



Faculty perceptions of the twenty selected academic roles of the Department of English in the Montana University System  
by Gary Allan Acton

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF EDUCATION  
Montana State University  
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**Abstract:**

The problem of this study was to determine if faculty perceptions of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English differed between English faculty and faculty in other academic departments. The study was conducted during the 1979-1980 academic year.

The six public institutions of higher education that constitute the Montana University System were included in the study. Questionnaires were mailed to a stratified random sample of faculty in order to determine faculty perceptions of the level of importance of twenty selected academic roles of the department of English as identified by a review of the literature. The data collected were analyzed by the chi-square test of independence and the Spearman rank-order correlation.

All hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance. Nine of the twenty selected academic roles were found to be significant when comparing faculty affiliated with English to faculty affiliated with other academic departments. Seven of the roles were significant exclusive to the departmental affiliation hypothesis.

Accordingly, English faculty and other faculty do differ markedly in their perceptions of the relative importance of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English. The importance of literature as compared to the importance of composition was a prime area of disagreement. Also, the importance of remedial English, the library research paper course, and technical writing proved to be roles that were perceived differently by the two groups. Uniformly, English faculty perceived the literature roles as more important and the composition roles as less important than did the faculty in other academic departments.

English faculty should be cognizant of these differences in perceptions so that they can communicate effectively with faculty from other departments about the academic roles of the department of English. From informed communication, misperceptions held by faculty outside the department of English may be corrected, both English faculty and faculty from other academic departments may alter certain perceptions, and some curricular changes as a result of the dialogue may be beneficial.

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ROLES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH IN THE MONTANA  
UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
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Approved:



Chairperson, Graduate Committee



Head, Major Department



Graduate Dean

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY  
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## ABSTRACT

The problem of this study was to determine if faculty perceptions of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English differed between English faculty and faculty in other academic departments. The study was conducted during the 1979-1980 academic year.

The six public institutions of higher education that constitute the Montana University System were included in the study. Questionnaires were mailed to a stratified random sample of faculty in order to determine faculty perceptions of the level of importance of twenty selected academic roles of the department of English as identified by a review of the literature. The data collected were analyzed by the chi-square test of independence and the Spearman rank-order correlation. All hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance. Nine of the twenty selected academic roles were found to be significant when comparing faculty affiliated with English to faculty affiliated with other academic departments. Seven of the roles were significant exclusive to the departmental affiliation hypothesis.

Accordingly, English faculty and other faculty do differ markedly in their perceptions of the relative importance of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English. The importance of literature as compared to the importance of composition was a prime area of disagreement. Also, the importance of remedial English, the library research paper course, and technical writing proved to be roles that were perceived differently by the two groups. Uniformly, English faculty perceived the literature roles as more important and the composition roles as less important than did the faculty in other academic departments.

English faculty should be cognizant of these differences in perceptions so that they can communicate effectively with faculty from other departments about the academic roles of the department of English. From informed communication, misperceptions held by faculty outside the department of English may be corrected, both English faculty and faculty from other academic departments may alter certain perceptions, and some curricular changes as a result of the dialogue may be beneficial.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Departments of English received criticism during the 1960's and 1970's. The concern with the declining ability of students to write effectively focused attention on ". . . the overriding significance of writing and composition as a task for English departments" (ADE Bulletin, 1975:59). The decline in SAT verbal scores from 474 in 1960-1961 to 429 in 1975-1976, a drop of 45 points (Missions of the College Curriculum, 1977:211), helped to generate the near hysteria of the "back-to-basics" movement (Arizona English Bulletin, 1976). States adopted, or seriously considered, competency tests for high school seniors as a requirement for graduation. The term "functional illiteracy" caused concern in parents and educators alike. Montana educators, although late to the concern for competency testing in English, were involved in developing a program by 1978 (Montana English Journal, 1978). Thus, attention was focused on the English programs of the high schools and on the departments of English of institutions of higher education (Brogan, 1978:18).

During the middle to the late 1970's, articles on the problems, methods, and needs of teaching students how to write appeared more regularly than usual in English journals. Departments of English responded to the concern by devoting more attention to writing courses. In 1978, the College English Association conducted a national survey of

departments of English. The results indicated a significant increase in the number of writing courses, in the academic rank of faculty teaching composition courses, in the number of faculty with doctorates teaching composition courses, and in the prestige earned for teaching composition (Gibson, 1978). The responsibility for the development of writing ability in students was, however, the subject of controversy. Increasingly, the period from 1975 to 1980 saw emphasis placed on the teaching of writing as a campus wide concern. Faced with criticism of their perceived responsibility as insurers of student competency in written expression, teachers of English reminded the rest of the academic community that achieving competency in written language was the responsibility of all academic departments (Judy, 1975; Donlan, 1976; Collins, 1977; Dorenkamp, 1978; Pfister, 1978; Bataille, 1979; and Tweet, 1979). Faculty of the department of English began writing programs that involved directly or indirectly faculty from other academic disciplines in an effort to meet the perceived weakness in student writing ability.

In addition, the roles of the department of English in the academic community were the subject of confusion. According to Neel (1976:11), what the faculty affiliated with English saw as the functions of the department of English and what faculty affiliated with other academic departments saw as its functions was unclear. Minimal attempt was made to analyze differences in the perceptions of the

academic roles of the department of English held by the faculty in the academic disciplines that constituted the typical college or university.

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of the study was to determine whether a significant difference existed between the perceptions of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English by full-time faculty of English and full-time faculty of other academic departments at selected Montana public institutions of higher education during the 1979-1980 academic year.

