CONSTITUTION

Department of Literature College of Arts and Sciences American University

Revised April 2012

MISSION STATEMENT

The Literature Department’s mission is twofold: to foster awareness of the fact that the field of literature, because both its medium and its object of study are language, holds a unique position as the point of convergence of many disciplines, social forces and ideas and to teach how to interpret the unfamiliar and unaccustomed forms into which literature as a medium of the imagination transforms all that converges on it. Put in its simplest form, these are the important things we do: we teach how to read, and therefore how to write; how to write and therefore how to think; how to think and therefore how to live.

All committees—apart from the Reappointment and Tenure Committee (see guidelines below)—are elected in the spring semester for the following academic year from a slate of candidates nominated by the Executive Committee and voted upon by the Department. Recommendations for students who will serve on committees are made by the Department. The Department Chair serves ex officio on all committees apart from the Reappointment and Tenure Committee and the Grievance Committee. Substantive decisions by the committees require a vote by a quorum—a simple majority of the voting members of a given committee. At the discretion of the Department Chair and with the guidance of the Executive Committee, full-time Visiting Faculty members may be invited to serve on all department committees except the Executive Committee and the Reappointment and Tenure Committee.

DEPARTMENT CHAIR

The Department Chair is selected in accordance with the procedures established by the Educational Policy Committee of the College of Arts and Sciences. The Chair may appoint a Deputy Chair to serve as advisor and to assist as needed. Normally, the Chair serves for a term of three years. The Chair, as appointee of the Dean of the College, carries out duties spelled out in a document prepared by the Dean’s office. The specific duties of the Chair include the following: the Chair exercises the power of the Council with respect to those matters which he or she deems not important enough to bring to either the Executive Committee or the Council (where no established procedure dictates otherwise). The Chair also decides which actions of the M.A., M.F.A., and Undergraduate Studies Committees should be considered “departmental actions” and which ones require review by the
Executive Committee and/or the Council. The Chair appoints the Director of Undergraduate Studies; Director of the M.A. in Literature; Director of the M.F.A. in Creative Writing; and other departmental faculty administrative positions.

The Chair oversees the recruitment of new faculty members by naming one or more ad hoc committees whose members screen the initial letters of application, dossiers and writing samples, and conduct interviews with the final candidates. The Chair may or may not serve as a member of such committees; final decisions on matters concerning faculty appointments are reserved for the appropriate standing committees (as described below). The Chair is responsible for hiring and supervising departmental staff positions. The Chair is charged with the responsibility of preparing departmental budgets and insuring that expenditures do not exceed such budgets and may seek the recommendations of the Executive Committee in this regard. The Chair is finally responsible for all teaching assignments and course scheduling, though such decisions are made with the consultation and advice of the M.A., M.F.A., and Undergraduate Studies Committees.

The Chair has a variety of responsibilities which occur by virtue of the fact that her or his signature is required by other offices within the university. These responsibilities include: hiring adjunct faculty, approving book orders, bulletin and catalogue copy, and materials needed by various departmental committees. The Chair has other responsibilities generated by needs within the department. These include: assignment and supervision of departmental space, drawing up schedules for faculty advising, conducting various departmental elections, distributing brochures or other materials that describe the various programs of the Department, and providing an Annual Report for the Department. In addition, the Chair is responsible for long-term planning in concert with the College and the University.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Composition: The Executive Committee is comprised of the Department Chair, Director of the College Writing Program, Director of Undergraduate Studies, Director of the M.A. Program, Director of the M.F.A. in Creative Writing Program (all ex officio), three members of the full-time faculty elected at-large, and two students (one graduate and one undergraduate).

