

# A Changing Major: The Report of the 2016–17 ADE Ad Hoc Committee on the English Major

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## ADE Ad Hoc Committee on the English Major

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## A Note from the Executive Director

This report from the ADE Ad Hoc Committee on the English Major was, from the start, meant to be a descriptive summary of the state of the field in English departments in four-year colleges and universities today. When you read it, you can place your own department's curriculum and approach in the context of the national scene, to help you benchmark where you are.

But I want to urge you to use the report more proactively. In a national climate of declining numbers of students majoring in English, it's time to use the data we have to make real changes in our outreach, in the cases we are making for our majors, and even in our departmental structures and curricula.

The committee's report connects the decline in interest in the English major to a national decline in leisure reading and to the reshaping of reading practices by electronic media. How is your department addressing those changes directly? How are you changing your courses, your recruiting, and your public programming to acknowledge that the ways in which students approach narrative, poetry, and performance have changed since we were English majors?

The report notes the centrality of writing to the English major and the rise of interest in creative writing as a separate major. What is your department doing to link the study of reading and the study of writing? How are we capturing the interest of students who want to write but who don't connect that desire to a need to read broadly and critically? How are we recruiting students who want to study literature and to write but who worry that they should be business majors instead?

Career prospects for English majors are wide and varied, and all departments, the report shows, are wrestling with ways to assert the intrinsic value of the content we teach while touting the instrumental value of the skills our students acquire in our majors. The report notes that literary history is still the frame for most English majors. How are we helping our students connect literary history to the values, perspectives, and skills we want them to acquire in the major? And what is the evidence that our students complete our majors with those values, skills, and perspectives we believe we've helped them acquire?

Please use this report to help your department decide whether to develop tracks or concentrations, to prompt discussion about the place of genre studies or periodization or new media in your curriculum, and to see whether the number of courses you require is in the ballpark of national norms. And please also use it as an impetus to change: to think about how your major prepares students for success after graduation; to think about what kinds of reading your program does and does not address, and how an English department should be equipping students with the tools for critical analysis of their culture; and to think more broadly about how the ADE and the MLA can provide you with the tools—such as this report—to help you make the changes you need to make to meet our students where they are and help them become the readers and writers, the citizens and workers, and the parents, friends, and community members they want to be.



Paula M. Krebs

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## Introduction

IN THE spring of 2016, the Executive Committee of the Association of Departments of English (ADE) appointed an ad hoc committee to take stock of the current state of the English major. This study follows the “The Undergraduate English Major: Report of the 2001–02 Ad Hoc Committee on the English Major” in 2003 and the MLA’s *Report to the Teagle Foundation on the Undergraduate Major in Language and Literature* in 2009. The call for a new report arose from the growing attention that ADE had been giving to the major in its sessions at the MLA Annual Convention, its annual Summer Seminars, its Web site and related resources, and its Executive Committee deliberations.

The obvious activating circumstance for that interest and for this report was the precipitous decline in undergraduate English majors across North America that began around 2009. (For a comprehensive review of recent trends in bachelor’s degree completions in English in colleges and universities in the United States, see [appendix B](#).) That decline may have resulted from various forces: most immediate, the radical downturn in the United States economy beginning in 2007–08, and, more general, the rising personal cost of (and declining public support for) higher education, which together put pressure on students to value higher education for the employment prospects it produced. Combined with that pressure was a devaluing of the humanities in favor of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and applied programs (in health sciences, for example) designed to prepare graduates for specific jobs and careers. Other cultural factors were at work, too—among them the national decline in leisure reading (see “Results”) and the saturation of culture by electronic media (including its reshaping of reading practices).

In recent decades, the English major has been undergoing changes and developments, reflective of its own values and dynamics. Those developments include the increased importance of issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and identity; the focus on the historical contextualization of literary works; the rising attention to global anglophone literature; the upsurge of new media; and the growth of programs in creative writing and in composition and rhetoric.

Such changes are part of a dynamic history, for the English department has long been central to educational innovation and to the modern concept of the liberal arts and has spurred the creation of new areas in the humanities. Many colleges and universities prescribe study in literature as a core requirement, because literature—with its fusion of the verbal and the imagistic, its incorporation of grand ideas and emotional experience, its responsiveness to the historical and the personal—provides a record of humanity and a vision of its possibilities available nowhere else. Historically, the field of English has been the humanities discipline perhaps most generative of new fields

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that have turned into their own disciplines. English has become the primary academic home of recent areas of inquiry such as cultural studies and postcolonial studies; likewise, programs in comparative literature are often housed in English departments. At many schools, English also includes creative writing, film, media studies, rhetoric, professional writing, and composition studies. The fertility and comprehensiveness of English departments make them signal and extraordinary contributors to the growth and vitality of the academy. The English department is one of the anchors of the intellectual life of the academy, and its well-being is a matter of importance to all.

The ad hoc committee examined the major in three categories of institutions, determined by the highest degree awarded: PhD-granting schools, MA-granting schools, and BA-granting schools. The groupings recognize the different sizes, missions, and compositions of student bodies and faculties among colleges and universities. Committee members compiled lists of representative institutions, giving some attention to geography, stature, and mission in selecting forty-five PhD universities, thirty-nine MA colleges and universities, and forty-two BA colleges. Committee members studied these institutions primarily through public information available on their Web sites.<sup>1</sup> In addition, members of the MLA staff conducted an online survey of ADE-member departments in spring 2017, which produced ninety-four responses, including discursive replies, from a wide variety of institutions (see [appendix A](#)). Information from these sources was supplemented by data on trends in bachelor's degree completions compiled by MLA staff members from the federal government's Integrated Post-secondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The committee's findings, then, come together from several different angles.

English departments are responding creatively to external economic pressures and to internal intellectual trends. The growth of certain areas, including creative writing and rhetoric and composition, has encouraged many English departments to structure their majors according to tracks and concentrations. The presence of cultural studies has also prompted the organization of courses and course sections by topics. These are all signs of academic vitality. Yet with a movement toward subdivision and diversification, departments need to be careful to make clear the unifying goals and values of the curriculum and to communicate them engagingly to their publics. (Of the English departments responding to the ADE-member survey, 51% had recently revised their majors, another 20% were in the process of doing so, and 18% were anticipating a revision to the major soon—responses that encompass almost 90% of departments that replied.)

Departments struggling with enrollment, however, should be under no illusion that revising the major will be the panacea to their problems. All institutions are subject, to some degree, to national trends, no matter the specific composition of their programs. Yet a responsive and engaging major can play its part in efforts to recruit more students into the major. It is the committee's impression that a well-crafted change in the major can help support strong enrollments, as can a program that has learned to showcase its major (or revised major) appealingly. We encourage departments to bear closely in mind the goals and deep values of their programs when they undertake changes.

Throughout this report, examples and data are shaded somewhat toward departments at PhD- and MA-granting institutions, since those programs collectively graduate the

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majority of English majors and since their curricula exert considerable professional influence. (The often unique characters of BA-granting institutions made their patterns harder to generalize.) This report does not take up the structure of associate's-degree programs at community colleges, although it is worth exploring whether the English major at two-year institutions reflects the national patterns outlined here. In general the period under consideration is post-2008, with emphasis on the last half-dozen years (during which many departments have reviewed their curricula).

The report does not attempt to sort curricular developments according to whether they reflect changing student needs or changing interests in the discipline; nor does it address changing pedagogies and their influence over curriculum. The report also has less to say about digital humanities than one might expect. Somewhat to our surprise, this area was not as formally registered in curricula as it surely will be in the future. And this report largely leaves out curriculum-related issues such as advising, external partnerships, and career counseling except where they enter into the curriculum, as with career-oriented course modules.

Those caveats notwithstanding, the committee hopes to provide a comprehensive picture of the current English major that can be widely and usefully consulted.

### Why Study English?

English departments—whether in BA-, MA-, or PhD-granting institutions—are seeking ways to respond to recent social and cultural contingencies that have affected the major and its appeal. The English major must now justify itself to students in terms of employment prospects, find its way in the new media landscape, integrate works into the curriculum beyond those of the British and American national traditions, and acknowledge a range of methodological approaches and historical and social interests.

Under those pressures, departments need succinct ways to portray themselves. The primary vehicle of doing so—and a valuable source of information for prospective students—has become the departmental Web site. Such Web sites typically provide an introductory description of the major (on the home page or the undergraduate studies landing page) before proceeding to more detail. An analysis of those overviews opens a window into how departments perceive their majors and how they wish to be perceived by others, especially by prospective students and their parents; it also reveals changes that have been taking place in English studies and difficulties attendant to those changes.

On the whole, departments are using introductory statements to respond straightforwardly to the current crisis in enrollments, often with a headline such as “Why Study English?” The answers to this question might be roughly grouped into three categories: skills, career prospects, and disciplinary content (although the order in which these three are presented varies from Web site to Web site).

### *Skills*

Virtually every English department promises to develop students' skills in reading, critical thinking, and writing, and many add a fourth skill, research. A typical

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formulation is a declared commitment to cultivating “the reading, writing, and critical thinking skills necessary for [students] to excel in today’s world.” One department at an MA-granting institution assures students that “you’ll hone your written and critical thinking skills, while developing intellectual curiosity, creativity, independence, and an ethical framework that will prepare you to make a difference in the world”—a vision that links the acquiring of skills to the nurturing of qualities of character. Likewise, transmitting a passion for reading, writing, and research recurs as a value among departments at BA-granting institutions. Statements sometimes emphasize active learning in the major, as in one department’s commitment to “promote academic excellence by teaching students ways of engaging, inquiring, and learning through intensive study of language, and by involving them in creating, comprehending, and interpreting different kinds of text in various media.” Regarding reading, the adjectives most often employed are “close” and “critical,” without any explanation of these reading practices. (Varieties of modern reading practices, such as deep reading and digital skimming, are typically not mentioned.)

As with reading, the cultivation of thinking is universally treated as important and as not requiring explanation. Perhaps the most repeated phrase across all Web sites is “critical thinking.” From the descriptions, three characteristics of thinking emerge: close, detailed analysis; flexibility or adaptability; and creativity and imagination. This continuum of qualities—from rigorous concreteness to nimble-mindedness to thoughtful speculation—suggests something of the special nature of the thinking that is taught across English departments (although other departments may claim these qualities, too). More specific skills such as thinking with metaphors are introduced on Web sites less frequently.

Department after department emphasizes the centrality of writing to the English major. The modifiers used to describe the writing cultivated in the major include the following: “critical,” “good,” “effective,” “strong,” “clear,” “sophisticated,” “variety,” “boldly,” and “elegant.” (Generally missing is “persuasive.”) One Web site notes the importance of self-editing (“re-write”), and another points at “writ[ing] in ways that change lives.”

### *Careers*

The topic of careers for students comes up on almost every Web site and is generally addressed forthrightly and well. Several sites acknowledge students’ concerns about the marketability of the major or earnings and career prospects; the increased levels of student debt have made earning power an urgent concern. In response, some departments point to the high percentage of English majors employed and their career satisfaction. Almost all departments emphasize the range of good jobs and careers available to English majors. Some do so by identifying the career paths of certain graduates, others by naming famous English majors, and still others by listing fields that English majors typically enter. Testimonials are often most persuasive when graduates who have found success cite the specific skills and broad knowledge base of the English major as crucial assets in their careers. BA-granting institutions make special efforts to highlight job preparation and job-skills-based learning while attempting to remain true to the benefits of a liberal arts education.<sup>2</sup>



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*Content*

Describing the content of the English major in a crisp and effective way is the most challenging aspect of Web site overviews. The task is made easier by those majors that are organized into a limited number of strong tracks or concentrations, such as literature, creative writing, and rhetoric and composition. Most descriptive statements note their program's study of literary history or of literary periods (with historical and cultural contexts as a subtheme). Such highlighting acknowledges that literary history continues to provide the most common curricular framework for the major.

Web site introductions often indicate the breadth of literary studies by listing some of its elements. Those might include language; genre and literary variety; pleasure and aesthetics; critical theory, especially its many types; social contexts of production; popular culture; global interests; and attention to issues of gender, race, and class. Departments celebrate their intellectual breadth, and such range attests to the vitality of English studies. Worth noting is the increased attention to global literature written in English (as a part of literary history). One frequently sees categorizing phrases such as British, American, and anglophone (or postcolonial) literatures or "literatures written in English," rather than nationally named traditions.

To this wide intellectual range in the discipline, departments have responded variously. Some have emphasized the freedom students are given to carve out an integrated course of study. Others prefer to showcase pedagogical values, such as small classes and good teaching. Still others indicate various lines of organization in the major, sometimes by articulating major curricular groupings: for example, forms and genres, regional and historical contexts, and theories of cultural and literary analysis. For departments seeking a more easily identifiable through-line, the cultural centrality of narratives or stories has sometimes been invoked. Another through-line, generally more implicit than explicit, is the study of language and figuration. "Media" is sometimes invoked as a helpful keyword, and it, too, may hold promise. Columbia University approaches the problem of coherence by noting "three organizing principles for the study of literature—history, genre, and geography."

An alternative tactic might be to ask, What are the big and inspirational questions in literary study? What are the possibilities that animate the field and constitute its justification? Some departmental Web sites touch on these matters. Duke University honors the transformational power of literature; the University of Kansas declares that "reading and writing shape the world"; the University of Southern California speaks of "Representation and the Human Soul" and of writing "in ways that change lives"; the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, asks students if they "are ready to change the world"; the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, addresses expansively the power of "imaginative reasoning" and of motivating "social and political change." These attempts to think in large and inspiring terms signal an urgency about finding new, trenchant ways to project the major.

Web site introductory statements about the major offer crucial portals into the program and constitute a collective picture of how the discipline works to imagine itself.<sup>3</sup>

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## Majors, Tracks, and Concentrations

It is rare to find more than one major within a department. In our review of departmental Web sites, we found that only seven of the forty-five departments in PhD-granting institutions, for example, offered a major in addition to English (including three in creative writing and two in teaching English). Other majors at other types of institutions include narrative studies, film, and comparative literature. A few departments at MA-granting institutions offer BFAs, although, as the program at Portland State University indicates, students in those majors still typically fulfill requirements in literary history.

Not surprisingly, departments at PhD-granting institutions tend to have the most curricular options within the major. Ten of those institutions employed track systems in the major. (For practical purposes, let us define a track as a program of courses that accounts for at least half of the major.) At these ten institutions, two tracks always occur: in literature and in creative writing (or, in one instance, writing). Other tracks include professional writing, rhetoric, and literacy (Ohio State); folklore studies (Ohio State); editing, writing, and media (Florida State); and language and linguistics (Wisconsin). Stanford lists six tracks. Among the departments at PhD-granting institutions we studied, twenty-two—almost half—maintained a single set of requirements for all English majors; that is, these programs did not obligate students to select among tracks or concentrations with separate demands. As more and more departments review their programs, however, the trend is toward the designating of pathways within the major. Nearly two-thirds of PhD-granting departments that responded to the ADE-member survey reported having tracks or concentrations.

Almost all departments at the MA-granting institutions we studied (and almost three-fourths of MA-granting departments that responded to the ADE-member survey) offer at least one track beyond those in literature and in secondary education, the most common being creative writing. Others include business and technical writing and rhetoric and writing, so that some form of writing is often showcased in a track. A few departments at MA-granting institutions offer a linguistics track (where linguistics is not a separate department), and several offer programs in ESL/TESOL. At departments in BA-granting institutions, writing tracks often figure, too, especially creative writing but also technical writing and rhetoric and composition (two-thirds of BA-granting departments reported having tracks or concentrations in response to the ADE-member survey). One also finds a few tracks in specialties such as world literature in translation, cultural studies, or the teaching of English. The track system, it seems, works well for programs that wish to showcase their offerings in writing for different audiences and purposes, in a range of contexts and media.

Concentrations go under various names, including “emphases,” “areas,” and sometimes “tracks.” (We will treat a concentration as a set of courses that accounts for less than half of the major’s total—typically a quarter or a third). Of the forty-five departments in the PhD-granting institutions we studied, eleven require concentrations, roughly the same number as had tracks. All the departments with concentrations except one include creative writing or writing as concentrations, along with literature. (In several cases, creative writing is an optional emphasis in programs otherwise



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without concentrations.) A few departments—at the University of Chicago, Cornell University, and Emory University—require concentrations devised by students in consultation with advisers. PhD-granting institutions typically have two or three concentrations and sometimes include a language-, theory-, or rhetoric-related concentration. Departments in MA- and BA-granting institutions feature similar concentrations, but one department at an MA-granting institution offered concentrations in theory and criticism; historical perspectives; film, drama, and new media; and culture and identity. At BA-granting institutions, recently added concentrations include professional writing; literature, media, and cultural studies; creative and applied arts; and writing.

Outside literature, creative writing is by far the most common program within the major. Among the forty-five departments at PhD-granting institutions whose Web sites we studied, eighteen (40%) fielded majors, tracks, or concentrations in creative writing. In addition, six programs (including those at Stanford, Michigan, and Notre Dame) offered some form of certification in creative writing for course work beyond that required by the major. Thus, half of the departments at PhD-granting institutions showcased creative writing in some programmatic fashion. At departments in MA-granting institutions, twenty-nine (74%) of the thirty-nine under examination offered tracks in creative writing, while a few others provided minors. Creative writing tracks have also become more common at BA-granting institutions.

English education programs are also common at all levels. According to the ADE-member survey, 40% of departments in PhD-granting institutions and 62% of those in MA- and BA-granting institutions offer English education tracks or concentrations. Departments at MA-granting institutions, whose roots are in teacher-training colleges, take a special, historic interest in such programs.<sup>4</sup>

In departments at PhD-granting institutions that include majors, tracks, or concentrations beyond literature and creative writing, the most common other program is rhetoric (often in combination with composition or language). According to the ADE-member survey, 25% of MA- and BA-granting departments include tracks in rhetoric and composition.<sup>5</sup>

### Requirements of the Major

According to our study of Web sites, departments at PhD- and MA-granting institutions typically require ten to twelve courses for the major; in BA programs, eleven courses was the minimum. Across institutional types, a few departments require thirteen or more courses. Note, though, that some departments exclude lower-division prerequisites from the number of courses required for the major.

### *Scaffolding*

Most departments imagine their majors as following a trajectory in which students progress from an introduction to the analytic reading, writing, and research skills required of every English major to foundational or representative literary texts, both canonical and noncanonical, then to a wider variety of texts, topics, and areas of expertise through elective courses, and, often, to focused research on a specialized subject by means of a small seminar or capstone project. Within these categories,

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departments differ considerably, reflecting varying ideas about what is central to the major. Beyond those requirements, departments sometimes add others in, for example, distribution courses, diversity courses, and theory courses. Some English departments, such as Boston University's, envision students taking, in sequence, historical and other foundational courses before proceeding to the next stage, although in most other departments there is little to guarantee that students will follow the kind of sequenced experience common in the sciences—and quite a lot to ensure that students will be able to proceed through the program and complete their degrees on schedule without needing to complete a specific progression of courses.

### *Introductory Courses*

Required courses that introduce students to the major are now common, probably because of the uneven precollege preparation of students. Two-thirds of the departments at PhD-granting institutions whose Web sites we inventoried require a course that constitutes an introduction to literary studies. Of the departments at MA-granting institutions that responded to the ADE-member survey, 87% reported that the introductory course was required of all majors, 75% require the introduction to the major, and others were including the course in upcoming revisions (a few had even added a second introductory course). Of the twenty-four BA-granting departments that responded to the ADE-member survey, 68% required an introductory literature course. A few departments substitute surveys, genre courses, or similar work as training grounds for the major.

In departments fielding a single introductory course, the emphasis typically falls on close reading, form and genre, interpretive practice, and critical writing. When several sections of a required course are offered, they frequently differ according to instructor-chosen topics (in one example, we noted sections on power relations, technologies of print and reading, and form in relation to literary experience and knowledge). Indeed, the varying of content by section or by instructor seems to be at least as common as introductory courses with a relatively fixed syllabus across sections.

Where two introductory courses are required, often the first is in genre, close reading, and contexts (with the expectation of considerable writing) and the second is in critical theories. As interesting variations to this pattern, the two introductory courses at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, emphasize poetry and narrative. The University of Pittsburgh has created an innovative two-course sequence called *How to Do Things with Literature*: the first semester employs a common theme, such as adaptation; the second may involve projects such as annotating. At the University of California, Irvine, the introductory sequence emphasizes forms and genres (poetry, comedy, tragedy) and modes (realism, romance).

### *Literary History Requirements*

For training students in literary history, two models prevail: one with a required survey sequence (sometimes with limited choice) in combination with some subsequent distribution requirements among historical periods or one with distribution requirements only. (By “survey,” we mean a standard, historically broad course with a

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largely common reading list from section to section; by “distribution requirement” we mean a requirement to take a course within a historical period.)

#### PHD-GRANTING INSTITUTIONS

Of the forty-five departments in PhD-granting institutions reviewed, sixteen (about 35%) required survey sequences: six had a prescribed set of courses and largely common readings among sections, and ten had some student choice or variations of content in the sections (e.g., organized by a topic, such as gender or violence). The survey sequence might involve two to four courses with standard chronological boundaries: beginnings to 1700, 1700–1900, 1900 to the present, or some such.<sup>6</sup> Traditionally, requirements have been in British and American literature or, more recently, take the form of “literatures in English.” That is, the emphasis on national traditions is sometimes being broadened to incorporate postcolonial anglophone literature. One program, Yale University’s, emphasizes poetry in its surveys.

Departments with a required survey sequence typically add to it some historical distribution requirement, most commonly for two courses in early British literature (e.g., before 1640 or 1800); it might also include American literature and anglophone literature.

Twenty-nine of the departments at PhD-granting institutions whose Web sites we examined (approximately 65%) require no surveys but do retain historical distribution requirements, by which a student might choose from a wide variety of courses within a traditional period. Such courses typically focus on at least one major figure, a chronological span, a genre or mode, or a movement or topic. The courses required may range from two to as many as five—four is typical—and sometimes include more than one course in early literature. Essentially, these departments have replaced mandated survey sequences with flexibility of choice (for both students and teachers) within periods, and that arrangement seems to be a trend.

Shakespeare was required for the major or the literature track in four (9%) of the departments in PhD-granting institutions whose Web sites we studied (University of California, Berkeley; University of Minnesota, Twin Cities; University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; and Harvard University, which specifies a course that “must involve Shakespeare”). In our study, a few departments that recently had such a requirement have now dropped it, although programs that call simply for distribution courses in early literature do include Shakespeare on the list. The ADE-member survey shows that 18% of responding PhD-granting departments require Shakespeare.

#### MA-GRANTING INSTITUTIONS

For MA-granting institutions, seemingly more than for other types, the study of literary history is central to the English curricula. Although many departments have either completed or are in the process of curriculum restructuring, few have dispensed with literary history as a framework for the major—although many have expanded the choice of courses students might take or the range of anglophone literary traditions. Of the thirty-nine departments at MA-granting institutions we examined, twenty-five (64%) required a specific course or set of courses that provided

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historically grounded surveys of national literatures (most often, a survey of British literature and one of the literature of the United States). This finding was borne out in the ADE-member survey of MA-granting departments: almost 70% required all majors to take a survey course in British literature and one in the literature of the United States. Departments that did not require specific courses often mandated that students choose from a small menu of survey offerings or fulfill a historical distribution requirement. Many of the majors that had required survey courses also required a certain number of courses distributed over historical periods and geographic spaces (e.g., British literature before 1800 or literature of the United States after 1900).

Some departments at MA-granting institutions presented this fidelity to literary history as a strength of their programs, often featuring it on the front pages of their Web sites. Iona College's English department, for example, declares on its Web site that "our programs are rooted in traditional literary studies, engaging you in a rigorous analysis of literature that can begin with Shakespeare, Chaucer and Milton, then take you from the 18th-century novel to the graphic novel." Similarly, the Web site for West Texas A&M University's department promises students that they will "[s]tudy masterpieces of World, British, and American literature." Focusing on the most canonical writer in anglophone literature, the home page of Utah State University's English department is dominated by a large engraved portrait of Shakespeare.