#### NEED OF THE STUDY

The study was important because, with the exceptions of Wilcox (1968, 1973) and Applebee (1974), no comprehensive study of undergraduate English programs had been done. Moreover, no effort had been made to identify the specific academic roles of the department of English in undergraduate education and how academic faculty perceived those roles. Since the department of English is related by its service role to the operational effectiveness of all other academic departments, the level of interdependence is higher for the department of English than for any other academic department. Because it plays such a central role in undergraduate education, a clear understanding

of how its academic roles are perceived by full-time faculty affiliated with the department of English and by full-time faculty affiliated with other academic departments is vital to the effectiveness of the undergraduate program.

According to Biglan (1973a,b), academic departments differed significantly according to the differences among academic disciplines. In addition, Kelly and Hart (1971) found support for the contention that the nature of their chosen academic discipline influenced faculty perceptions of traditional faculty roles. Because the academic disciplines and the scholars in these disciplines differed in personal values, in goals, in views of knowledge, and in perception of the academic roles of other academicians, misperceptions abounded. Academic faculty did not understand each other's specialities. Moreover, the differences and misunderstandings persisted at the departmental level. Various academic departments had distorted views of the academic roles of other academic departments. According to Tibbetts and Tibbetts (1980:479), "teachers and researchers fail to communicate because of an enormous difference in how they view their roles. . . ." According to Wilcox (1973:55-56), the department of English was in a unique position. It had a universal service function to all other academic departments because the English language is the common communication device of all academic disciplines. Wilcox stated that "it is possible to practice many disciplines without using mathematics or the

method of the social sciences or the techniques of the sciences, but no discipline can be practiced without the use of English" (1973:55). The department of English, therefore, is under the scrutiny of all other academic departments. All academic faculty have perceptions of the academic roles of the department of English. Furthermore, because the department of English has to function effectively with all academic departments, the faculty of the department of English need to know how their departmental functions are perceived by the rest of the academic community. At present, no such knowledge exists in anything but impressions and gossip. A systematic, scientific analysis of the perceptions of the academic roles of the department of English will prove extremely important. Faculties of departments of English will be able to use the information to redress obvious misperceptions among themselves as well as among other academicians. The study is, in effect, a needs assessment that will be beneficial to future changes in the English curriculum and to communication and cooperation among or between departments of English and the rest of the academic community.

#### GENERAL QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

1. Do the perceptions of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English differ according to institutional type?
2. Do significant differences exist between the perceptions of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English by

full-time faculty of the department of English and other full-time academic faculty?

3. Do the perceptions of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English differ by the type of academic degree held by the faculty member?

4. Do the number of years of experience affect the perceptions of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English?

5. Do the perceptions of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English differ by the academic rank held by the faculty member?

6. Do full-time department of English faculty and other full-time academic faculty rank-order the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English differently?

#### GENERAL PROCEDURES

The problem was investigated using the following procedures. First, the perceptions of the academic roles of the department of English by full-time faculty at the six public institutions of higher education in Montana were determined.

Next, a questionnaire was developed to determine what faculty perceived to be the level of importance of twenty academic roles of the department of English. Also, the questionnaire was designed to determine: (1) the institutional type, (2) the academic rank of the

respondent, (3) the years of teaching experience of the respondent, (4) the highest academic degree held by the respondent, and (5) the academic discipline with which the respondent was affiliated.

Fourth, the questionnaire was submitted informally to several English faculty at the Montana College and University Teachers of English (MCUTE) conference held in Missoula, Montana, on November 3-4, 1978. The validity of the questionnaire was discussed further with faculty at Eastern Montana College, Billings, Montana.

Fifth, the reliability of the questionnaire was established by conducting a pilot study at The College of Great Falls, Great Falls, Montana; Rocky Mountain College, Billings, Montana; and Morningside College, Sioux City, Iowa. Evaluative comments about the questionnaire were solicited.

Sixth, the questionnaire was mailed to all department of English full-time faculty and to a stratified random sample of all other full-time academic faculty at the six public institutions of higher education in Montana.

#### LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

The following delimitations were placed on the study. First, the survey was restricted to selected public institutions of higher education in Montana. Second, the study was restricted to the 1979-1980 academic year. Third, only employees clearly defined as full-time

academic faculty were surveyed. Fourth, the study did not attempt to distinguish between perceptions of the academic roles of actual departments of English and ideal departments of English.

#### DEFINITION OF TERMS

Full-time academic faculty: All 1.00 Full-time Equivalent employees of one of the selected Montana public institutions of higher education who are designated as having .50 FTE or more of their professional responsibility assigned to classroom instruction.

Academic department: ". . . The basic administrative unit of the college, housing a community of scholars that is relatively autonomous and responsible for instruction and research within a specialized field of knowledge" (McHenry and associates, 1976:2).

Academic role: The typical functions and purposes of particular academic departments within and without the academic community as derived from the literature.

Department of English: That group of full-time academic faculty in a Montana public institution of higher education assigned to teach the skills and content normally designated as English.

Institutional type: Colleges and universities were the two types of institutions with which the study was concerned.

#### SUMMARY

The literature suggested that the differences in disciplines

tended to affect faculty perceptions of departmental roles. Studies of academic organization, for the most part, overlooked the importance of the differences among disciplines and by application among departments. However, departments were interdependent and the department of English had the most extensive interdependency of all due to its broad service role to the other departments. The differences among the various disciplines meant that no consistent or common perceptions of the academic roles of the department of English were held by the academic community.

