Introduction

On March 10, 2006 the Graduate School of Texas Tech University established a five-person committee composed of three internal reviewers (Dr. Robert Henry, Dr. Jorge Iber, and Dr. Joann Shroyer) and two outside reviewers (Dr. Eve Bannet of Oklahoma University and Dr. James E. Porter of Michigan State University) to conduct an assessment of the graduate program of the Department of English. Committee members held meetings with the chair, Dr. Sam Dragga, graduate faculty, and graduate students in order to discuss a variety of issues. In addition, the committee met privately in order to discuss the outside reviewers' reactions to the information collected during the review. The committee completed this process by April 14, 2006.

Overall, both the internal and external reviewers agreed that the Department of English's graduate program is functioning at a "good" level; with certain facets of the program meriting nearly a designation of "excellent," in regard to faculty productivity, quality of graduate students, curriculum, and use of academic facilities. While impressed with the general quality, there are some concerns that should be addressed in order to strengthen an already effective program.

Program Overview and Vision

The Department is divided into two broad areas: literature and composition. The "literature" faculty specializes in Creative Writing, Linguistics, and Literature studies; the "composition" faculty refers to Rhetoric, Composition, and Technical Communications. The intellectual divisions, and the tensions they create among faculty, are causing some problems for the department. This area merits an overall rating of between "satisfactory" and "good."

- It was apparent to the entire review committee that there are tensions within the Department along the "lines" mentioned above.
- These divisions are impacting the graduate program, in particular in how it relates to the utilization of graduate students within the ICON/TOPIQ program.
- The entire committee, and in particular Professor Porter, expressed concerns about the department's seeming inability to arrive at "a common ground, a common identity, and a set of shared intellectual foundations and values that is worth keeping together and building."

Faculty Productivity

The review committee was impressed with the level of productivity of the entire faculty, but especially so with the intellectual and research achievements of the department's assistant professors. The faculty are producing a sufficient amount of scholarship and placing their works in respected journals. This area merits an overall rating of "good."

- The faculty involved in the Technical Communication facet of the program was described by Professor Porter as being comprised of individuals who are "nationally known as leading researchers." The excellent scholarship produced has earned the TC section of the department a reputation as "one of the premier programs of this type in the USA."
- The Creative Writing and Linguistics portion of the department also has a strong publishing record, especially in 19th century literature and transatlantic literature. Professor Bannet noted, however, that the promotion of one senior linguistic and two senior literature professors into University administration will, most likely, slow down the level of productivity in this area. Professor Bannet recommends (and the internal reviewers agree), that two targeted hires, at the full or associate level, are necessary in order to continue to develop these areas of specialization and attract more and better students to the department.
- All of the reviewers agreed that the department has made good hires over the past few years. The heavy teaching load, however, especially its affect upon assistant professors, is an area of concern for both the internal and external reviewers. Professor Porter noted that "several excellent untenured faculty have already come and gone...and that) the department seems to have difficulty keeping the excellent hires that it makes—particularly in TC...where job opportunities (and 2-2 teaching loads) are widely available nationwide."
- One key area of concern is the faculty profile; particularly the lack of diversity among the department's faculty (and graduate students). Professor Porter noted that it is imperative that the department (and the university as well) be more aggressive in its pursuit of a more diverse faculty and that "the curriculum makes racial and ethnic identity a priority." Given the location of Texas Tech University, the focus, Porter notes, should be upon Latino faculty and students. "The opportunity exists for developing a distinctive concentration in this area, if the faculty is willing to commit to it."

Quality and Quantity of Graduate Students and Graduates
The review committee was quite impressed with the quality and quantity of graduate students in the program. Further, we were also impressed by the quality of the jobs, both in academia and in corporate settings that recent graduates have accepted. While most of the "end products" of this process appear to be excellently trained, there are important issues, particularly involving the ICON/TOPIC program, that raises some trepidation. This area merits an overall rating of "good."

