Below is my response to the issues raised in the unit’s Graduate Program Review dated 11 May 2006 and reiterated in your memo dated 17 October 2007. Please forgive the lateness of this response, it can mostly be attributed to the fact that workload issues aren’t restricted to faculty alone, but unit administrators as well.

- The first issue raised deals with the reported teaching workload of the faculty. It is noted, and I will not disagree, that the workload of the full-time faculty is excessive. We face a Catch-22 with this. To reduce the workload, especially in regards to the supervision of thesis and dissertation sections, the department would need to drastically reduce its number of graduate students. This would be in direct opposition to the stated desire to grow graduate programs. With the exception of dance, in which there are no graduate classes, the actual contact hours of the graduate faculty is within the minimum workload as stated in OP 32.18. However, when thesis/dissertation supervision, co-curricular activities, and endeavors for which release time is granted are factored in, the workload of many of the faculty is excessive. For example, Dr. Linda Donahue’s workload for fall 07 was 16.00 (normal for T&D) when her thesis and dissertation hours are subtracted her workload is a manageable 10.00. The most logical and desired solution would be to add faculty which would help to distribute faculty workload. I have visited with our dean and she is keenly aware of this issue and fully supports the addition of faculty to the department when positions are made available.

- Item two, quality and quantity of graduate students. With the exception of programs in design, the lack of graduate students does not seem to be a current issue. Graduate programs in acting/directing, arts administration and playwriting have plenty of graduate students in them and our Fine Arts Doctoral Program is well populated. Where we seem to fall short is in landing the most sought-after students. Although there is no empirical date to support the supposition regarding the low number of top graduate students who matriculate into the program once accepted, it is a fair to suppose that non-competitive funding of graduate students along with healthcare issues for incoming students plays a supporting role.
The department is attempting to combat this by letting the students know what support they will be receiving as soon as possible in the spring; there is little we can do about healthcare. It should be noted that healthcare, especially the 90 day waiting period is not only an issue when recruiting graduate students but has also been a deal breaker in the recruitment of faculty. The department is also competing with graduate programs where students are offered full tuition and fee waivers in addition to their stipends. This makes it especially difficult to recruit MFA design students (our most critical need) who are some of the most highly recruited by all graduate programs. Regarding student workload, there is a difference of opinion amongst the faculty here. The nature of our graduate programs is that they are highly participatory. Students entering the program are forewarned that they are required to not only serve as instructor or teaching assistant for departmental classes but will carry a production assignment in return for their TA/GPTI. The department strives to balance the students workload and place students in production assignments that best suit their course of study or areas of interest, but it is not guaranteed. Even with this requirement, students are assigned a combined workload not in excess of 20 hours a week. While this may seem excessive in other disciplines, in theatre it is not.

Regarding concerns over safety, each student working in the scene shop or costume shop are required to undergo safety training each semester. With changes in the production staff in both shops I am confident this issue has been addressed insomuch as we can. The larger issue is the shape of the facility and the lack of funding to address such serious safety issues as fall protection, ventilation, shop space, and mechanization of manual systems lessening the physical exertion and potential injury of the students, staff, and faculty.

- Regarding the graduate programs offered; the faculty has, in the past, discussed replacing or eliminating some areas of specialization in the PhD, but decided that the program as designed best fits the mission of the department as well as serves the educational theatre job market. It should be noted that the outside reviewer comes from what was a traditional PhD program (which had been eliminated from his institution) and did not appear to understand or accept the design of the Fine Arts Doctoral Program at Texas Tech. The Fine Arts Doctoral Program has consistently produced leaders in the educational theatre throughout the region and nation. Our graduates include vice presidents, deans, departmental chairs, and faculty at major universities. The attraction of our student to these institutions is the breath with depth of their course of study and has been accredited by the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST).

- Finally, the question, have I been able to make progress in dealing with facilities deficiencies. The quip answer would be a simple no. Facility issues with the department are well documented. There are no classrooms in the building, faculty and staff is housed in closets, and the production facilities are dangerous and inadequate. Up to four graduate students share an office smaller than a federal jail cell and classes are taught throughout the campus. The current misconception is that since the fires of January and June 2007 that all the ills of the department have been addressed; nothing could be further from the truth. The funding for fire restoration simply restored the facility to the substandard standard prior to the fire. None of the core issues that impact the department’s ability to improve or grow have been addressed and no action that would address the lack of facility issue appears to be on the horizon.

Most if not all of the issues/concerns raised in the Graduate Program Review stem from fact that the faculty, staff, students, and facilities of the Department of Theatre and Dance are stretched to their limits. The department has grown its graduate and undergraduate programs with the promise that faculty lines and facilities would follow, they have not. In order to realistically address these, the department needs additional faculty, staff, and truly renovated facilities that meet the minimum standards of the NAST. I appreciate the Graduate Schools honest desire to address departmental issues as they relate to graduate programs.