The concern over declining verbal competency focused attention on the department of English by the rest of the academic community. In order to respond effectively to the demands of other departments, the department of English needed to know how its academic roles were perceived by academic faculty in other departments. No other information existed in any concise and verified form. The present study was designed to provide that information which then might be used to improve communication, plan change, and increase the effectiveness of the department of English.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The following review of literature is intended to give the reader an understanding of: (1) the history and development of the academic department, (2) the research conducted on the academic department, and (3) the growth and development of the department of English and the pertinent research conducted on this department.

#### THE ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT--HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

The organizational structures within which the pursuit of higher education occurs are colleges and universities. Further, the basic element of the college and university structure is the academic department. The academic department, moreover, provides the focus by which faculty and students identify their academic orientation and objectives, and around which curricula are presented. Euwema (1953:38) defined the academic department as ". . . a community of scholars engaged in an organized program of research and teaching in a single clearly defined field of knowledge." Andersen (1968) agreed but added emphasis on the academic department as the fundamental administrative body of the university or college. Gross (1963) and Rudolph (1977) concurred but added the observation that the academic department was a logical and natural development in the organizational structure of higher education.

According to Dressel and Reichard (1970), the academic department, as defined previously, was a recent addition to the academic organization. On the other hand, although its present form had existed for about eighty years, the history and development which led to this form was, according to Rashdall (1958), extremely old indeed. Andersen (1968:207) claimed that ". . . the earliest reference to something called a department . . ." occurred in Josiah Quincy's History of Harvard University (1840:28). Quincy commented on "departments" when referring to a 1739 investigation by the Harvard Board of Overseers. The last decades of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth century were marked by a gradual movement toward departmentalization in numerous American colleges and universities (Dressel and Reichard, 1970). However, recent discussions of the history of departmentalization (Andersen, 1968; Dressel and Reichard, 1970; and Yeo, 1970) indicate that the major period of departmentalization in American colleges and universities was the late nineteenth century. During that time the classical curriculum crumbled before a number of factors that forced specialization. The forces studied by Yeo (1970), Baldrige, Curtis, Ecker, and Riley (1973), and Brubacher and Rudy (1976) were:

1. secularization
2. utilitarian interests
3. the elective system
4. the German model graduate school

5. the increase in knowledge
6. the increase in the number of students.

The curriculum was organized into distinct academic departments and the faculty were divided by specialized subject matter areas (Brubacher and Rudy, 1976:118). The departmentalization of American higher education resulted from "indigenous needs" (Andersen, 1968). As Dressel and Reichard (1970:396) pointed out:

The departmental system was not forced upon the university by a well-defined organization of knowledge; rather it resulted from a combination of orientations to social problems, vocational preparation, disciplinary interest, personal aspirations, and management concerns.

The process of departmentalization, then, was organic and unplanned.

#### THE ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT--RESEARCH

The academic department in colleges and universities was not the subject of extensive study. Dressel, Johnson, and Marcus (1970) and McHenry and associates (1976) were the only comprehensive studies of the academic department.

Andersen (1968:212-213) defended the academic department as ". . . virtually the last remnant of the community of scholars. . .". Yeo agreed that the academic department was ". . . the traditional system in American higher education" (1970:44). Dressel and Reichard concluded that the academic department was ". . . a natural and probably inevitable development . . ." (1970:402). However, they also

noted that the academic department as an organizational unit needed study. McConnell (1963) observed that hardly any research had been conducted on how institutions of higher education organize themselves. Andersen (1968) and Yeo (1970) attempted to study the academic department by analyzing its advantages. On the other hand, Riesman (1958), Mooney (1965), and Dressel and Reichard (1970) concentrated on identifying and analyzing the disadvantages of the academic department. Light (1974) stated that the lack of productive research was due to the absence of any valid theory of academic organization upon which to base research. McConnell (1963), Hobbs and Anderson (1971), Lodahl and Gordon (1972), and Smart and Elton (1975) agreed that the lack of a theoretical framework had stymied productive investigation of the functions of the academic department.

Some attempts were made during the 1960's and 1970's to provide a conceptual framework against which to organize investigations of the academic department. Murray (1964) theorized that academic departments could be understood and classified by their size and the power of the department head. Vreeland and Bidwell (1966) attempted to develop a theory of departmentalization that was based on a classification of academic departments by their departmental goals for undergraduate education.

Smart and McLaughlin (1974) attempted to use the theory of vocational choice as developed by Holland (1973) to classify academic

departments. Holland's theory attempted to explain why people chose their occupations. He determined that people could be classified by personality into six categories and that job environments could be classified into the same categories. Smart and McLaughlin (1974) ". . . attempted to determine if there were significant difference in the amount of emphasis attached to various departmental goals when academic departments were classified according to Holland's criteria of model environments . . ." (1974:379). The general conclusion was that faculty of the department of English differed from faculty of the department of biology and both groups differed from faculty of the department of psychology (1974:388). Thus, to consider academic faculty as a homogeneous group when referring to academic goals was naive.

None of the studies mentioned so far paid attention to the differences among the various disciplines represented by departmental organization. Dressel, Mayhew, and McGrath (1959) and Dressel and Lorimer (1960) did attempt to get at such differences, but they based their studies on a higher level of organization than the academic department. They analyzed how liberal arts and professional school faculties perceived each other. They did not attempt, however, to investigate how individual academic departments differed from other academic departments or were perceived to differ by other academic departments.