The Executive Committee exercises the power of the Department Council with respect to those matters which it has itself deemed not important enough to bring to the full Council (where no established procedure dictates otherwise). The College Writing Council, the M.A. Committee, the M.F.A.Committee, and the Undergraduate Studies Committee shall report all policy or curricular recommendations to the Executive Committee, which shall in turn either approve, amend, or move to return to committee such recommendations before submitting them for the consideration of the full Department Council. The Executive Committee is the department’s budget committee and has the power to endorse or to refuse to endorse any principle of salary distribution used by the Department Chair and the department’s merit committees; however, it has no authority over the salary of
any individual faculty member. The Executive Committee—in accordance with College and University regulations—is vested with the responsibility for recommending the appointment of full-time faculty members at the junior ranks (Instructor and Assistant Professor), even though, in the normal course of events, an ad hoc recruitment committee may be given the task of initially screening the applicants. It is department practice for all and only full-time faculty who attend the presentations by candidates to vote on the final candidates.

The Executive Committee advises the Chair prior to his or her appointment of faculty members to the following departmental administrative positions: Associate Director, Writing Center; Director, Undergraduate Studies; Director, M.A. Program in Literature; Director, M.F.A. Program in Creative Writing. The Executive Committee serves as the nominating committee for all department committees except for the Reappointment and Tenure Committee and the Executive Committee itself. The nomination process is conducted after the Executive Committee for the following academic year is elected by departmental ballot late in the spring semester. The Department Council votes on the slate of faculty and student nominees proposed by the Executive Committee either toward the end of the spring semester or at the beginning of the fall semester.

A performance review of the Department Chair will take place at the mid-point of the Chair’s term. The composition of the Chair Review Committee will be determined by the department’s Executive Committee (meeting without the Department Chair). By the end of the semester in which the review takes place, the results of the review will be communicated to the Department Chair as well as to the Deputy Chair and the Executive Committee.

The Executive Committee shall serve as a grievance committee in all cases in which grievances (excluding salary grievances) are brought against the Department or an individual member of the faculty by another member of the faculty. (Should a member of the committee be a direct party to the grievance, the Chair will appoint a temporary replacement.) No substantive decisions shall be rendered in the absence of a quorum (2/3 of the members of the committee). All members of the committee, including the chair, shall vote; decisions are rendered by a simple majority of those present and voting. Minutes of all meetings are kept and are distributed to all members of the Department Council, all adjunct faculty members and the office staff.

**REAPPOINTMENT AND TENURE COMMITTEE**

**Composition:** The Reappointment and Tenure Committee is comprised of all tenured faculty members of the department except for the Department Chair. The committee chair is elected or agreed upon by the members of the committee. During the review of Writing Instructors for multi-year and one-year contracts, the Director of the College Writing Program and all Writing Instructors on multi-year contracts—excluding those who are to be reviewed during the year—may participate in the discussion as non-voting members.
Quorum: A quorum is 2/3 of the tenured faculty who are present to participate during a given year. Since university deadlines for faculty review must be met, in unusual circumstances and with the agreement of the Department Chair, the chair of the Reappointment and Tenure Committee, and the committee members present, the committee may conduct its business in the absence of a quorum.

All proceedings of the Reappointment and Tenure Committee are held strictly confidential. The Reappointment and Tenure Committee makes all departmental decisions concerning reappointment, promotion, tenure, satisfactory progress toward tenure, initial appointment and renewal of multi-year contracts for writing instructors, and the granting of sabbaticals and other forms of leave; acts as a hiring committee in the event that the Department hires at the rank of either Associate or Full Professor. The committee chair reports to the Department Chair, in writing, the recommendations of the committee the grounds for their decisions. Department Chair in turn passes such reports on to the appropriate persons together with his or her own recommendations. Since the deliberations of the Committee are confidential, minutes of all Reappointment and Tenure Committee meetings should indicate only motions voted upon and results of the votes. The minutes, available to tenured members of the department, will be maintained in the Chair’s office.

