditional” fields for English majors. This is the perceptual crisis that English majors and prospective employers face, as well as the eventual “real” crisis of lost and limited job opportunities.

Traditional Employment Areas Underpaid

I have already discussed the low pay for teachers as it causes both perceptual and real crisis for those within English studies, but the issue of English and its status as more generally “underpaid” has wider implications than previously mentioned. According to one professional, “the traditional areas of employment for English majors no longer offer either good wages or a modicum of prestige or respect…Taxpayers and legislators clearly are loath to pay elementary and high school teachers decent salaries, and entry-level
salaries in publishing remain notoriously low” (Cohen 11). Cohen importantly connects the underpayment of fields tied to English studies and a lack of respect, likely it seems logical within American consciousness that higher salaries are naturally given to individuals with more skill, who work harder, and who are more essential to society. This assumption – which is untrue in many cases, especially with regard to teaching – leaves English studies in a perpetual crisis. Not only are English majors entering underpaid “traditional employment areas” put into material crisis, but all English majors face a material crisis from the outset if society believes that careers for English majors are not respectable (in the very fact that they are underpaid). Academic studies leading to low-paid jobs are least likely to receive monetary support from any source – be it the government, the private sector, or even the students themselves. As one professional explains, “there’s rarely any profit to be made in the humanities, which could spell problems for if not death to the humanities in a for-profit university” (Shepard 27). Even Shepard seems to partially buy into the stereotype that the humanities are no path to monetary security, but he rightly points out how the stereotype of low pay can produce a material crisis in humanities departments within universities in constant need of funding.

Low Institutional Salaries

The salaries of English professionals are relevant to any perceived or real crisis within English studies because they affect the material and perceptual realities of the English professionals themselves, which students likely experience in kind, as well as the perceptions that administrators and donors will have of English departments.
The financial crisis that English professionals may feel is likely due in part to the rise of the non-tenure-track, as I have already discussed. As more and more English professionals are hired off the tenure track, material and perceived security of these professionals is jeopardized, creating a crisis as the workload for these professionals remains steady or even increases due to the continued popularity of English studies generally. As the workloads of professors increase without adequate compensation, professors are stretched thin, which does not serve the needs of these professionals or their students, and degradations in professional salaries within the institution will likely affect how English majors perceive their futures and their status on campus. The proof I have of this is my own experience of the material and perceptual realities of English teachers at OSU – inhabiting the same building, being identified under a common label (English), and hearing almost daily their words and also their thoughts and experiences. That students and professors have different realities is clear, but their perceptual and material realities interact and affect one another. English professionals’ receiving low salaries can only have a negative effect on the self-conception of English students and can produce a crisis as they are pushed onto the job market with a pre-conceived notion of low pay despite their abilities to do “anything.” I will not go into the many ways that these salaries could be raised, as they are covered in previous sections.

I will give more concrete information about salaries in the humanities at OSU in coming sections, but English professionals generally agree that their salaries are lower than acceptable. One professional states that “many higher-level administrators have access to information about low salary figures in our profession, but whether or not they use this information in a productive way is debatable indeed” (Selfe 65). Bowen talks
more aggressively of these low salaries, telling fellow professionals they “should never willingly allow administrations to increase their fiscal options at our expense, replacing full-time department members with part-timers and reducing our colleagues to McDonald’s temporary wages” (Bowen 14). Bowen makes an explicit connection between administrative priorities and low salaries for English professionals, meaning of course that lower English salaries are likely not a function of declining or deteriorating work on the part of English departments generally. These professionals seem compelled to accept declining salaries due to economic constraints brought on by new administrative priorities and the lack of association with the private sector I have already explained. Declining salaries only continue to feed administrative neglect and similar neglect from the private sector, in that low salaries are inevitably associated with low prestige, however wrong this is in practice.

Administrators and private sector donors will likely perceive English studies as an irrelevant or unnecessary field as departmental salaries decline, which only causes a greater material crisis for English studies and its practitioners. It is too simplistic to see low salaries in English studies (partially brought on by the rise of the non-tenure-track) and the humanities as merely a function of the absolute usefulness of these studies to students and society. Salary inequalities are not often a function of honest appraisals of workloads and usefulness, and more often based on perceived value and privilege (salary inequalities based on gender and the poor pay for back-breaking agricultural work come to readily to mind). English professionals deserve the power and right to improve the monetary and perceived value of their work to accurately reflect the role they play in a productive institution and society. I have already discussed in previous sections the ways
that English professionals and students can go about changing the perceived value of English studies to society – particularly the creation of narratives for the deep and concrete usefulness of English studies – and this applies directly to institutional salaries as well.

**Lack of Association of English Studies with Technology**

I have already explored the fact of a perceptual and material disconnect between English studies and the production of solid, material goods, and even material results, which are largely seen as the basis for demonstrable “usefulness” in society. Wilcox makes explicit this disconnect in asserting that “ours may not seem a dynamic and inventive profession…we do not deal with hardware as others do, cannot be expected regularly to produce new models and new devices” (Wilcox 448). I call these devices more generally *technologies*, and indeed in the way that popular culture defines technologies (computers, programs, phones, agricultural tools, gadgets, zippers, brakes, etc), English seems largely excluded. That English professionals produce many new techniques (in how to analyze literature; how to conceptualize and understand many aspects of our daily social, cultural, and material lives; how to teach ever more complicated subjects; etc) is historically accurate, but that *techniques* are called techniques instead of technologies both within English studies and outside of it is indicative of the radical exclusion of the work of English professionals from the realm of products.
The exclusion from technology is an exclusion from usefulness, as the
development and production of technologies is a concrete, well-understood, viable path
of justification for the existence of the newest and most popular fields within academia
and elsewhere – particularly fields involving computers, the internet, and related
communications technologies. The public can very easily understand the justification for
pouring money into technologies to solve their problems, but the public is more
suspicious of funding new ways of thinking (which is one endeavor of English Studies),
however inseparable this may be from ways of solving. English Studies face a material
crisis when they are separated from the funds that go along with the rise of technology in
contemporary culture, and English professionals and students face a perceptual crisis
when outsiders consider English studies neither useful nor productive in generating
technologies.

The ways that society reads and writes are physically and conceptually changing
in the direction of technologies narrowly defined (toward widespread use of computers)
as children are born with keyboards and mice, rather than pencils and paper, in hand.
Another professional asserts that “as the world goes digital, so it appears inevitable that
the increasingly globalized curricula of English departments are sure to follow” (Travis
56). Not only will the curricula change, though. Definitions of texts change also. I offer
as proof the analysis of two English professionals based on a national study: “the forms
of literacy defined as literary are currently facing a dramatic drop in their public
currency…the National Endowment for the Art’s Reading at Risk reports on national
surveys that document historic declines in the reading of literature…novels, poems,
plays, or stories” (Miller and Jackson 700). The study predicts that these declines, if they
proceed at the current rate, mean that “the reading of literature will ‘virtually disappear in half a century’” (Miller and Jackson 700). This sounds absurd given the popularity of English courses on college campuses and the literature requirements of students in K-12 education, but the decline here may be partly in the narrow ways that literature is conceived – as novels, poems, plays, or stories. These are and have been most relevant to English studies and the focus of English courses from time immemorial, but the rise of new technologies presents a challenge to traditional conceptions of literature and literacy.

English studies seems to have slowly incorporated the literary aspects of new technologies into the discipline, the most notably and widespread of which may be film studies, as movies have identifiable scripts along with their visual and auditory elements. The general exclusion of new forms of literacy, the new ways that our society reads and writes - “online journals, or blogs” (Miller and Jackson 701) for example, along with other communications technologies and media – from the realm of literature poses a serious perceptual crisis for English studies, especially for students who must perceptually and materially separate the everyday ways they encounter their language from their rarer and more in-depth interactions with “literature” narrowly defined. English professionals seeking serious intellectual involvements with these new technologies having an ever-greater presence in society and daily life are likely to find less material support from within English departments with restrictive definitions of literature. This exclusion likewise produces a perceptual disconnect between an outside society of new literacies and an interior society of “old” literacies. A more expansive definition of literacies within English departments as well as the general public (which likely does not consider blogs or other forms of new media as literature either) would
help alleviate both the sense that literature is “disappearing” – along with its professionals – and also alleviate the crisis students may feel between their “real” and “academic” lives, a separation that will spell trouble if and when they move permanently back into the real world.

A more expansive definition of literature to encompass more of the daily ways that students (and professionals) interact with writing and language would also help combat the identification of English studies with “uselessness” which I have already discussed. The concerns of English studies permeate all sectors of experience, as writing and language are carried by individuals into all realms, and it is a mistake not to recognize the ways that new technologies are literary. With the redefinition of literature, English professionals would also benefit from a radical redefinition of technologies. The close association of technologies with the sciences and engineering at the exclusion of the humanities and English studies seems largely an arbitrary distinction. Technologies are the tools that we produce and apply to things (problems) we encounter in society, and English is full of technologies. Books, pens and printing presses, plays and films, poetic forms, literary theories and pedagogical frameworks, professional journals and anthologies, the many changing conceptual models from which we approach language and literature, and language itself – all are part of a technological framework having profound influence over how we think about and experience life and our society.

Though the creation of “literature” would likely expand as more and more people have access to public venues for imaginative writing (accessible through the internet and other emerging technologies), the limited definition of literature and the exclusion of English professionals, old and new, as producers of technologies has instead created a
crisis of irrelevance and disappearance for English (literary) studies. Some English professionals fear what the exclusions of new media from literary studies will bring to their departments. From one standpoint, “the history of classics provides one model for projecting where these historical trends could leave traditional English majors” (Miller and Jackson 701). By the classics, Miller and Jackson likely mean Greek and Latin studies, which were at one time widespread within colleges (and suspicious of the then-protean English studies) and now apparently represent a small minority of courses at universities. Rather than accept new media studies into the definitions of literary studies, English departments appear to be reinforcing their own exclusion from technologies: “as the corporate confines of journalism seem to be breaking down, English departments appear to be reducing their offerings in journalism and leaving interactive technologies to other disciplines” (Miller and Jackson 701).