A number of recent studies have indicated that academic departments were probably more different than similar. Hobbs and Anderson (1971) noted the variety of terms ("fiefdom," "autocracy," "bureaucracy," and "democracy") used by scholars to describe academic departments. Kelly and Hart (1971) found evidence to support the idea that academic discipline affected faculty perception of academic faculty roles. Lodahl and Gordon (1972, 1973) asserted that there were distinct differences between disciplines that caused academic departments to function in different ways and have different values and goals.

Recently, Biglan (1973a,b) tried to find a conceptual framework by which academic departments could be understood. Biglan (1973a) attempted to use subject matter differences to classify academic departments. He found that faculty did perceive distinct differences among academic disciplines which indicated that conclusions derived from the study of one area should not necessarily be applied to any other area. Biglan (1973b) applied the results of the first study to analyze the characteristics of departmental structures. Biglan postulated that the social connectedness of faculty, their informal relationships, was important to the operation of academic departments. Biglan attempted to demonstrate whether there was any significant relationship between social connectedness and academic discipline. Faculty were found to differ significantly in their approach to the

functions of education according to their disciplines which provided Biglan with a means to classify academic departments.

Smart and Elton (1975) used Biglan's model to determine if academic departments emphasized differently the eleven typical goals of academic departments developed by Dressel, Johnson, and Marcus (1970). Academic departments were found to vary greatly and any study of academic departments would have to take into account the differences of academic disciplines, faculty personalities, and departmental goals. Smart and Elton pointed out that the theory developed by Biglan (1973a,b) might well provide the conceptual framework needed for the serious study of academic departments.

#### THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

If the development of the academic department was lengthy and its history in its present form was brief, the history and development of the department of English was even shorter. In what Wilcox (1973) described as the first effort to develop a history of the evolution of the department of English, William Riley Parker stated that ". . . the teaching of English, as a constituent of college or university education is only about 100 years old, and departments of English are younger still" (1967:339). As a result, the department of English had not received much study. One comprehensive study of the department of English was done during the 1967-1968 academic year by Thomas W. Wilcox at

the behest of the National Council of Teachers of English (Wilcox, 1973:x). From this study a number of important facts emerged. The department of English was a distinct unit at 81.1 percent of all colleges and universities surveyed. In addition, English was the largest academic department at 67.6 percent of the institutions and tied for largest at an additional 4.8 percent (1973:2-3). Further, 40.7 percent of the typical department of English student credit hour production was from freshman English. Additionally, Wilcox noted that ". . . very few other departments are obliged as English is, to staff freshman and sophomore courses that are required of most students or that satisfy group requirements" (1973:3). In fact, Wilcox found that 55.8 percent of the students enrolled in English courses above the freshman level were nonmajors. The department of English is, thus, unique in its relationship to other academic departments and the academic community at large.

In spite of its important influence on undergraduate instruction, English has, in the words of William Riley Parker, ". . . never really defined itself as a discipline" (1967:348). Ohmann (1976:229) further defined this discrepancy in goal orientation evident in what English faculty actually do and what they perceive they do. Ohmann further asserted:

The professional ideology of English teachers emphasizes transmitting high culture and generating new knowledge. Why should this be so, when surely . . . [English faculty] spend, as a group,

a tiny proportion of . . . [their] time in scholarship and only a relatively small proportion teaching on the higher slopes of culture? What . . . [they] do most is teach--and mostly lower level undergraduate courses (1976:229).

Wilcox noted in his study that there was almost no consensus among departments of English about what the plan of studies for English majors should be (1968:447). Finch (1965:5) attempted to determine what the basic components of the curriculum were that prepared future teachers of English. After reviewing the curricula of forty institutions, he found

. . . the requirements and programs in English . . . to be so varied that they almost defied generalization. One might have expected something approaching a consistent pattern, but I found instead an array of disagreement that would confound the most ardent advocate of diversity. If I had to make a single statement, I would say that collegiate instruction in English is what goes on in a given course in a given year in a given division of a given institution. It is as varied as the autumn leaves, and not nearly as predictable.

This lack of definition can be noted, according to Muller (1967:4), in the incredibly wide variety of courses covering ". . . almost anything beyond toilet training" that are taught as English courses. Muller also stated, "English is the least clearly defined subject in the curriculum." Randel (1958:36) concluded that "in an acknowledged discipline there is general consistency. English is prodigal, extravagant, inconsistent internally and externally."

Winterowd (1974:399) stated that among department of English faculty there was a "collective disquietude" about what they were

teaching yet almost no questioning of the purposes of the department of English. Winterowd felt that while scholarship was obviously a major purpose of the department of English, a basic decision must be made between emphasis on cultural roles and emphasis on professional roles. Accordingly, ". . . the English department must decide whether it is an agency to promulgate at least a segment of the ideal culture or simply an academic compartment whose function is to teach the narrow skills of professional literary scholarship and criticism" (1974:400).

Departments of English grew chaotically and never collectively defined what the academic roles or purposes of the department of English should be. Various scholars have criticized the department of English for not fulfilling certain roles. Henry (1963:81-84), Finch (1974:53-56), and Burling (1977:21-22) felt that departments of English placed too much concern with teaching literature and not enough concern with teacher preparation and teaching writing. Axelrod (1967:74) asserted that departments of English are too concerned with such roles as preparation of English majors and graduate education in English and not enough concerned with providing ". . . more and better courses for the non-major in English . . .".

At the same time, some English faculty claimed that literature was the true emphasis for English (Marcquardt, 1966:15) and that "the mechanics of English can be learned, but it is doubtful if all of them can be taught. Mechanical accuracy will come with maturity, or it will

not; and what the teacher does about it may make little difference" (Thompson, 1966:9). On the other hand, Kitzhaber (1965:77) claimed that departments of English must recognize their "dereliction" in not confronting the fact that the teaching of English at all levels is their responsibility.