A. Faculty Actions
The faculty member under review is responsible for gathering such information (including resumes; syllabi; teaching evaluations; reviews; copies of published and unpublished manuscripts, etc.) as he or she feels necessary; the Department Chair, in turn, is responsible for insuring that the information is made available to the entire committee. If outside review letters are required for the faculty action, these will be solicited by the Department Chair. Folders containing all relevant information are prepared by each faculty member whose case will be acted upon by the committee. These folders will be made available to the full committee. Prior to rendering any decisions during the academic year, the full committee will meet (a) to decide upon the criteria to be used in reviewing the materials provided, (b) to discuss the issue of confidentiality and the manner in which the committee shall conduct its votes, (c) to decide on the manner in which the recommendations of the committee are to be reported, and (d) to read with special care the folder of each person on whom there will be an action. The discussion itself must assess the performance of the faculty member in question in each of the three areas spelled out in the Faculty Manual, that is, in teaching, scholarship and university service. Normally, the committee will not vote on any case until one week after the meeting in which the merits of the case have been discussed. However, delayed voting may be overridden by unanimous vote of the Committee. The chair of the Committee is charged with the responsibility for reporting both the vote of the Committee and the grounds for its decision to the Department Chair for transmission to the Dean of CAS. The Department Chair reports her or his own recommendations, along with those of the Reappointment and Tenure Committee, to the faculty member and to the Dean.
B. Senior Appointments
Final authority for making senior appointments in the Department is vested in the Reappointment and Tenure Committee. In the ordinary course of events an ad hoc committee might be responsible for much of the initial screening, but the Reappointment and Tenure committee, after a review of all the supporting documents, and after a public presentation by the candidate in question, must approve the appointment.

C. Merit Evaluation Process
There shall be two merit evaluation committees: one to evaluate tenure-line faculty and full-time Visiting faculty, one to evaluate Writing Instructors. The tenure-line committee shall be comprised of four tenure-line members of the faculty and two writing instructors (to be chosen, as nearly as possible, on a rotational basis by the Executive Committee); the Writing Instructor committee shall be comprised of four writing instructors and two tenure-line members of the faculty, of whom one shall be the Director of College Writing (the rest to be chosen, as nearly as possible, on a rotational basis by the Executive Committee). The Department Chair shall be an ex officio member of both committees. Faculty receive from the Department Chair the Merit Evaluation Survey form and submit data and supporting documents—including publications and syllabi, as required to make their dossiers fully current—for review at least two weeks in advance of the annual merit evaluation meetings. All Merit Evaluation Committee members will review the dossiers carefully. Members may not vote on or participate in discussions of their own files, their spouses’, in-laws’, or partners’, or the files of any person related to them as defined in the Faculty Manual. Faculty members who participate in the evaluation meetings will observe rules of confidentiality and will not report comments on individual cases other than statements they have made themselves. The ratings submitted are averaged in confidence by the Department Administrative Assistant and given to the Department Chair, whose ratings are weighted at 40% of the total; the merit committee’s averaged evaluations are weighed 60%. The resultant Individual Composite Ratings (ICRs) will then be considered by the committees as wholes either to confirm the results or to respond to perceived anomalies. When the rating process is completed, each ICR, as well as separate ratings for scholarship, teaching, and service, shall be reported to the person rated, along with the department average and range for each category and for the ICR. Members of the Department will be allowed one week to report any grievance concerning their ratings. The Department Chair shall not see the tenure-line merit committee’s ratings of him/her.

D. Salary Grievance
If for any reason a member of the department feels that his or her salary or salary increment is inequitable, that person may petition in writing to the appropriate merit evaluation committee, which will make the final decision concerning rating adjustments. On the basis of all the information provided, the committee shall, by majority vote, make a recommendation. If the committee concurs with the faculty member in question and therefore recommends that her or his salary be adjusted, the Department Chair shall act accordingly. However, if salaries for the coming academic year have already been established, and if no monies for salary
adjustments remain within the budget of either the Department or the College, then the adjustment cannot occur until the following academic year, at which time the adjustment in question shall have the highest priority. Since the Department Chair of the department does not see his/her merit figures, he/she may not present a salary grievance to the tenure-line merit committee. Any salary concerns should be addressed to the dean of the college.

