

STANFORD UNIVERSITY
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

January 16, 1985

Professor William Mahrt
Western Culture Program Committee
Department of Music
Stanford, CA 94305

Dear Bill,

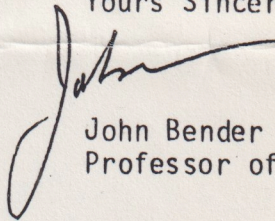
When the new English Department track, 'Literature and the Arts in Western Culture,' was approved last year as a pilot program, the Program Committee presumed its establishment in 1985-86 as an ongoing track with at least 125-250 students. The conception and structure of the course, as well as its provisional syllabus, the arrangements for professorial staff, and other matters were approved. However, two questions were left open for final discussion this year: (1) could the link of this track with Freshman Writing be successfully forged; (2) could the aesthetics/fine arts emphasis of our description be carried out? Although we have made every effort to supply materials which address certain questions you have raised informally (such as that of student response), we take the two original concerns still to be the heart of the matter. The enclosed materials document our view that the course has fully lived up to expectations on both counts:

Both students and teachers have been full of enthusiasm for our integration of the Western Culture and Writing Requirements: not least because the courses reinforce one another and give students two chances to master the readings. At the same time, the presence of difficult reading material that is central to education as Stanford defines it seems to increase the seriousness with which students approach the Writing Requirement. I think you will agree that our coordinator, Steven Marx, has worked out extraordinarily inventive joint assignments.

When the course was approved last February/March, the provisional syllabus included the same number of fine arts lectures as the final syllabus now does. But the subject matter of the current fine arts lectures is much more tightly integrated with the other lectures, and with the readings. A typical unit is the array of lectures on 'Gothic' architecture, music, and literature. Moreover, we have worked very hard (and successfully) both to get excellent teachers and scholars to give these lectures. I believe everyone of the staff considers those offered this autumn to have been splendid, not merely as the 'additions' they can too easily become but as vital elements of the course. You will see from the essay assignments and the examinations that the fine arts element penetrates to the grass roots of the track.

Let me close by saying that we are all enormously pleased and enthusiastic about this track. Every indication we have strongly points to its present and future success. Although the autumn quarter evaluations have not been fully tabulated by the Registrar, a hand count of critical questions indicates that an overwhelming majority of students thought the course "good" or "excellent" on the whole. Moreover, responses evaluating the fine arts and Writing Requirement elements were still more favorable. With the prospect of continuation in mind, let me just say that the staff all feel we can eventually manage more students than the 125-~~150~~ projected for next year. This is not to say that we want more than previously envisioned for next year, but rather that we would like to work up to something more like 180-200 during the year or two following 1985-86. The returns from Approaching Stanford last summer give us every reason to believe there would be an audience for a course of such size.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'John', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

John Bender
Professor of English

STANFORD UNIVERSITY
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

STEVE:
FYI
DM

January 15, 1985

Prof. George Dekker, Chair
English Department

Dear George,

I wanted to write you a letter about Steve Marx and have it go on file. He has done an exceptional job running the Western Culture course. The curve on the final exam was preternaturally high, and I told him to save the exams so the committee can see them. The truth is, the students master the material because they have to write about it weekly: our concept has worked, as of course we knew it would.

But it wouldn't have worked as well without Steve Marx. He's an enormously conscientious, intelligent, and inventive person whose master syllabus of writing assignments, quizzes, and so on was original and brilliant: he showed me sample papers on each topic, and the papers were as good as the assignments. You ought to have a look at it if you haven't seen it. He did a lot of other inventive things, like having certain section meetings, when it was relevant, in the Art Museum, Special Collections, and the like.

I want to go on record as saying that I think we have a very valuable asset in him; I'm sure Ron Rebholz and Larry Friedlander will agree. I think we ought to think about putting him in a tenure-track job. It would be to our advantage.

Sincerely,

DM

Donald R. Howard
Professor of English