This continued separation of literature and technology causes different and more direct crisis for English professionals and English majors. If English departments are perceived to be non-technological, they will likely not receive administrative support for increases in technology for pedagogical purposes, however much these technologies would materially benefit students. As Selfe describes, “technopower has a financial cost. In most departments, computers must be purchased piecemeal, one or two at a time, often at the expense of other educational resources our profession values – books, travel, release time” (Selfe 64). This article is from the 1980s, and 20 year later, computer and communication technologies have become indispensable pedagogical tools at the very least. Without wider acknowledgement of the deep ties between literature and technology, the need for technological upgrades just to keep up with basic societal
changes will create an ever greater material crisis for English professionals and departments subsisting on slim budgets. Website technologies, as part of computer technologies more generally, are considered “the sine qua non of communicating with a teenage audience” (Moffat 29), and “a sloppy, out-of-date departmental Web site suggests a badly managed, individualistic, and probably dysfunctional department” (Benton para. 7). If English departments are unable to lobby for adequate financial support of communication technologies vital to their livelihood and also relevant to English studies as a discipline, they will be less able to communicate themselves clearly and persuasively to students as well as the various controllers of funds.

Students are also increasingly expected by prospective employers of all types to be familiar with a variety of technologies, and the widespread disassociation between English studies and technology (in the minds of those both inside and outside the discipline) will only exacerbate the disconnection between English majors and employment, or how potential employers view the viability of English majors. English professionals know this and “recommend that students develop strong computer skills, which are becoming a necessity for potential employees from all disciplines” (Colavito, Abney, and Green 27). Development of computer skills is insufficient, however, because as literacy goes digital, English students interested in jobs dealing with literature in any way will likely be increasingly called upon to speak to literature as it exists in new media. They will be required not only to use the internet to analyze literature but to take into account the internet as a form of literature influenced by and profoundly affecting more traditional modes and conceptions of literature. As our records and experiences go digital, we will likely use that media for our deepest expressions of our lives, and English
majors face a crisis when they are forced by a narrow definition of literature to separate their realms of study and experience. Not only will they face a crisis of interest, but their perception of the relevance of their discipline to daily, material life may also wane.

*Lack of Definition – Internal and External*

If I have perhaps spent too long explaining the minute particularities of the various situations within English studies on a national scale (the crises, as I label them), it is my own first way of combating the crisis I treat in this section – the lack of definition of and within English studies and the English major.

One potential structural cause of a lack of definition tied to English studies is the poor definition of what constitutes the college that normally houses it, namely the Liberal Arts. According to one English studies professional, “a liberal art is a little like obscenity. We faculty members know it when we see it, even if we can't quite define it…at some colleges that includes computer science, industrial design, physical education, and even engineering” (Stone para. 11). That the purpose and special province of liberal arts is ill defined reflects directly on its member departments as they are perceived within the wider University community. As a contrary example, a College of Pharmacy would not face the same definition problems as a College of Liberal Arts, as the general public is probably able to readily envision a clear mental picture or general conception of pharmacy.

I have already discussed the identity crisis English studies had to undergo in order to incorporate service courses as a regular part of English departments. Departments had
to relinquish the narrow definitions of their discipline – including the reincorporation of rhetoric and composition into literary studies – in order to make the study of literature more readily relevant to the concerns of majors in fields seemingly unrelated to literature studies narrowly defined. As Travis asks, “is there any performance or inscription that is not open to so-called cultural analysis?...anything written…in the Anglophone world, that is beyond the pale of English studies?” (Travis 54). English professionals increasingly said “no” and proceeded to incorporate an ever widening array of related fields and sub-specialties into the disciplines, not narrowly in self-interest but also because of the shift in the interests of students choosing to pursue degrees in English. Schwartz notes a historical “change in students who elected English as their major. As the economy changed many saw the major as useful preprofessional training; some wanted a career path in journalism; still others wanted to have an emphasis in film or creative writing” (Schwartz 18). Likewise, historical changes allowed for progressively more expansive definitions of what counted as literature within English studies, beginning narrowly with English literature and incorporating American literature, with “the mass defection of students…into American literature courses” (Fenton 205) and later “world literature, since a colonialist past has given rise to a wealth of texts composed in English from Africa to India to the Caribbean (Kolodny 157). The increasingly global concerns of American culture as they play out historically have helped to give rise to the need to continually widen the reaches of English studies according to student needs and interests as well as professional interests in remaining culturally relevant and financially viable.

The term English which the discipline maintains for itself, in the face of the rapid change in the range and scope of English studies, contributes to a crisis for professionals.
If English studies are rooted in the conception of “literature from England,” which originally was the only “proper” and most popular object of literary study, English departments face a self-definition crisis whenever their members are compelled to redefine what counts as literature and what counts as English. These redefinitions are viewed by some professionals as moving farther and farther away from coherent and “original” identity on the part of English departments. One report put together by a number of English professionals about the crisis in the English curriculum “laments an increase in courses on queer studies and postcolonial studies—topics, it says, that are better suited for other departments, like sociology or psychology…the report says that while film and television are worthy of study, they have no business in English departments” (Leatherman para. 13). These professionals feel a perceptual crisis between their definition of literature and the concerns of English studies and new definitions of literature and the differing concerns of “new” colleagues. The feelings of these professionals are not unnatural but rather can be seen partly as a function of material fears about the degradation of English studies into incoherence internally and externally and also the potential that the traditional fields of English studies will lose their strength with the rise of new conceptions of literature. In a small way, these professionals fear the loss of the status of English studies as an identifiable discipline with the ever-greater diversity of sub-disciplines and the decentralization of identity within English studies.

This has the potential to be a real crisis for all English professionals when English departments can no longer explain and justify their existence to new students, administrators, the private sector, or the public at large. With the great variety of sub-specialties, professionals can say English majors study literature and writing, unspecific
generalities, but the core consensus about more specific things studied (be it concepts, things, structures, discourses, cultures, societies, language only, etc), the specific skills English majors can acquire, and how the major can be applied outside academia are no longer clear, agreed upon, or widely known. English departments may also face a different material crisis if they do not have the monetary resources to hire specialists in all the major fields of English studies which would be part of maintaining departmental prestige and offering students thorough programs in the discipline. This may lead to the hiring of singular departmental specialists (rather than groups of 2 or 3 specialists) which could contribute substantially to the disciplinary feeling of fragmentation and identity crisis – though it may be more a function of budget than of reality. The propagation of sub-disciplines without the building of strong and foundational ties between the various specialties can lead to a perceived disciplinary crisis when professionals find themselves unable to identify with each other in fundamental ways.

David Laurence sums up the crisis produced by the lack of definition within English studies: “the expansive redefinition of the field…could not be achieved without cost. What we have gained in possibility we are perhaps paying for by a blurring of institutional definition and a loss in articulateness of educational purpose” (Laurence, “Notes” 3). The diversification of English studies has the potential to renew English studies, while the cost of this radical diversification is perhaps the ability of the public and English professionals alike to talk and think coherently about English studies as a purpose-driven educational endeavor – with clear and communicable goals and concrete, practical benefits for students and the public alike. The lack of definition of English studies – for all its achievements – participates in the general crisis of communication
between English professionals, English majors, the administration, donors and employers in the private sector, and the general public. I have already hashed through the perceptual problems this communication crisis can cause for these various individuals which feed the material crises of English professionals and English majors specifically. The radical redefinition of English studies and the English major within its powerful diversity seems necessary to the material and perceptual well being of English studies and all its practitioners.

Interestingly, Culler (a literary theorist) discusses the identity crisis of English studies and provides some useful ideas about what English studies are about in general. For him, “studying literature is above all a matter of relating individual works to the common structures that they manifest and vary” (Culler 7). While this is likely still too abstract an identity for English professionals to sufficiently address the deep perceptual and material crises facing English studies, his ideas provide one framework for how think about the project of redefining English studies and the English major. English professionals along with English majors (for these are the English professionals of the future, inside and outside academia) should study themselves seriously as powerful “texts” of a sort and determine the common structures which English studies are relevant to and also what new things English studies and English students bring to those structures. This project of redefinition should be expansive and address not only the wants and needs of students heading to the private sector but also those of students drawn to English by a profound love and enjoyment of reading, inestimable in its value to students inside and outside of academia. Schwartz asserts that “English studies is a discipline in change, rooted in history but always renewed by both new literature and new
interpretation” (Schwartz 21), and it is time to put all this “newness” to work for English studies and its practitioners to address the individual sources of crisis I have taken pains to elucidate.

As Shepard explains, “persons who do not already hold advanced degrees in the discipline frequently misread the intellectual freedom…as suggesting a lack of coherence or even bad faith…because from another angle it looks as if we are refusing…to recognize that not everyone comes to college already knowing what we take for granted” (Shepard 25). English majors should still be allowed intellectual freedom in their studies, but they should also receive a carefully developed set of narratives which those students can use to figure out what they are doing in their studies. These narratives also would help students when they are called upon to explain their studies and potential career options to others, especially those outside the major.

**Declining Academic “Rigor” or Limited Programs**

This source of crisis is likely one of the most controversial to discuss because it presupposes some sort of tangible “decline” in English professionals themselves or even the abilities of English students, of which I have found no evidence nor even any discussion. I have, however, found discussions of and evidence for narrowness or narrowing of English academic programs. While the limiting of academic offerings may have much to do with slim departmental budgets, another aspect of this has to do with the structural practices limiting the successful launch of new undergraduate classes. In one English program with a list of required classes and an undifferentiated set of elective
courses (meant to offer freedom for undergraduates to pick relevant classes), these “courses were offered less frequently and both students and faculty members were drawn to those on the central list. Since all new or innovative courses fell by default into the elective domain, they were launched or auditioned under an inherent disadvantage” (Schwartz 17). This curricular setup apparently kept this particular English program relatively limited despite its best intentions toward expansion and an adequate breadth of courses. The perception of limited departmental offerings for students can contribute to a perception on the part of English majors that the department is either materially unable to provide the sort of program they require (which only feeds any material crisis the department actually faces) or unwilling to adequately support the newest and most innovative areas of the discipline in favor of the more traditional areas. This may perpetuate a perception on the part of English majors that their major is “antiquated” or out of sync with the times somehow, a perceptions that the English professionals in those new and innovative fields may come to share.

Another professional tells of a general feeling on the part of English majors that their major is considered less rigorous or less hard-won than majors in other disciplines. Beidler says that, “at least at Lehigh, where historically there are lots of business, science, engineering, and social science majors, students who major in English sometimes feel put down for selecting an impractical, pie-in-the-sky, lazy-bones, artsy-fartsy major” (Beidler, “What English Majors Do” 32). This is not so much an indication of whether English majors are actually ridiculed for their major, but speaks rather of how English majors perceive the ways other people would characterize their major. This perception may cause a material and perceptual crises for English majors entering the career world
already convinced that their major is less difficult than the other areas of undergraduate study that Beidler references, of which I have found no objective proof.