After the grievance process has been completed, final ratings for each member of the department faculty will be converted by the department’s Senior Administrative Assistant into merit allocations, and the salary information will be communicated to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Salary information is considered confidential and may not be released to third parties without the express written consent of the employee. Salary averages for the institution by rank are listed in the university’s Data Reference Book.

**E. Faculty Leave**

It is the normal expectation that faculty members at American University will be publishing scholars. Hence the Department of Literature strongly supports research and also normally supports faculty applications for leave time devoted to research (e.g. sabbaticals, research leaves, or leaves without pay). However, such leaves may have a detrimental impact on the department’s programmatic and teaching responsibilities, both in coverage of department courses and in the continuity of instruction our students have a right to expect. Because the programmatic needs of the department must be met, the Department of Literature stipulates that in order to be considered for a leave of any kind—excluding medical or family leave—a faculty member must be engaged in full-time teaching for three out of five academic years in any five-year period. Faculty members are reminded that, under the provisions of the Faculty Manual, they will be considered to have resigned their position if they are on leave of any kind for more than two years in a row. The university does not make exceptions to this policy.*

*[From the AU Faculty Manual, Section 17b, *Leaves of Absence*]:
The University cannot permit any member of the full-time faculty to be away from his/her duties on any type of leave (or combination of types of leave) for more than two consecutive years at a time except in cases of serious illness or required active military serve. Ordinarily, a faculty member who chooses to extend a leave beyond two years will forfeit his/her position at the University, even if s/he has not submitted a formal letter of resignation.

**DEPARTMENT COUNCIL**

**Composition:** The Department Council is composed of all full-time faculty members of the Department, the Director of the College Writing Program, the Associate Director of the
Writing Center, the International Student Coordinator, one member of the adjunct faculty, and four students (two undergraduate majors, one M.A. and one M.F.A. candidate).

The Department Council is the basic governing unit of the Department. It has final jurisdiction—in accordance with College and University regulations—over all matters of policy and requirements regarding the academic programs offered by the department.

The Council approves any changes in the administrative organization of the Department, such as the creation of new committees and the re-allocation of duties among existing committees, and may set guidelines for the recruitment of new faculty, the conduct of courses and programs, and other matters of concern to the Department as a whole. The Council meets monthly; the Chair sets the agenda and provides necessary materials to the members prior to meetings. No substantive decisions are rendered in the absence of a quorum; a quorum is 2/3 of the members of the Department Council who are available to serve during a given academic year. Minutes of all meetings are kept and are distributed to all members of the Council, adjunct faculty members, and the office staff.

COLLEGE WRITING COUNCIL

Composition: The College Writing Council is comprised of the Director of College Writing (ex officio), the Associate Director of the Writing Center (ex officio), all full-time College Writing instructors, the International Student Coordinator, one adjunct College Writing instructor, and two full-time tenured or tenure-line faculty members recommended by the department’s Executive Committee.

The College Writing Council advises the Director of the College Writing Program on matters of policy and curriculum in the College Writing Program. It makes recommendations regarding the Writer as Witness Program text and consults on other day-to-day operations of the College Writing Program. The Director of College Writing will report all actions and recommendations of the Council to the Department Chair, who then, as necessary, brings such matters to the attention of either the Executive Committee or the Department Council.

UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

Composition: The Undergraduate Studies committee is comprised of four members of the full-time faculty; two undergraduate Literature majors, and the Director of Undergraduate Studies (ex officio).

The Undergraduate Studies Committee formulates and makes recommendations on all changes in Departmental policy regarding undergraduate study (with the exception of the College Writing Program), receives and responds to petitions from undergraduate students requesting exceptions to the usual rules and requirements of undergraduate study. The Undergraduate
Studies Committee, in concert with the M.A. and M.F.A. Committees, works with the Department Chair to determine course offerings and schedules for the following year as well as for two- and three-year course projections. The committee chair reports all actions and recommendations of the committee to the Department Chair, who then, as necessary, brings such matters to the attention of the Executive Committee.