- Both the internal and external reviewers agreed that the typical workload for graduate students employed by the Department (3 classes per semester and 2 instructional assignments) is in excess of the norm in the Big 12; probably above and beyond what is normal throughout the entire country.
- The ICON/TOPIC approach to composition is as expected, a major topic of conversation (and for some, concern) among the graduate students. The primary issue of apprehension is that students of Linguistics, CW, and Literature feel that this system of delivery does not provide them with proper preparation for future college teaching. While the committee agrees with this assessment, we do so only to a point. As Professor Porter notes, "the purpose of first year composition is not to enhance employment opportunities for graduate students" but rather, to serve the needs of the entire university. Having said that, however, we also believe it is important that graduate students be provided with greater opportunities to teach their "own" classes (such as through the creation of composition "pods"), as well as with other possibilities, such as paid editing internships. Increased investment in such opportunities will, we feel, make these students much more marketable and employable; thereby further enhancing the reputation of the Department of English and of Texas Tech University as well.

- Some of the graduate students raised concerns about the "mysteriousness" of the procedures for determining who gets to teach upper-level classes, the distribution of information regarding summer dissertation fellowships, and the application of the "99 hour rule." The internal committee members recommend that this "mysteriousness" be addressed.
- The committee was particularly impressed with the department's desire to make formal and mandatory a "professionalization" curriculum designed to better prepare students for professional careers in academia.

Curriculum and Programs of Study
The review committee was impressed with the offerings and areas of specialization within the department and found the offerings compatible with similar institutions. This area merits an overall rating of "good."

- One of the outside reviewers noted the lack of courses on racial/ethnic identity and cultural studies within the curriculum. An effort to expand such offerings might be of help in increasing the level of diversity within the department (both for faculty and graduate students).
- Professor Porter, in particular, praised the Department's efforts in instituting an on-line version of the Master of Arts in Technical Communication and Ph.D. in Technical Communication and Rhetoric program. He also suggests, however, that the department "implement an assessment protocol to determine whether the program is indeed working as intended/hoped." He summarizes his concern, and that of the committee as a whole, when he asks "Can you have a responsible online doctoral program that adequately prepares students for academic positions?"
- The committee also believes that it might be time to review the course titles and descriptions presented in the catalog. One outside reviewer noted that the graduate course curriculum, as listed, "seems dated." Further, they noted that the Department should provide more emphasis upon digital rhetoric, visual rhetoric, new media design, and other related topics.
Facilities and Resources

The review committee members, especially the outside reviewers, were particularly impressed by the department’s facilities; the space, the available technology, and the support staff all appear to be first rate. It is in the area of resources (as specified in various places above), however, where there are causes for concern. The committee feels so strongly about these issues that we decided that this area merits an overall rating of between “satisfactory” and “good.”

- The department needs more resources in order to reduce the teaching load of assistant professors so that it may retain the promising young scholars hired in the past few years.
- The department needs more resources in order to reduce the teaching load of graduate students so that it may afford them more time to research, write, and produce in their areas of study. This will do much to further strengthen the academic reputation of Texas Tech University and the Department of English; thus attracting more and better graduate students in the future.
- Graduate students need to be provided with more opportunities to non-teaching RA activities (such as editing internships) that will be of benefit when they begin career searches.

Conclusion

The Department of English is to be commended for the many things that they are doing to produce excellent graduate students and for enhancing the academic reputation of Texas Tech University. As noted above, issues of concern exist (including serious ones) that need to be addressed. It appears to the committee that the faculty is well aware of these problems, and is undertaking some good faith efforts to deal with them. They are to be commended for their efforts, but should work to build a greater level of consensus if the Department of English is to retain its current configuration and positive reputation.
TTU Department of English Outside Report

Literature, Linguistics, Creative Writing

Assessment by Eve Bannet, Oklahoma University

Leadership and Faculty

A graduate program is ultimately as good as its faculty and its leadership. The department Chair and graduate director are smart, able, energetic, dedicated and creative, know what they are doing, and are making the most of available resources. There is strong publishing faculty in Creative Writing and Linguistics, and the department has made many extremely promising hires at the junior level for the literature program. Unfortunately, at least from the point of view of leadership and regional/national visibility for these graduate curriculae, the senior publishing linguistics person and the two senior publishing literature persons have been moved into University administration. It will take some time for the new junior people, good and professionally active as they are, to achieve the sort of recognition in their fields which will help the department achieve its goal of recruiting more and better students for these programs.