At the same time, I came across reference of a study by the National Association of Scholars conducted in 2000 stating that, out of a study of English departments in 25 colleges, “only 10 of the departments required students to complete a thesis or take a comprehensive examination in 1997, compared with 20 departments in 1964” (Leatherman para. 11). There seems to be a professional perception, however limited, of crisis in the academic rigor of English programs, and yet the inclusion of the word “comprehensive examination” in this study may pinpoint this particular decline in a movement within academia generally away from a belief in finals tests and towards a more process-centered curricular model. Moffat reports a decidedly more optimistic upswing in academic rigor for English graduates, saying that, “for the last decade, our curriculum capstone has been a yearlong senior experience…during which they write a fifty-page paper on a topic of their choice…students (and the professor) read and support the work in progress of all students in the class…seniors present their essays to the faculty and underclassmen” (Moffat 29). The perception that English majors participate in a less rigorous academic program than other majors can produce an untoward material crisis as English Studies seeks funds from others, since parents, administrators, and donors from the private sector must be convinced of the programs’ quality and challenge to students in order to confidently provide funding.
Lack of Active Recruitment

I found two professional accounts of the recruitment imbalances between English majors and students within other majors such as science and engineering. Clayton points out that “a bright engineering student is actively recruited – courted; no one recruits English majors” (Clayton 122), and Fenton likewise says that “scholarships and fellowships in the sciences are at this moment infinitely more plentiful than in the humanities; a bright kid with a gift for physics is as abundantly and shamelessly recruited as a promising fullback” (Fenton 204). Both agree that English and humanities majors are not actively recruited – at least not to the extent that students for other majors are, and Fenton points to the lack of scholarship-type funding as the main source of recruitment inequality. Active recruitment of students for a major coupled with the receipt of scholarships for that major have a huge impact on how a student may feel about the prosperity and health of his or her major. Departments able to secure donors show students not only that the department has the resources and access to these donors but also that people outside academia – be they alumni or members of the private sector or government bodies – value the major, believe it will make money, and are willing to invest money and energy into keeping it alive. The active giving out of scholarships to students is not merely monetary security for those students but a sign of where people outside of academia are willing and able to place their money and interests in the long term. The perceptual crisis caused by a lack of recruitment of and scholarships for English majors puts them in a real material crisis as well as the perceptual crisis that they are not valued outside of academia, however untrue this is in practice.
If administrative compensation for service courses is not enough to support scholarships for students in departments required to offer service courses, English departments are less likely to be able to retain and nourish the top-notch graduates who will become the English professors which administrators rely upon in the future.

**Sources of Hope**

In addition to the potential solutions I have offered already, I offer in this section more concrete reasons for why English studies should not be seen as in a state of decline, though it may face a number of real, material problems and also deep conceptual problems as it moves into the second decade of the new millennium.

*English Departments are Active, Aware, Willing to Confront Challenges*

One English professional speaks honestly of the “the rapidly changing dispositions and values of undergraduates…There is nothing very novel or revolutionary in these statements, but they reveal…a high degree of self-awareness and a willingness, indeed a determination to modify and adapt conventional procedures to meet the demands of the present” (Wilcox 449). I provide this statement as a synopsis of what the various analyses I have presented so far mean for the state of English studies and English departments in general. Collectively, the numerous statements and discussions of crisis that I have cited can be seen also as a strong statement of the lengths English professionals are willing to go to in order to bring positive changes (through criticism and
discussion) to their departments, disciplines, students, and institutions. As troubling as the testimony of the challenges English departments and their practitioners face should be for all, the wealth of articles discussing and addressing these problems represents the deep activity of these departments and the people who care about them. These departments and their students are vibrant and actively devoting time to the advocacy and continued development of their students and disciplines in a variety of ways – as can be seen by the diversity of issues I have covered so far. Perceptions that indicate that English departments are somehow “unable” to address their own needs and concerns are problematic given that English professionals seem ready and willing to address their own interior challenges as well as those challenges they face from outside the discipline. The material resources may be lacking to fully overcome these challenges, but this should not be construed as an inability, unwillingness, or any lack of desire.

**Enduring Popularity**

*Humanities Still Very Popular*

A report published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 2002 provides information about undergraduate student majors and degrees. According to this information, 19% of undergraduates major in business, and surprisingly, the “arts and humanities fields rank a close second at 10%, collectively” (Laurence, “Notes” 4). As of 7 years ago, a tenth of U.S. undergraduates chose the arts and humanities as their field of choice, so it cannot be said that these fields are not worth active advocacy on the
part of humanities professionals and administrators alike. Declining budgets for fields in which there are still a huge number of undergraduates put undue monetary strain on these hard working students and professionals who care deeply about their fields and about what their field can do for society.

**English Studies Still Popular and Valued**

I cannot stress enough the reality of the continuing high enrollments for English studies nationally. Whatever crises and inequalities English majors stand to face in this field, a large number of students want to be English majors and actively enter the discipline, at least as undergraduates. The pervasive assumption that the degree is somehow useless does not dissuade student passion for this area of study. According to a study by the NCES on students in the academic year 1999-2000, “the English major remains one of the strongest majors in the humanities and in any area of study…more than 50,000 baccalaureate degrees were awarded in English, about 4% of all baccalaureate degrees…English ranked ninth among more than fifty fields in the Department of Education’s general categorization of academic fields of study” (Laurence, “Notes” 4).

If there were any fears that English studies was somehow moribund within the modern university system and not deserving of serious financial support, I hope these statistics show why these doubts represent a crisis – a distinct disconnect between the real choices of students and the perceptions that attend the areas of study students choose. Also, undergraduate students in English, in a survey Beidler conducted of his English
undergraduate alumni from 1980-2000, value four main aspects of their English education particularly, namely writing skills, critical thinking skills, literary appreciation, and personal growth (Miller and Jackson 699), in that order. An English education is both popular and valued in general by a good many students. The perception that students don’t find both material and personal value in studies as an English major presents undue problems for these students as they explain themselves and their work to others.

I should also note here that English departments may be in better shape generally than some of their close friends in the humanities. As one scholar asserts, “departments of English are more or less thriving, while departments of other language and literatures in the same places are depleted and struggling” (Greene 1241). That English departments may deserve to be much more thriving based on the integral role they play in the university system should seem true based on my previous discussions. However, that English may be doing well compared to other humanities departments also seems likely, as English has found success making itself universal within the University. That English has succeeded in making its majors specifically useful in a variety of fields seems less true given my previous analyses. There very well may be departments within the humanities in more dire need of financial support and deep revitalization than English studies, and yet advocacy for the specific usefulness of English studies would likely only benefit other departments of language and literature. Especially, a revitalization of the definitions that English professionals have of literatures (as part of the greater project of making more useful narratives about the value of English studies) would likely benefit
departments of foreign languages and literatures as much as it would benefit English departments more specifically.

Growing Connections

*English Majors in Demand / Valuable in Private Sector and Non-Traditional Fields*

I have put much emphasis on the specific disconnect between English studies and the private sector, with the important clarification that this disconnect is largely perceptual and false. In a 1986 study of English alumni post-bacc careers at the University of Kansas, “the management category, comprising 63 percent…is conclusive proof…that business, broadly construed, continues to seek out and hire graduates in the humanities for managerial positions, and that the ‘marketable’ qualities they possess are as attractive as those of any newly-minted MBA” (Cook, “A Comment” 493). In other words, though English studies may not be viewed as having direct connections and relevance to the private sector, a huge percentage of English students go into this field. As such, developing stronger financial and support ties between a wide variety of professionals within the private sector would help validate and support the many English majors who feed directly into the private sector. That businesses would put most of their support behind business programs and neglect to realize the contributions that a wider range of disciplines (including English studies) make to the private sector is a crisis that should be actively addressed by English departments. English departments *already*
support the efforts within the private sector, and it is only logical that businesses should invest in the students and departments feeding into private sector careers.

Beyond what English majors do end up doing for a living, the skills that they possess are well-suited for work in a wide variety of fields. As one professional reports, “several marketing directors have told me that they prefer hiring English majors over marketing majors because English majors frequently possess a sophisticated sense of audience that enables them to craft better specific communications for particular niche audiences” (Cohen 14). Another group of English professionals also points out that English majors might also look into the lucrative field of corporate training, playing up their writing and communications skills as key for training a wide variety of professionals.

As another venue, humanities and specifically English majors can look to the rising medical profession also. According to a 2007 Newsweek article, “approximately 40 percent of the students that Penn accepts to its medical school now come from nonscience backgrounds (Kliff para. 3), perhaps because, compared to science students, “humanities students also fare better on the MCAT, the standardized test for medical-school admissions. Among the 2006 applicants to medical school, humanities majors outscored biology majors in all categories. (Kliff para. 4). That humanities scholars do well on the MCAT is likely not a message most English majors receive, but this sort of specific information, if brought to the attention of students and the general public, would likely reverse the perception of English as only a teaching major and somehow disconnected from employment opportunities.
To summarize the valuable skills that English studies can provide, “the person sensitive to the nuances of human relationships, to the contradictions within each one of us, to the feelings of other people, to the fact that any situation can be examined from a variety of perspectives…makes a valuable lawyer, doctor, business executive, social worker” (Clayton 125). I like Clayton’s tendency toward listing concrete fields that humanities students go into, as it represents a trend away from saying that these students can simply do anything and away from the assumption of teaching. Rather, it calls upon these fields to directly recognize the contributions that the humanities can provide – which may lead to better communication and funding – and also helps students to imagine themselves within specific fields, combating feelings of uselessness on all counts. These fields can still be manifold, but calling them “anything” doesn’t necessarily help students.

**Increasing Use of Technology in English Studies**

I have already spent a considerable amount of time discussing the perceptual and often material disconnections between English studies and technology, but as in the disconnect between English studies and the private sector, there are many real and important connections that are merely overlooked or ill publicized. English professionals, by and large, are gradually incorporating technology into the English curriculum, whether or not adequate funding for this change is available (Cohen 13). English professionals put computers and other technologies to use in their classrooms in a wide variety of ways, and students are also regularly expected to interact using a wide
range of digital technologies. The humanities and English studies are not naturally
separated from technology, and any separation that is perceived is likely not grounded in
the material realities of departments – with computers in most offices/classrooms and the
standard requirement of email access and word-processed writing assignments, to name
the most basic technology uses.