The centrality of Shakespeare to the public face of these departments points to a larger pattern. Probably the most striking difference between MA-granting institutions and BA- and PhD-granting institutions is the enduring importance of Shakespeare to the literature major. A third of the departments in MA-granting institutions we examined required a stand-alone Shakespeare course, and a few more required students to take one of a slate of courses of canonical or pre-1800 writers, of which Shakespeare was an option. In the ADE-member survey we found a similar result: more than half of responding departments required Shakespeare either for all (23%) or for some (33%) concentrations within the major.

#### BA-GRANTING INSTITUTIONS

At BA-granting institutions, more than at other types of institutions, the structure of the curriculum reflects local circumstances, such as the orientation of the institution (e.g., liberal arts or preprofessional), the needs of students, the size of the undergraduate cohort, the number of departmental faculty members, the specific expertise of continuing faculty members, and the ever-present constraints of the budget. Thus, institutional conditions often play a larger role than national trends do in decision-making about the major. Notwithstanding, curricular change at these schools is under way, although it is harder to generalize than it is for other types of institutions. In the ADE-member survey, seventeen out of twenty-four responding BA-granting departments (71%) indicated that they had recently completed a revision of the English major. The remaining respondents were either in the process of discussing a revision, completing a revision, or had completed a revision before 2010. These data are consistent with the committee's study of English departments' Web sites.

Most English departments at BA-granting institutions have engaged in some kind of recent revision to historical requirements, with considerable variation. For

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instance, schools in the ADE-member survey as well as in the Web site study chose both to tighten and to loosen survey and historical requirements. Notably, several schools created survey requirements for English majors where previously there had been none. (Likewise, some schools created introductory courses, while others did away with them.) In some departments, students were newly required to take survey courses but were allowed greater freedom than before in their choices; survey courses became part of the listings under distribution requirements. A small number of programs whose Web sites we studied continued to require a Shakespeare course; in others, a Shakespeare course could fulfill a historical-period requirement or a major-author course requirement. By contrast, of the twenty-four departments responding to the question about a Shakespeare requirement in the ADE-member survey, nearly 46% indicated they still had at least one course requirement for Shakespeare.

### *Other Requirements*

#### THEORY

Nineteen (42%) of the departments at PhD-granting institutions we studied require a course in theory, a percentage almost identical to that of PhD-granting departments responding to the ADE-member survey (43%). On Web sites, that requirement is identified typically as literary theory but sometimes as critical or cultural theory, approaches, theories and poetics, or theories and methodologies. Alternatively, theory can come packaged with other areas, as in course titles like Language, Theory, and Criticism or Literary Theory and Interdisciplinary Studies. Theory operates as an expansive term, whose emphasis varies by department (from critical theory and cultural studies to queer theory to formalism) and whose meaning is perhaps blurred. In the ADE-member survey, half of MA-granting departments and 45% of BA-granting departments report requiring a theory course.

#### DIVERSITY

Almost half the departments at PhD-granting institutions that we analyzed require a course in diversity. In the ADE-member survey, 61% of PhD-granting departments reported a diversity requirement. The diversity requirement began as a means to highlight African American literature, then literature by women, and it has subsequently broadened to include literary voices understood as marginal, ignored, or noncanonical. Thus, departments employ a wide variety of descriptive terms: race (especially African American), ethnicity (including Latino/a and Jewish), indigeneity, gender, sexuality, disability, postcolonial, global, multicultural, transcultural, noncanonical, identity and difference, and diaspora. A related field of increasing interest, which shows up in this category, is anglophone (or postcolonial or global English) literature.

Among MA-granting departments, more than half (56%) of those who responded to the ADE-member survey require a course organized around race, ethnicity, or gender. In our Web site analysis, the addition of a diversity requirement characterized most of the recent or proposed curriculum revisions. That took a variety of forms: the choice of one course from a list of ethnic literatures in the United States, post-

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colonial literatures, or world literatures; requirements in classes focused on texts and approaches that foregrounded gender or sexuality; or a global literature requirement.

Some departments at MA-granting institutions were explicit about their goals for the diversity requirement. One survey respondent reported that the department expected students to “analyze underrepresented experiences and cultural diversity, including issues of race, gender, class, sexuality, and ethnicity, through the study of ethnic minority or non-Western texts.” Occasionally, however, these requirements were so broad that they functioned as catchalls for everything that was not white-authored British or American literature after 1600. In one department, for example, students could choose between World Literature or Classics; in another, the diversity requirement, formulated as Literature for Global Understanding, could be fulfilled by courses organized by region and ethnicity, by a course on Holocaust literature, by a course on medieval literature, or by a Homer-to-Dante course.

Seven (27%) of the twenty-six BA-granting institutions in the Web site data set (and 26% of the BA-granting departments responding to the survey) indicated that their English majors had specific diversity requirements, although the ways in which students might satisfy their requirements were not always apparent, and some range might be expected. At some schools, according to the ADE-member survey, diversity has been addressed by broadening the representation of authors by race and gender in courses across the curriculum generally.

#### GENRE

Fourteen (a third) of the departments at PhD-granting institutions whose Web sites we studied have some form of genre requirement, whether as a prerequisite, as a course chosen from a category, or even as a required course in poetry. In the ADE-member survey, three PhD-granting departments (13%) report adding a genre requirement as part of their curricular revisions. Among MA-granting departments responding to the survey, two reported changes in requirements that de-emphasized genre, two reported doing the opposite, and two reported ongoing genre requirements. Of the BA-granting departments responding to the survey, two reported adding a genre requirement, along with other changes. In some BA-granting departments, survey courses are structured to emphasize genres.

#### RESEARCH

Finally, twenty-seven (60%) of the departments at PhD-granting institutions we studied maintain a research-oriented requirement; the figure was 36% of the PhD-granting departments in the ADE-member survey. The requirement may take the shape of a senior seminar, thesis, or research project—a capstone experience. For departments at MA-granting institutions, twenty-eight (72%) out of the thirty-nine Web sites we researched listed some kind of culminating experience for majors in their senior year. Of the respondents to the ADE-member survey, 70% of MA-granting departments and 74% of BA-granting departments require a research seminar for all majors. Since some programs treat a thesis as independent of a seminar, the percentages of departments at MA- and BA-granting institutions with some research requirement are likely even higher.



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At MA-granting institutions, the capstone is a small reading-, writing-, and research-intensive seminar taken in the last year of study, although in a few departments it can include an internship. In revising their curricula, departments had either instituted a new capstone or senior seminar as part of the series of required classes or narrowed the options in the category.

### *Writing*

As Web site overviews make clear, departments at all levels advertise their ability to cultivate students' writing skills. The typical introduction to literary studies course involves intensive work in critical writing, whereas capstone, seminar, and research projects further develop writing as an undergraduate career matures. Most institutions require at least one writing-intensive course: 78% of PhD-granting departments, 71% of MA-granting departments, and 68% of BA-granting departments responding to the ADE-member survey. Advanced writing courses also often count toward the major, and various institutions have tracks or concentrations that allow for purposeful, focused approaches to writing, a trend that seems to be growing. In addition, offerings in professional and technical writing are becoming more numerous.<sup>7</sup> Writing for new media has also blossomed in some curricula.

### *Career Preparation*

On their Web sites, English departments are careful to stress the career value of verbal, analytic, and research skills acquired in the English major that go hand-in-hand with "a broadened perspective on the world" (University of Washington, Seattle). Departments repeat the refrain that the English major readies students for a range of careers, which makes its breadth and variety assets. Although preparation for professional school sometimes figures in descriptions of the major, preparation for graduate study in English seldom does.

Some departments at PhD-granting institutions have developed career-oriented courses and course modules. The University of Nebraska, Lincoln, offers ENGL 300: Professional Practices for English Majors, and the department encourages students to partake of internships and other career-development activities. Likewise, the University of Georgia offers the course Careers for English Majors. The University of Iowa has even created a literary publishing track within its major. This four-course program involves units in publishing and editing and includes work in digital media. Implied in these activities is the notion of a supplemental package or module of courses that provides job-seeking acumen, internships, industry knowledge, and new-media training. For those departments interested in enhancing their career appeal, the various approaches here offer valuable models.

Departments at MA- and BA-granting institutions also increasingly feature internships. Some departments at MA-granting institutions are beefing up their internship offerings as a way to provide students with a clear sense of the links between the English department and life after graduation, and internships are playing a greater role in concentrations and tracks. All but one of the MA-granting departments responding to the ADE-member survey reported internships as a component of increased

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focus on career services for students. Some departments have integrated career placement into the curriculum itself. One department at an MA-granting institution required a “junior seminar course in which students hear from alumni about various postgraduate pathways—they also create their first résumé and *LinkedIn* page for this course.” Others include career-preparation skills in introductory courses or in senior seminars or offer one- or two-credit optional classes in career planning.

Departments at MA-granting institutions report that faculty members are sometimes enlisted to convince students of the marketability of the English degree. One survey respondent describes how the department “[p]rovide[s] all faculty teaching major-level courses and . . . our majors/minors with current statistics about the value and utility of the B.A. and M.A. in English.” They “counter the myth of the unemployed English/Humanities major” with both numbers and anecdotes about student successes in the work world. That kind of robust conversation about career options, however, is not universal among English departments in MA-granting institutions. Nonetheless, even those respondents whose departments were less invested than others in career readiness implicitly acknowledged that this was important work, both in terms of busting myths about the useless English major and actively helping students find their feet after they graduate.

In some departments at BA-granting institutions, the advocacy for internships is part of newly robust advising and new curricular strategies for preparing students for life after graduation. While three departments surveyed required an internship course, most included courses or modules with some focus on internships, though often in the form of electives. Generally at BA-granting institutions one can discern an increased concern for the practical applications of the English major as well as for the theoretical understanding it provides. Some departments, such as at Spelman College, are especially active in helping students document how the skills developed from studying English can translate into a career and a life of the mind.

### **Commentary**

Our research shows that a rethinking of the English major has been and continues to be under way. Trends are difficult to generalize because changes are deeply influenced by local conditions, and it is evident that at some institutions certain formats for the major are being preserved or enhanced while at others they are being abandoned.

### ***Introductory Courses***

Given the historic drift away from required, common-syllabus survey courses, departments have instituted a required one- or two-course introduction to the major. Universally, these courses involve considerable discipline-specific writing, and they train students in close reading and in methods and theories, sometimes in two courses. (A few departments at BA-granting institutions, however, have recently eliminated introductory courses.) There are reasons to consider the two-course model. One is that many current methods are built on a substructure of theory that reaches into sociological, philosophic, aesthetic, or other domains. Another is that students’ close reading skills have arguably declined, while reading itself is a subject of growing complexity

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(see, e.g., Hayles). Since the survival of the English major depends on reading habits and skills, understanding and cultivating them are of paramount importance.

Sometimes sections of introductory courses are organized by topics that vary with instructors. We appreciate the value of making introductory material as vibrant as possible, both to students and faculty members. Nonetheless, whatever structure these courses assume, they are an important place to nurture a curriculum's sense of shared enterprise.

*English Studies and Tracks*

One trend among departments is to think of the English program not just as a program in literature but more expansively as one in English studies, a term intended to show self-aware hospitality to media, composition, rhetoric, film, cultural studies, and other interests that reside in English departments at all types of institutions. Accordingly, tracks and concentrations within the major are becoming increasingly common. Our study indicates that the trend among all types of departments is toward including some system of tracks or concentrations.

The track and concentration models have appeal, since they respond to the shape of the profession as it exists. Yet these structures are not without risks. Specialization may be forced prematurely on students, or the major may balkanize and conflicts may harden between the fields (perhaps more a danger in a system of tracks than of concentrations). One response is to insist that faculty members teach across boundaries, as is done in some programs. Creative writing faculty members, for example, might teach literature (and appropriate literature faculty members might teach creative writing), or literature faculty members might teach in media studies (and vice versa). For a track system to work, departments might consider formally instituting cross-field teaching.

For a concentration system, a long list of fields can give the major a sense of diffused focus. Also, maintaining a rotation of courses to satisfy requirements in several tracks or concentrations can create scheduling and staffing problems, drive hiring, and even sometimes factionalize the faculty. A more abstract consideration for both tracks and concentrations is the preservation of liberal arts values and perspectives as departments emphasize the usefulness of the major for professional careers.

*Literary History and the Through-Line of the Major*

The most obvious trend in revisions of the major, suggested in the growth of tracks and concentrations, is the move toward contracting or reconceiving the requirements in literary history, what traditionally has been the backbone of the discipline. This development seems a feature especially of departments in PhD-granting institutions, which have wide-ranging curricula, and less a feature of those in MA-granting institutions, where historically close associations with primary and secondary education influence the major. At BA-granting institutions, the shift to a track system, when it occurs, is often driven by pragmatic considerations (e.g., budgetary concerns, including mergers of departments and programs or downsizing) and has sometimes entailed changes to literary history requirements. For many departments at BA-granting institutions, the ability to attempt traditional coverage has proved increasingly

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problematic; likewise, changing pedagogical concerns (such as on career preparation) can lessen the devotion to traditional ideas of coverage and breadth of knowledge.

Because literary history has been the central field in English studies and because it is now suffering the greatest enrollment losses, it deserves discussion. For several decades, faculty members have taken rigorous steps to increase the representation of women writers and of ethnic minority writers in literary history courses, by introducing them into survey and period courses and by creating specially designated courses (e.g., Literature by Women before 1800). This expansion helps explain why, in some cases, required surveys have been replaced by a rich list of course options. It also helps explain why some schools do not have specific diversity requirements: those concerns have already been integrated across the curriculum. These laudable developments perhaps offer further reason to encourage more curricular attention to the question of what we now mean by literary history and what function the study of it serves.

A basic trend is the replacement of requirements for survey courses by distribution requirements; within distribution requirements, the number of required courses is sometimes being reduced; and in various instances the typical early literature requirement is being cut from three courses to two or from two courses to one. Similarly, a traditional literary history major might be replaced by one that requires a course in each of several areas, such as individual authors or movements; literary theory; English language or rhetoric; transcultural approaches to language, literature, or writing; writing; forms and genres; or literary history. It is generally not clear whether the goals of the survey model are being served by the distribution model or how the goals of the distribution model are being conceived. A course focused on a period's cultural history might depart in significant ways from one focused on its literary history.

Another tendency is to transform literary history courses into topics courses or cultural studies courses where the social idea is dominant. A curriculum that strongly features topics courses has the advantage of timeliness; it can adjust flexibly, and it can take advantage of faculty expertise (see Stanton). Yet, as elsewhere, the risk is the weakening of the sense of a through-line in the program and of common enterprise. It can become unclear what topics have to do with each other or with literature as such. For some programs, the object of study has become cultural artifacts as much as literature (the phrase “literature and culture” occurs in a few program descriptions). In curricula emphasizing topics and cultural phenomena, articulating the coherence of the major will be especially important.

But the question of how to address literary history remains. On the one hand, the survey course model enables the study of genre, allusion, figuration, and linguistic change over time (see Guillory), elements that have been fundamental to the profession's work. The survey model also helps create a knowledge community among students. On the other hand, required surveys encounter objections from faculty members and students about their effectiveness. Further, an inability in some departments to provide staff in all historical areas means that the notion of coverage has often become something of a fiction.

Given the current curricular trends, a national conversation seems in order about what faculties want the twenty-first-century student—who is more likely headed into the general workforce than into graduate study of the humanities—to know

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and understand about literary history. The literary (creative works, authors, periods, movements, genres, tropes and figures, and the like) remains a defining feature of the English curriculum that distinguishes the discipline from other textually oriented fields in the humanities, such as history or philosophy. Yet new approaches may be called for. Departments might consider, for example, instituting foundational courses that pose basic questions about periodization, especially how an age's forms and paradigms give shape to human experience and knowledge. Departments might also experiment more than they do at present with teaching periods comparatively through themes or cultural topics. More courses comparing modes or writers from different periods might also be a vehicle.

Beyond teaching periodization per se, departments might explore genre as a through-line. Many of those we studied marked out various ways of training students in genre—through introductory courses, distribution requirements, or concentrations—so that it constitutes an important and viable dimension of the curriculum that allows literature and creative writing faculty members to connect. Genre has appeal for the historicist, the aesthetic critic, and the scholar of ideology. Genre studies entails thinking about the structuring patterns by which human beings conceptualize experience, and an interest in genre cuts across literature, media, popular culture, creative writing, rhetorical studies, cultural studies, political approaches, and psychological interests. Genre reaches beyond literature and beyond the academy. A self-conscious approach to genre might help departments center a curriculum.

An allied area that deserves emphasis is the study of language, especially tropes and figures of speech. Some departments already stress the linguistic dimension of the English major, to good effect (although very few curricula require any course in formal language study). Language study includes central figurative effects, such as metaphor—which, according to theorists such as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, constitutes an omnipresent principle of language use. As Robert Frost famously observed, “unless you are at home in the metaphor, . . . you are not safe anywhere.” Figurative language plays a role in cognitive linguistic studies. Nothing could be more congenial to an English department than an emphasis on the world-creating power of language. The studies of genre, linguistic style, and cognition also bear on other important topics, including the operation of metaphor in poetry, narrative in the novel, or dialogue in drama. Language study—an aspect of close reading—crosses subfields in a department and reaches out toward the world, offering a skill, a base of knowledge, and a position from which students can analyze and critique.

A final potential centering element is values, a realm that puts English studies in contact with other humanistic disciplines. Students are often struggling to think through their personal and social values, and literature and its associated fields typically take special interest in exploring ethical and moral values, as well as related aesthetic, social, and cultural ones. A heightened sense of values will certainly serve students as they graduate into their professional and civic lives. Because literature often works at the place of tension between categorical imperatives and local, human contingencies, it provides a ground for investigating value making.

That last point suggests the capacity of literature to have a transformational influence on individuals and, if indirectly, on society. Historical, generic, linguistic,



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moral, aesthetic, and sociological interests all bear on that transformational value, something to which students attest and that literary studies shares with only a few other disciplines. The power to move students' minds and sensibilities remains one of literature's most compelling features.

*The Place of Shakespeare*

The peculiar curricular status of Shakespeare also bears mention. In departments at PhD- and BA-granting institutions, one trend has been to replace a required Shakespeare course with Shakespeare as an option within period distribution requirements, perhaps because program revisions are being implemented with attention to type of school, type of program, and student needs. At departments in MA-granting institutions, however, even as they integrate a wider variety of literary traditions and texts into their course offerings, the Shakespeare requirement retains a stronger presence, arguably because of the English education mission of these schools. Some faculty members oppose a Shakespeare requirement because it can crowd out other figures worthy of study, including marginalized writers. Shakespeare is also judged by some to be the carrier of patriarchal, hegemonic, and even racist values—although this view is not universally held (it also raises questions of what standards apply when evaluating works of early periods). Similarly, programs that stress a sociological view of literature often decide to de-emphasize the individual author. From a pragmatic perspective, some faculty members may fear that, at a time of declining enrollments, a Shakespeare requirement makes some cohorts within a department into winners and others into losers. That said, Shakespeare might be regarded as perhaps the only global author; his plays are performed worldwide and from radically different political points of view, and his works constitute a commonly held site for rethinking values across cultures. For many, an understanding of English literary history and criticism implies some engagement with Shakespeare (who attracts comment from philosophers, thinkers, and op-ed writers). Not least, Shakespeare courses have staying power and continue to appeal to students.

We make no recommendation regarding a Shakespeare requirement, for that matter seems best decided by individual faculties, giving consideration to institution type, local situation, and vision of the curriculum. For interested programs, a helpful model might be found in Harvard University's expansive requirement of a course that "must involve Shakespeare." Another approach might be to think of Shakespeare as the curricular property not of a limited group of historical specialists but of the entire faculty, so that the teaching of Shakespeare or of courses pairing Shakespeare with another author or genre (e.g., Shakespeare and Melville, Shakespeare and Film) might be available across the curriculum. Such a change could have the benefit of extending Shakespeare beyond the confines of a particular period. The key is to find appropriate ways to treat Shakespeare as a useful asset to a program.

*The Place of Poetry*

Among the departments at PhD-granting institutions we studied, eight require poetry courses for the major (Stanford, Michigan, Notre Dame, Chicago,



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Harvard, Yale, Pennsylvania, and Emory). (Related information was not gathered about departments at MA- and BA-granting institutions.) In departments at all types of institutions, poetry is represented richly in introductory literature courses and in literary history courses. But the recent emphasis on narrative and story as intellectual anchors of literary studies may diminish the curricular presence of certain kinds of poetry. Relatedly, students typically find poetry more difficult to understand than prose fiction and thus may gravitate toward prose fiction when they have choices. Yet among poetry, drama, and prose fiction, only poetry has existed continuously throughout literary history, up to contemporary song lyrics and hip-hop. It is encouraging to see these new voices finding their place in the curriculum. We urge continued attention to the role of poetry in the literary curriculum.

### *Other Curricular Areas and Models*

#### CREATIVE WRITING

The structural visibility of creative writing suggests its considerable importance for the English major—and the growth potential of creative writing does not appear to be exhausted. Student interest in creative writing continues to be high or rising at all types of institutions. Almost 60% of survey respondents from departments in MA-granting institutions, for example, reported that they had experienced either significant or sharp increases in enrollments in creative writing tracks. For most programs, creative writing students provide an important source of majors and help shore up contracting literature-class enrollments.

#### DIVERSITY AND POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE

The diversity requirement has often come to include not only African American literature but also that of other ethnic groups, along with literature of gender and sexuality, postcolonial literature, and even early literature. Yet one of the strengths of English programs has been their championing of African American literature in particular. Many English programs show higher enrollments from African American students and other underrepresented groups than do majors elsewhere in the college or university—another strength worth building on. Thus, what departments include in this requirement deserves careful scrutiny.

Courses in postcolonial (or anglophone or global) literature, if not folded into diversity requirements, are sometimes treated as a third geographic category triangulated with American and British (even though *global* sometimes implies “non-Western” in a way that *anglophone* does not). In an interconnected world, these courses offer valuable global cultural insight.

#### MEDIA AND DIGITAL STUDIES

Digital studies sometimes appears in concentrations (e.g., University of Nebraska, Lincoln; Indiana University, Bloomington) or is included in a media studies track (prospectively at University of Maryland, College Park), concentration (Florida

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State), or distribution requirement (Pennsylvania). Likewise, media studies might form part of a track, concentration, distribution category, or even introduction to the major course. Media courses (including those on film and journalism) are especially common in MA-granting departments. What may be surprising is the extent to which departments have *not* made digital and media studies visible parts of the major or the curriculum. Their absence from English departments may be attributed to their presence in other departments or to difficulties in staffing. For digital studies, skepticism still lingers in some quarters about the field's usefulness. Notwithstanding, there is no doubt that electronic and other new media loom large in the landscape of reading, writing, editing, design, and (increasingly) literary study and that training in digital and related studies can only enhance students' employment prospects. Several MA-granting departments reported adding courses in digital literacy (in order, as one respondent to the ADE-member survey put it, to "explore the rhetorical, critical, and ethical dimensions of digital composing, producing genres such as web-based videos, podcasts, blogs, websites, and video essays"). English departments, it would seem, generally lag behind in this curricular area, making it an obvious possibility for future growth. English departments have a rightful and important stake in the term *media*. Nonprint media—radio, film, television—were important to early-twentieth-century writers, just as digital and online platforms are important in the twenty-first century.

#### RHETORIC, COMPOSITION, AND PROFESSIONAL WRITING

The development of one's writing for a discipline entails considerable conceptual development as well, since the capacity to write well brings tremendous personal and career value, and since the English department can claim to be a place that gives unusual energy and scholarly attention to teaching writing and enlarging the capacities that writing engages. Training in writing is important to the health of the English major, and it deserves attention and cultivation.