Curricular Issues

The department, which has recently revised its graduate requirements, has a strong Creative Writing program, that is increasingly achieving national visibility, a growing Linguistics program, and a variety of interesting curricular initiatives in the literature program – for instance, the new focus on “Literature, Technology and Discourse,” the initiative in transatlantic literature, the focus on nineteenth century literature. The Self-Study rightly plans to give the literature degree a more distinctive and attractive profile by developing particular concentrations within it, that would be more or less unique to TTU and that students would come to TTU to specialize in.

The department is also to be commended for its professional development initiatives. It has made admirable efforts to make students more marketable by preparing them for college teaching, by helping them to give papers at conferences and publish articles, and by giving them relevant experience in the department. There are further excellent initiatives under way in these directions. However, graduate students, who take 3 courses and teach two, are currently overworked, in comparison to other Big 12 schools. This not only affects student recruitment and retention; it also negatively impacts students’ ability to produce quality work, and the publications the department rightly thinks they need to get academic jobs. Although in principle, TTU students will have an edge in the job market by being given teacher training and experience both in the traditional classroom and in TOPIC/ICON, many students find the latter frustrating, unhelpful and off-putting in its current, still experimental, configuration. And because the department is awarding an exceptionally large number of graduate degrees, not all its graduates will find jobs in college teaching.

Recommendations

The department is well on its way to excellence. These recommendations are designed to support and help its initiatives.

- Both the development of visible concentrations in the literature program and the recruitment of
graduate students would be facilitated and enhanced by one or two targeted hires at the senior level of faculty who would help focus those concentrations, attract regional and national attention, and draw students to TTU.

- Both the quality of graduate students’ work and the department’s ability to compete for students would be immeasurably improved by a reduction in graduate students’ workload to something more comparable to other competing institutions. There should certainly also be a paid “dissertation semester” without teaching, to permit students to focus on writing and finishing their dissertations – offering such a semester has become a widespread practice in graduate programs, not least because it helps move students through the program.

- Since not all graduates of TTU (or anywhere else!) will find teaching jobs, it would be helpful to provide some alternative training opportunities, for instance as editorial assistants in one of the department’s several distinguished journals.

- Student frustration with TOPIC/ICON should be respected and addressed, perhaps by developing teaching “pods.”

At 08:46 AM 4/21/2006 -0500, you wrote:

There you go, Marlene. It's just above. Outside the committee, which was very gracious indeed, I didn't actually meet too many people while I was at TTU (probably also because it was the first time anyone had done this). In the dept I met Sam Dragga, Sean Grass, a linguistics prof briefly (and someone in tech writing, which didn't actually apply to my brief,) plus 2 students. I dare say by the time Jim Porter arrived everyone had gotten more into the spirit of the thing. It was very useful talking to Sam Dragga and Sean Grass though. I couldn't have done a fair assessment just from the written materials -- there was so much in the way of context and culture and other stuff that one simply can't get from a written report, esp when it's written to people inside a university who already know why things are as they are. If you have only been there for 3 and 1/2 years, you will know what I mean. I needed to be able to ask the idiot questions to find out how things work at TTU and why things were being done in a particular way, to be able to see where the shoe was pinching and which recommendations would be simple, sensible, practical and take the dept where it needs to go.

cheers. Eve

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Comments of External Reviewer
James E. Porter, Michigan State University

Overall, the English Graduate Program at Texas Tech University is a strong and effective program, one that is generally meeting the needs of its graduate students by providing them with a strong academic curriculum that prepares them well for their professional lives. It is an effectively designed, effectively directed, and effectively implemented graduate program. The technical communication graduate program—both the MA component (MATC) and the PhD in Technical Communication and Rhetoric (TCR)—is a nationally prominent program, clearly an excellent program that enhances the reputation of Texas Tech University as a leading research university. It has long been recognized as one of the premier programs of its type in the USA; its faculty are nationally known as leading researchers; its students enjoy strong placements in both industry and academia. The online MATC/TCR online program has also emerged as an important, cutting-edge program, but even before the online program came into being the technical communication program at Texas Tech University had an excellent reputation in the field of rhetoric and technical communication. The English MA/PhD program is doing a good job of serving a regional mission, with its particular identity being the preparation of students for employment in teaching positions in smaller colleges, universities, and community colleges within the State of Texas. All elements of the program seem to be serving their constituencies well, given their respective missions. Clearly the faculty as a whole take their graduate stewardship responsibilities very seriously and are committed to the welfare of graduate students in the Department.