Furthermore, English departments seem to be actively incorporating technology
into the repertoire of English majors beyond the simplest uses – using it as a basis for
excellent English studies rather than merely an attached appendage. Cohen reports that,
in his department, some English courses are taught in “computer classrooms that seat
twenty-five to thirty-five students, [and] they still require a great deal of writing and class
discussions, the staples of traditionally highly interactive English classes” (Cohen 13).
As Cohen testifies, “the power of being able to do in a single lab classroom what we have
done in the past with slides, records, books, posters, handouts, and field trips is
impressive” (Cohen 13). Computer labs devoted to particular disciplines are particularly
useful to the promotion of student and professional community, as they are places where
students can work for long periods of time and at the same time hear and see the work of
their peers and other professionals (Selfe 66). It is not enough to say that computer labs
are unnecessary in a world of personal laptops, as this negates the particular sense of
community that these labs help to develop for students – versions of community essential
to study in the humanities.

Given the perceptual and material problems English Studies must overcome,
especially in the cases of self-redefinition and public presence, “technology would be
used to distribute power beyond traditional hierarchical structures, to create collaborative
opportunities, and to invite involvement, professional development, and communication” (Selfe 67). This is to say, the deep and widespread incorporation of technologies into humanities and English departments would give these studies new power to revitalize themselves and their members beyond traditional structures that may currently hamper these efforts.

Also, there do seem to be movements afoot to incorporate technology into English departments’ definitions of literature. Stroupe, for example, analyses a variety of English department websites and finds that one such website entitled “‘What does it mean to study English today?’ suggests that language itself is a technology, and thus that technology can function as a language: ‘At the heart of literary study lies the simple yet striking recognition that language constitutes both a technology of thought and a constituent of human reality’” (Stroupe 630). This sort of information on a webpage is powerful for both students and industry members, as it cognitively and materially ties English studies to technology, not to mislead students but to bring perceptions of English studies in line with its material realities.

Technologies are also merging into literary studies in the subfield of digital humanities. One English professional in the digital humanities describes “what a growing number of practitioners in the digital humanities (and related disciplines, like digital art or game studies) have begun to call procedural rhetoric, or procedural literacy” (Kirschenbaum para. 18). He goes on to state that this new sort of literacy is “essential if humanities students are to understand virtual worlds as rhetorical and ideological spaces, just as film and the novel are likewise understood as forms of representation and rhetoric” (Kirschenbaum para. 19). He points out in these statements that new technologies and
media communications are not merely peripheral to literary studies but actually the future and continuation of those studies, as basic to these studies as film and the novel have come to seem. In this same vein, there are some professionals composing poems using computer languages, called code work, which “blends functional computer code with creative composition” (Kirschenbaum para. 8). This is but one concrete articulation of the deep connections between literary studies and technology that have been suppressed in popular perceptions of English Studies and English majors.

Another article I looked into discussed large and expansive projects undertaken by English studies professionals to create digital maps to create visual representations of the “worlds” within literary works, such as the world of Shakespeare in London or the world of his characters – as well as the intersections of the worlds of works with one another (Howard, “Literary Geospaces” para. 17). All of these projects and subfields are “vitality putting the lie to claims that literary studies are moribund and that scholars have failed to draw on the analytic and quantitative tools now available to them” (Howard, “Literary Geospaces” para. 3-4). English professionals do already understand the material and perceptual problems facing their disciplines and actively seek to change these realities through their work and – as they are writing articles about these changes – to publicize these revitalizations to the wider public.
Beneficial Diversity

Diversity of English Education a Function of Student Change and Diversity

I have already spoken at length about the incoherence of the English major as it is currently conceptualized, and I bring it up again in this section because for many professionals the breaking down of the walls of the English major – at the expense of its ability to be easily understood – has been and will continue to be one key to its lasting survival and thriving. As the literary possibilities expand, so will the relevance of the discipline to the wider world. That considerable work still needs to be done to accomplish this potential is still important, but English has laid important groundwork for its claims to serious and specific importance to society by rejecting many of its previous limitations.

Other professionals point to the fact that “the increased range and diversity of the materials available for study, and also our altered sense of what makes study in English worthwhile, have some connection, however indirectly, to the increasing range and diversity of the undergraduate student population itself – ethnic, racial, economic, demographic” (Laurence, “Notes” 3). This is to say that the lack of definition that goes along with English studies today can be directly related to the positive, burgeoning diversity of the student population in American universities. The inability for English to easily and narrowly define itself is in part due to the willingness of English professionals to acknowledge and take into serious consideration the diversity of its students and student interests. At the same time, coherent and understandable public and departmental
narratives that explain the purposes of English studies and its ability to address the needs of the wider public are still possible within a framework of diversity is not the same as a large undifferentiated whole – rather it is a collection of individually located voices with their own identities as well as deep and important connections to a wider whole. The direction of departmental narrative should be specificity, not narrowness. It is not sufficient to simply slim down the range of topics that English covers, as some professional might advocate.

_Diversity in Education Fits Well within Global Society_

Along with the diversification of the student population, the national direction in the U.S. is toward globalization, and the humanities in particular (including English studies) are intentionally broad to allow students to adequately confront the large issues of an internationalized culture. Cohen asserts that “the growing diversity of the American workforce and internationalization of markets for American products, moreover, suggests that companies will increasingly seek out employees with the ethnic and cultural awareness that the humanities cultivate” (Cohen 17). That English studies should remain diverse and expansive is clear, but it will be increasingly useful for English department narratives and identities to incorporate the ways that English studies are concretely relevant to globalization within the private and public sectors alike. This is one of the clearest ways that English studies are important for and valuable to students, and that this is not part of the larger public discourse surrounding English studies represents a perceptual discontinuity.
View from Student Level

**English Students Do Get Jobs – A Variety of Jobs**

One of the clearest and most enduring ways to clarify perceptions of what English majors are and what they do is to “[invert] the question…commonly asked by prospective English majors – What can I do with an English major? – into the more historical question, What have English majors…gone on to do?” (Moffat 26). It should be clarified, first and foremost, that English majors do go on to do. A 2007 study by the National Science foundation finds that “of the 40,000,000 graduates, 3.7%...received their first bachelor’s degree in English…75.1% of graduates with bachelor’s degrees in English reported they were employed; 11.5% were retired, and 7.2% were not working for family reasons. Only 3.2% of graduates reported they were not working because they had been laid off or no job was available” (Laurence, “Undergraduate Degrees” 5).

There is no material evidence to suggest that English majors are unemployable, though material crises (such as inadequate funding) may reinforce the perception that English majors are unemployable.

Beidler’s study of undergraduate alumni published in 2003 suggests that, as English majors, “few graduates do continue in English. Less than 6% obtain the MA in English – only a few more than go on to get an MBA – while 10% study education. Only 5 of the 218 respondents got a PhD in English, in sharp contrast to the 39 who became doctors of jurisprudence – that is, lawyers…less than half…are involved in some sort of educational enterprise or in…professions like writing, publishing, television, and
librarianship. More than a quarter are involved in law or public-service fields…But more than 40%…are involved in some sort of business or industry” (Beidler, “What English Majors Do” 30). This study gives an expansive look at what fields English majors choose after their undergraduate studies – business, law, public service, industry, education, media, and also graduate studies in English. English studies professionals should look to these sectors specifically for new areas in which to build donor support networks as well as employment networks for students – practices which I discuss in coming sections. The statistics I have provided here speak directly to how false the perceptions of English studies as very narrow or nonexistence career preparation truly are, and why they constitute a crisis.

*English Students Find Their Major Useful in Careers*

In the same report by Beidler, when alums were asked “whether having majored in English helps alums do their current job…more than nine-tenths…said that it did” (Beidler, “What English Majors Do” 32). It is also instructive to note that when these same alums were asked what they would have done differently, they said they would have studied a foreign language and taken a few additional courses related to business (Beidler, “What English Majors Do” 33) – though not, importantly, that they would have changed their major. Larsen reports that English studies have also been important to graduates while job searching, as mastery of the fine points of communication helped them avoid various common problems with job applications and other work situations (Larsen 133). This is an instructive take on what English studies can provide to students
– not only the skills needed in jobs but also the nuanced and specific skills needed to
even obtain employment: to compose résumés, to advertise and market oneself
effectively, and to ace an interview. There is a sort of employability inherent in the skills
that English majors stand to gain from their studies, and public acknowledgement of the
applicability of English studies to career-minded students would help combat mistaken
perceptions that English studies are somehow antithetical to career placement.

**Student-Centered Change**

*Alumni Networks Possible and Probable for Humanities / English Departments*

Given that English students do appear to get a wide variety of jobs in an array of
professions, there is already a widespread network of former English students to whom
English professionals can reach out for support. In particular, a strong and diverse
alumni network with a visible presence on campus and within the department specifically
would help to combat the perceptions that English majors do not get jobs, are limited to
very few careers, and do not have direct paths – concrete paths – to reach those careers.

One professional points out that “one major difference between a state university
and a private college is that we have no ‘old-boy/old-girl network’ to draw upon for help
for our majors” (Clayton 129). A wide variety of English professionals have gone about
rectifying this situation. For example, Moffat describes inviting a group of alumni back
to the department for a two-day community-building event where alumni “visited
relevant classes and met informally with students…this time events were widely attended
by faculty members and students (not just majors)” (Moffat 29). What is most important about this effort is that “these alumni spoke fervently to younger peers about the value of their education and far more persuasively than faculty members could have done” (Moffat 29). It is vital for the improvements of the perceptions of English majors in particular that real, living, breathing models for what their future can be are offered to them on a regular basis, and active, visible alumni networks can provide this for students.