Enrollments in rhetoric courses remain strong (although the ADE-member survey suggests that the boomlet of recent years has subsided), and rhetoric and composition, including professional and technical writing, still constitute promising areas for students to broaden and diversify their understanding of writing and to develop as writers, along with specialist courses with practical, career-oriented goals. Rhetoric as a field seems to be changing, as the historical study of rhetoric comes to include approaches such as comparative rhetoric or cultural rhetorics (although such considerations are here left to specialists and associations in that field). That said, professional writing (modules, certificates, minors, parts of concentrations) may well offer departments an area for expansion and increased enrollments. In general, a strict separation between rhetoric and composition, on the one hand, and literary study, on the other—such as in a track or concentration system—seems unwise. Literary study draws heavily on rhetorical analysis, and becoming an accomplished rhetorician requires one to read widely. Such considerations constitute a reason that departments might encourage faculty members to teach across tracks or concentrations.

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## CAREER PREPARATION COURSES AND MODULES

One of the most interesting developments is the emergence of career-oriented courses, modules, internships, and even concentrations (professional writing may be seen in this light). MA-granting institutions have historically enjoyed links to local community schools and businesses, but the current attention to internships and career preparation surely reflects larger national developments (including the accrual of student debt at these schools). Many graduates of English programs pursue careers not only in teaching but also in writing, journalism, editing, publishing, and public relations and marketing—and, beyond those, in business, consulting, nonprofit organizations, cultural institutions, and government. Students appreciate work in the major that provides quasi-professional experience (as in internships), and many appreciate courses that teach them how to present their academic experiences (through letters, résumés, interviews, and the like) in ways of interest to prospective employers. Thus, an optional, well-publicized module of such courses can only make the major more inviting to students anxious about their careers—and to their parents. The more that these programs can be tied in with alumni, career services, and local institutions, as at many BA-granting institutions, the better.

## An Ideal Major?

It is not possible to propose an ideal English major, especially since the many types of ADE-member departments have different missions and respond to different local and regional circumstances (for one general outline of a literature major, see the MLA's 2009 report to the Teagle Foundation [*Report*]). For enrollments, programs will always be at the mercy, to some extent, of national trends no matter the structure of a specific department's major. Yet we hope that our findings provide information and assistance to departments. Altogether, coherence deserves continuing attention, which may mean sorting out the real values held by the departmental community and then visibly aligning the curriculum with them. The challenge is to keep focus while still showcasing variety. In our investigations, furthermore, those programs that have been able to present what they do in imaginative, catchy, and compelling terms appear generally to have suffered less than others have from enrollment declines. Indeed, there are instances where departments have reversed the downward trend and rebuilt enrollments. The Ball State University English program, for example, employs a track system (literature, creative writing, rhetoric and writing, and English studies) and has made skillful use of its Web site (especially its blog *Ball State English* [bsuenglish.com]), social media, internships, and individualized contacts with prospective students to reverse its loss of majors. Departments can improve their situations, it would seem, through a clear and imaginatively presented major, especially when combined with active outreach and the creative use of new media. Likewise, we encourage departments to make the most of their Web sites and to sharpen and refine the language in these important portals into the major. Specifically, departments might find it useful to offer more clarification, when possible, about the nature of skills gained through studying English and how they relate to one another and to less obvious values.

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## Recommendations

While declines in the number of undergraduate majors have affected English departments widely and at all types of institutions, most departments are exploring ways to respond. We recommend that departments continue and share with each other (for example, through ADE) their experiments and innovations in addressing the enrollment downturn.

Constructing and presenting a new major well can be one step among others that departments take to reverse enrollment losses; ongoing monitoring and refining of the major are also important. We recommend that departments continue to review and revise their majors in terms of the interest that study in English can hold for students, bearing in mind conditions that influence their learning, from digital reading and writing environments to employment concerns.

One subject deserving further curricular treatment is reading itself, including the history of reading, the modes of reading in different media, the kinds of reading experiences, and the effect or value of reading. The future of literary studies depends on a public that reads fictional works. We recommend that departmental curricula focus some attention on reading as a topic of inquiry and analysis.

English departments of every type advertise their programs to prospective students as training in critical analysis, writing, and close reading, skills that allow their graduates to thrive in a variety of professions. As departments reevaluate their majors and their Web site presentations, we recommend that they continue to affirm the intrinsic value of study in literature, language, rhetoric, and writing and consider carefully the learning specific to English study (as in the analysis of metaphor) and the relation of disciplinary content to skills development and career preparation.

The typical structure of the English major involves an introductory course or courses in literary study emphasizing close reading and critical methods; a foundational set of requirements in literary history, formed by required surveys, distribution requirements, or both; a set of electives allowing for divergent student interests, sometimes organized as concentrations or tracks; and a senior seminar, research seminar, or other capstone experience or project. That basic architecture is often supplemented by at least one additional requirement, such as research- or writing-intensive course work or courses in theory, diversity, or genre. We recommend that departments make this trajectory a topic of deliberate analysis as they review their curricula.

Majors can differ significantly depending on the type of the institution, its mission, its size, and its geographic location. We recommend that departmental curricula continue to reassess how they understand and respond to local and institutional needs.

A notable structural trend in program revisions is the addition of tracks to the major, typically in literature, creative writing, rhetoric and composition, and, where appropriate, English education. The track system acknowledges the importance of creative writing and the healthy interest in other perspectives, a historic strength of English departments. The track system has the advantage of clarity of structure but runs the risk of segmenting programs and faculty members. We strongly recommend that, as departments experiment with tracks or concentrations, they give attention to

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maintaining a clear sense of common vision and purpose for the English major. We also recommend that departments with tracks encourage cross-field teaching and other strategies to mitigate any adverse effects of segmentation.

The study of literature in broad historical periods remains the one central and organizing feature of English majors, across institutional types. Yet literary history requirements have sometimes been contracted or liberalized to accommodate other elements in an expanding curriculum; sometimes the required survey has been replaced with distribution requirements. Thus, the appropriate knowledge of literary periods and devices, of national traditions, and of literature understood contextually or comparatively is open to reconsideration. How viable, then, is literary history as the major's main structuring principle? We strongly recommend a continuing professional conversation (currently being furthered by ADE) about best approaches to the study of literary history for twenty-first-century students. We likewise recommend a professional conversation about organizing principles for the major.

Certain aspects of English study—including genre and form, language, figuration, ethical or moral values, transformational effects—cut across fields and periods and thus help identify common dimensions of a curriculum. We recommend that departments give consideration to these ways of countering the centrifugal tendency of curricular tracks and the apportioning of the major to disciplinary subfields.

A valuable new feature of English curricula is the increasing prominence of anglophone literature from traditions outside the United Kingdom and the United States. We recommend that departments give curricular attention to global anglophone literature.

Many departments have started to build preprofessional experiences into their programs, and these efforts look promising. We recommend that departments develop and showcase preprofessional curricular opportunities and use ADE, the ADE Summer Seminars, and the *ADE Bulletin* to share and publicize the results of their work.

The diversity requirement has often been expanded to include African American literature as well as ethnic literature in general, literature of gender and sexuality, noncanonical literature, non-Western literature, and postcolonial literature. We recommend that departments generate coherent goals for this requirement.

Media studies, including digital work, has begun to find its way into many English programs, although to a degree less than one might expect. We recommend that, where appropriate, departmental curricular discussion expand its attention to media and digital studies.

Rhetoric and composition continues to be an important component of the English major, and enhanced opportunities for advanced study in writing and areas such as technical and professional writing are becoming well established. We recommend that departments give continued attention to writing studies and to its connection to other parts of the major.

Creative writing enrollments have risen sharply in recent years and remain strong, especially in prose fiction, and the field now constitutes an important part of English studies. We recommend that departments give continued attention to building enrollments in creative writing and to its fruitful connections and contributions to students' education in literary and writing studies.

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We recommend that departments and faculty members discuss and identify the big questions motivating literary and writing studies and the intellectual issues that engage scholarship; that bring vigor, dignity, and social purposefulness to English as an academic discipline; and that accommodate a broad range of student interests and perspectives.

Finally, we call on ADE and the MLA to give ongoing attention to this report and its recommendations by means of its conferences, seminars, journals, Web sites, discussion lists, consultancy services, and informational offerings.

Committee Members

*Kent Cartwright (chair), University of Maryland, College Park*

*Sarah Chinn, Hunter College, City University of New York*

*Tarshia Stanley, Spelman College*

Staff Liaisons

*David Laurence, MLA*

*Doug Steward, MLA*

## Notes

1. Analysis of the information available online proceeded from the late fall of 2016 until September 2017. It is possible, then, that information or its form of presentation online has changed since the draft of the report was completed.

2. The MLA's Connected Academics Web site ([connect.mla.hcommons.org](http://connect.mla.hcommons.org)), although geared toward doctoral students, offers a wealth of examples of individuals who have parlayed their humanities training into careers in a broad array of fields, including data management, the Foreign Service, cultural administration, and fund-raising and development.

3. The committee's comments are limited by a lack of detailed knowledge of how students access and use departmental Web sites. Departments might be well advised, where possible, to beta test Web site material before finalizing it.

4. This report does not discuss in detail English education tracks or concentrations. It is worth noting, however, that a national decline in degree completions in education parallels the decline in English. This trend may portend additional enrollment challenges for English departments (especially in literary studies), since in many institutions English education majors combine methods course work in education with content courses in English.

5. This report employs the term *rhetoric and composition*, which is commonly used in programs and was a categorical term in the ADE survey. Notwithstanding, departments sometimes employ other terms for their concentrations: "rhetoric and writing," "language and rhetoric," "language, rhetoric, and writing," "professional writing, rhetoric, and literacy," "rhetoric and media," or "writing studies." Rhetoric and composition might also be gathered under another umbrella term, such as "language." To complicate the picture further, at some institutions rhetoric and composition courses are not housed in the English department.

6. Departments specify chronological ranges in different ways. In some departments, for example, the end date 1640 was extended to 1800, because the faculty members embraced the displacement of the concept of the Renaissance by that of the early modern. Departmental decisions about chronological categories sometimes encapsulate debates and changes within the profession about how it conceptualizes periodization. Yet at other times, such decisions might express practical constraints within a department or pressures for the consolidation of historical periods driven by an expanding curriculum.

7. These courses are not typically required in the major as such, but at some institutions, such as the University of Maryland, College Park, they are required of all undergraduates.

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### **Institutional Web Sites of Interest**

#### **PHD-GRANTING INSTITUTIONS**

Columbia University: [english.columbia.edu/](http://english.columbia.edu/)  
 Indiana University, Bloomington: [english.indiana.edu/](http://english.indiana.edu/)  
 University of Kentucky: [english.as.uky.edu/](http://english.as.uky.edu/)  
 University of Minnesota, Twin Cities: [twin-cities.umn.edu/](http://twin-cities.umn.edu/)  
 University of Nebraska, Lincoln: [www.unl.edu/english/](http://www.unl.edu/english/)  
 University of Southern California: [dornsife.usc.edu/engl](http://dornsife.usc.edu/engl)

#### **MA-GRANTING INSTITUTIONS**

Ball State University: [cms.bsu.edu/academics/collegesanddepartments/english/lifeafterbsu](http://cms.bsu.edu/academics/collegesanddepartments/english/lifeafterbsu)  
 Drake University: [www.drake.edu/english/](http://www.drake.edu/english/)  
 Florida International University: [english.fiu.edu/](http://english.fiu.edu/)  
 San Francisco State University: [english.sfsu.edu/](http://english.sfsu.edu/)  
 State University of New York, Fredonia: [home.fredonia.edu/english](http://home.fredonia.edu/english)  
 Texas State University: [www.english.txstate.edu/](http://www.english.txstate.edu/)

#### **BA-GRANTING INSTITUTIONS**

Davidson College: [www.davidson.edu/academics/english](http://www.davidson.edu/academics/english)  
 Middlebury College: [www.middlebury.edu/academics/enam](http://www.middlebury.edu/academics/enam)  
 Skidmore College: [www.skidmore.edu/english/](http://www.skidmore.edu/english/)  
 St. Mary's College, MD: [www.smcm.edu/english/](http://www.smcm.edu/english/)  
 Swarthmore College: [www.swarthmore.edu/english-literature](http://www.swarthmore.edu/english-literature)  
 Wellesley College: [www.wellesley.edu/english](http://www.wellesley.edu/english)



## Appendix A

# The State of the English Major: Summary Findings from the 2017 Survey of ADE-Member Departments

IN APRIL 2017, the ad hoc committee invited ADE's member departments in four-year colleges and universities in the United States to complete a survey about courses and requirements for completing the bachelor's degree in English. Departments were also asked whether they had recently completed a curriculum revision or had a revision in view and about trends since 2010 in the number of undergraduates declaring English as a major.

Of the 539 departments canvassed, 95 responded to at least some survey questions, an overall response rate of 17.6%. Responses were anonymous, but the survey did ask respondents to indicate their department's highest degree program and whether the department is housed in a public or private institution. [Table 1](#) compares the 539 member departments invited to complete the survey with the 95 that responded. Departments in public institutions are overrepresented among survey respondents (61.3% of respondents compared with 52.9% of the member departments canvassed), as are departments that grant master's degrees as their highest degree (41.3% of respondents compared with 32.7% of member departments canvassed).

ADE-member departments are also not representative of all English departments covered in the MLA's file of departments and departmental administrators, which includes 1,138 BA-, MA-, and PhD-granting English departments in four-year public and private nonprofit colleges and universities in the United States. Of these departments, 39.4% are housed in public institutions (compared with 52.9% of ADE-member departments and 61.3% of departments that responded to the survey). BA-granting departments account for 58.8% departments in the MLA's file but only 36.4% of the member departments asked to complete the survey. And master's degrees and PhDs are the highest degree programs for 26.4% and 14.9% of English departments in the MLA's file but make up 32.7% and 31.0% of the ADE-member departments contacted for the survey—and 41.3% and 28.8% of respondents. Thus, while findings from the survey may provide departments with useful points for comparison, no claim is made for their broader representativeness.

### Revisions to the Major

Over 70% of departments either completed a revision of the undergraduate English major since 2010 or are undertaking a revision ([fig. 1](#)). Departments in private institutions and departments where a bachelor's degree is the highest degree were more likely to have completed a revision of the major since 2010, compared with departments in public institutions or those offering master's degrees and doctorates ([fig. 2](#), [fig. 3](#)).

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*Appendix A: Summary Findings from the 2017 Survey of ADE-Member Departments*

## **Recent Trends in the Number of Majors**

Two-thirds (66.3%) of responding departments indicated that the number of undergraduates majoring in English is either lower or sharply lower. Only 8.7% reported an increase in the number of majors; none reported a sharp increase (fig. 4). A significantly higher percentage of BA-granting departments reported sharply lower numbers of students declaring English as a major. The percentage of departments reporting a sharply lower number of majors is also higher in private than in public institutions (fig. 5, fig. 6). (The two categories overlap, since BA-granting departments tend to be in private institutions.)

## **Tracks or Concentrations in the Major**

A majority of departments offer students different tracks to follow through the undergraduate major (fig. 7). The responding English departments show little difference in this regard, whatever their highest degree program or type of institution (fig. 8, fig. 9).

Nearly a third of responding departments do not offer separate tracks or concentrations; instead, all majors complete a unified set of requirements (fig. 10). Where tracks are offered, the most commonly available are literature; creative writing; English education; and rhetoric and composition, technical writing, or a writing concentration that combines various writing specializations under a rubric such as professional writing or writing studies. The number of departments featuring this last option is notable, since it was not a response choice provided on the questionnaire but was written in by respondents.

In departments where different tracks are available, the most notable differences are in PhD-granting departments, which are somewhat less likely to offer a track in English education and somewhat more likely to offer a creative writing track (fig. 11). A track in technical writing is available in a lower percentage of BA-granting departments and more frequently in MA- than in PhD-granting departments.

While separate tracks are broadly available across departments of different degree-granting types and in both public and private institutions, a higher percentage of departments in public institutions than in private institutions offer tracks in different areas (fig. 12), no doubt because public institutions tend to have the larger faculty and student populations that make it possible to support a larger number of tracks. Of the responding departments in public institutions that offer different tracks through the major, the average number of separate tracks was 3.5 and the maximum number offered was 6. That compares with an average number of 2.6 tracks and a maximum of 4 tracks in the responding departments in private institutions.

Where separate tracks are available, the most common combinations are literature, creative writing, English education, and a program in either rhetoric and composition, technical writing, or writing more broadly defined (20 responding departments); literature, creative writing, and English education (7 responding departments); and literature and creative writing (6 responding departments).

Asked about enrollment trends in the various tracks departments offer for majors, only in creative writing and the other writing specializations were departments more

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likely to report enrollments that increased or remained unchanged than enrollments that decreased. Literature has experienced decreases in the highest percentage of departments (73.6%), followed closely by programs in English education (68.6%). Almost 60% of departments with a unified major (i.e., without tracks) reported declines in the number of students declaring English as a major; 14.8% of these departments reported increases (fig. 13).

### **Requirements for the Major**

The courses most commonly required of all majors are a writing-intensive course (required by 72.4% of responding departments), an introduction to literature (71.6%), and a capstone seminar (61.5%). Surveys of British and American literature are required by 58.4% and 53.8% of departments, respectively. A course focused on literature before 1800 is required by 57.7% (fig. 14). Figures 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 show the equivalent information by departments' highest degree and by whether departments are located in public or private institutions.

Over half (54.4%) of the departments that provided information about the number of course required for the major require 11, 12, or 13 courses. The median number of required courses is 12.0, and the average is 12.6. The largest number of departments (17 [21.5%]) require 12 courses (fig. 20).

More than 60% of MA-granting departments require more than 12 courses for the major. BA- and PhD-granting departments are more evenly split: 40.9% of PhD-granting departments require fewer and more than 12 courses, and, among BA-granting departments, 37.5% require fewer than 12 courses and 41.7% require more than 12 courses (fig. 21).

Departments in public institutions require more than 12 courses more than twice as frequently as departments in private institutions—62.5% compared with 29.0% (fig. 22).

In the largest fraction (40.0%) of departments, course requirements translate to either 36 or 40 credit hours to complete the major, and required credit hours fall between 33 and 42 for 70.7% of departments. The median number of required credit hours was 38.0, and the average was 36.8 (fig. 23).

Almost 60% of departments in BA- and MA-granting departments require more than 36 credit hours to complete a major, compared with 33.3% of PhD-granting departments. Almost half (47.6%) of PhD-granting departments require fewer than 36 credits, compared with 27.3% and 15.6% of BA- and MA-granting departments, respectively (fig. 24).

A higher percentage of departments in public institutions than in private institutions require more than 36 credit hours (60.9% compared with 37.9%), and a higher percentage of departments in private institutions than in public institutions require fewer than 36 credit hours (41.4% compared with 19.6%) (fig. 25).

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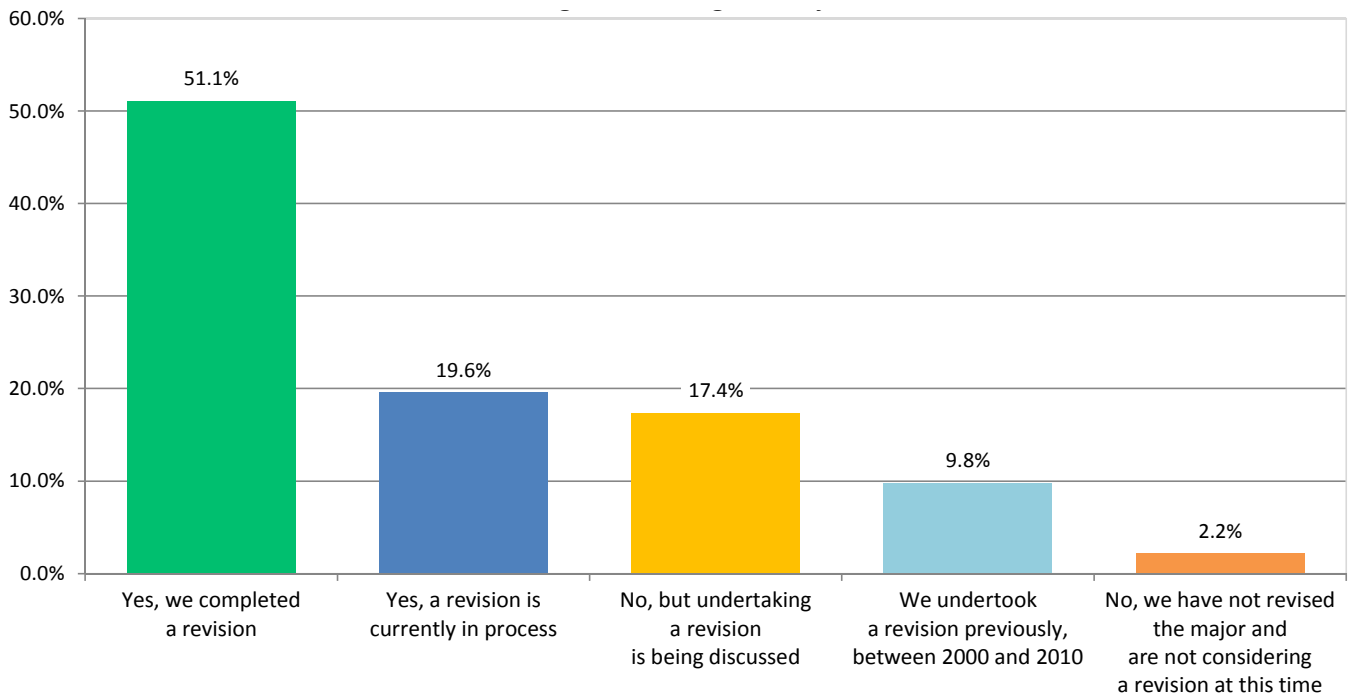
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Findings from the 2017  
Survey of ADE-Member  
Departments*

**Table 1**  
**Characteristics of Departments Canvassed and Responding to the ADE Survey**

	Canvassed	Responded
Department's Highest Degree		
BA-Granting	196 (36.4%)	24 (30.0%)
MA-Granting	176 (32.7%)	33 (41.3%)
PhD-Granting	167 (31.0%)	23 (28.8%)
Total	539 (100.0%)	80 (100.0%)
Institutional Control		
Public	285 (52.9%)	49 (61.3%)
Private Nonprofit	254 (47.1%)	31 (38.8%)
Total	539 (100.0%)	80 (100.0%)

Of the 95 responding departments, 15 did not answer the question about their type of department and institution.

