Welcome to the English Department at MTSU! We are very pleased to have you join us. The work you do with General Education students is important to the mission of the University, particularly its efforts to raise retention rates. Your work is also important to us, the largest department on campus. Last year, the English department scored above both the University and the College of Liberal Arts averages in every category of instructional evaluation. This success would not have occurred without the quality of teaching and the incredible dedication of our contingent faculty.

The Lower Division Office provides support for faculty who teach General Education courses. If you have any questions or concerns, or just want to talk about your classes, please don’t hesitate to contact me. You can reach the office by telephone at 898-2579 or by email at Regina.Nelson@mtsu.edu (secretary) or Tom.Strawman@mtsu.edu (director). You can talk to us “live” M-F from 7:30-4:00 in PH 324.

At this site, you will find information and materials to help you prepare for the upcoming semester:

- **General Information about Workload, Textbooks, Office Space and Secretarial Help.**
- **Office Hours.** Faculty should schedule at least 1 office hour per week per course.
- **Course Descriptions, Objectives, & TBR learning outcomes.** Use the department objectives to imagine your course structure and develop assignments. The learning outcomes are mandated by TBR so *while every section of English 1010, 1020, and 2030 will not be taught in exactly the same way, students with different teachers should be meeting the same objectives.* Please note that students in 1020 receive at least one hour of library instruction. 1010 and 1020 both have substantial reading requirements.
- **Sample syllabi.** There are two schools of thought when it comes to the syllabus. I adhere to the “less is more” rule. Typically, freshmen are overwhelmed even before classes begin. My four-page syllabus describes the course and my policies, lists the requirements and the grading criteria, and presents a daily schedule of readings and assignments. Others adhere to the “more is more” rule. Following this rule can, in the words of one FTT, “save your butt.” Failing to provide students with clear course policies can lead straight to a grade complaint/appeal. A syllabus is a rhetorical document. Think about your audience when you draft it. If you’re tech savvy, you might set up a course webpage with links to all the various department and university policies to free up space on your written syllabus. Or, you could present these policies in a separate document and require students to sign a form in the first week of the semester that affirms that they have, in fact, not only read all the course policies but that they understand the consequences of absences, late papers, plagiarism, etc. Your syllabus should include a daily schedule of readings/activities as well as short descriptions of essay assignments. A copy of your syllabus will be kept on file for accreditation purposes. The lower division committee conducts a syllabus review every semester to ensure consistency across all the various sections of general education English courses.
- **10 Guidelines for Making Writing Assignments.** Great advice from *Improving Student Writing.*
- **Information about the Writing Center.** Tutorials could be extra-credit opportunities.
• **Guidelines for Responding to and Grading Papers.** Students are most anxious about grades, so it’s important to be clear about how you will determine their final grades. You might decide to have a combination of ungraded and graded assignments to reduce anxiety and reward risk. You might decide to grade holistically and to emphasize revision. Please note that English 1010 and 1020 students cannot receive a D as a final grade. (They can receive an N or an F—see guidelines.) **Also note that all teachers must keep a record of students’ attendance and grades. This is crucial in the event of a grade appeal and/or complaint.**

• **Procedures regarding Academic Dishonesty and WPA Statement on Best Practices.** A clear statement about academic misconduct should appear on your syllabus. You might decide to have a session about avoiding plagiarism, especially in English 1020. Plagiarism is a serious issue, but assuming students will plagiarize is probably not wise because it sets an adversarial tone. Please note that the university policy regarding academic misconduct has recently changed.

• **Information for Students Regarding the Complaint Procedure.** One of my responsibilities will be to resolve conflicts that arise in the classroom, conflicts that cannot be resolved in a meeting between the teacher and the student. If you sense a potential conflict or would like advice or mediation, please call on me for help. I will appreciate a “heads-up.”

• **Guidelines for Supervision.** After you complete a self-evaluation and submit a syllabus and sample assignment, another faculty member will visit your classroom once during the academic year. This is an important assessment tool that should be considered part of your professional development. Observers write letters that can be used for employment applications.

• **Statement on Sexual Harassment.**

• **Two articles from The Chronicle of Higher Education.** Published in 2003, “Why College Can Wait” remains relevant and a real eye-opener, especially for freshmen. It’s important for them to see their education, including their participation in Freshman Writing courses, as a choice they are making. “The Adjunct Tract” appeared in the July 2009 edition. The role of contingent faculty in higher education continues to be a “hot topic” today. Perhaps you might want to get involved in efforts to improve the working conditions of adjunct faculty. I know that I will spend much of my time thinking about how to enhance your teaching experience in the English department.

Best wishes for a productive, challenging, and rewarding semester,

Dr. Tom Strawman  Regina Nelson  
Director  Secretary  
Lower Division English  Lower Division English  AY 2014-2015