Community building for students can take another form. Baker describes taking “a cue from departments of science, engineering, and business…the faculty members in these disciplines regularly invite speakers from industry to campus…the creation of an established advisory board to help the faculty members keep their courses current and relevant to their industry and to help their students make the transition from the classroom to the workplace” (Baker 36-37). Here, Baker describes inviting industry professionals into the department to promote community and to provide students with a visual reminder of their connections to the world outside of academia. These industry professionals likewise will carry out the message of English professionals into their industries, which would, if done on a large enough scale, benefit English professionals and students alike in the long run. Baker’s advisory board is also “asked to narrate for the student audience their path from studies in the arts and humanities to the position that they currently hold” (Baker 37-38), which goes hand in hand with the development of coherent departmental narratives to combat the perceptual inaccuracies attending English studies. The basic thrust of this movement on the part of English professionals is toward an emphasis on networking by and for students, as a way to reconnect the many
disconnections between English studies and the wider world, of which it is definitively a vital part, despite all assumptions to the contrary.

If a widespread movement toward the creation of a powerful alumni network is impossible at the current moment for English departments, Clayton describes asking “alumni/ae in various fields to send us audio cassettes, thirty minutes of talk about what they do, how they got to do it, and what it’s like, and what they would advise students interested in similar careers” (Clayton 131). In short, alumni networks should be by no means considered outside the possibilities of English studies, particularly because of the richness and diversity of these fields and the unique ability of English alumni to be able to communicate to current and prospective English students the strengths of English studies both inside and outside of academia.

*English Studies Coherence through Explanation / Introduction*

One way that professionals have gone about combating the “lack of definition” problems they have faced, as well as the similar problems of “uselessness,” is to offer a course on the assumptions and problems that attend the discipline. Schwartz’s department calls this course “The Pursuits of English,” and it is meant to raise a variety of questions: “What is literature? Why study it? What is a text? Why do we read what we read? How do we read and write? What are the politics of interpretation?” (Schwartz 19). Though this sort of course is perhaps not meant to explain to students a set of material and perceptual “crises” attending the discipline (as I have tried to outline and explain), this course at least begins to open up students to the wide discourses
surrounding the discipline. It represents the commitment of English professionals to presenting not only the materials which are studies in English but also a history of how English studies have existed. This sort of history or explanation can go a long way toward enhancing the ability of students to talk coherently about what it is they are doing (when meeting future employers and the general public) and also in their perception of the importance and relevance of their endeavors.

**Historical Bias Against English in American Colleges**

I offer, as the conclusion to this section, a short discussion of the beginnings of English Studies in the American college. I have made brief reference to this history already, but the story bears further telling because its relevance to the current crises that English studies face today. The beginnings of English departments can provide students with a deep sense of why English studies are they way they are currently.

My source for the history of English departments is the article Theodore Hunt wrote for the very first issue of the PMLA in 1885. In the article, he sets up the conflict between the classics departments and the newer English department, whose place was “one of decided inferiority…less than one-half as much instruction is offered in English as in the ancient tongues” (Hunt 118). Hunt further explains the common perception that English as the vernacular is inferior, as it is the common property of all English speakers, with no special knowledge imparted by the specific study of it (Hunt 120). Hunt predicts that if the claims of professional consideration of English studies are ignored, they will likely go the way of science by organizing its own school where it can develop itself
more fully (Hunt 123). He also laments the common perception that English is merely “a subject for the desultory reader in his leisure hours rather than an intellectual study for serious workers” (Hunt 126). He also fights against the claims of his time “that the mission of America is not literary but industrial” (Hunt 129-130).

Hunt’s comments and struggles of over a century ago echo the current crises which English departments face. The perception that English studies are somehow “not work” is still a problem and seems to have the same roots as the universality of the major – the idea that English studies are not work or proper preparation for work because everyone reads and writes English already. English teachers responded to this claim with the creation of their discipline and the development of theory and the literary canon and progressively higher degrees of study. Even so many years ago, Hunt struggled to dispel the common sentiment that literature had nothing to do with society, particular an American society bent on industry – which I have renamed in its most current manifestation, technology.

Perhaps what is more important for students to see is the breaking with tradition and the return to practical and local needs that English Studies originally represented within the American college. English studies broke with the classics in viewing something far too close and common to U.S. college students – the English language – as deeply important to students and worthy of careful thought and consideration. As odd as it may seem compared to public perception, English in American colleges has a progressive root in advocating for the abilities of students to study and take seriously their own language. That English studies have continued to expand and make room for new literatures can be seen as a continuation of an original fight and an original aim to
teach students the literatures closest, most relevant, and useful to them. The perception that English studies are not intimately tied to change (though rooted in history) may be a fundamental misunderstanding of the original arguments for English studies in the U.S.

Hunt’s article is also important in reminding everyone associated with English studies of a time when these studies were able to rise and were actively argued for and advocated for in academia as well as the general public. Many professionals within the disciplines carry on this advocacy and these arguments into the current moment. The fact that I have only come upon this realization with the initiation of an Honors thesis, and not within my regular course of English studies, may go some way toward explaining why I believe these arguments and advocacies have farther to go.
Local Discussions

My goal in this section is to compare some of the crises, problems, sources of hope, and changes most important to professionals within English studies nationally to the local situation of English studies at OSU. For this discussion section, I will use both university published information and a set of email surveys conducted specifically for this project.

Data Collection / Methods

Survey Design

I designed my survey to be sent / received via email so that a wider range of students and faculty inside and outside of the department would be able to participate.

I used direct emailing, class announcements, email/newsletter announcements, and posters to recruit participants, and I only sent surveys to those participants who notified me via email that they wished to participate voluntarily. All survey participants were sent standardized email scripts, a standardized Informed Consent document to inform them about the project and its aims, as well as the survey itself.

All surveys were entered into a centralized database, organized by the time the surveys were received, and the identifying names were removed, leaving only identification by time received, college/department association, and university role.
The survey consisted of 10 short answer questions, where participants were asked to give their personal opinions about the English department and English studies at OSU. The questions were intentionally open-ended to allow for a full diversity of opinions. Part of what I was trying to analyze was whether people relied upon standard stereotypes in thinking about the English major and English studies, and multiple-choice type responses would have likely prevented this sort of analysis. It was important for the questions to be the least suggestive possible while still remaining understandable.
The survey questions are as follows:

1) What department(s)/colleges(s) at OSU are you most associated with? In what capacity (student or faculty or staff member)?

2) Have you taken English classes through the English department at OSU? Which classes? If applicable, please indicate whether the classes were electives or required.

3) What do you know about the English department or have you had any other interactions with it?

4) What do English students (majors, minors, etc) study?

5) What do English students do after college (plans, careers, jobs, professions, etc)?

6) Do you think the funding for the English department differs from other departments?

7) Do you think the funding should differ, whether or not it does?

8) Do you think English studies are a priority at OSU?

9) Do you think general opinions about the English department and/or English studies differ from those of other departments at OSU? If so, in what way?

10) If you have any other opinions or ideas about the English department or English studies not addressed by the questions above, please share them below if you wish.
The first three questions are meant to gather information about how familiar the participants were with the English department at OSU, and in what ways they were familiar with it.

Questions 3, 4, and 5 are meant to gather personal opinions from participants about what, in their opinions, English majors do – both inside and outside of the university. The answers to these questions can be used to assess whether the messages and goals of English departments are well understood by a variety of people, both people inside and outside of the department. These questions also help in identifying, if any, the positive or negative stereotypical assumptions surrounding English studies and English majors at OSU particularly. These questions help to depict how English studies exists at OSU, or how it is constructed in a variety of imaginations. These opinions can be fruitfully compared to the material realities expressed by other sources of information about OSU to draw conclusions about what issues surrounding the English major at OSU are most real and important to consider.

Questions 6 and 7 address how people think about funding, in particular, and what they know about the funding situations at OSU. These questions also are meant to provide information about how funding affects perception, and how actual funding situations may differ from perceptions of funding differences or equalities.

Question 8 is meant to gather information about what a variety of people think about where the English department stands within the OSU community, and about what the priorities at OSU are. It is useful to compare this information about what the OSU administration says about its own priorities, the funding of different colleges, the Student Credit Hours (SCH) of a variety of colleges, and other relevant statistics. The goal is to
determine both how people view OSU priorities and whether there are any discrepancies or differences between priorities, funding, perceptions, and contributions.

Question 9 was intentionally difficult for respondents, as it asked them to evaluate the general perceptions surrounding English studies and the English major, rather than asking them to provide their own personal opinions. I am sure that the responses to the questions are a mixture of personal perceptions on the part of respondents as well as an honest evaluation of what they believe others think or what they have heard from others. This question in particular asks respondents to do what I have done in this study – to report on how something is perceived and exists, by looking to outside opinions as well as one’s own opinions and perceptions. This is a difficult task, but one of the most fruitful and important to determining the larger “atmosphere” surrounding English studies and the English major at OSU.

The 10th question was meant as a release valve for survey participants, or a way for them to vent any opinions about English studies not addressed in the other questions and a place for them to make suggestions. Among responses in this category were a few thank-you notes and well-wishes for my project, a quote by Cervantes, suggestions and complaints about particular classes at OSU, praise for particular professors, and laments about upcoming graduations. I was encouraged by the many responses offered to this question in particular, as it seemed to indicate a genuine desire on the part of many survey respondents to engage in the survey topic and sit through an extra few minutes on its behalf.

The survey responses were designed to be particularly useful in developing two sorts of discussions. The first is a discussion of the different perceptions and realities
between the students and faculty most associated with the English department and those farther away from it. The second is a discussion of how perceptions and realities differ between the students and faculty associated with the English department at OSU and the views of a national sampling of English department professionals. These will be my two main modes of discussion and analysis in the coming sections. At the same time, I have extensive statistical information about the material realities of English studies at OSU, so within these two larger discussions I will be providing clarifications of where perceptions differ from or confirm the material “realities” of English studies at OSU.

**Data Analysis Methods**

Though I was extremely pleased to hear the expansive responses of my survey participants via my very open-ended survey, the nature of the responses (sometimes paragraphs long) made drawing generalizations and conclusions more difficult. I put the data through progressive consolidations in order to make semi-organized presentation possible. These consolidations necessitated a great many generalizations and subjective decisions on my part. Because of this, the data charts containing the survey information received should be taken as general trends rather than hard and fast statistical data. It was often possible to find consistent wording throughout the survey responses, which was the basic way I went about analyzing and categorizing responses.

In general, my method was to standardize the wording of all responses first by replacing words like “teaching,” “to teach,” “instructor” with the standardized term “teacher.” Many responses did not fit into clear categories, so these often became new
categories. After this, I passed through the data a second time to consolidate as many wordings as possible into relevant meta-categories from which fruitful conclusions could be made. For example, in question 9 about whether or not opinions about English studies differ from those of other departments, some respondents said that lack of visibility made it hard for non-majors to form opinions about English studies, while others said that visibility affects how well a major is known. The meta-category for this question is “Visibility Important,” which suggests a more general conclusion than individual responses would provide.