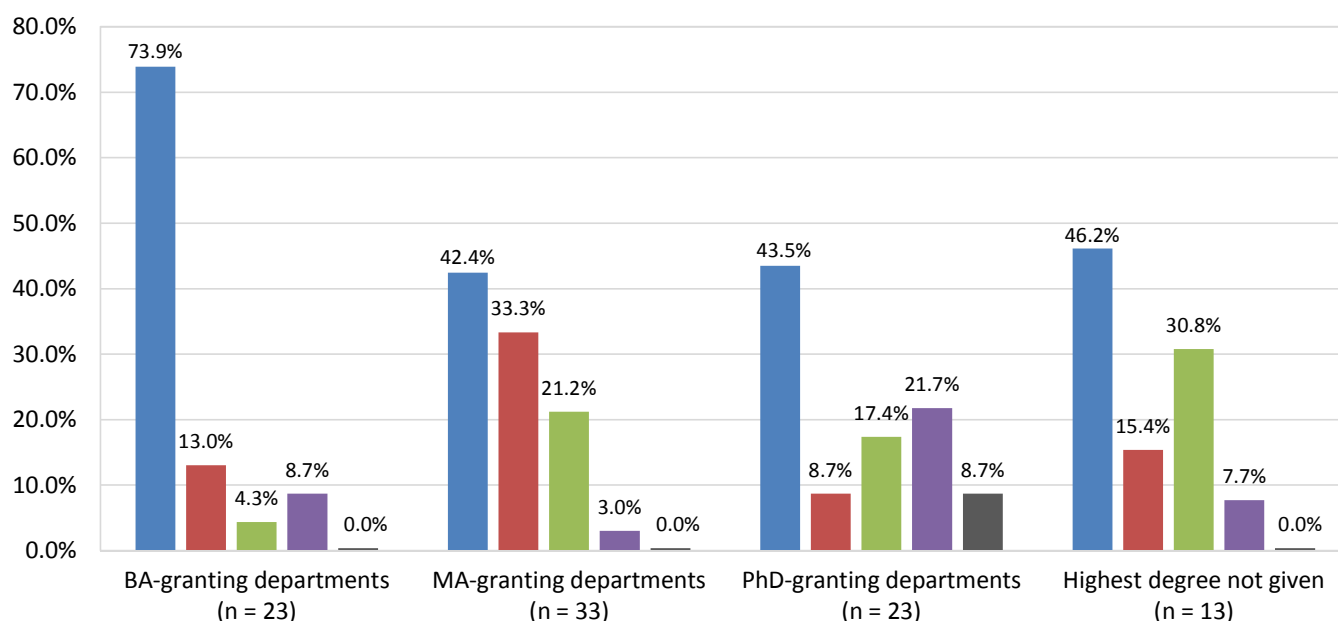
**Figure 1**  
**Percentage of Departments Revising and Not Revising the Undergraduate English Major since 2010**



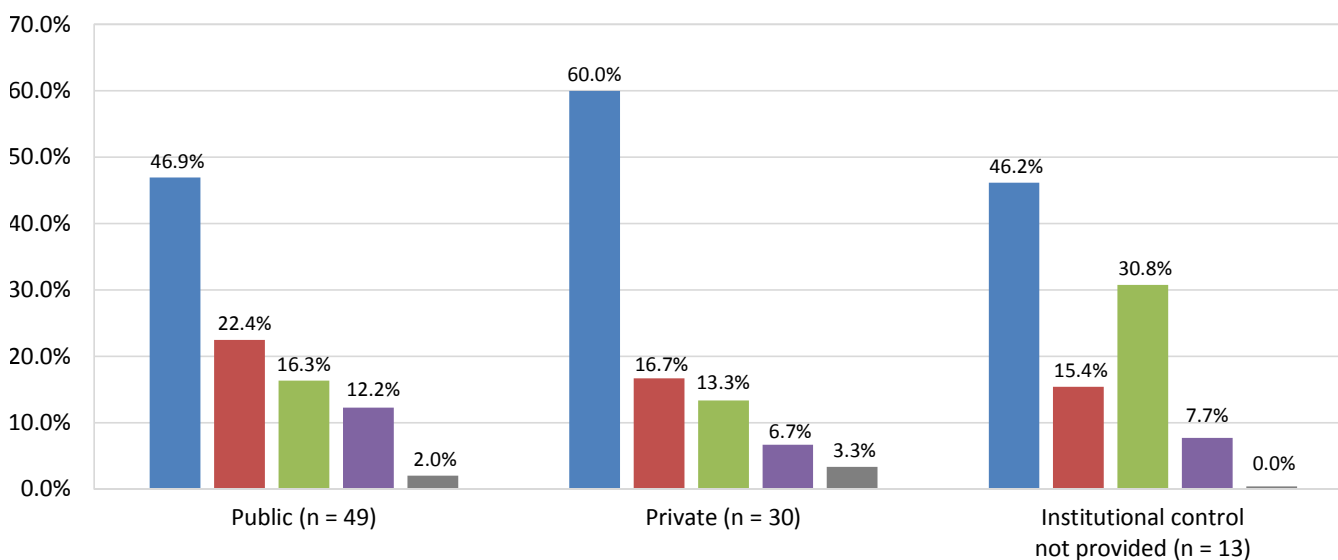
Note: Figures 1–3 present responses to the question, “Has your department revised its undergraduate major since 2010?” (92 departments responded to this question; 3 did not.)



**Figure 2**  
**English Curriculum Revision since 2010, by Department's Highest Degree**

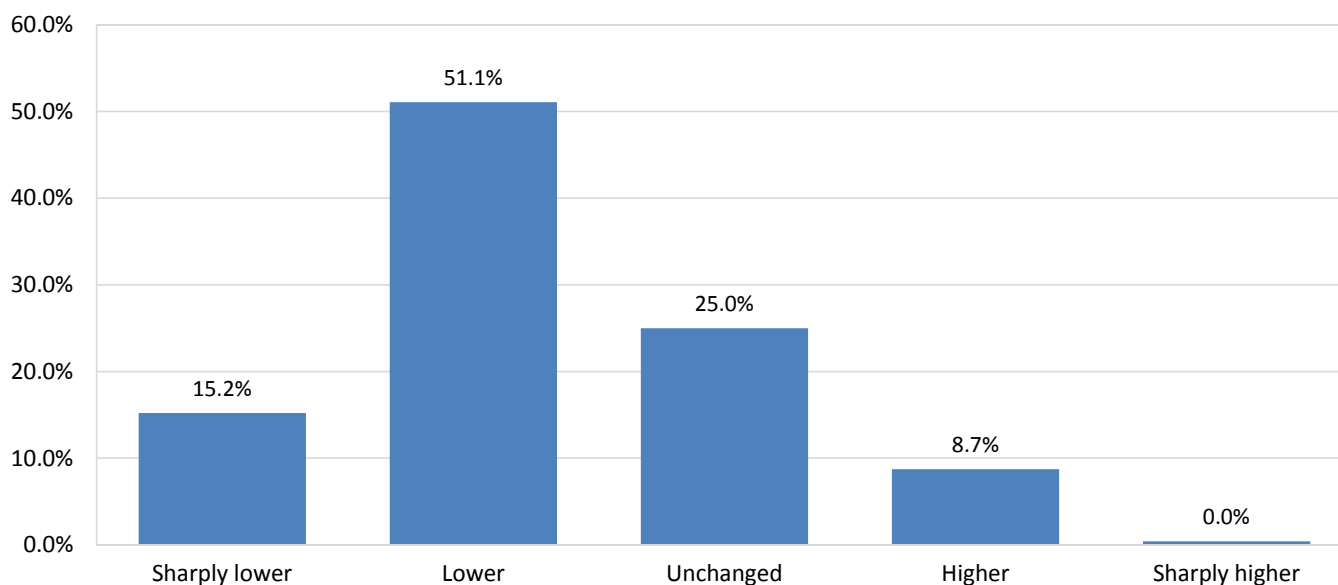


**Figure 3**  
**English Curriculum Revision since 2010, by Control of Institution**



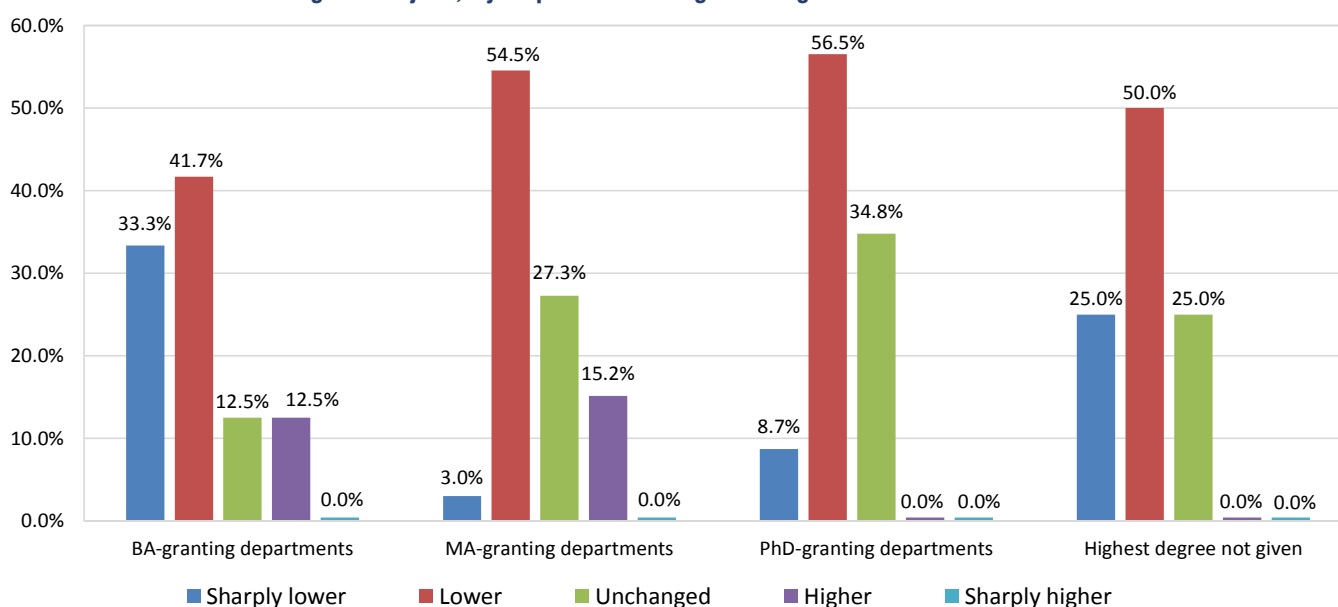
- Yes, we completed a revision
- Yes, a revision is currently in process
- No, but undertaking a revision is being discussed
- We undertook a revision previously, between 2000 and 2010
- No, we have not revised the major and are not considering a revision at this time

**Figure 4**  
**Trend in the Number of Undergraduates Declaring English as a Major, 2012–17**

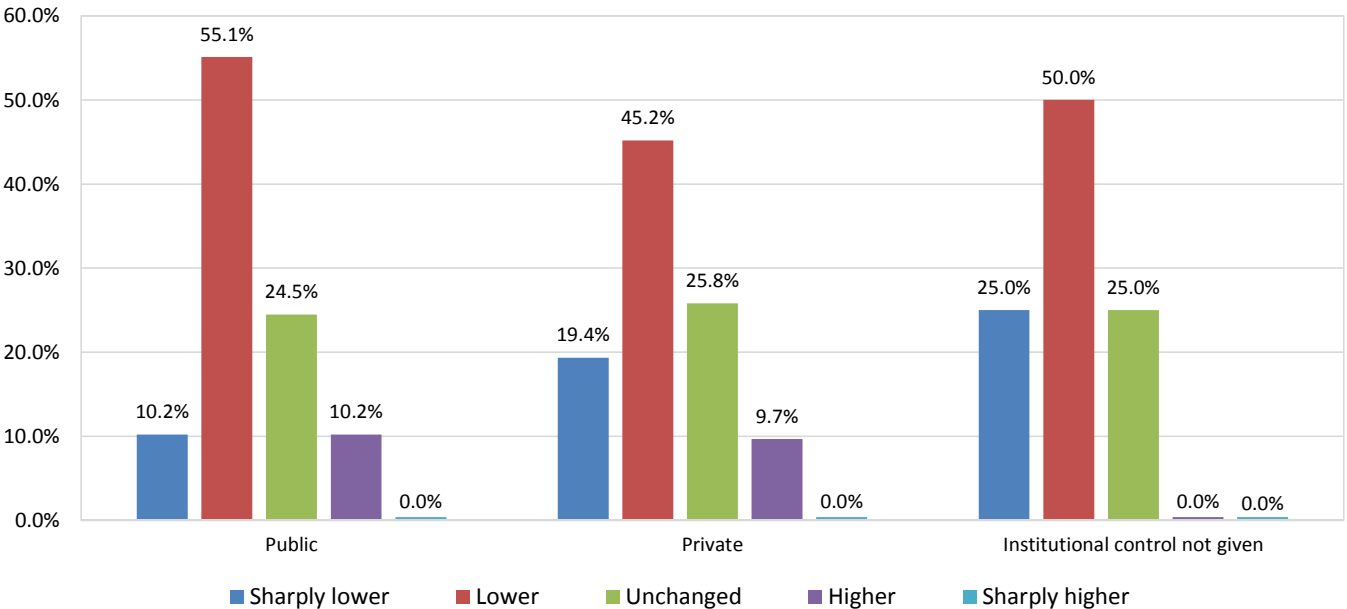


Note: Figures 4–6 present responses to the question, “Over the past five years, what has the trend been for the number of undergraduates declaring English as a major?” (92 departments responded to this question; 3 did not.)

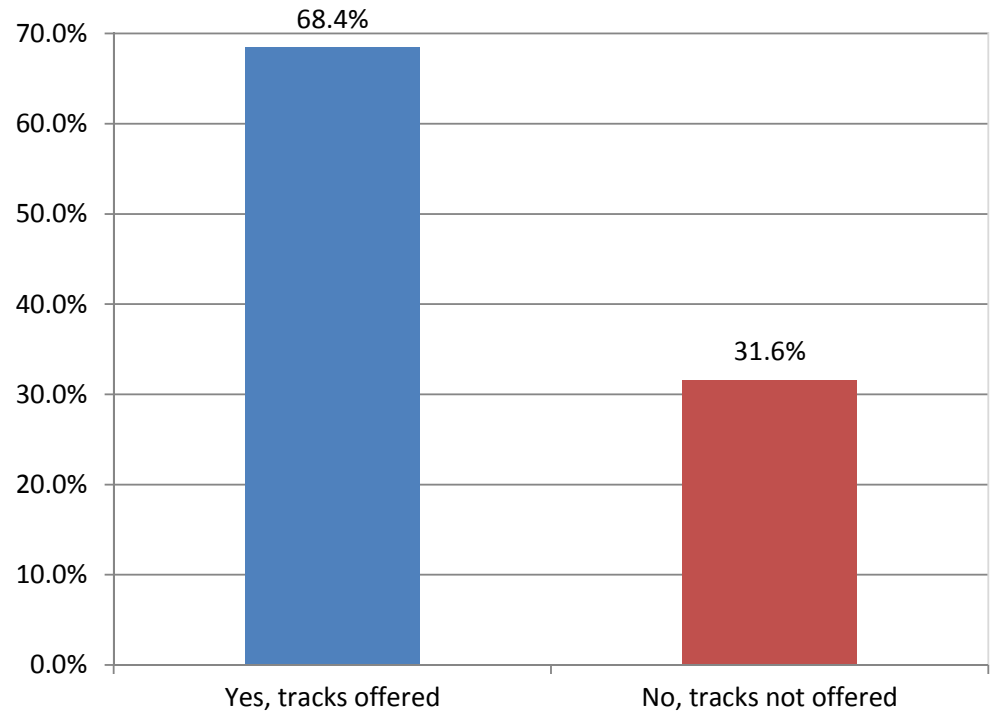
**Figure 5**  
**Trend in the Number of English Majors, by Department’s Highest Degree**



**Figure 6**  
**Trend in the Number of English Majors, by Control of Institution**

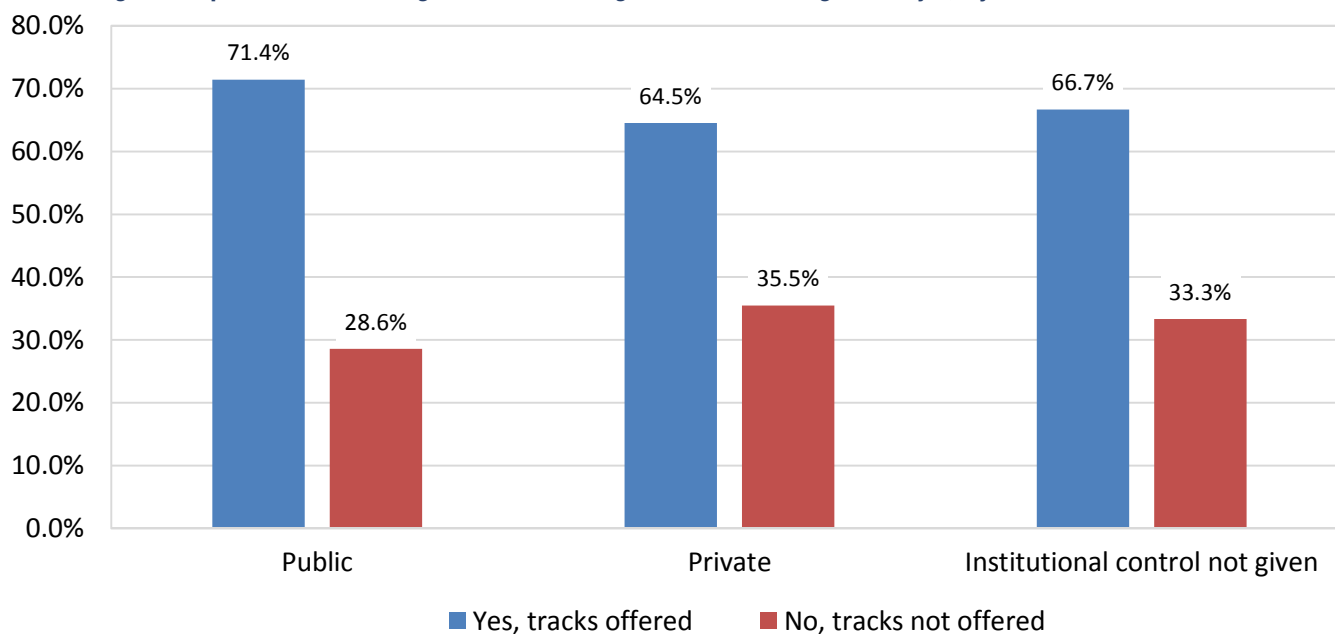


**Figure 7**  
**Percentage of Departments Offering and Not Offering Tracks in the English Major**

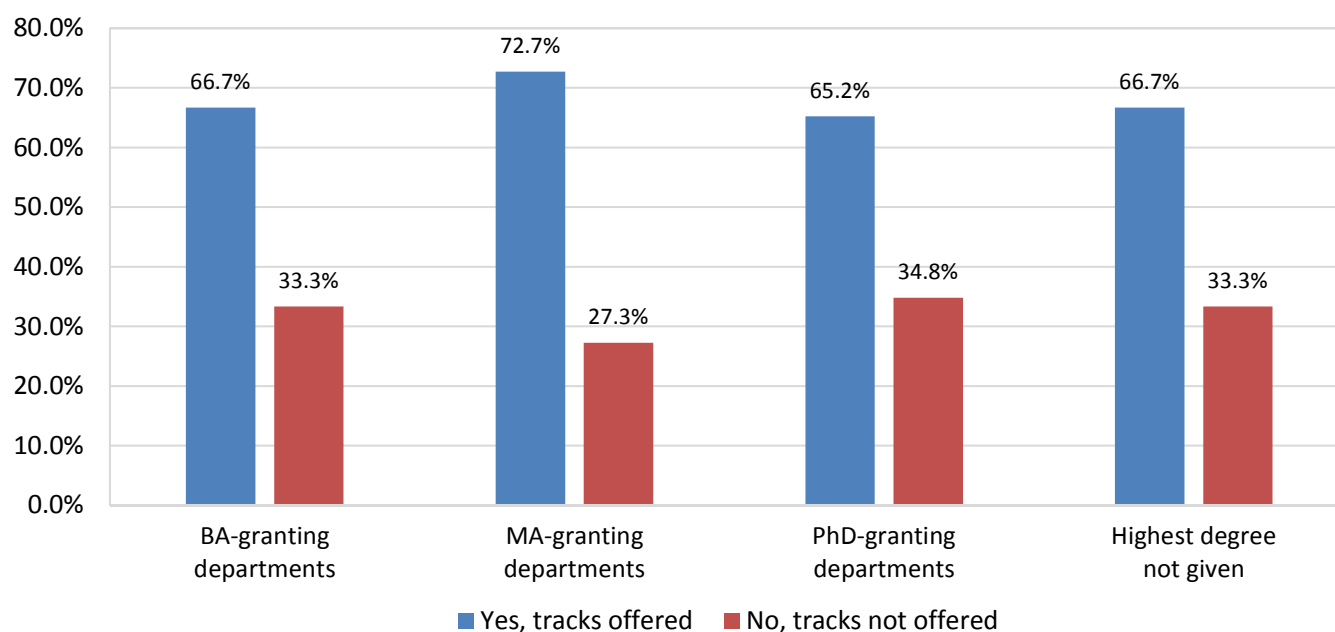


Note: Figures 7–9 present responses to the question, “Does your department’s English major offer students different tracks or concentrations?” (All 95 responding departments answered this question.)

**Figure 8**  
**Percentage of Departments Offering and Not Offering Tracks in the English Major, by Control of Institution**



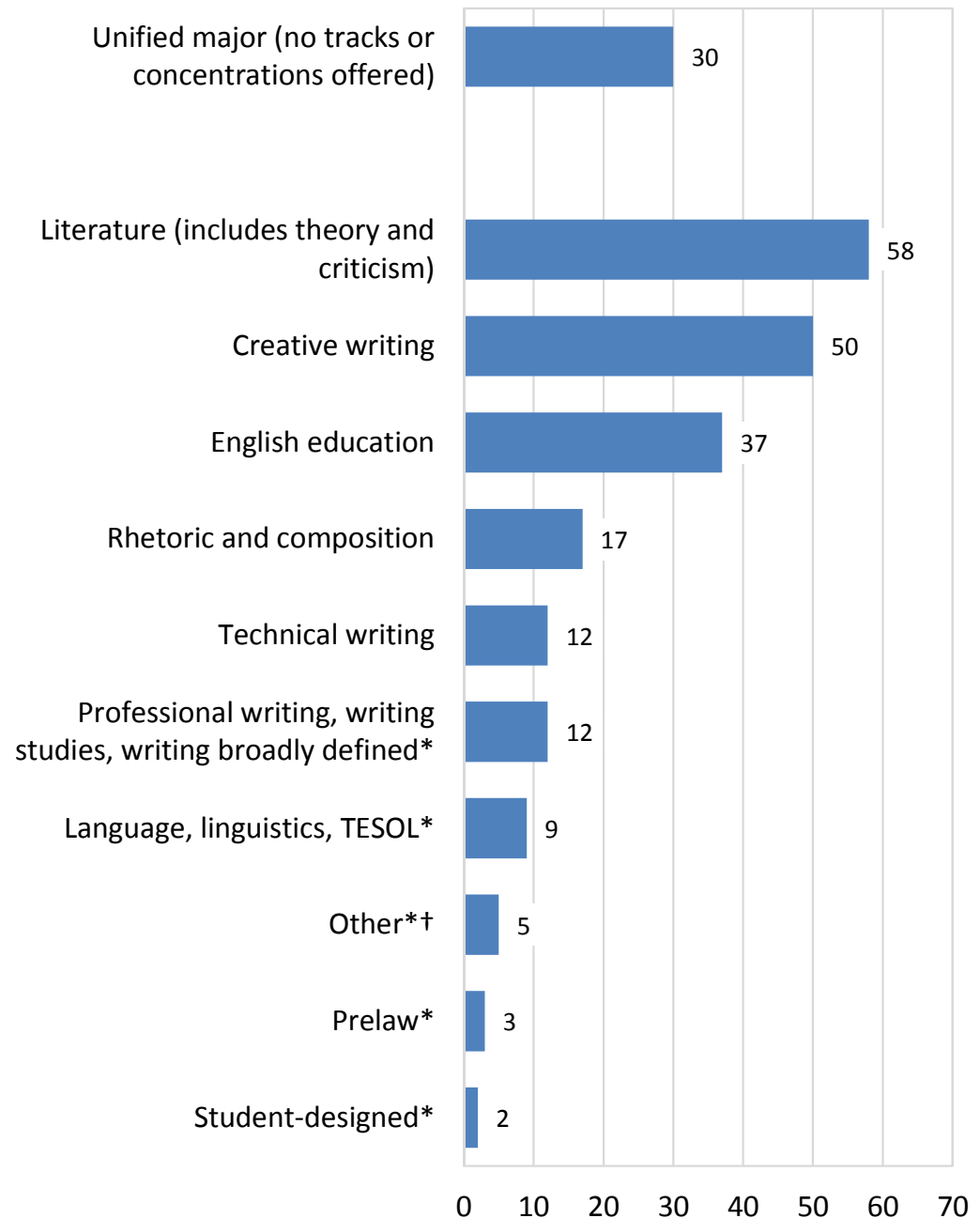
**Figure 9**  
**Percentage of Departments Offering and Not Offering Tracks in the English Major, by Department's Highest Degree**



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**Figure 10**  
**Number of Departments without Tracks and Number of Departments Offering Tracks, by Type of Track**