M.A. COMMITTEE

Composition: The M.A. Committee is comprised of the Director of the M.A. Program (ex officio), the Director of the Writing Center (ex officio), and four members of the full-time faculty and two M.A. students, ideally one student from each class year.

The M.A. Committee approves and makes recommendations on all changes in departmental policy or program requirements regarding graduate study in the Master’s Degree program, may advise on the awarding of teaching unit fellowships and assistantships to M.A. candidates and may be consulted on admissions decisions. The Committee may receive and respond to petitions from graduate students requesting exceptions to the usual rules and requirements of graduate study which are not handled by the directors of the graduate programs. The M.A. Committee, in concert with the Undergraduate Studies Committee, works with the Department Chair to determine course offerings and schedules for the following year as well as for two- and three-year course projections. The committee chair reports all actions and recommendations of the committee to the Department Chair, who then, as necessary, brings such matters to the attention of the Executive Committee.

M. F. A. COMMITTEE

Composition: The M. F. A. Committee is comprised of all full-time tenured and tenure- line faculty who direct and teach in the M.F.A. program.

The M.F.A. Committee approves and makes recommendations on all changes in Departmental policy or program requirements regarding the M.F.A. program, may advise on the awarding of teaching unit fellowships and assistantships to M.F.A. candidates, and may be consulted on admissions decisions and other decisions affecting the M.F.A. Program. The Committee may receive and respond to petitions from graduate students requesting exceptions to the usual rules and requirements of graduate study which are not handled by the directors of the graduate programs. The M.F.A. Committee works in concert with the Department Chair to determine course offerings and schedules for the following year as well as for two- and three-year course projections. The committee chair reports all actions and recommendations of the committee to the Department Chair, who then, as necessary, brings such matters to the attention of the Executive Committee.
GRIEVANCE COMMITTEE

Composition: The Grievance Committee is comprised of two tenured or tenure-track faculty members, the Director of College Writing (ex officio), the Associate Director of the Writing Center (ex officio), one writing instructor and one upper-level or graduate student.

The Grievance Committee decides in all cases of grievance brought by students against the department or an individual member of the Literature Department faculty. Procedures and specific guidelines to be followed have been provided by the Dean of CAS and are available to all members of the Committee. If a member of the committee is a direct party to the grievance, the committee’s chair will appoint a temporary replacement.

GRADUATE INTERNS INTERVIEW COMMITTEE

Composition: The Graduate Intern Interview Committee is comprised of two full-time writing instructors and two tenure-line professors nominated by the Executive Committee or the Director of the College Writing Program. The chair of the department will serve ex officio, as will the director of the College Writing Program, who will also function as the chair of the committee. Normally, the committee will interview graduate interns who have completed the two-semester sequence, “Teaching Composition,” toward the end of the spring semester. Based on a student's portfolio and the interview, the committee will decide whether or not to recommend that the student be given the opportunity to teach a section of College Writing scheduled for the fall semester of the following academic year (pending availability of sections) as an Adjunct Instructor.

TERM FACULTY GOVERNANCE

As full-time members of the Literature Department faculty and its Department Council, term faculty members are eligible to participate in all aspects of department governance and may vote on all issues except for those pertaining to tenure-line hiring, reappointment and promotion. All full-time term faculty members are officially members of the Department Council and all full-time College Writing faculty members are also officially members of the College Writing Council. Term faculty members on one-year, non-renewable contracts have no service expectations. Term faculty members on one-year renewable contracts will be assigned to one additional departmental committee or to equivalent departmental service, including but not limited to College Writing program committees, Literature Day moderator, Literature Colloquium participation or leadership on other curricular or administrative initiatives. Term faculty members on multi-year contracts are expected to serve on the Department Council and will be assigned to at least one other departmental committee or equivalent departmental service. Term faculty members are also eligible to participate on College and University committees. In making their decisions about service, term faculty
members should keep in mind that the departmental guidelines for promotion include expectations of service.