The data received in the surveys would make fantastic fodder for an extensive and protracted textual analysis, but for the purposes of assessing general situations – my purpose – I needed only a set of general conclusions.

For discussion purposes and in an effort to be more transparent, at the end of every data table I have appended a short listing of the most popular responses within any given meta-category. Any exclusion from this list indicates that the meta-category title was the most popular or only response offered.

An additional field within the data charts could have been the relative strength of each response, or even the diversity of the responses offered by any given respondent, but this sort of categorization would have necessitated undue subjectivity in determining the tone of each response and a less language-based categorization. Suffice it to say the data was categorized based most on language and wording, with the goal of balancing important distinctions between responses as well as the need to make broad connections. The meta-categories represent the most important and common conflicts within responses.
Data Discussion

Survey Response Statistics

In total, 43 respondents returned surveys, 27 of whom were students. The remaining 16 respondents were 14 faculty members and 2 staff members. I had originally designed the survey to be primarily for students, with the hope of 2 student respondents for every non-student respondent. Though I reached fewer English students than I had originally intended, I was still able to reach several English majors willing to give expansive responses, as well as a good number of faculty members. To make up for the under response from English students, I have included some responses from the 2006 English department Senior Exit Surveys to provide supplemental information on a few questions and issues.

I received responses from every college at OSU except the College of Pharmacy and the College of Oceanic and Atmospheric Science.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Faculty / Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Sciences</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forestry</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>HHS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Survey Participation by College and Role
Figure 2: Survey Participation - Student by College
Figure 1: Survey Participation by University Role
**Question 3**

What do you know about the English department or have you had any other interactions with it?

**Figure 2: Responses for Question 3**

**Most Popular Responses within Meta-Categories:**

- **Well-Known:** teaches classes; enrolled/major; extensive interactions
- **Known Through Publication:** research; recent published works
- **Not Much Known:** not much known; minimal interactions; nothing known
- **What Department Known Through:** taken a few classes; located in Moreland; known through friends
- **Major Areas of Study:** Shakespeare; English literature; cultural studies
- **What Department is About:** Literature and Reading; Writing; Literature and Writing
- **Negative Comments:** department with budget problems; building problems; students (in general) not proficient enough at writing
- **Positive / Neutral Comments on Department:** rewarding; flexible; lots of students; diverse
Overall, the responses for this question follow expectations. English faculty, English majors, and the Education major all know the department well, and most non-majors say that they don’t know much about the department or that they know about it through taking classes or through the location. Most significant in these answers is that basically no students said they knew of the department through publicity, publications, events, or newsletters of any kind. The responses for this question fit with the ideas of English professionals nationally who indicate that the common conception of the English department is in its role as service course provider for the university at large. It is not surprising, then, that many of the non-majors have taken what they consider English classes. Significantly, the Liberal Arts majors did not generally proclaim to know the department extremely well.

Also significant are the negative ways that both English faculty and students characterized their department – in talking about budget and building problems. The survey itself likely elicited some of the negative responses, but a common thread through many of the responses I will present in this section is a general sense of concern on the part of English faculty and students for problems facing the department, a sense that is not necessarily shared by non-majors. Non-majors tend to characterize the department, especially in this response, through what is studied and types of learning, as well as the diversity of the department.

At the same time, English faculty and students, along with a couple non-majors, felt it was important to point out the quality of the professors in the department, which will also be a common thread through many responses.
Question 4

What do English students (majors, minors, etc) study?

![Diagram showing various topics and their associated studies.]

**Figure 3: Responses to Question 4**

- **Writing-Centered:** creative writing; grammar; form; style
- **Reading-Centered:** reading methods / techniques
- **Literature-Centered:** literature; World literature; American literature; literary history; English literature
- **Author/Writer-Centered:** authors; famous writers; classical writers
- **Genre-Based:** film; fiction; short story; drama
- **Art-Based:** art; art history; visual arts
- **World-Based:** world understanding
- **Culture-Based:** culture; cultural theory; acculturation
- **Context-Based:** context; social context
- **Critical Thinking/Analysis-Based:** analysis; critical thinking; rhetoric
- **Teacher-Based:** education; pedagogy
- **Creativity-Based:** creative thought process; aesthetic appreciation
- **Term/Concept-Based:** ideas; significance; power
- **History-Based:** history; historical context; history of English language
- **Language-Based:** language; linguistics; spoken English
- **Communication-Based:** communication; oral communication
- **Research-Based:** library research; research techniques
- **Humanities-Based:** philosophy; psychology; women's studies
- **Human-Based:** human experience; problems of human nature
- **Student-Based:** personal connections; how to succeed
Almost all respondents felt they had a good handle on what English majors study, which seems relatively encouraging considering many non-majors originally said they didn’t know much about the English department.

In general, the most popular responses were literature-based learning and writing-based learning, though popularity of those responses was reversed among non-majors. Critical thinking / analysis based-learning was significantly more common for English faculty and students than it was for non-majors, although some non-majors did identify this as something English students study. I believe the emphasis on critical thinking and analysis is still too general, but it seems to indicate that English majors at OSU are aware that their discipline is useful for more than just learning to read and write – for which skills it is likewise helpful.

One respondent mentioned “how to succeed at life” as something that English majors study, and beyond this one response very few respondents mentioned career-centered learning, which is one of the crises that English studies seems to face nationally – one that advisors actively try to change. Responses sometimes focused on skills gained that could be used in a career, but “how to be something” was by and large not in the scope of responses.

Only 2 respondents out of 43 (and no non-majors) thought of research as something English majors study, although the wording of the question may have prevented this answer from coming up – although it did twice. Considering “Research Methods” is a required class for English majors (one of very few absolutely required classes), the fact that not even English majors identified this area of study is troubling. English majors do plenty of research for papers, and I consider this one of the most
important aspects of my English education. Research also figures prominently in the “Letter from the Chair” on the English department website which describes study in the English department. As Dr. Ahearn writes, “we teach students to read objectively, gather data, analyze sources, judge hypotheses, create research parameters, and communicate their findings with force and clarity…we have won…national prizes for writing and research. We also contribute to OSU’s international influence…presenting research at international conferences” (Ahearn 1). Further, in the 2006 English department Senior Exit Surveys, one senior notes: “I have sharply honed my writing skills while as an English major, especially in regards to a research paper” (Department 9).

One of the most likely reasons that very few respondents recognized “research” as one of the main areas of study for English major is that the OSU administration tends to downplay the research aspect of the College of Liberal Arts in general, which is very problematic for any college trying to survive within a research university. According to the Budget Rebasing document produced by the OSU administration in 2006, “the Colleges of Agricultural Sciences, Engineering, Forestry, and Oceanic and Atmospheric Sciences, are critical to University’s Top-10 vision. These colleges contribute significantly to the research mission and they offer some of the most visible and recognized programs” (Randhawa and McCambridge 6). This document describes the criteria for general fund distribution and is actually meant to help bolster funding for the CLA, except that it relegates this funding to the CLA based on the fact that “the Colleges of Liberal Arts, Health and Human Sciences, and Science deliver the baccalaureate core to the University” (Randhawa and McCambridge 5).
Furthermore, in this document, administrators note that “to increase research, a significant proportion of new F&A [Facilities and Administration] recovery must go to programs that account for sponsored research” (Randhawa and McCambridge 7). I find this a conundrum, pushing extra research money to sponsored research, as it might be better to push funding to research which is less well funded – and which still is valuable research and which might increase with better funding. Though it is a significant step forward for the university administration to recognize the strong contribution the CLA makes to the university, the administration appears to believe that a strong, amply funded Liberal Arts program contributes less to its goal of becoming a top-10 Land Grant university than would the continued funding of high-publicity “research” departments.

The English department and Liberal Arts at OSU face the same disassociation between English and research (or teaching and research) likely due to a separation between service courses and research programs in the administrative imagination. This disassociation seems to be strong for both the majors and non-majors who responded to the survey.

In looking at the chart more generally, it is key to notice the huge number of columns required to express the scope and breadth of English studies as it is conceptualized at OSU. The literature-based and writing-based columns also encompassed the largest sub-sets of responses among any meta-category. The inability for both majors and non-majors – though especially majors – to define what English majors study in concise, coherent, forceful, specific language (though they had a strong sense of the value of its diversity) may be indicative that English studies at OSU suffers the same sort of identity crisis problems of English departments nationally. This crisis,
again, has to do with the lack of administrative, public, and private support that accompanies an inability for either English professionals or English students to succinctly name the specific skills English majors can acquire and how the major can be applied outside academia to benefit society in practical ways. This message must also make it outside the discipline, but non-majors tended to identify more abstracted areas of study like literature, writing, language, and history.

According to a panel review of the English department in May 2007, “the department lacks a coherent intellectual and artistic focus. It began largely as a service department, teaching basic composition skills to science and engineering students. It then evolved into a department of literature…it has added courses and or programs in creative writing, film studies, post-colonial literatures…” (Halasek et al. 7). Suffice it to say the list goes on extensively from there. The panel goes on to say that, despite this renewing diversity, “the number of tenure-track teaching faculty has declined…the department is trying to cover more areas than ever with fewer faculty per specialty” (Halasek et al. 7), which the report finds unacceptable, saying that “many English departments across the country share this same situation” (Halasek et al. 7). The review panel suggests focusing on which classes and areas of study are most important and cutting out unnecessary classes, though – as I will point out in the section covering question 10 – the students already are concerned about a lack of course offerings.

This review panel recommends eliminating programs “with a realistic eye to what resources are actually available at present” (Halasek et al. 9), but I believe there are honest ways for the English department to combat the problematic combination of increased diversity and fewer funds without shutting down programs and courses
wholesale. As an alternative, the department could undertake widespread endeavors to sharpen the perceived focus of the department to fuel understanding and collaboration between the English department and the controllers of funding both inside and outside academia. This might involve increased publicity, redoing the department website, the creation of new promotional materials for wide distribution, offering a course for students on community promotion to engage them in outreach on behalf of the department (which would give valuable experience), more promotion of student internships to increase community presence, the creation of a stronger alumni network of a wide diversity of English graduates in a variety of fields, the creation of an advisory board to strengthen ties with industries the department considers relevant to English studies, etc. I find it unacceptable to assume that the beneficial aspects of the diversity of English studies must be curtailed due to funding inadequacies.