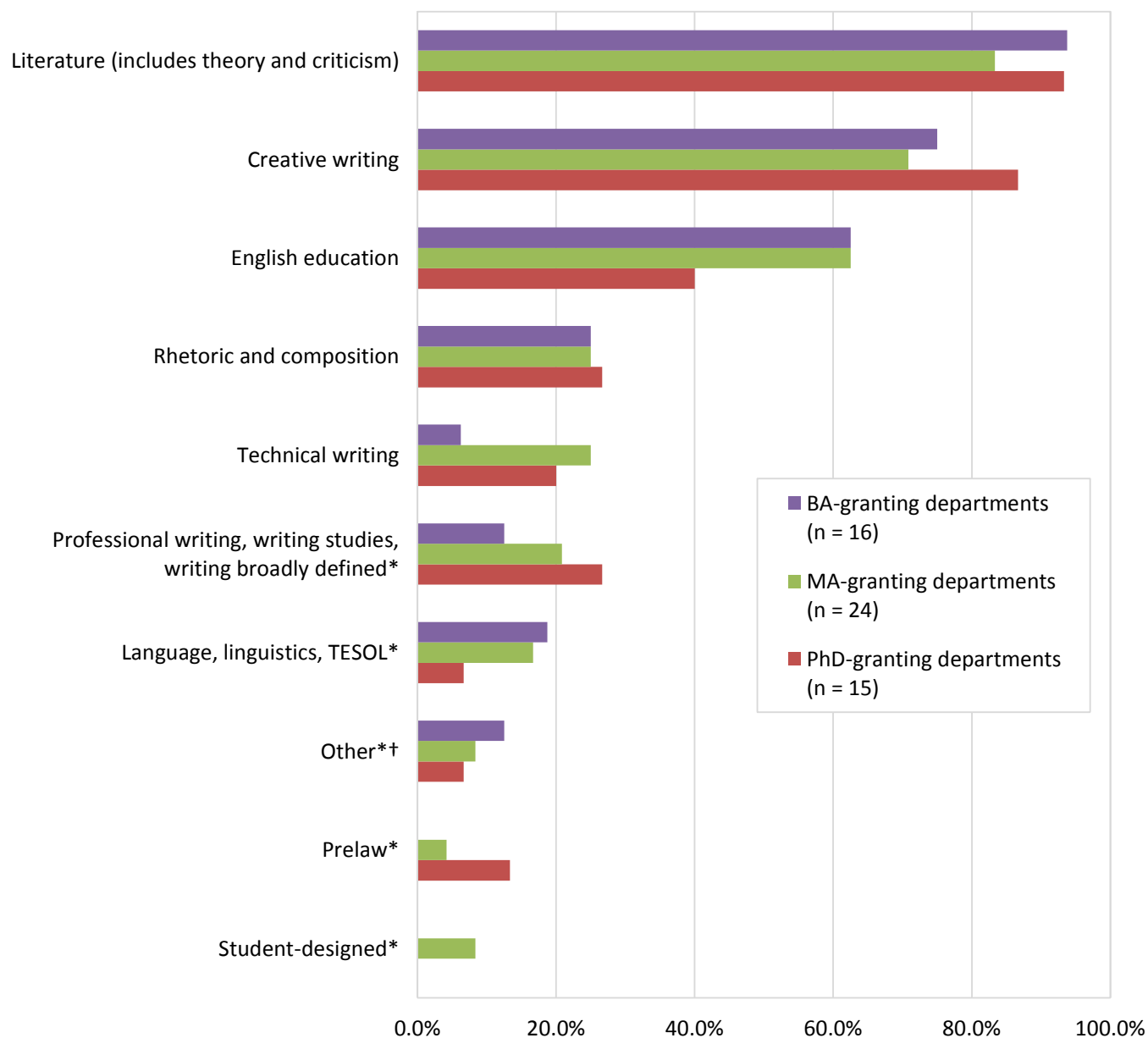


\* Items written in by respondents

† Includes cultural studies, drama and film, media studies, identity studies, and global and international studies

Note: Figures 10–13 present responses to the question, “What tracks or concentrations can English majors elect?” (94 departments responded to this question; 1 did not.)

**Figure 11**  
**Percentage of BA-, MA-, and PhD-Granting Departments Offering Various Tracks**

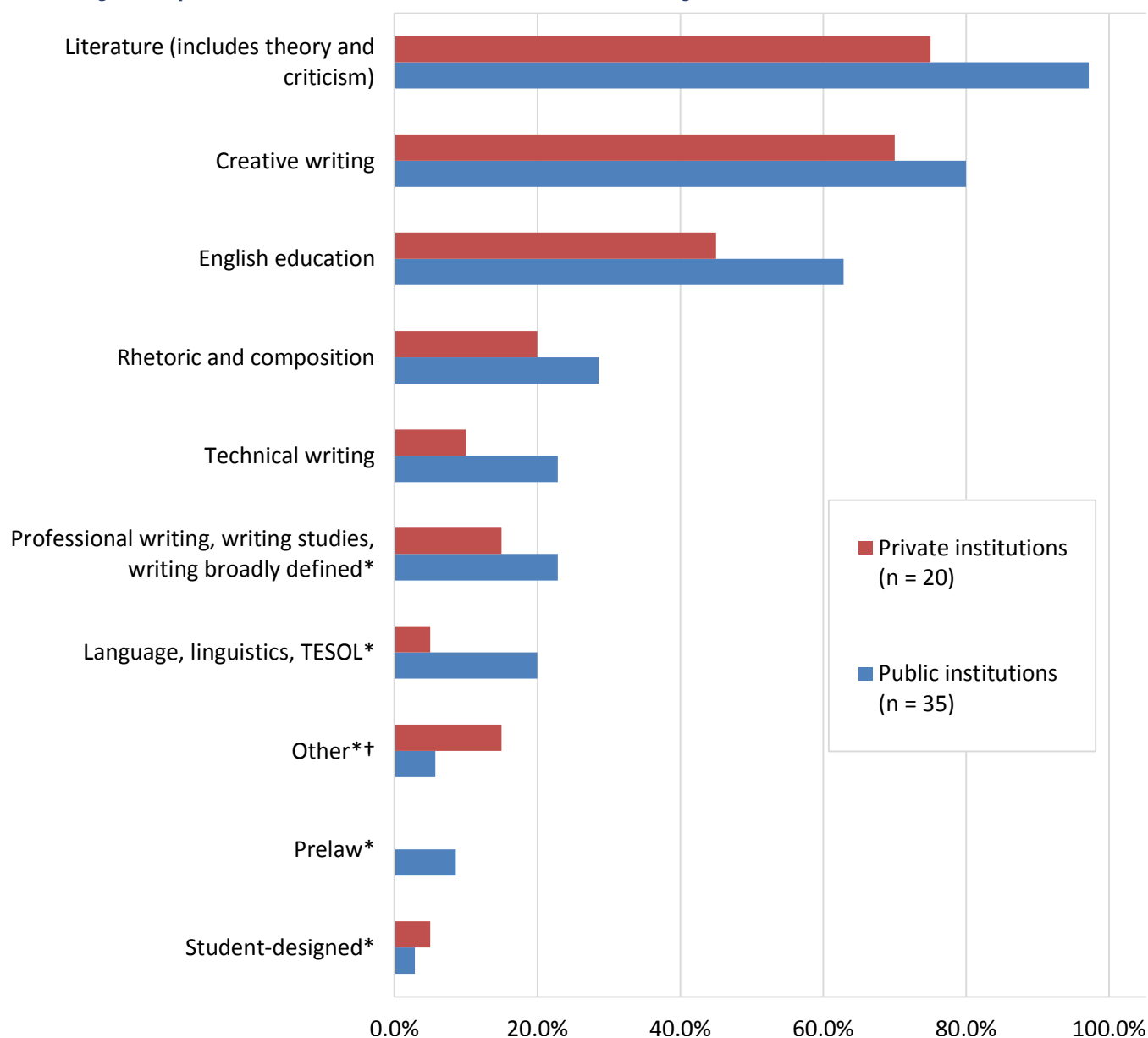


\* Items written in by respondents

† Includes cultural studies, drama and film, media studies, identity studies, and global and international studies



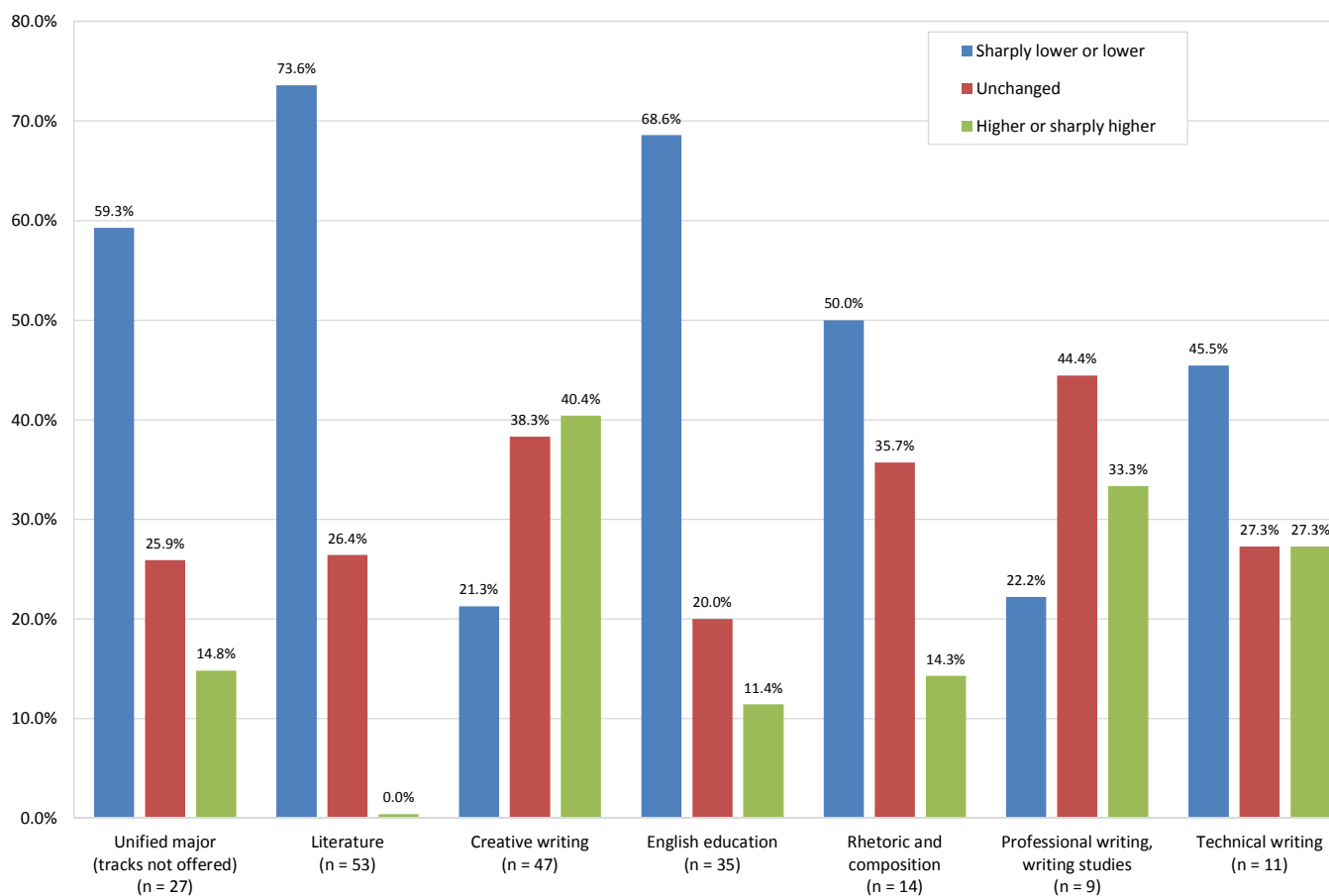
**Figure 12**  
**Percentage of Departments in Public and Private Institutions Offering Various Tracks**

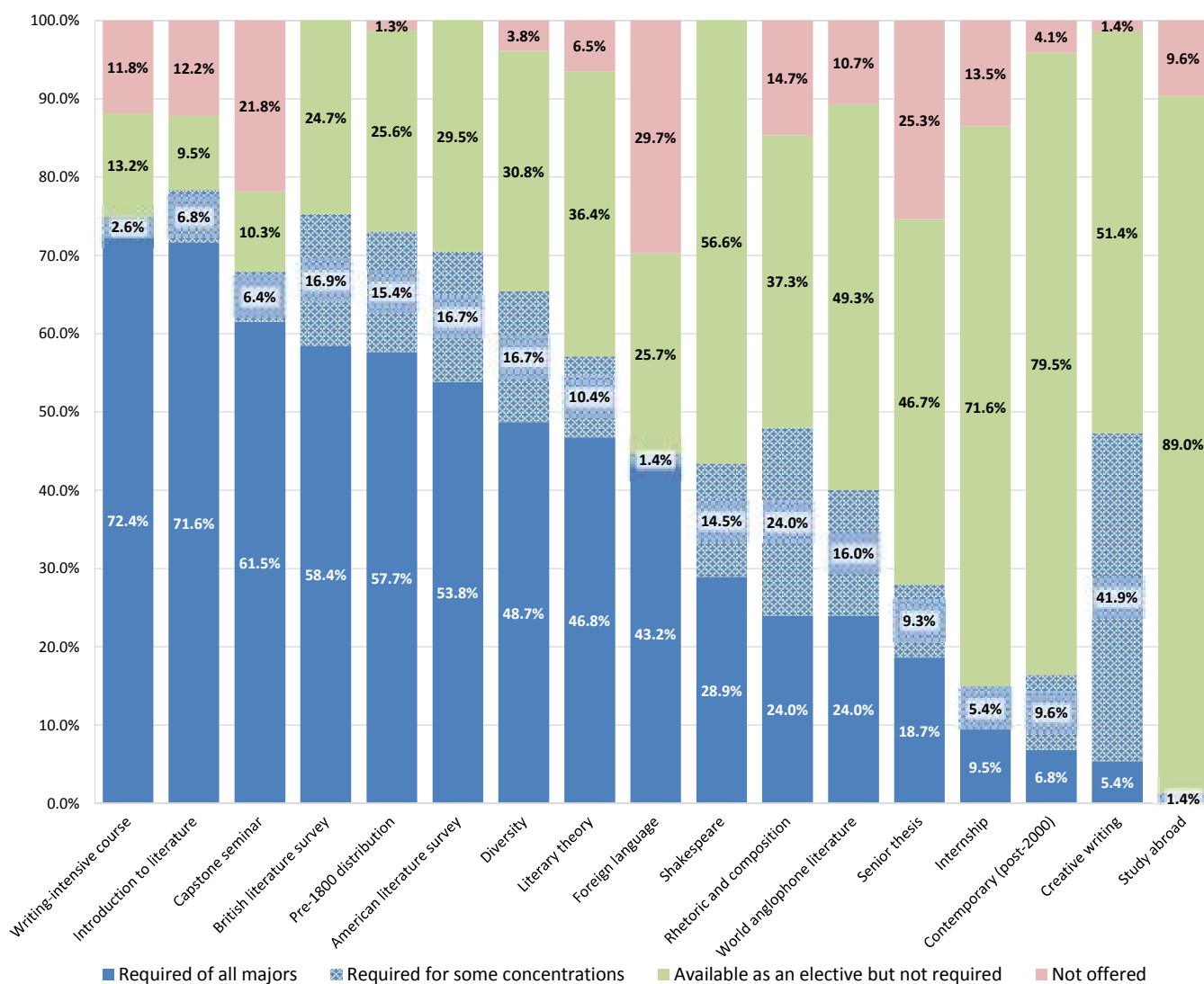


\* Items written in by respondents

† Includes cultural studies, drama and film, media studies, identity studies, and global and international studies

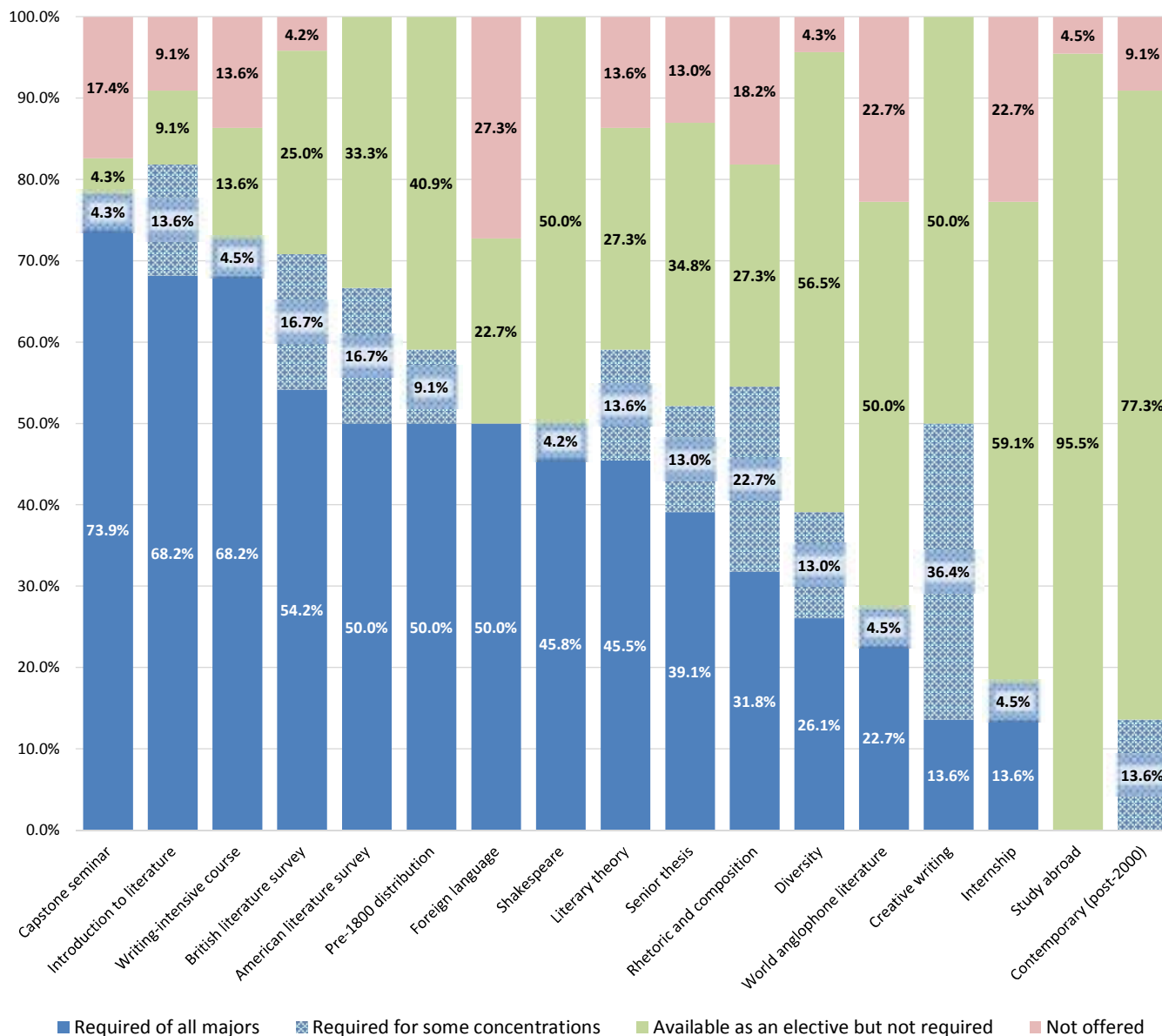
**Figure 13**  
**Enrollment Trends for Tracks in the Undergraduate English Major since 2010**



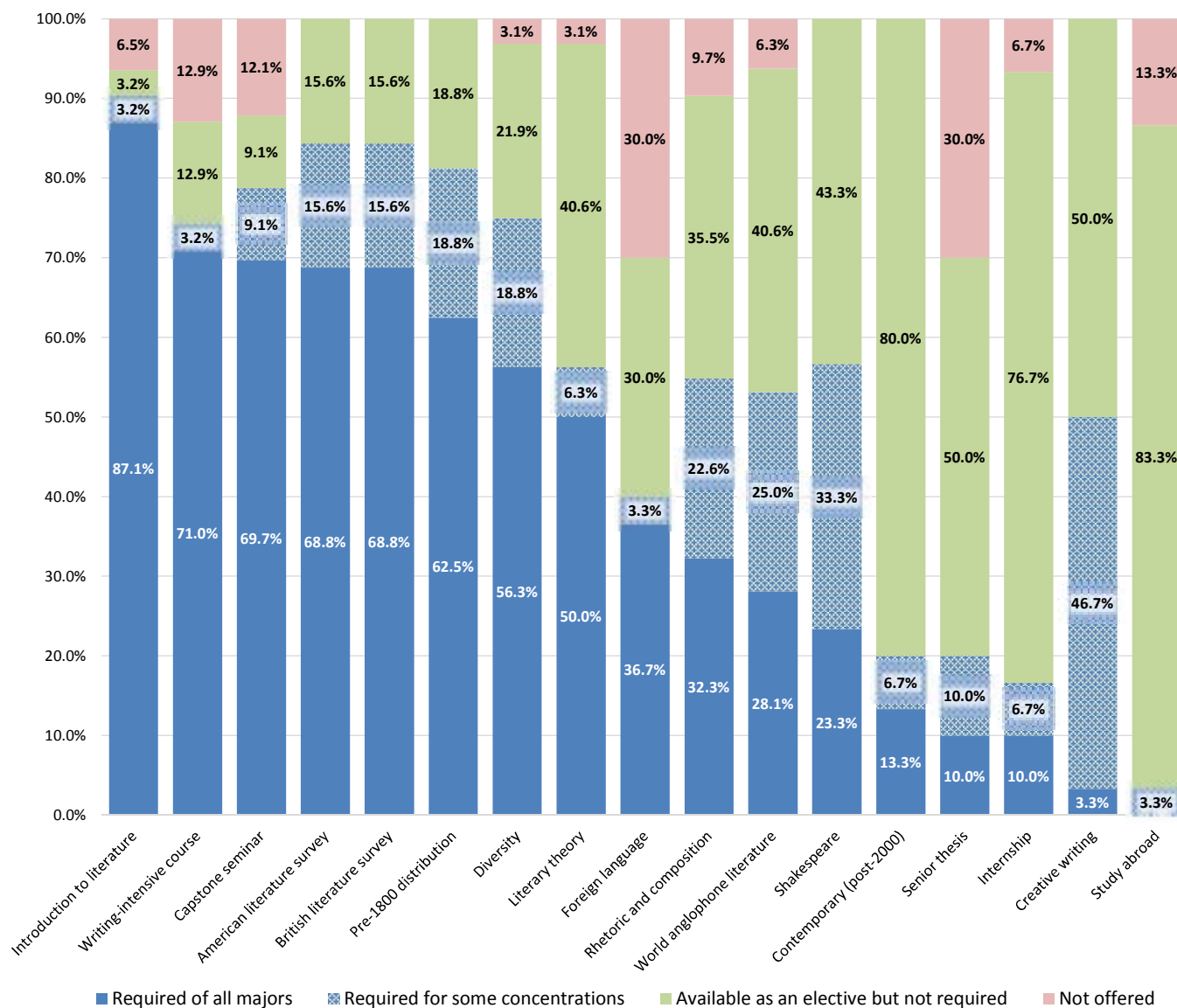
**Figure 14****Course Requirements for the English Major: Percentage of Departments Requiring Different Types of Courses**

Note: Figures 14–19 present responses to the question, “Which of the following course types are required of all or some English majors to complete a bachelor’s degree in your department?” (80 departments responded to this question; 15 did not.)