Some scholars have claimed that English faculty do not understand their own discipline or know how to teach composition (Tibbetts and Tibbetts, 1980:478-480). They place the blame for the failure of English teachers to teach their discipline effectively on the failure of college and university departments of English to fulfill their teacher preparation roles. Kitzhaber (1963:147) summed up the basic charge leveled against the typical teacher preparation afforded most English majors when he stated:

. . . college English departments have seldom recognized the extent of their own culpability not only for inexpert teaching in the schools but for teaching in their own freshman English courses that is even less expert and less informed. A principal reason for this situation is that both the undergraduate and the graduate curricula in English for the prospective teacher, whether school or college, have long consisted almost entirely of courses in literature, as though literature is all that English teachers are ever asked to teach . . . . This attitude reveals an almost perverse disregard by college English departments of the plain facts.

Walpole (1974) agreed substantially with such criticism and further charged that if the college student cannot write effectively ". . . the fault lies squarely with English teachers" (1974:52). Earlier, Finch (1965:4) had noted that ". . . in the teaching of English neither the schools nor the colleges are doing well enough to meet the demands

which . . . society will increasingly place upon the average citizen."

Thus, departments of English were subject to criticism due to the perception that they had failed to achieve their academic roles.

The perception of academic roles is an important consideration for the department of English because of its distinct service function to all other academic departments. Historically, the service role of the department of English was created by

social and educational pressures in the latter half of the nineteenth century and was encouraged by the increasing compartmentalization of the college curriculum in those years and by the confusion of functions that attended the disappearance of departments of rhetoric and oratory and the rise of departments of English (Kitzhaber, 1963:3).

Wilcox (1973:55) summarized the significance of the service role in the following statement:

In one important respect the department of English is unique among the several faculties which serve at American colleges and universities; it alone has something all others must use. It is possible to practice many disciplines without using mathematics or the methods of the social sciences or the techniques of the sciences, but no discipline can be practiced without the use of English. As the college or university's principal authority on its common language, the English department inevitably claims or is delegated a kind of monopoly that is denied all other departments. Words are its stock in trade, and its goods are everywhere in demand. But the prosperity which accrues to the department because of the very nature of its subject often proves an embarrassment of riches which distracts the department from its goals, dissipates its energies, and greatly complicates its efforts to define its function.

The impact of fulfilling the service role can be observed in the proportion of the curriculum of a typical department of English that is

devoted to freshman English courses. According to Wilcox (1973:63), more than 40 percent of the curriculum of the typical department of English was devoted to teaching freshmen even though freshmen constituted only 31.3 percent of all undergraduate students. To increase the significance of the figures further, Wilcox pointed out that not all students took English during their initial academic year. Even a cursory examination of the course offerings of the departments of English (or their equivalent) at the public institutions of higher education in Montana indicated that the percentage of typical service courses (Freshman Composition, Library Research, and Introduction to Literature) constituted a far higher proportion of the departments' effort than 40 percent. In fact, the bulk of student credit hour production for the department of English came from the typical "service" courses where most of the students were nonmajors.

The magnitude of the commitment to service courses in the typical department of English meant that the shock felt by the academic community and the general public over the obvious decline in the writing skills of students focused critical attention on the academic roles of the college and university department of English. One of the primary responses of departments of English to this expression of concern by other academic disciplines was to point out that writing is an academic role of all departments, and not the sole responsibility of the department of English. Rose (1979:274) said: "The teaching of writing should

not be the sole responsibility of the English department." Maxwell (1980:481) wrote that ". . . teaching writing is an all-school responsibility." Featherstone (1977:14) asserted that ". . . a permanent solution to the writing crisis can come only when all post-secondary teachers care enough about good writing to require it in their classes."

In addition, studies at particular institutions were undertaken in an attempt to address the problem caused by the responsibility for teaching writing skills and for overcoming the writing crisis. At the University of Illinois, a study found "several substantial differences" among the academic divisions--the Humanities, the Biological Sciences, the Physical Sciences, and the Social Sciences (Applebee and others, 1976:62). The study found that "the divisions seem to disagree over the degree of the writing 'problem' and its proper corrective" (1976:63). These studies show that the perceptions of the roles of the department of English in teaching writing skills differ between English faculty and the faculty of other academic disciplines.

Connelly and Irving (1976:668-670) described a schoolwide program to educate other faculty about their responsibility to promote good writing. Rose (1979:272-279) described an effort at UCLA to integrate information about writing from all areas of the institution. Donlan (1976) even proposed that English teachers become writing consultants to other academic disciplines. Thus, the literature of the late 1970's reflected a growing concern with writing and with

identifying the responsibility for promoting it as a campus-wide concern. Obviously, in order to enable the department of English to go to and work with other academic disciplines on improving writing skills, significant communication was necessary. As Rose (1979:272) stated:

"Clearly, these people need to talk to one another."

In order to communicate with faculty in other academic disciplines, English faculty must know how the academic roles of the department of English are perceived. Donlan (1976a) developed a writing attitude survey to be administered to faculty in academic disciplines other than English to determine differences in attitudes about or perceptions of writing skills and the responsibility for ensuring good writing among students. For the most part, however, no effort was made to analyze the perceptions of the academic roles of the department of English.