It is also significant that only 5 people of 43 mentioned teacher-based learning, as I will show in the coming section. If there is still the assumption that English majors go into teaching, there is not a corresponding assumption that they study teaching – something which indicates a distinct disconnect in the “logical” perception of English majors at OSU. This may stem from the fact that there is a separate College of Education here, and yet the existence of this college has not severed the perception of teaching within English. I am not advocating that English and education should not be connected. I am rather pointing out a perceptual disconnect between what people imagine English students study and what they think they go on to do. I believe this is due to a longstanding history of the association between English and teaching, rather than experience of what all majors actually go on to do.
Question 5

What do English students do after college (plans, careers, jobs, professions, etc)?

Figure 4: Responses to Question 5

Career Path Uncertain: may not use degree; BA degree less useful
Teaching-Centered Fields: teacher; education; academia
Writing-Centered Fields: writer; author; technical writing; critical analysis
Media-Related Fields: editing; journalism; publishing; newspapers; communications
Business-Related Fields: business; management; marketing
Other / Unclear: critical thinking; research; office; information; career; computer programmer; firefighter; mechanic; peace corps
Public / Government: politics; public relations; government
Medicine: medicine; health
Teaching is still considered the most common career for English majors, with all English students and faculty, along with most non-majors indicating this career destination. Writing-centered, media-centered, and anything were also extremely popular, in that order. Business was 5th, with Grad School placing 6th, although business was nearly as popular as was “career path uncertain” for non-majors.

Looking at the larger trends, it is clear that English faculty and some English majors had the best grasp on the many particular careers that English majors can and do go into. Some non-majors were creative in their perceptions, but for the most part the career choices for English majors were centered around writing, teaching, media, and anything/varied. It seems that the English department at OSU is likely subject to the more traditional careers for English majors and the assumptions that may come with those careers – i.e. low job market, low pay, lower or no degree required, etc. Several respondents (including English majors) expressed distressing opinions about the inability of English majors to become employed, and I generally put these into the Other / Unclear or Career Path Uncertain meta-category. The combination of a focus on traditional careers for English majors and assumptions of the disconnect between English studies and the private sector leads me to conclude that the English department at OSU would benefit from clearer definition and promotion of the direct and concrete connections between careers and a major in English. The department would likely benefit from this in promoting wider understanding of the importance of English studies to the community, and the OSU English major would develop a clearer sense of the real career opportunities – not just possibilities – involved in majoring in English.
It is also important to consider whether or not English is a teaching major at OSU, as there is clearly the assumption that teaching is key to the life of the English major from the opinions I received. I provide here a chart (Figure 7), based on the 2006 English department Senior Exit Surveys, showing the post-bacc plans of class of English majors at OSU.
Figure 5: Post-Bacc Plans based on English Department Senior Exit Surveys 2006
There is a strong teaching contingent – approximately 1/5 of these students express plans for teaching. However, clearly, nearly 1/4 of these students express plans for business and public relations. The perceptions of the English major do not match up to the reality of English majors at OSU, meaning that the English department and its students may experience some of the problems that go along with the assumptions of limited or traditional careers for English majors – namely that students not going into teaching feel more alienated, assumptions of low pay, and assumptions of lack of career choices.

Important to point out is the fact that both the strong identification of teaching and the strong identification of anything are found among respondents both inside and outside the department, leading me to conclude that the publicity of English as “good for anything” is inadequate to dispel any negative historical and structural stereotypes that go along with the belief that the English major is a relatively narrow major (teacher, writer). Eliminating the message of variety is not the goal; the goal is to concretize this “variety” into real manifestations of English careers. “Variety” can’t be easily and believably put on a résumé, and “variety” is too hard for the public and the private sector to visualize.
Question 6

Do you think the funding for the English department differs from other departments?

**Figure 6: Responses to Question 6**

*Inconclusive:* unsure of funding situation; no reasoning provided; national education funding problem  
*OSU Focused Elsewhere:* OSU focused on other areas; Engineering focus; Science focus; Athletic focus  
*Funding is Equitable:* similar to other departments; university applies same funding to all departments  
*English – Low Resource Requirements:* doesn’t require as many resources; doesn’t require as much technology / equipment  
*Funding Differences Based on Outside Sources:* fewer research grants; research provides more funding  
*Serious Funding Inequalities:* arts underfunded compared to others; CLA underfunded; less funding compared to tuition generated  
*Inadequate Funding Visible / Noticeable:* significant funding differences; inadequate faculty pay; Moreland is outdated
Most non-majors said they were unsure of the funding situation for the English department, but almost as many also said they thought the funding for it was less compared to other departments. Non-majors were also more likely to say that funding was equitable and that funding differences are based on outside sources. Non-major overall were less likely to point to structural problems or inequalities in funding or to point out that funding inequalities were serious or noticeable.

The respondents closest to the English department agreed by a large majority that funding is less for English studies, and these respondents also indicated that funding inequalities were more structural (that OSU priorities are elsewhere or that the BCC causes funding problems), serious, and visible/noticeable. I append to this list the opinions of three individuals returning surveys for the 2006 English department Senior Exit surveys. One of these respondents says, “I would be a fool not to recognize the importance of the agricultural and engineering schools at OSU…Moreland Hall is ages behind these other departments. Simple things like desks that function properly escape me on a daily basis” (Department 19). Another asks for “some freaking air conditioning in Moreland so the windows don’t have to be open cause it seems that whenever the windows are open…something loud and obnoxious in general usually happens outside and it’s a distraction” (Department 20). Yet another states that “Moreland Hall itself, that building is a joke really, I get it, it’s not a liberal arts school, but come on” (Department 20).

These respondents combined with the respondents from my survey express a serious concern about the funding inequalities between the most and least “prioritized” areas of study at OSU, particularly between facilities and between faculty pay. The
facilities were most often expressed as problematic by English majors, while English faculty were more likely to point out faculty pay discrepancies. The concerns on the part of those most associated with English studies were not generally about funding differences per se, but more often about funding inadequacies – for the more basic material needs. Along these same lines, the May 2007 department review panel suggests that the department “identify a portion of any capital campaign funds it receives to support need-based scholarships for undergraduates, the need for which the review panels were reminded of by students, some of whom reported working in excess of 30 hours per week and some of whom rely on food stamps” (Halasek et al. 3).

I offer the following Figures (9-14) as direct information about a variety of structural issues facing English studies at OSU. The source for the following tables is the Office of Academic Planning and Assessment (OAPA), at OSU.
Figure 7: Average Salary 2006-2007
Figure 8: Percentage Professors / Instructors 2006-2007
Figures 11 and 12: Percent Total Enrollment compared to Percent Total SCH (2006)
Figure 9: Percent Tenure Estimates
Figure 10: Outside Funds 2006-2007
Figure 11: Total Degrees Awarded 2006-2007
Particularly, Figure 9 shows that the average pay for faculty in the Liberal Arts is approximately $30,000 less than the faculty in Engineering, and approximately $12,000 less than the faculty in Science.

Figure 10 shows the large percentages of Instructors in the Liberal Arts, especially compared to Engineering, Agriculture, and Forestry.

Figures 11 and 12 show a comparison between enrollment percentages and Student Credit Hour (SCH) percentages, two categories where Liberal Arts ranks very high. The comparison confirms that Liberal Arts and Science share much of the burden of the service courses taught for general education at OSU.

Figure 13 shows a comparison of the tenure track between areas of study with similar SCH generated, with the assumption that this is not identical to enrollment, but more indicative of course loads. The English department ranks second to last on the list, at approximately 60%, with the lower value belonging to the Dept. of Foreign Languages and Literatures, at approximately 30%. This table helps to show that tenure-track faculty members in English studies are found in considerably lower percentages than in the Liberal Arts more generally (77%).

Figure 14 is meant to give some idea of the differences between outside (non-university-fund) funding for the various colleges. The College of Liberal Arts is at the bottom end of the list, at approximately $3 million, with Agriculture in excess of $40 million, and Engineering above $30 million. This funding difference should be considered foundational to the structural and material issues that English studies faces at OSU. That service courses can make up for some portion of this funding discrepancy is clear. However, the poor material situation of English faculty (expressed in their
opinions and the low average pay within the CLA) and the material problems felt and expressed by English majors should attest to the inadequacies of service course funding to provide for the material needs of such a large college with large numbers of professors and especially large numbers of students, both enrolled in the CLA and served by it.

Figure 15 shows that the CLA contributes the most degrees total to OSU overall. That the College of Liberal Arts is important to OSU in its service capacity is clear. However, this table shows that the College of Liberal Arts is also strong within its own programs of study, with the most graduates overall, particularly in the undergraduate category. This goes hand in hand with the high enrollments in CLA.

Overall, the tables should indicate the wide discrepancy between the contributions that the CLA (and English studies) make to the university compared to the funding it receives, whether from the university or from outside sources. The Liberal Arts have high numbers of their own graduates, even as they also serve the needs of most other programs, and yet receive very little outside funding comparatively and are paid some of the lowest salaries within the entire university. These trends are consistent with national trends which I have already explained for English studies, where professionals from a variety of departments report high enrollment, high service responsibilities, poor internal and external funding, high reliance on instructors and low pay overall. The striking material crisis of English studies at OSU can be seen even more clearly and concretely than can be seen on a national scale, due to the availability of hard statistics to demonstrate material disparities. I believe that the material crises facing English studies at OSU are the most pressing and real needs that the department and the university must address. At the same time, I have presented many of the perceptions and opinions of
English studies from a variety of sources to bring to bear the real, personal weight of these material crises and to suggest new paths from which the material crises attending OSU may be addressed.

I also present the material crises that English studies face at OSU in order to posit structural causes for how the English major is experienced and perceived within this university. That there are negative and stereotypes perceptions of English studies and the English major at OSU is both a function of the historical and current roles of English studies within society and universities, but these perceptions at OSU also owe themselves to the specific material situation for these studies at OSU should be obvious. The ways in which material resources are allocated and distributed at OSU – given the negative testimonies of respondents closest to the English department and the statistics already provided – are damaging to the material and perceptual realities of English studies and the English major at OSU.
**Question 7**

Do you think the funding should differ, whether or not it does?