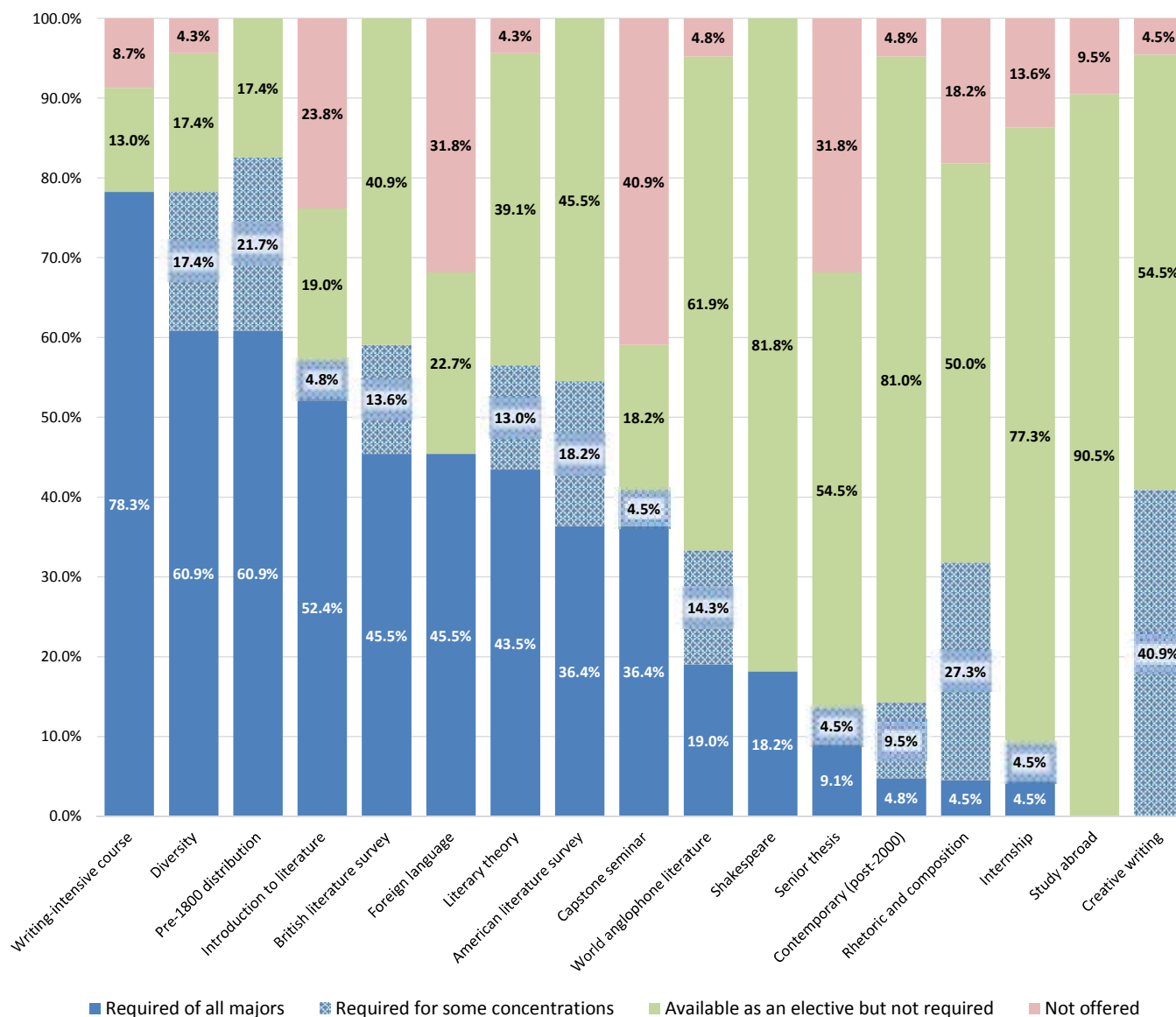
**Figure 15**  
**Course Requirements for the English Major: Percentage of BA-Granting Departments Requiring Different Types of Courses**



**Figure 16**  
**Course Requirements for the English Major: Percentage of MA-Granting Departments Requiring Different Types of Courses**

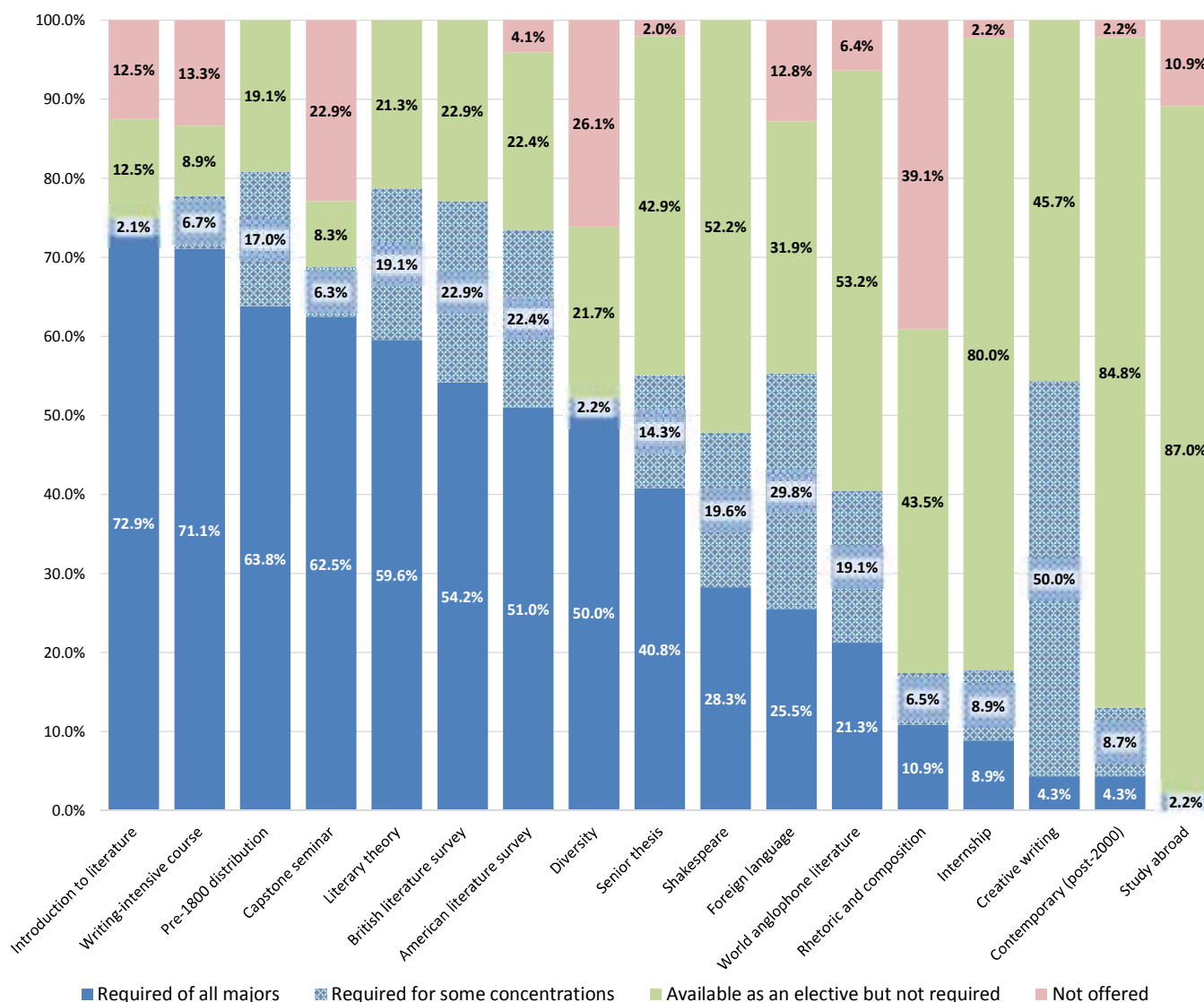


**Figure 17**  
**Course Requirements for the English Major: Percentage of PhD-Granting Departments Requiring Different Types of Courses**

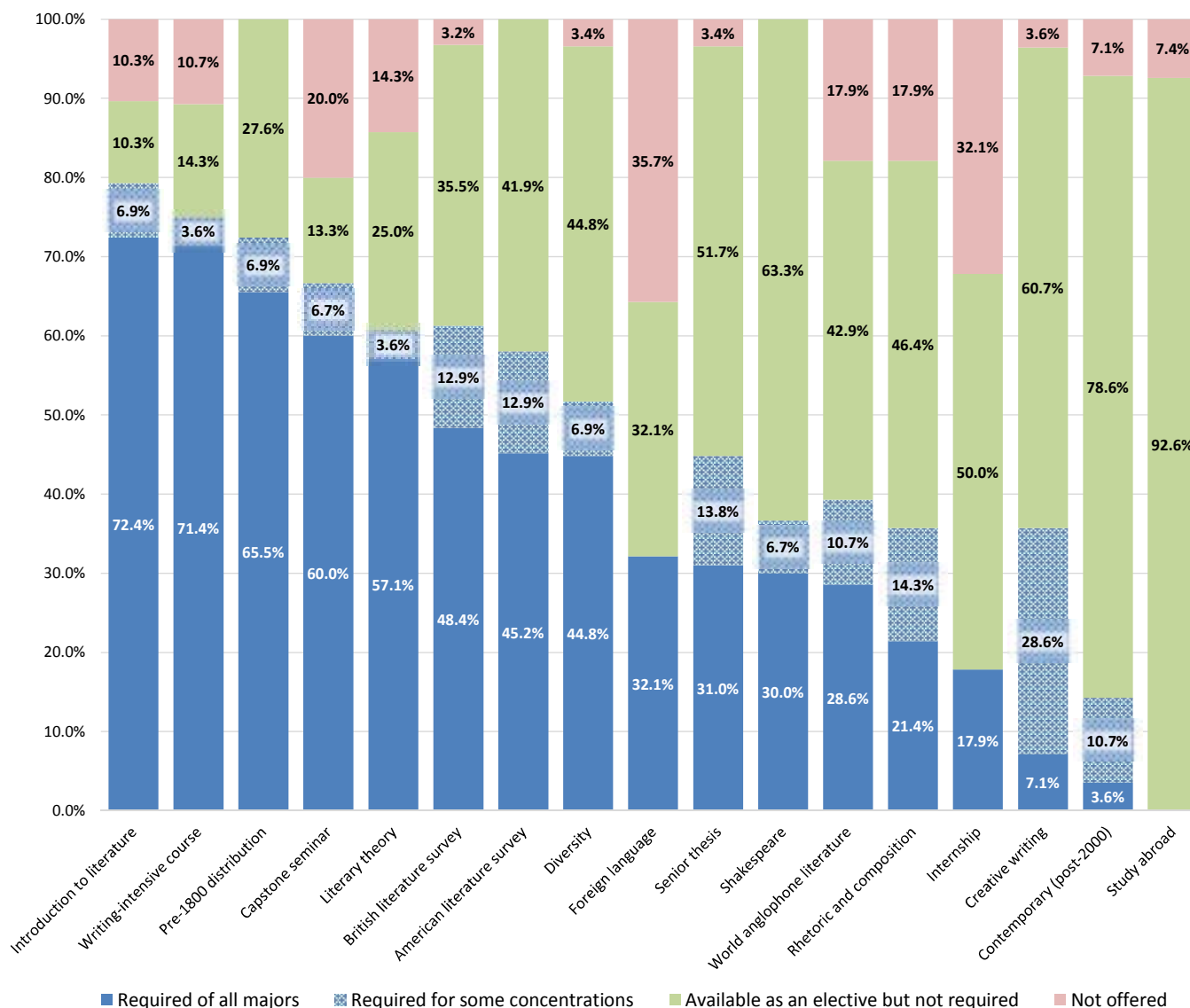




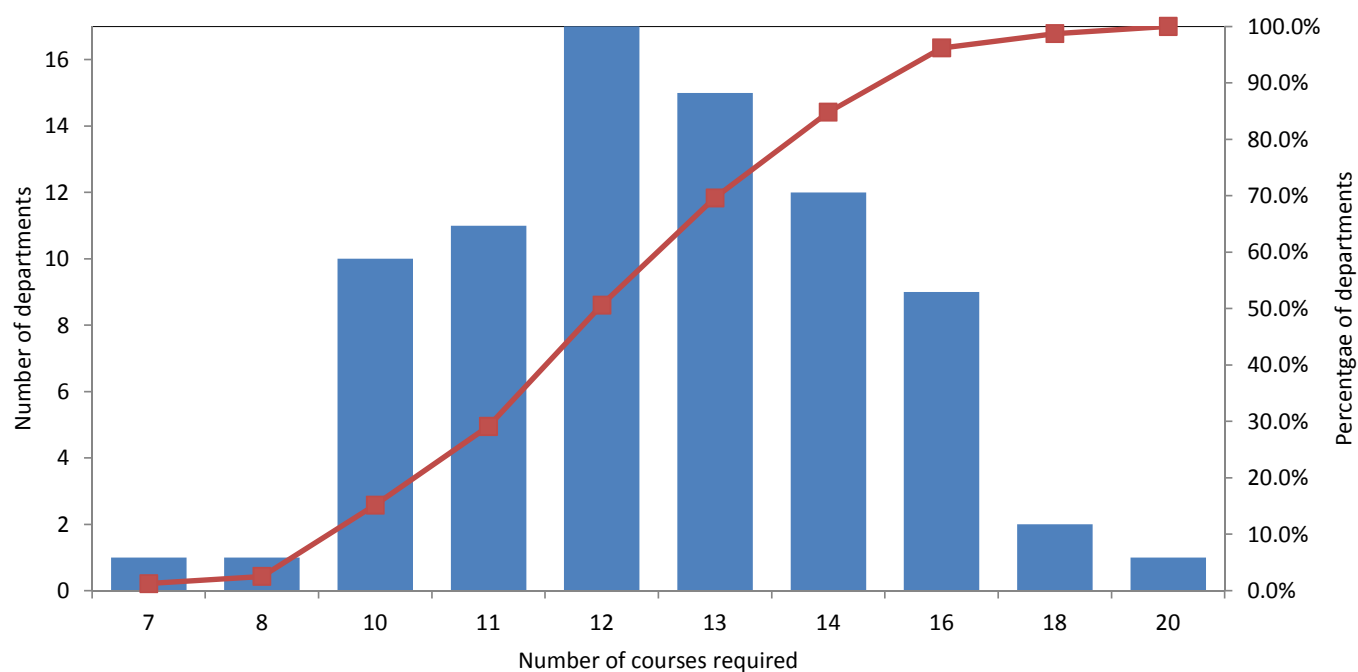
**Figure 18**  
**Course Requirements for the English Major: Percentage of Departments in Public Institutions Requiring Different Types of Courses**



**Figure 19**  
**Course Requirements for the English Major: Percentage of Departments in Private Institutions Requiring Different Types of Courses**

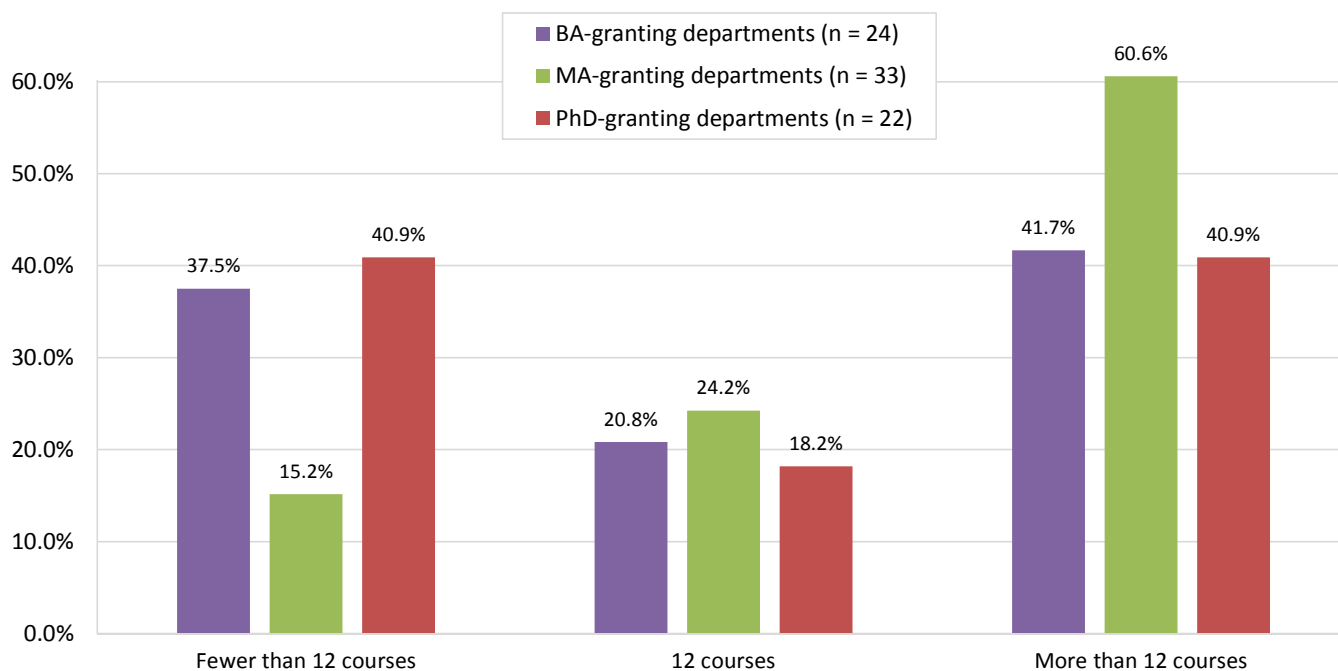


**Figure 20**  
**Distribution of Departments by Number of Courses Required for the English Major**

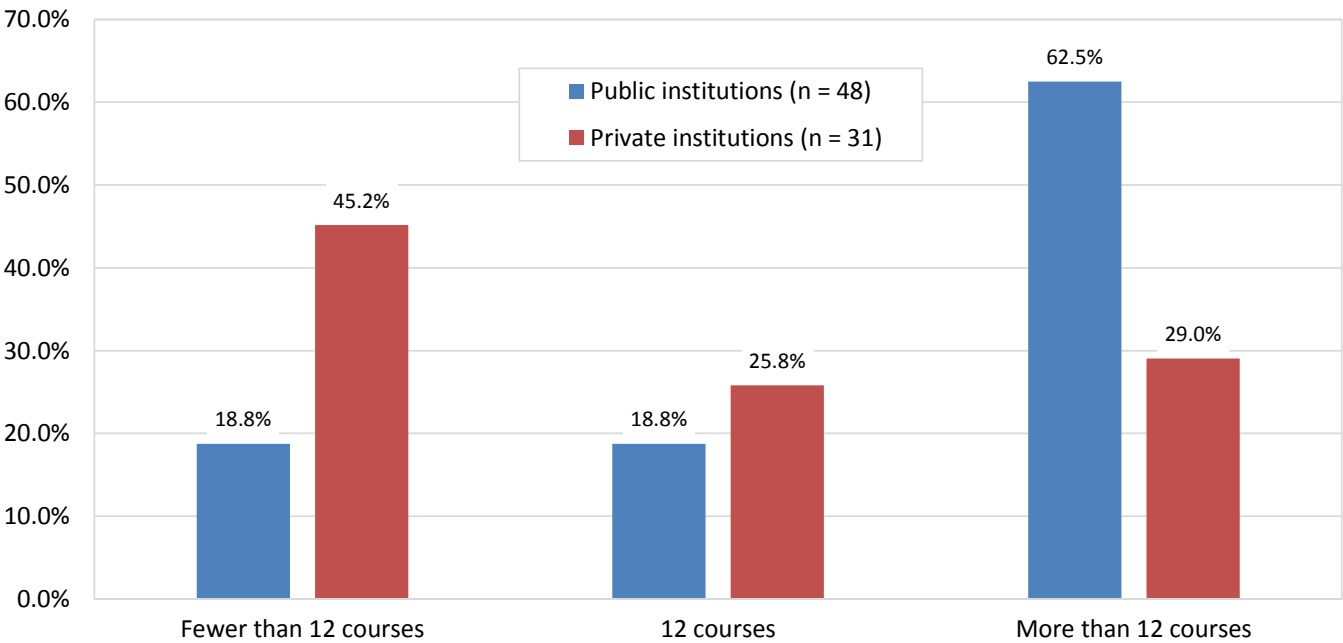


Note: Figures 20–22 present responses to the question, “How many courses must students take to complete a major in your department?” (79 departments responded to this question; 16 did not.)

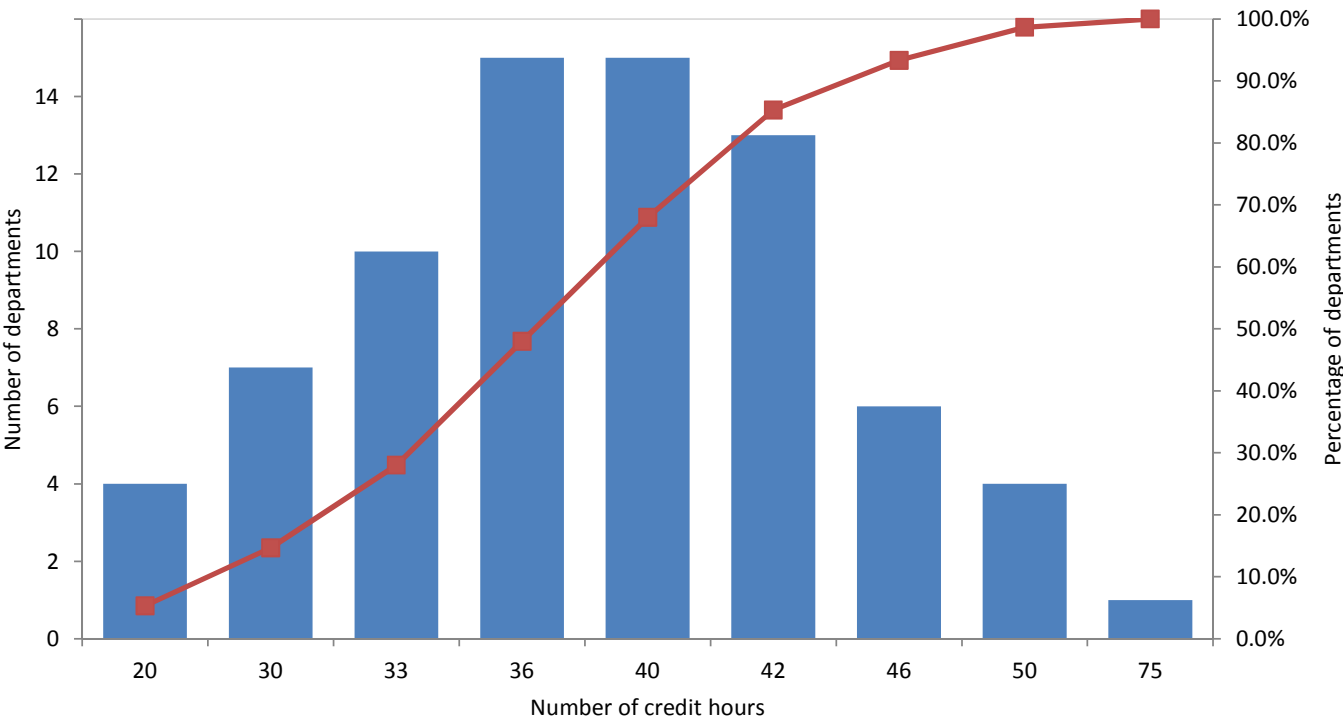
**Figure 21**  
**Percentage of Departments Requiring Fewer than 12 Courses, 12 Courses, and More than 12 Courses for the English Major, by Department’s Highest Degree**



**Figure 22**  
**Percentage of Departments Requiring Fewer than 12 Courses, 12 Courses, and More than 12 Courses for the English Major, by Control of Institution**