As Millet (1962) pointed out, academic departments had numerous relationships with each other. The critical importance of understanding the relationships of an academic department to the rest of the academic community was made forcefully by Dressel and Dietrich (1967:26) when they stated:

When a department is not responsive to the concerns and criticisms of other departments which it is presumably serving, dissatisfaction is likely to crystallize in a demand that it be forced to change its practice, or that every college and department be made solely responsible for its curriculum.

Partly because of its extensive service role, the department of English

was the subject of such dissatisfied criticism from the rest of the academic community.

#### SUMMARY

The review of literature was divided into three parts. The first part traced the history and development of the academic department and noted that the academic department grew organically and without plan. The second part reviewed the research that had been conducted on the academic department as an organizational unit of institutions of higher education. While research had attempted to define a conceptual framework by which academic departments could be understood, recent research concluded that the differences among academic departments outnumbered their similarities. The third part reviewed the history, development, and pertinent research concerned with the department of English as an academic department. Departments of English grew chaotically which resulted in an unclear definition of the discipline. The service role was the center of much controversy as English faculty were judged by their academic peers by how well they were perceived to fulfill the service role. The lack of definition of purpose was also evident in the lack of consistency in the curricula of departments of English. The result was pointed criticism of the department of English.

## Chapter 3

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The problem of this study was to determine whether a significant difference existed between the perceptions of the academic roles of the department of English by full-time English faculty and by full-time faculty in other academic departments.

In order to investigate this problem, Chapter 3 is presented in the following sections: (1) description of the population and sampling procedures, (2) categories for investigation, (3) the questionnaire, (4) methods used for collecting the data, (5) statistical hypotheses tested and level of significance, (6) statistical methods used for analyzing the data, (7) precautions taken for accuracy, and (8) chapter summary.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE POPULATION AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

The population of the study included all faculty members of the six public institutions of higher education in Montana who spent at least half of their FTE in classroom instruction during the 1979-1980 academic year. The six public institutions of higher education in Montana are listed in Appendix A. The population of full-time faculty at the colleges was compiled from lists of full-time faculty provided by the office of the Academic Vice President or Academic Dean of the

institution. The list of full-time faculty at the two universities in the institutions included in the study was compiled from the list of faculty provided in the minutes of the budget of the Montana Board of Regents (June 25, 1979, and September 10, 1979) and from the lists of faculty in the current university catalogues. The faculty rosters supplied by the colleges participating in the study identified faculty as full-time or part-time. The rosters compiled for the universities, however, did not distinguish full-time faculty from part-time faculty. Therefore, the questionnaire requested all respondents to indicate if less than 50 percent or 50 percent or more of their FTE was devoted to classroom instruction. (See Appendix B.) The names of the faculty members were numbered consecutively on the respective lists in the order in which the lists were received. Department heads and others who could be expected to have reduced teaching loads because of their administrative duties were removed from the list. In order to assure adequate representation, all full-time faculty in the department of English or its equivalent at each institution were selected as part of the sample population. A table of random numbers was used to draw a stratified random sample from the rest of the population (Ferguson, 1976:132). A sample stratified by institutional type (university and college) was used because the two universities dominated the population.

Cochran's formula (1963:74-75) was used to determine the minimum sample size. The formula used was:

$$n = \frac{\frac{t^2 PQ}{d^2}}{1 + \frac{1}{N} \left( \frac{t^2 PQ}{d^2} \right) - 1}$$

In this formula, ". . . t is the abscissa of the normal curve that cuts off an area at the tails" (Cochran, 1963:75). In this study, a t of 1.96 was used. P is the probability of the parameter and Q is equal to (1-P). P equals .5 and Q equals .5 were used in this study because they produced the largest required sample size. The value of d is the margin of error: .05 was used. N is the population size. The population of full-time academic faculty with .5 FTE devoted to classroom instruction was estimated to be 1058. Using this formula, the sample of full-time academic faculty members in the study was 282. This was the optimum number of respondents to be included in the study. Since the study attempted to survey 100 percent of the faculty members affiliated with the department of English or its equivalent at each participating institution, a total of 335 questionnaires was mailed. Had 100 percent of the questionnaires been returned, the investigator could have been 95 percent confident that the sample accurately reflected the population. Because a 100 percent return was not achieved, the confidence level is somewhat less than 95 percent.

#### CATEGORIES OF INVESTIGATION

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not the

perceptions of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English by full-time academic faculty were different as a result of institutional type, academic degree, academic rank, years of experience, and academic discipline. Therefore, the following variables were used:

1. Whether the respondent taught at a university or at a college.
2. Whether the respondent was a faculty member affiliated with the department of English or was affiliated with some other academic department.
3. Whether the respondent held a doctoral degree or a master's degree. Respondents who held degrees other than masters or doctorates were either eliminated from the study or were added to the appropriate category.
4. The academic rank of the respondent. Academic rank was restricted to the traditional ranks of instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor.
5. The years of experience in higher education of the respondent.
6. The level of importance of twenty selected academic roles of the department of English as perceived by the respondent.

The full-time academic faculty at the six Montana public institutions of higher education were divided into two main categories--

full-time faculty affiliated with the department of English or its equivalent and full-time academic faculty affiliated with academic departments other than English. This was done in order to determine if the perceptions between these two categories differed significantly. The sample was further categorized by academic degree in order to determine if perceptions can be attributed to the level of academic degree. The sample was categorized according to the type of institution at which the full-time academic faculty were employed in order to assess whether their perceptions of the academic roles of the department of English were influenced significantly by the type of institution. The sample was classified by the academic rank of the academic faculty members to see if rank influenced their perceptions significantly. Finally, the sample was categorized by the years of experience of the academic faculty members in order to determine if experience had any significant influence on the perceptions.

#### THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire was developed in three parts. The first part was the demographic data discussed in the previous section. The second part contained the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English to be rated by the respondent. The third part was designed for the respondent to rank-order the five most and the five least important of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English.

Validation

The part of the questionnaire on departmental roles was constructed after a review of the literature. According to the review of the literature, the purpose and nature of the department of English were ill-defined. No literature was found that dealt directly with the identification and discussion of the academic roles fulfilled by a department of English at an institution of higher education. However, a wide variety of academic roles were mentioned by various sources. From the literature, a list of forty-eight role statements was compiled. This list was consolidated by eliminating obviously obscure roles and by combining role statements that dealt with the same basic academic role. The list was submitted to several academic faculty members at Eastern Montana College, Rocky Mountain College, and Western Montana College for their comments. The process of selection produced a list of twenty academic roles typical for a department of English at an institution of higher education. A Likert type scale was employed using six numerical levels of importance where 1 was low and 6 was high. After the academic roles had been identified, several steps were undertaken to validate the questionnaire. First, faculty members in Adult and Higher Education at Montana State University were asked to review the questionnaire. The questionnaire also was distributed informally to several English faculty who attended the Montana College and University Teachers of English (MCUTE) conference held in Missoula,

Montana, on November 3-4, 1978. The questionnaire also was distributed to other faculty and administrators for their suggestions.

After revisions were made, the questionnaire was mailed to all full-time academic faculty at Rocky Mountain College, Billings, Montana, and The College of Great Falls, Great Falls, Montana, in a pilot study of the questionnaire. Permission to survey the faculty at the two private institutions was granted by the Academic Dean at each institution. Faculty rosters were supplied by each institution that identified full-time and part-time faculty. The investigator selected private colleges in Montana for the pilot study because they were the closest institutions to those that were intended for the final study that could be found. Each respondent was requested to fill out the questionnaire and to make suggestions on how to improve the questionnaire. Thirty-one full-time faculty members at Rocky Mountain College and 42 full-time faculty members at The College of Great Falls were sent questionnaires. Fifty usable questionnaires were returned (24 from Rocky Mountain College and 26 from The College of Great Falls) for a 68.5 percent return. This pilot study was conducted during November and December of 1978. The validity of the questionnaire was established by careful examination of the returned questionnaires. The responses written on the section of the questionnaire reserved for evaluative comments were read and recorded. Where the investigator felt it to be necessary, interviews were conducted with respondents. Those roles

that the respondents found confusing or vague were restated or eliminated and the third section of the questionnaire was added. Changes in the twenty selected academic roles were made in accordance with the comments received.

### Reliability

The revised questionnaire was pilot tested by full-time academic faculty at Morningside College, Sioux City, Iowa, during May, 1979. Morningside College was selected because it was a private college similar to the private colleges used in the first pilot study. The Academic Vice President supplied a roster that identified full-time faculty members. The questionnaire was mailed to 79 full-time faculty. Fifty questionnaires were returned from this initial mailing for a 63.3 percent return. Two weeks later, the same questionnaire was mailed again to all respondents to the first questionnaire. Thirty-five questionnaires were returned from the second mailing.

The process of establishing reliability consisted of comparing each individual answer on the second questionnaire with each individual answer on the first questionnaire for the individuals who responded both times. The Computer Center at Eastern Montana College, Billings, Montana, was used to compute the correlation coefficient. The statistical program used was the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. A Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient of .8810 was established. The positive correlation coefficient indicated that faculty

responded to the questionnaire in a similar manner on two different occasions.

Next, the questionnaire was professionally printed and mailed to the sample population of full-time academic faculty involved in the study.

### Content

The questionnaire consisted of three parts: demographic data, department of English academic roles, and rank order of the five most and the five least important department of English academic roles.

1. Demographic data: This part provided data for an analysis of the respondents concerning:

- a. years of experience
- b. academic rank
- c. highest academic degree held
- d. percentage of FTE devoted to instruction
- e. academic discipline--English or other
- f. institutional type--college or university.

The questionnaires were color coded white and yellow for universities and green for colleges.

2. Academic roles of the department of English: This part provided data for an analysis of the respondents' perceptions of departmental roles.

3. Rank order of the most and the least important roles: This

section provided data for precise differentiation among those roles typically perceived as having high importance and those roles typically perceived as having low importance.

#### METHODS OF COLLECTING DATA

Initial contact by mail was made with the Office of Academic Vice President or its equivalent at each of the public institutions of higher education in Montana. The purpose of this contact was to obtain permission to mail the questionnaire to a random sample of faculty at the particular institution. At three institutions where the Academic Vice President or Dean felt it to be necessary, a more formal presentation was made before permission was granted. At Montana College of Mineral Science and Technology and at the University of Montana, a copy of the letter requesting permission, a copy of the cover letter, and a sample questionnaire were circulated to the appropriate administrators and concerned faculty members before permission was forthcoming. As a result, the cover letters for Montana College of Mineral Science and Technology and Northern Montana College were tailored to reflect the departmental structure of those institutions. The cover letters are presented in Appendices C and D. At Eastern Montana College, a formal request for participation was made at the November 11, 1979, meeting of CHAD (Chairpersons of Academic Departments) before official permission was granted.

During November and December of 1979, the questionnaires were mailed to all full-time faculty selected by the sampling procedure. Each questionnaire mailed also included a cover letter (see Appendix E) and a prepaid return envelope. The questionnaires were coded so that follow-up questionnaires could be mailed to nonrespondents.