![Figure 12: Responses to Question 7](chart)

*Inconclusive:* unable to answer; none provided; unsure of funding situation; university underfunded

*Different Funding:* each department needs different funding

*Equal Funding:* each department deserves equal funding

*English Deserves Better Funding:* English deserves better funding; CLA deserves better funding

*Student-Number Based Funding:* number of students; contribution to students; departments offering classes
Respondents both inside and outside of English studies by and large acknowledged that funding can be different between the different departments and colleges at OSU, particularly because some areas of study require more expensive equipment. At the same time, a few people in both camps felt that funding should at least be equitable or even equal, especially those closest to the English department, which is the first hint of material and perceptual inequality for those closest to English studies. I generalize that those suffering on the lower end of inequality (those who have less) are more likely to recognize a need for equal funding than those enjoying the upper end of the inequality, which would include many of my survey responses represented in the lower half of Figure 15.

Furthermore, those closest to English studies were most likely to suggest that English deserved better funding, as the material inequalities seem most apparent to these respondents.

The rational for funding also differs slightly between the English respondents and non-English respondents. Respondents closest to English studies were most likely to suggest contribution-based, needs-based, and student-number based funding, which likely indicates that these are areas of funding where people close to English studies feel they are strong and/or for which they feel they are not adequately compensated for. Funding models among respondents farther away from the English department tended to be scattered, including priority-based funding, research-based funding, needs-based funding, and student-number based funding, reflecting areas that those departments might be strong in.
The needs-based funding model could work well for English studies, as long as a wide range of needs are considered, beyond the most basic materials for English students and professionals. An adequate need-based funding model would have to consider the financial situations of students compared to students in other colleges, the ability of English studies to attract and sustain outside funding sources using its current materials and facilities, and the ability of teachers and students to form a strong, sustaining, lively, and productive community within the department. The material problems facing the English department are exacerbated by the assumption that English studies doesn’t require extensive material goods for study, particularly because the idea of “research” in English studies is not well understood at OSU in particular, despite the attempts of the department and the College of Liberal Arts to advertise their true focus on research.
**Question 8**

Do you think English studies are a priority at OSU?

*Inconclusive*: no reasoning provided; University underfunded; all studies priority  
*English Not Priority*: not priority to OSU community; not priority to administration; lower priority than other areas  
*OSU Focused Elsewhere*: lower priority because OSU focused on other areas; Science focus; Engineering focus; Agriculture focus  
*OSU Focus on English through Service Courses*: English represented through BCC  
*Some Priority*: priority for people within English department; higher priority than some departments  
*English Should Be Priority*: should be a priority; should be more of a priority

![Figure 13: Responses to Question 8](image-url)
Respondents in both camps agreed that English studies are not a priority at OSU by and large, with the exception that English studies are a priority to people within the English department. The material proof for this assertion can be found in the statistical information presented in an earlier discussion of question 6. Respondents also tended to agree that English studies were mostly represented through service courses, which seems natural, except that these respondents did not say that English studies were represented through publicity or through advertising and promotion through another venue. This feedback further reinforces that service courses – and the problems that attend them, namely a lack of acknowledgement of unique research contributions, increasing numbers of students without ways to attract considerable outside capital from attractive departmental programs and facilities, etc – are the main conception and reality of English studies at OSU. The material problems that go along with the conception of service courses within a research university presents a distinct structural problem for English studies at OSU and the perception of the English major. The material realities of these students are threatened within the university due to slim funding budgets and within the wider society, which will be less likely to view students from “service” departments as possessing prestigious and hard-won degrees with unique and important skills to offer to top-notch professions both within and outside of the private sector.

As the English department will likely continue in this capacity, the problematic material and perceptual realities attending service courses must be fully addressed rather than eliminating the service functions. Faculty could focus more on the research aspects of their discipline in service courses or advertise exciting opportunities and events in English studies within the service courses to begin addressing perceptual problems.
attending service courses. In the Bacc Core courses I have taken through non-English departments (particularly Physics, Spanish, and Sociology), advertising of exciting opportunities and events within sponsor departments is common practice and has helped me better appreciate the work of these departments and their importance in and of themselves, as well as the important work going on in those departments. In any case, better discussion of English departments and the work that they do should legitimately be part of the curriculum of every English course offered at the university, at least in some way, because the material realities of English departments in U.S. colleges has had a profound effect on what sort of work these professionals can and have undertaken. The best support for this is presented in the “National Discussions” section, especially in the example of theory within English studies, which seems to have had its heyday while English studies had been receiving most plentiful funding nationwide.
**Question 9**

Do you think general opinions about the English department and/or English studies differ from those of other departments at OSU? If so, in what way?

*Figure 14: Responses to Question 9*

*Inconclusive:* opinions differ between people/studies; unable to say  
*Visibility:* visibility affects opinions; visibility problems make it hard for non-majors to form opinions of English studies  
*Publicity:* English not well known; lack of publicity  
*Negative:* English looked down upon; English considered silly/unimportant/less difficult  
*Positive:* English department respected; English important for general education courses
Most clearly for this question, respondents acknowledged that opinions differ between people and their studies, which is intuitive. Despite this widespread acknowledgement, respondents by and large were also able to identify a number of negative perceptions and opinions about English studies, particularly that English studies are looked down upon, or considered silly, unimportant and/or less difficult than other areas of study. These negative stereotypes are surprising on their own, but most striking is the fact that those respondents most close to the English department were most likely to identify negative stereotypes and opinions about English studies than those farthest from the department. This indicates that those closest to English studies are most aware of the perceptual problems that go along with their discipline.

In my view, this would indicate that it is first and foremost necessary to address the self-perception of English majors, even before addressing the perceptual realities elsewhere. Addressing the material inequalities of these majors would likely improve these perceptions, but visible and important events along with stronger publicity and testimony from the public or outside sources about the importance of English studies would likely also improve the perceptions that English majors have about what others think of their studies. Those farthest from the English department seemed to agree that English faced publicity problems, so a greater emphasis on promotion, visibility, and promotion would help perceptions of English studies in both camps.
**Question 10**

If you have any other opinions or ideas about the English department or English studies not addressed by the questions above, please share them below if you wish.

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<th>Appreciation for English</th>
<th>Unsure About English</th>
<th>Would Like More for English Studies in Future</th>
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**Figure 15: Responses to Question 10**

*Serious Financial Problems:* financial support doesn’t match department quality; funding limits University reputation

*Appreciation for English:* appreciation for English Studies; appreciation for English faculty

*Unsure about English:* not much known; unsure what English majors do/study

*Would Like More for English Studies in Future:* more English department publicity; more course offerings; would like to take more English courses
Responses were by and large absent for this section, but the responses that were received focused largely on appreciation for English studies, especially for the faculty, the serious financial problems facing the department, and specific recommendations for the English department in the future, focusing on publicity and different/more course offerings. I take the responses for this section as a summary for how English studies and the English major exist at OSU. By and large, the department is an important contributor to the university and is well appreciated by students and faculty inside and outside of the department. At the same time, the material inequalities facing the department are by and large acknowledged by those closest to the department, rather than the entire university.

To combat the perceptual and material problems facing the department, both camps recommend improving the publicity and visibility of the department for the administration, students, professionals, the private sector, the community overall, and the general public. English majors seem by and large pleased with their experience in the department and yet deeply aware of and troubled by the negative stereotypes and funding situations they face, both real and perceived— as there is likely a mixture, though the structural problems impeding funding cannot be denied.
Conclusions and Future Directions

At OSU, English studies are generally considered underfunded, similar to the national trends for English departments. Sources for this underfunding seem to come from a lack of administrative priority on funding the wider needs of the English department, a lack of extensive publicity for English Studies in a variety of areas (especially its practical values and value to industry and the private sector), a lack of outside funding for English studies (tied to publicity and facilities), a reliance on service courses for funding, and negative perceptions about what English Studies require and what benefits they confer.

Also, English Studies and the English faculty are a generally appreciated and are an integral part of the university, especially through the BCC, similar to national trends. The main source of crisis facing English Studies at OSU is the perceptual and material disconnect between the importance of English studies to survey respondents (and the university overall) and the material problems that the department faces.

Furthermore, the problematic combination of rising service course loads with declining budgets for full-time faculty, along with the distinct lack of outside funding to supplement funding has caused a substantial declination in the material realities of English studies at OSU, and this situation should continue to be the focus of the OSU administration. The related problems of low faculty pay and increasing numbers of non-tenure-track faculty are in need of redress by administration. The best direction that the administration could take would be to fund tenure-track hires first and foremost. In the long term, the OSU administration should fund ways for English studies to strengthen ties and connections to the outside donors (particularly within the private sector or industry) that its graduates feed into, and which the English department identifies as worthwhile and important to its goals and able and willing to support its missions.
The sponsoring of a wide range of visible department events would also contribute to a better perceptual reality for all members of the English department and for the OSU community overall.

The widespread perception that OSU is not focused on Liberal Arts (as expressed by those inside and outside the English departments) causes perceptual and material inequalities for English studies similar in other “research” universities. The disassociation between English studies and research should be corrected through sustained and widespread publicity and promotion of the contributions of English professionals and the ways that English students and their professors constantly engage in and produce research in both traditional and non-traditional ways. One part of this extension of the research conducted by the English department, I would suggest as a future direction the survey of all English majors within the department and also the survey of administrators at OSU to continue filling in the picture of how English studies exists at OSU.

An emphasis on publicity would also help improve the disparity between the actual careers of English majors and the perceptions of those careers among both English majors and non-majors. This situation can be rectified in similar ways – through publicity, promotion, and the creation of coherent and specific departmental narratives for the purposes and uses of English studies. The department could also take more drastic measures to create a strong and highly visible alumni network or advisory board to benefit students and professionals alike – through monetary donations and sustained verbal testimony of the importance of English studies in many specific careers.

Overall, the English professionals are strong in their research and their teaching abilities, as attested by English majors and non-major alike, who express appreciation and gratitude for English studies, and it is unacceptable that these studies and the material situations of those engaging most closely in these studies are put in jeopardy within the structure of a research university. This project should be seen as a confirmation of the value of English studies at OSU and the conflicts and material inequalities it faces at the current moment, as well as a call to the
members of the OSU community to make an increased commitment to addressing at least some portion of these conflicts and inequalities. These are commitments to both the better status of English students and professionals and the better status of the entire OSU community, as the university is fed by the wellbeing and health of its departments.
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