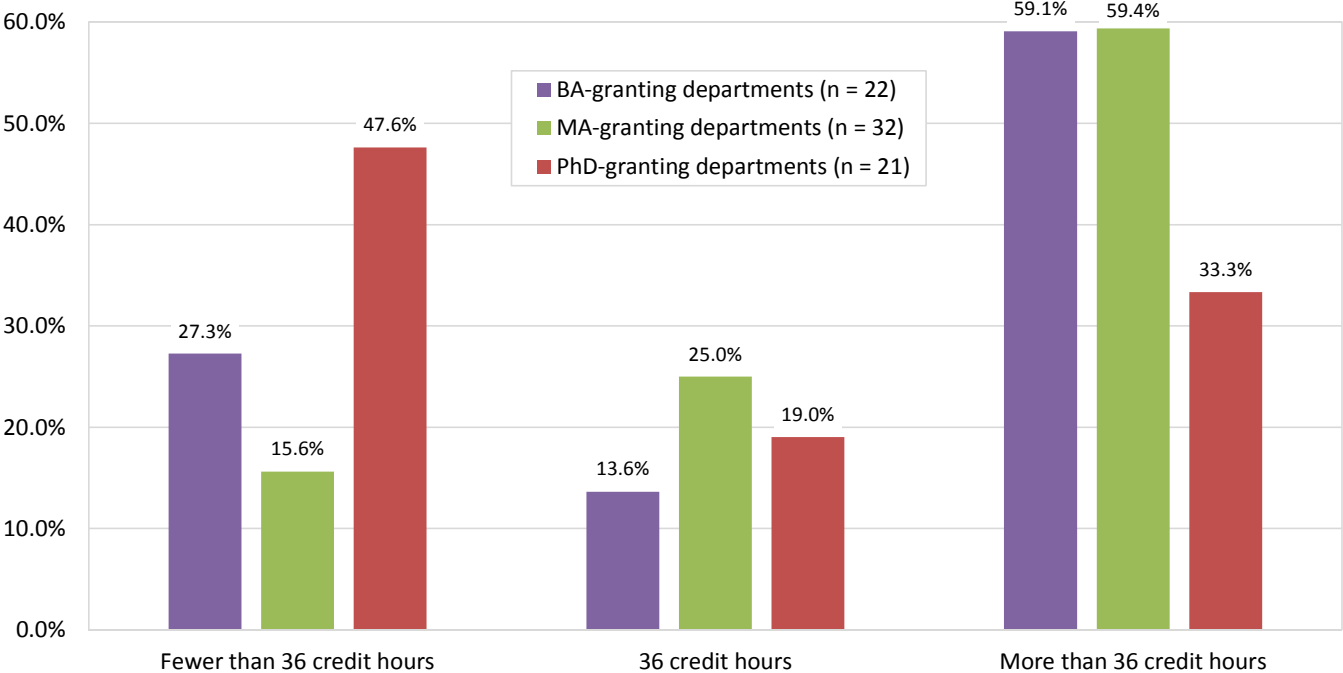


**Figure 23**  
**Distribution of Departments by Number of Credit Hours Required for the English Major**

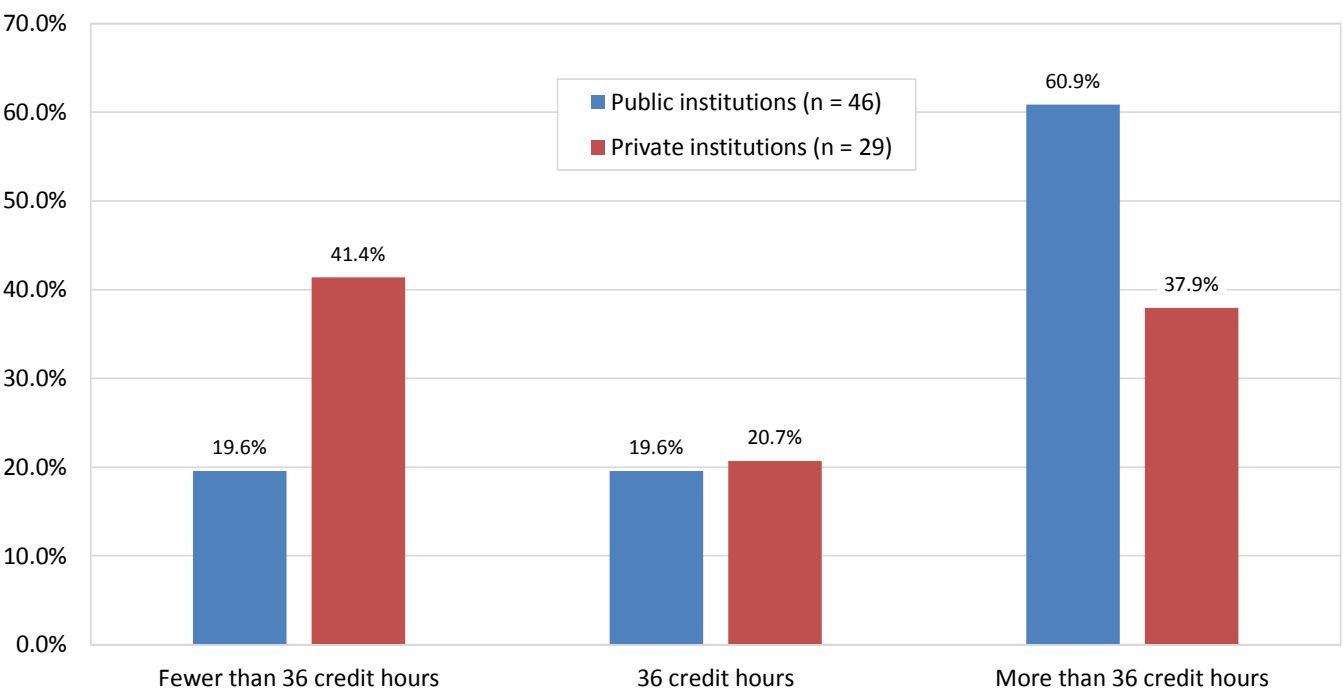


Note: Figures 23–25 present responses to the question, “How many credit hours in total do these courses represent?” (75 departments responded to this question; 20 did not.)

**Figure 24**  
**Percentage of Departments Requiring Fewer than 36 Credit Hours, 36 Credit Hours, and More than 36 Credit Hours for the English Major, by Department's Highest Degree**



**Figure 25**  
**Percentage of Departments Requiring Fewer than 36 Credit Hours, 36 Credit Hours, and More than 36 Credit Hours for the English Major, by Control of Institution**







## Appendix B

# The Downturn in Bachelor's Degrees in English since 2012

IN JULY 2017 the National Center of Education Statistics released degree completions data for 2015–16 that documented the continuation of the decline in the number of bachelor's degrees in English that has been evident since 2012.<sup>1</sup> In the four years since 2012, bachelor's degree completions in English have fallen by almost 11,000, or 20.4%, from 53,840 in 2012 to 42,868 in 2016. The recent downturn is not confined to English but has affected all the humanities, especially history, where bachelor's degree completions have fallen by over 9,500 (27.0%) between 2012 and 2016, from 35,190 to 25,686. Degrees in languages other than English and in philosophy and religious studies have also declined, by 15.3% and 18.7%, respectively, since 2012. (Following the convention of WebCASPAR, the National Science Foundation's online resource for tracking time series data from the IPEDS degree completions survey, the numerical values cited here include degree completions from outlying areas as well as those from the fifty states and the District of Columbia.)

The declines in humanities BAs since 2012 follow two decades of relative stability. Over the twenty-two years from 1991 to 2012, the number of bachelor's degrees in English fluctuated in a range between 48,689 (in 1997) and 55,518 (in 2009) and had a mean of 52,684 and a median of 53,242. Since 2012, the number of degree completions in English has declined each year; at 42,868 in 2016 it reached its lowest point since 1989, when there were 41,769 bachelor's degree completions in English. Completions in the other humanities fields follow a parallel course. **Figure 1** shows trends in the number of bachelor's degrees in English and in three other humanities disciplines over the thirty years from 1987 to 2016.

Of course, over the same thirty-year period, the total number of bachelor's degree completions saw steady increases year after year, almost doubling from 1,003,532 in 1987 to 1,944,127 in 2016. In terms of market share, as measured by the number of bachelor's degrees per 100 bachelor's degrees in all fields, English has seen a long decline since 1993, as **figure 2** makes apparent.

The national data for English represent an aggregate compiled from the more than 1,500 institutions that have awarded bachelor's degrees in English in at least one of the thirty years from 1987 to 2016. Not all these institutions have completions in English every year. **Table 1** shows the number of years between 1987 and 2016 that institutions have reported awarding one or more bachelor's degrees in English; the number of institutions reporting those degrees; and the number of degrees in English reported in three selected years, 2009, 2012, and 2016. Over the thirty-year period, 1,519 institutions have awarded degrees in English; 943 have awarded at least 1 bachelor's degree in English in each of the thirty years. The English bachelor's degrees these 943 institutions awarded account for 91.8% of the total in 2009, 90.8% of the total in 2012, and 87.5% of the total in 2016. To measure the scale and distribution of change in English bachelor's degrees across the array of institutions

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the IPEDS completions survey canvasses, this discussion focuses on these 943 institutions, which form the historical core of undergraduate programs in English.

The IPEDS data track degree completions; that is, what's being counted are the number of bachelor's degrees institutions confer. Only indirectly and retrospectively does the count of degree completions provide an index of the number of students enrolled as English majors. In addition, the completions data examined here are limited to first majors; students who completed what institutions classify as a second major in English are not counted here. The IPEDS completions file does include second majors (but not minors) when institutions report them; however, not all institutions report second majors. In 2016, of the 2,559 institutions that reported awarding one or more bachelor's degrees, only 1,088 (42.5%) reported second majors in any field of study. Completions data also take no account of the many undergraduates who enroll in courses in English but complete majors in other fields.

**Table 2A** breaks out degree completions in English by the 2015 Carnegie classification of the institutions in the array of 943 institutions that have awarded at least one bachelor's degree in English in each of the thirty years from 1987 to 2016. The numerical and percentage values shown here are per-institution averages. That is, the average number of bachelor's degree completions in English over the eleven years from 2000 to 2010 was calculated for each of the 943 institutions. This eleven-year average is used as a basis for comparison with the number of bachelor's degrees in English each of the 943 institutions conferred in 2016.

In percentage terms, the largest declines from the 2000–10 average have come in the arts and sciences baccalaureate colleges and the doctoral universities with the highest research activity. The absolute number of bachelor's degree completions in English dropped by an average 7.62 degrees (22.19%) in the 183 arts and sciences baccalaureate colleges and by 52.31 degrees (27.90%) in the 106 doctoral research universities with the highest research activity. These are the two Carnegie sectors where, measured in degree completions per 100, English has historically been strongest—8.22 per 100 in the baccalaureate colleges on average from 1987 to 2016 and 4.67 per 100 in the research universities. (The single institution in the Carnegie Special Focus category [Regis College] is excluded from consideration here as an outlier.)

**Table 2B** examines the decline in English bachelor's degree completions between the 2000–10 and 2016 averages in terms of the number of degrees in English per 100 degrees in all fields. This analysis corrects for increases in English (or less-steep numerical declines) within each institutional sector that are a by-product of the growth in the overall number of undergraduates institutions are enrolling and in the number of bachelor's degrees institutions are conferring. It also corrects for the significant differences in scale between the relatively small baccalaureate colleges and the much larger master's and research universities. The drop in English bachelor's degrees per 100 degrees in all fields has been most pronounced in the arts and sciences baccalaureate colleges (down 2.21 degrees per 100, or 26.61%) and in the research universities with the highest research activity (down 2.09 degrees per 100, or 44.14%).

The rest of the tables present additional details about the degree completions data for Carnegie baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral institutions, providing the mean, median, minimum, and maximum values first for the number of degree completions

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and then for the number per 100. The tables indicate the range of increases and decreases in degree completions across the array of institutions by comparing degrees in English that institutions awarded in 2016 with the average number and the number per 100 over the eleven years 2000–10. A chart accompanying each table shows how the decreases and increases are distributed across the institutions included in each Carnegie grouping.

**Table 3A**, for example, provides a statistical profile for the number of bachelor's degrees in English conferred by the 254 institutions in the two Carnegie baccalaureate college categories (arts and sciences focus and diverse fields). Per institution in 2016, these 254 institutions awarded a mean of 18.50 bachelor's degrees in English and a median of 15.00, down from the 2000–10 mean and median of 24.57 and 17.59, respectively. Over the 2000–10 period, the minimum average number of English degrees conferred was 3.18, and the maximum 89.09. In 2016 the minimum was 1.00, the maximum 107.00. Across the 254 institutions, the number of bachelor's degrees in English in 2016 represented a mean decline of 6.08 degrees (19.52%) and a median decline of 4.05 degrees (24.34%). The largest numerical decline for any single institution (the “minimum”) was 43.73 degrees, down 88.54%; the largest numerical increase for any single institution (the “maximum”) was 38.55 degrees, up 157.14% from the institutional average for 2000–10.

**Figure 3A** shows the percentage of institutions reporting decreases or increases in the number of English degrees across a six-category scale—declines of more than 40%, declines of 20% to 40%, declines of 10% to 20%, declines of less than 10%, increases up to 10%, and increases of more than 10%. As the chart indicates, of the 254 Carnegie baccalaureate colleges that awarded at least one bachelor's degree in English in every one of the thirty years from 1987 to 2016, 68.5% reported that in 2016 bachelor's degrees in English declined 10% or more from the average number conferred over the eleven year period from 2000 to 2010. Only 18.5% of these 254 institutions saw the number of degrees in English increase by more than 10%.

**Table 3B** reviews the same statistics for the number of bachelor's degrees in English per 100 bachelor's degrees in all fields. In 2016 the 254 Carnegie baccalaureate institutions reported a mean of 4.81 bachelor's degrees in English per 100 bachelor's degrees in all fields and a median of 4.16. These figures compare with a mean of 6.71 and a median of 6.15 degrees per 100 over the eleven years 2000–10. The 2016 figures represent a mean decline of 1.89 degrees per 100 (25.33%) and a median decline of 1.84 degrees per 100 (29.69%). Over the eleven years 2000–10, the minimum reported from these 254 Carnegie baccalaureate institutions was 0.99 degrees per 100; in 2016 the minimum was 0.56 per 100. The largest drop was a decline of 9.57 degrees in English per 100 degrees in all fields, down 88.04%. The largest increase was 5.77 degrees in English per 100 degrees in all fields, up 145.08% from the institutional average for 2000–10.

**Figure 3B** indicates that of the 254 Carnegie baccalaureate colleges that awarded at least one bachelor's degree in English in every one of the thirty years from 1987 to 2016, 72.8% reported that the number of bachelor's degrees in English per 100 bachelor's degrees represented a decline of 10% or more from the average number per 100 conferred over the eleven-year period from 2000 to 2010. Only 13.4% of

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these 254 institutions saw the number of bachelor's degrees in English per 100 increase by more than 10%.

Table 4A and table 4B (and figure 4A and figure 4B) present the parallel descriptive statistics for the 431 institutions in the three categories of Carnegie master's institutions. Table 5A and table 5B (and figure 5A and figure 5B) cover the 257 institutions in the three categories of Carnegie doctoral institutions. Again, the presentation is limited to the institutions in these Carnegie classification categories that awarded at least one bachelor's degree in English in every one of the thirty years from 1987 to 2016. These profiles make clear the diversity of institutions within and between the Carnegie institutional types and attempt to indicate as well how widely shared the recent downward trend in English bachelor's degrees has been across institutions that consistently confer bachelor's degrees in English each year.

Tables 3A, 4A, and 5A convey vividly the wide differences of scale between the 257 Carnegie doctoral institutions, which conferred 111 bachelor's degrees in English per institution per year on average over the eleven-year period 2000–10, and the 254 Carnegie baccalaureate and 431 Carnegie master's institutions, which conferred on average 25 and 35 bachelor's degrees in English, respectively, per institution per year over the same eleven-year period. Comparing the eleven-year average with the number in 2016 in figures 3A, 4A, and 5A reveals declines in the number of English bachelor's degrees of 10% or more in 68.5% of the Carnegie baccalaureate institutions, 55.5% of the Carnegie master's institutions, and 69.6% of the Carnegie doctoral institutions. Numerical increases of more than 10% appear in 18.5% of the Carnegie baccalaureate institutions, 25.8% of the Carnegie master's institutions, and 15.6% of the Carnegie doctoral institutions.

The distribution of declines and increases in degrees in English per 100 degrees reveals that substantial portions of the numerical increases from the 2000–10 institutional averages are likely due to increases in institutions' undergraduate student populations. Increases of more than 10% occurred in 13.4% of Carnegie baccalaureate institutions, 13.0% of Carnegie master's institutions, and only 3.9% of Carnegie doctoral institutions. Declines of 10% or more in bachelor's degrees in English per 100 bachelor's degrees in all fields have occurred in 72.8% of Carnegie baccalaureate institutions, 72.6% of Carnegie master's institutions, and 91.9% of the Carnegie doctoral institutions (figs. 3B, 4B, and 5B).

Per-institution data also develop awareness of the range of difference within each of the Carnegie institutional categories. The 2000–10 average number of bachelor's degrees in English conferred by the Carnegie baccalaureate colleges varies from 3 to 89, with a standard deviation of 18.8 degrees; in 2016, the average number ranged from 1 to 107, with a standard deviation of 15.0 degrees. The equivalent figures for the Carnegie master's institutions are 3 to 487 degrees for 2000–10, with a standard deviation of 46.4 degrees, and 1 to 296 for 2016, with a standard deviation of 35.9. The figures for the Carnegie doctoral institutions are 7 to 474 degrees for 2000–10, with a standard deviation of 100.1 degrees, and 3 to 433 for 2016, with a standard deviation of 72.3.

The number of bachelor's degrees in English per 100 degrees in all fields shows similar variation across the set of institutions in each Carnegie institutional type. In the Carnegie baccalaureate colleges, the number of bachelor's degrees in English per

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100 degrees in all fields ranges from 0.99 to 21 per 100 per year for the 2000–10 per-institution average, with a standard deviation of 3.6 degrees per 100, and from 0.56 to 21 for 2016, with a standard deviation of 3.3 degrees per 100. The equivalent figures for the Carnegie master's institutions are 0.43 to 16 English degrees per 100 per year for the 2000–10 per-institution average, with a standard deviation of 2.42 degrees per 100, and 0.19 to 15 for 2016, with a standard deviation of 1.9 degrees per 100. The figures for the Carnegie doctoral institutions are 0.52 to 17 English degrees per 100 for the years 2000–10, with a standard deviation of 2.0 degrees per 100, and 0.36 to 10 degrees per 100 in 2016, with a standard deviation of 1.3 degrees per 100 (tables 3B, 4B, and 5B).

The institutional data that form the basis for this report are available in a **spreadsheet** containing three worksheets, listing the 254 Carnegie baccalaureate institutions, the 431 Carnegie master's institution, and the 257 Carnegie doctoral institutions. Each list is arranged in descending order, largest to smallest, according to the average number of bachelor's degrees in English per 100 bachelor's degrees in all fields that each institution conferred each year over the eleven years from 2000 to 2010. Each list contains five columns, showing the name of the institution, the institution's average number of bachelor's degrees in English per 100 degrees in all fields in 2000–10, its average number of bachelor's degrees in English per 100 degrees in all fields in 2016, its average number of bachelor's degrees in English in 2000–10, and the number of bachelor's degrees in English the institution conferred in 2016.

## Notes

This version of appendix B includes corrections to the table and figure references.

1. Degree completions data cover academic years that span two calendar years. Degrees awarded in a given academic year are referred to by the second of the two calendar years. Thus, degrees awarded in 2011–12 are referred to as 2012, degrees awarded in 2015–16 as 2016, and so forth.

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**Table 1**  
**Bachelor's Degrees in English, 1987–2016**

Number of Years Institutions Awarded English BAs, 1987–2016	Number of Institutions Awarding English BAs	Number of English BAs, 2009	Number of English BAs, 2012	Number of English BAs, 2016
1	35	7	–	182
2	19	–	–	42
3	19	–	26	510
4	24	9	24	197
5	13	4	19	55
6	16	9	58	66
7	17	3	156	139
8	11	73	130	93
9	17	115	156	122
10	13	33	86	137
11	11	49	27	81
12	15	71	107	86
13	11	71	109	88
14	15	245	351	658
15	9	118	171	146
16	10	79	107	135
17	19	307	335	224
18	13	37	42	63
19	7	105	38	26
20	8	59	77	76
21	18	62	57	67
22	8	22	17	12
23	14	131	49	60
24	15	77	80	79
25	17	291	231	208
26	28	356	405	99
27	28	219	202	192
28	49	522	426	374
29	97	1,455	1,466	1,128
30	943	50,989	48,888	37,523
Total	1,519	55,518	53,840	42,868



**Table 2A**

**Average Number of Bachelor's Degrees in English, per Institution, for Institutions Awarding at Least One Degree in English in Each of the Thirty Years from 1987 to 2016 (N = 943)**

Carnegie Classification of Institutions	Number of Institutions	Average Number of English BAs per Institution, 2000–10	Average Number of English BAs per Institution, 2016	Numerical Change, 2000–10 to 2016	Percentage Change, 2000–10 to 2016
Baccalaureate colleges, arts and sciences focus	183	29.87	22.26	–7.62	–22.19
Baccalaureate colleges, diverse fields	71	10.91	8.80	–2.11	–12.66
Doctoral universities, highest research activity	106	169.20	116.89	–52.31	–27.90
Doctoral universities, higher research activity	88	83.85	61.83	–22.02	–18.13
Doctoral universities, moderate research activity	63	49.86	40.44	–9.42	–12.98
Master's colleges and universities, larger programs	267	43.28	36.56	–6.72	–4.99
Master's colleges and universities, medium programs	111	21.20	16.89	–4.31	–16.92
Master's colleges and universities, small programs	53	19.61	15.17	–4.44	–14.61
Special focus four-year, other health professions schools	1	10.45	6.00	–4.45	–42.61
Total	943	52.66	39.79	–12.87	–15.22

**Table 2B**

**Average Number of Bachelor's Degrees in English per 100 Bachelor's Degrees, per Institution, for Institutions Awarding at Least One Degree in English in Each of the Thirty Years from 1987 to 2016 (N = 943)**

Carnegie Classification of Institutions	Number of Institutions	Average Number of English BAs per 100 BAs, per Institution, 2000–10	Average Number of English BAs per 100 BAs, per Institution, 2016	Numerical Change, 2000–10 to 2016	Percentage Change, 2000–10 to 2016
Baccalaureate colleges, arts and sciences focus	183	7.96	5.76	–2.21	–26.61
Baccalaureate colleges, diverse fields	71	3.47	2.39	–1.09	–22.01
Doctoral universities, highest research activity	106	4.58	2.49	–2.09	–44.14
Doctoral universities, higher research activity	88	3.74	2.22	–1.52	–36.55
Doctoral universities, moderate research activity	63	3.33	2.09	–1.24	–33.77
Master's colleges and universities, larger programs	267	4.03	2.73	–1.30	–24.82
Master's colleges and universities, medium programs	111	3.62	2.41	–1.22	–28.87
Master's colleges and universities, small programs	53	4.02	2.69	–1.32	–23.98
Special focus four-year, other health professions schools	1	5.38	1.73	–3.65	–67.86
Total	943	4.69	3.13	–1.56	–29.30

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**Table 3A**  
**Number of Bachelor's Degrees in English, Carnegie Baccalaureate Institutions (N = 254)**

	Average Number of English BAs, 2000–10	Number of English BAs, 2016	Numerical Change (Per-Institution Average), 2000–10 to 2016	Percentage Change (Per-Institution Average), 2000–10 to 2016
Mean	24.57	18.50	–6.08	–19.52
Median	17.59	15.00	–4.05	–24.34
Minimum	3.18	1.00	–43.73	–88.54
Maximum	89.09	107.00	38.55	157.14

**Table 3B**  
**Number of Bachelor's Degrees in English per 100 Bachelor's Degrees, Carnegie Baccalaureate Institutions (N = 254)**

	Average Number of English BAs, 2000–10	Number of English BAs, 2016	Numerical Change (Per-Institution Average), 2000–10 to 2016	Percentage Change (Per-Institution Average), 2000–10 to 2016
Mean	6.71	4.81	–1.89	–25.33
Median	6.15	4.16	–1.84	–29.69
Minimum	0.99	0.56	–9.57	–88.04
Maximum	21.06	20.82	5.77	145.08

**Table 4A**  
**Number of Bachelor's Degrees in English, Carnegie Master's Institutions (N = 431)**

	Average Number of English BAs, 2000–10	Number of English BAs, 2016	Numerical Change (Per-Institution Average), 2000–10 to 2016	Percentage Change (Per-Institution Average), 2000–10 to 2016
Mean	34.68	28.86	–5.82	–9.24
Median	20.55	17.00	–2.73	–16.52
Minimum	3.00	1.00	–229.00	–93.21
Maximum	487.00	296.00	104.64	530.77