One week after the first questionnaire had been mailed, a post card serving as a reminder was mailed to all members of the sample population. Three weeks after the first questionnaire had been mailed, a new cover letter, another questionnaire, and another prepaid return envelope were mailed to all nonrespondents. The follow-up post card and the follow-up letter are presented in Appendices F and G. The follow-up questionnaire was printed on blue paper to prevent confusion in recording the returns.

#### STATISTICAL HYPOTHESES

Based on the questions posed in Chapter 1, the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. (Ho) The perceptions of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English are independent of whether the respondent is a member of the department of English.

2. (Ho) The perceptions of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English are independent of whether the faculty member teaches at a university or at a college.

3. (Ho) The perceptions of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English are independent of whether the faculty respondent has a doctoral degree or a master's degree.

4. (Ho) The perceptions of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English are independent of the academic rank of the respondent.

5. (Ho) The perceptions of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English are independent of the years of experience in higher education of the faculty respondent.

6. (Ho) No correlation exists between the rank-order assigned the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English by the faculty affiliated with the department of English and the rank-order assigned the twenty selected academic roles by faculty affiliated with other academic departments.

#### STATISTICAL METHODS USED FOR THE ANALYSIS OF DATA

The null hypotheses one through five were tested with the chi-square test of independence. According to Roscoe (1969:196), the function of the test is to provide

. . . extremely useful statistical procedures for determining whether two nominal (or higher level) measures are related. If one of the variables is group membership and the other a criterion of some sort, the test may be used to determine whether two or more populations are distributed in the same fashion with respect to the criterion.

A chi-square test for each of the roles in each of the hypotheses one through five was computed and tested at the .05 level of significance. The selection of the .05 level of significance was based on the "common convention" in research cited by Ferguson (1976:162). While the .01 level of significance protects more adequately against the possibility of rejecting a true null hypothesis (Type I error) and the .10 level of significance protects more adequately against retaining a false null hypothesis (Type II error), the .05 level of significance protects adequately for both Type I and Type II errors. Since neither error was judged more dangerous than the other, the .05 level of significance was deemed to offer an acceptable compromise position between the other levels.

Finally, to estimate the over-all correlation between categories, the sixth null hypothesis was tested by the Spearman rank-order correlation. According to Tuckman (1978:272-273), a valuable use of the Spearman rank-order correlation ". . . is to compare judgments by two judges of a group of objects or items and for . . . assessing inter-judge equivalence of judgments over a set of items or objects." In a situation where there are numerous items, such as twenty selected academic roles of the department of English, the test indicates whether or not there is agreement by the judges. The medians of the ratings assigned each of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English by faculty affiliated with the department of English and by

faculty affiliated with other academic departments were used to compute the coefficient.

The third part of the questionnaire asked the respondent to rank-order what he perceived to be the five most important academic roles and to rank-order what he perceived to be the five least important of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English. The computer was used to give a frequency distribution for each role as it was rank-ordered among the most important five roles or the least important five roles as perceived by faculty respondents affiliated with English and as perceived by faculty respondents affiliated with other academic departments. The over-all rank-order of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English was determined for faculty affiliated with English by assigning point values to each of the ten possible positions (High 1 through 5 and Low 16 through 20). This procedure identified the most important five roles and the least important five roles in rank order as perceived by faculty affiliated with English. The same procedure was followed to calculate the rank-order of the five most and five least important of the twenty academic roles of the department of English as perceived by faculty affiliated with other academic departments. The rank-orders calculated in this manner were entirely descriptive and were separate from the rank-orders calculated for Hypothesis Six.

## PRECAUTIONS TAKEN FOR ACCURACY

All responses to the questionnaire were checked by the investigator to insure that respondents had followed the instructions properly. When a questionnaire was completed erroneously, the questionnaire was considered unusable and was discarded. Also, when the respondent indicated on the questionnaire that less than 50 percent of his FTE was devoted to classroom instruction, the questionnaire was considered as unusable and was discarded.

All coding for computer input was double checked by the investigator and by an independent observer. All key punched cards were verified and all statistical tests were done on the computer at Montana State University using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

## SUMMARY

This chapter contained a detailed description of the procedures used in the study. The survey sample population contained 282 randomly selected full-time academic faculty members at the six public institutions of higher education in Montana during the 1979-1980 academic year.

The data were collected, compiled, analyzed, and presented in appropriate tables. The chi-square test of independence and the

Spearman rank-order correlation were chosen to test the null hypotheses. Each statistical analysis was made at the .05 level of significance.

## Chapter 4

### RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This study collected information from academic faculty members at the six public institutions of higher education in Montana. The findings of the study are presented in four major subdivisions: (1) a description of the population and response is presented, (2) a descriptive profile of faculty respondents is presented, (3) the analysis of data as related to the hypotheses tested is presented, and (4) a descriptive analysis of the rank-order of the five most important and five least important of the twenty selected academic roles of the department of English by the respondents is presented. Where appropriate, tables are presented within the subdivisions. Tables in subdivisions one and two are presented in both raw numbers and percentages. Tables in subdivisions three and four are presented in raw numbers.

### POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The population of this study was the full-time academic faculty employed at the six public institutions of higher education in Montana during the 1979-1980 academic year.

Full-time Academic Faculty: All 1.00 Full-time Equivalent employees of one of the selected Montana public institutions of higher education who are designated as .50 FTE or more of their professional responsibility assigned to classroom instruction.



































































































































































