**Table 4B**  
**Number of Bachelor's Degrees in English per 100 Bachelor's Degrees, Carnegie Master's Institutions (N = 431)**

	Average Number of English BAs, 2000–10	Number of English BAs, 2016	Numerical Change (Per-Institution Average), 2000–10 to 2016	Percentage Change (Per-Institution Average), 2000–10 to 2016
Mean	3.92	2.64	–1.28	–25.76
Median	3.43	2.22	–1.08	–32.43
Minimum	0.43	0.19	–10.44	–93.59
Maximum	15.98	14.81	4.91	246.71

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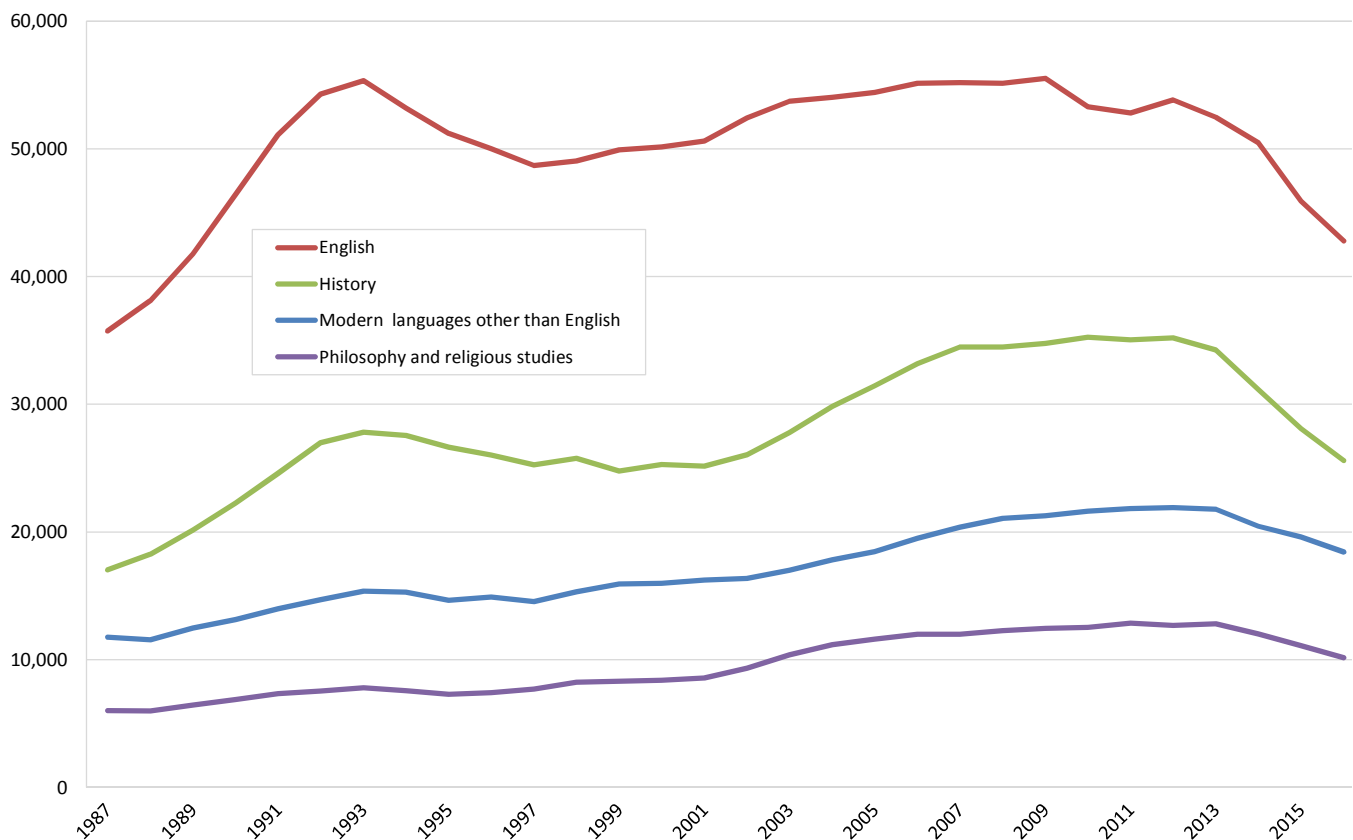
**Table 5A**  
**Number of Bachelor's Degrees in English, Carnegie Doctoral Institutions (N = 257)**

	Average Number of English BAs, 2000–10	Number of English BAs, 2016	Numerical Change (Per-Institution Average), 2000–10 to 2016	Percentage Change (Per-Institution Average), 2000–10 to 2016
Mean	110.72	79.30	–31.43	–20.90
Median	78.45	57.00	–15.36	–26.17
Minimum	7.18	3.00	–307.91	–80.00
Maximum	474.09	433.00	106.55	121.61

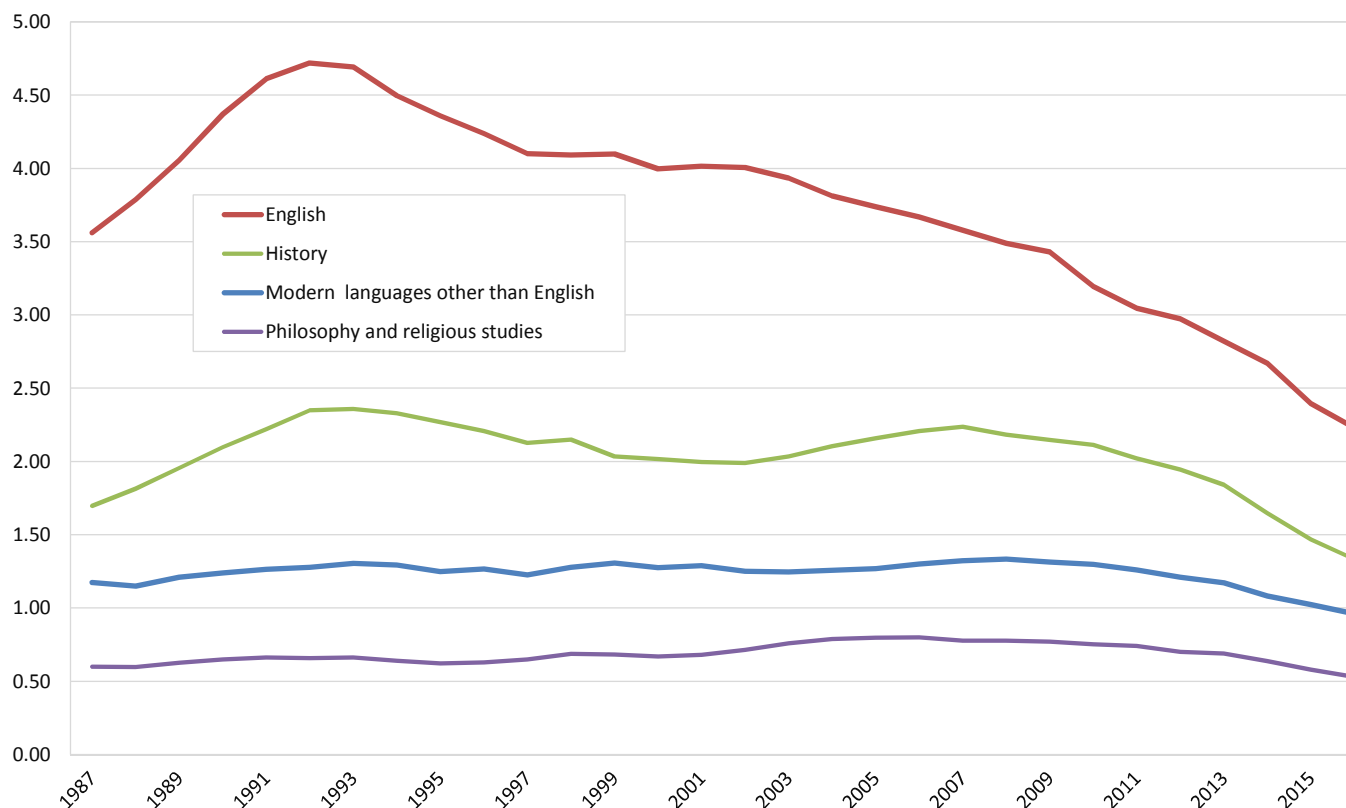
**Table 5B**  
**Number of Bachelor's Degrees in English per 100 Bachelor's Degrees, Carnegie Doctoral Institutions (N = 257)**

	Average Number of English BAs, 2000–10	Number of English BAs, 2016	Numerical Change (Per-Institution Average), 2000–10 to 2016	Percentage Change (Per-Institution Average), 2000–10 to 2016
Mean	3.99	2.30	–1.69	–39.00
Median	3.66	2.02	–1.44	–41.57
Minimum	0.52	0.36	–7.47	–85.91
Maximum	17.20	10.36	0.82	78.27

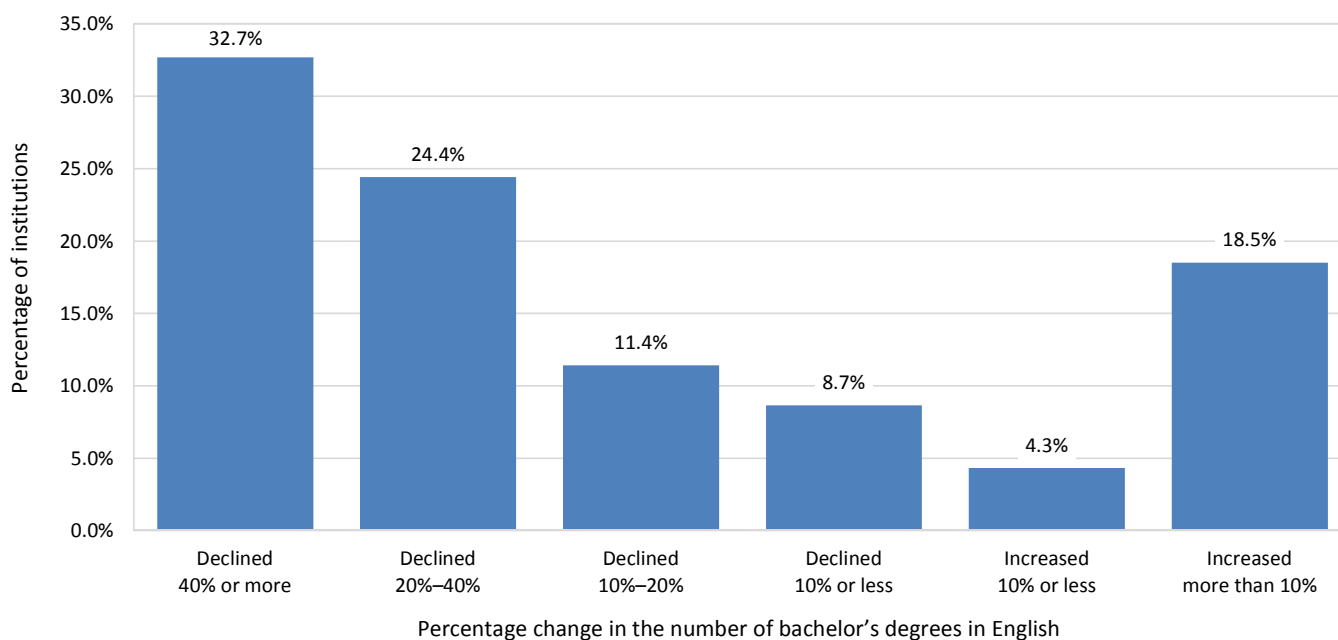
**Figure 1**  
**Number of Bachelor's Degree Completions in English, History, Modern Languages Other Than English, and Philosophy and Religious Studies, 1987–2016**



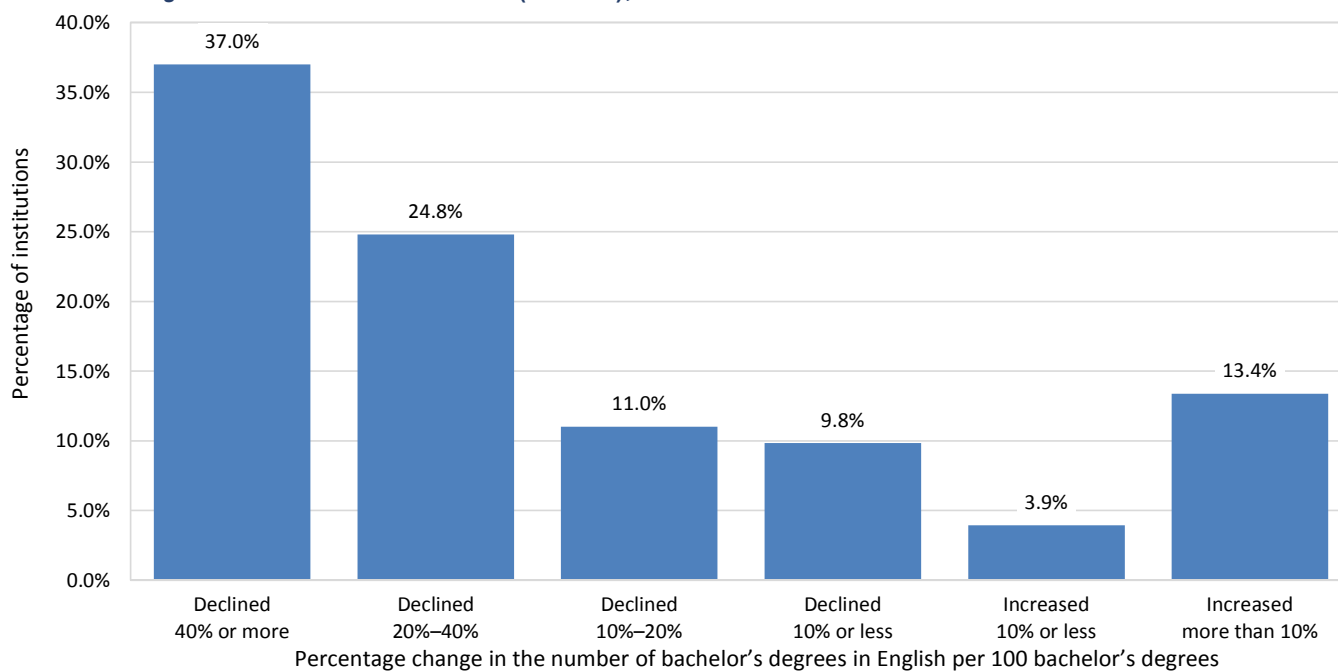
**Figure 2**  
**Number of Bachelor's Degree Completions in English, History, Modern Languages Other Than English, and Philosophy and Religious Studies per 100 Bachelor's Degrees in All Fields, 1987–2016**



**Figure 3A**  
**Distribution of Numerical Declines and Increases in Bachelor's Degrees in English across Carnegie Baccalaureate Institutions (N = 254), 2000–10 and 2016**

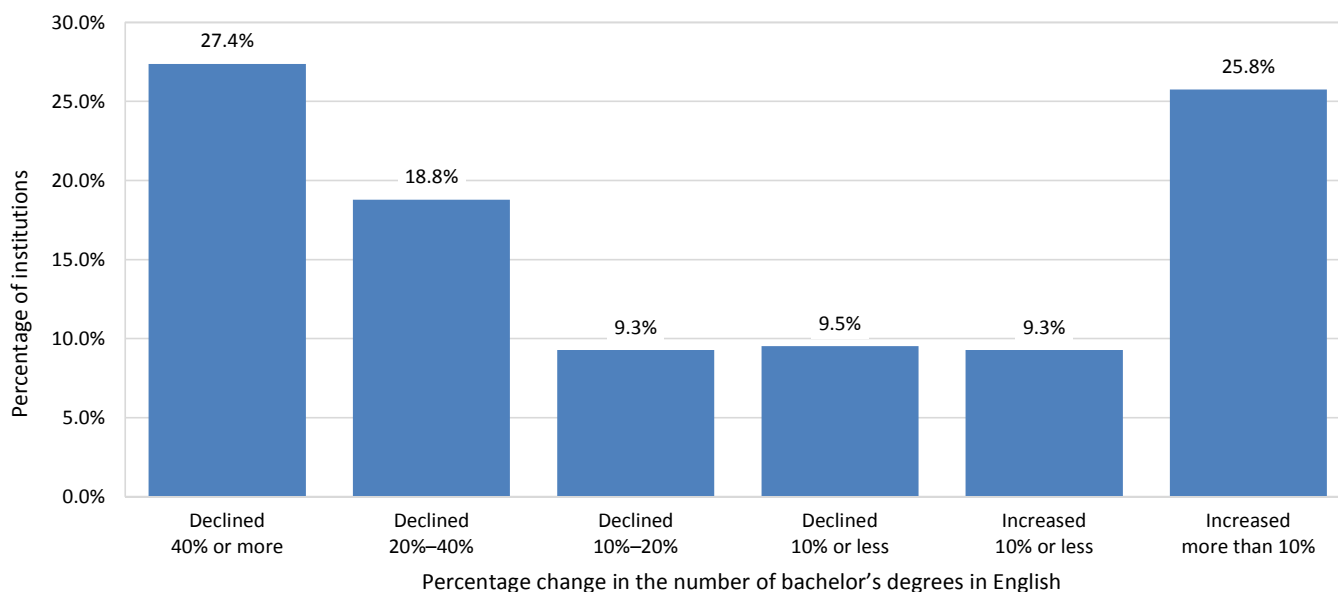


**Figure 3B**  
**Distribution of Declines and Increases in the Number of Bachelor's Degrees in English per 100 Bachelor's Degrees across Carnegie Baccalaureate Institutions (N = 254), 2000–10 and 2016**

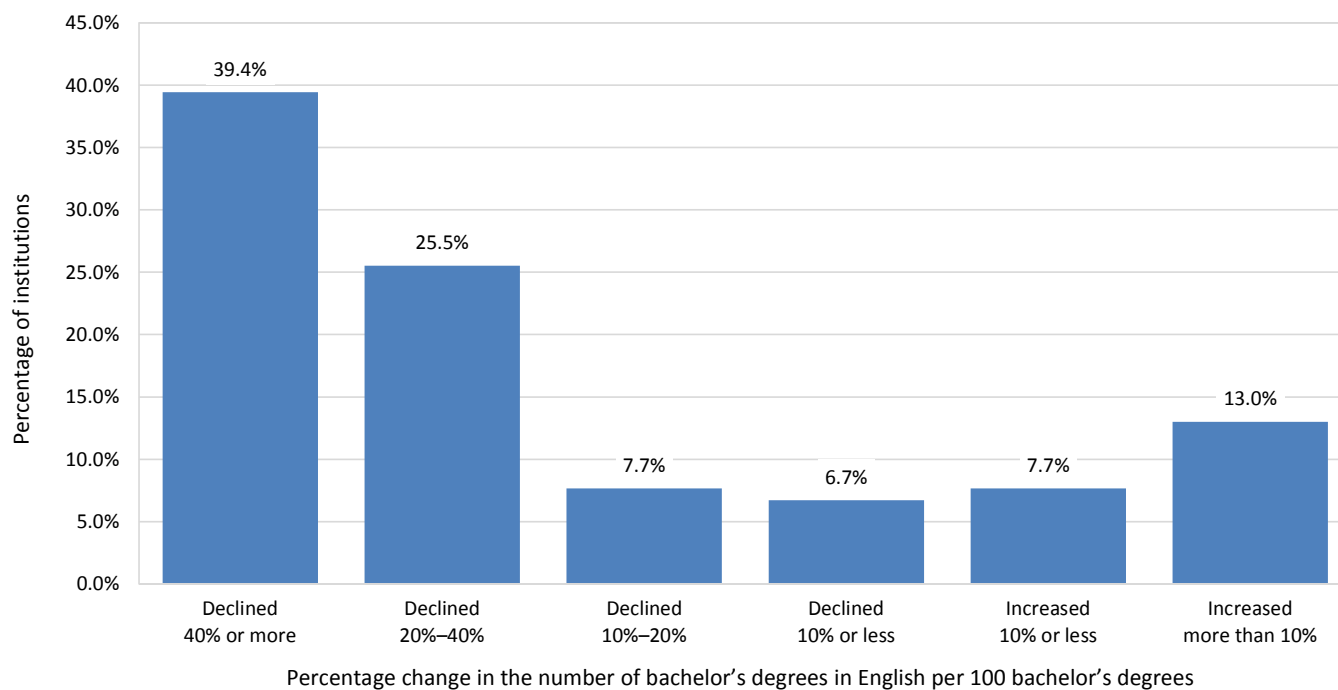


**Figure 4A**

**Distribution of Numerical Declines and Increases in the Number of Bachelor's Degrees in English across Carnegie Master's Institutions (N = 431), 2000–10 and 2016**

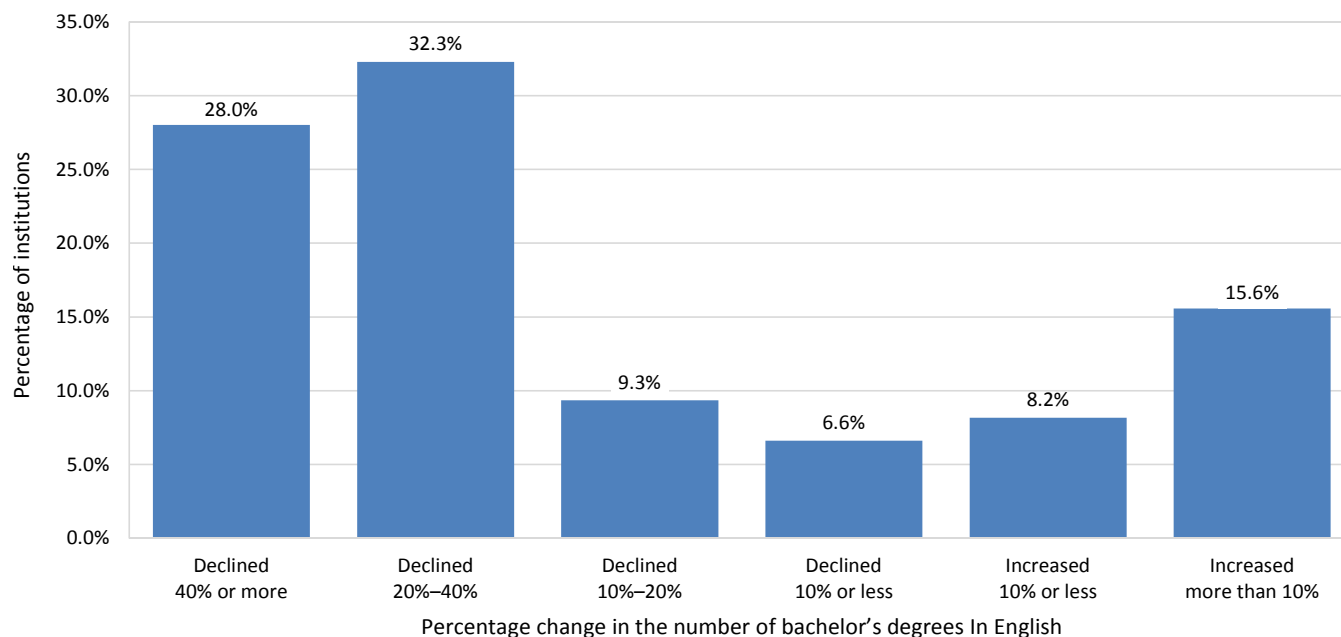
**Figure 4B**

**Distribution of Declines and Increases in the Number of Bachelor's Degrees in English per 100 Bachelor's Degrees across Carnegie Master's Institutions (N = 431), 2000–10 and 2016**



**Figure 5A**

**Distribution of Numerical Declines and Increases in the Number of Bachelor's Degrees in English across Carnegie Doctoral Institutions (N = 257), 2000–10 and 2016**

**Figure 5B**

**Distribution of Declines and Increases in the Number of Bachelor's Degrees in English per 100 Bachelor's Degrees across Carnegie Doctoral Institutions (N = 257), 2000–10 and 2016**