Below I offer my comments, criticisms, observations, and suggestions about the graduate program overall. These remarks should be understood as offered within the framework of an overall positive evaluation. My findings indicate that this is an effective graduate program whose faculty are deeply committed to graduate education and whose students appreciate the value and contribution of the program to their professional formation. As with any English graduate program, there are tensions—between faculty in different specializations, between competing program priorities, between different degree programs, and between established and emergent views of the discipline—and there are always deep resource issues. Most English graduate programs across the country are experiencing tensions between “literature” and “composition”—and have been for some time. (Note: Within the English Department at Texas Tech, “literature” can be taken as shorthand for English and Creative Writing degree programs and faculty specializing in those areas, while “composition” refers to rhetoric/composition faculty, to technical communication faculty, and to the MATC and TCR graduate programs.) The disciplinary tensions evident within the Texas Tech University English Graduate Program are not unusual; however, they may be slightly more discordant than is typical. The ICON/TOPIK approach to first-year composition has clearly increased tension within the Department and created a public (national) controversy. I do not intend to comment on the validity or effectiveness of the ICON/TOPIK approach to composition, as it is not within the purview of my review to do
so. However, this tension does manifest itself in the graduate program, as GPTIs teach within the FY composition program. The tension is not likely to go away anytime soon, and it cannot be ignored. These tensions within the Department overall, and as circulating around the ICON/TOPIC controversy, do affect graduate education and do need to be addressed if the graduate program is to continue to thrive.

FACULTY
The single greatest intellectual asset of the Department is its younger faculty—its untenured assistant professors. The Department has done an excellent job in its recent hiring and has built an impressive cadre of younger faculty across all areas of the Department. This cohort already has an impressive publication record. However, I see two problems in regards to this cohort: (a) Several excellent untenured faculty have already come and gone in recent years. The Department seems to have difficulty keeping the excellent hires that it makes—particularly in technical communication and technorhetoric, where job opportunities (and 2-2 teaching loads) are widely available nationwide. (b) The ratio of untenured assistant professors to senior faculty is unusually high—and this will put considerable burden on the senior faculty to provide mentoring, to serve on tenure/promotion review committees, and so on. The positive side of this development is the tremendous intellectual energy that this group of younger faculty is likely to generate. I would encourage the Department to do everything it can to support these faculty, particularly in terms of reducing their teaching loads, allowing them to contribute to curriculum development, and encouraging their participation in the governance of the Department. Their areas of expertise represent the future of the Department—and it could be a very promising future.

Lack of racial diversity—in both faculty and graduate students—is a critical issue facing this program. I was glad to see that the Department’s Strategic Plan offers a plan for encouraging diversity in the Department overall. However, the plan does not go quite far enough to address the the problem. In my experience, it is difficult for a program to recruit a racially diverse student population unless (a) the faculty is racially diverse, and (b) the curriculum makes racial and ethnic identity a priority in the curriculum. The problem in the field of technical communication generally (and also in the field of computers and composition, or technorhetoric) is that racial identity has never been viewed as a key topic in the field—and until the field understands how race does matter as a key topic, and how cultural rhetoric plays a critical role in technical communication, it is unlikely that the field will attract faculty or students from underrepresented groups. My key recommendations to the program are these: (a) Hire faculty from underrepresented groups in the area of rhetoric and technical communication, but also, in conjunction with this, (b) develop courses in the curriculum that makes it clear that racial/ethnic identity, cultural rhetoric, and cultural studies are key topics for this field. (An example of such a course might be one on literacy and technology access that merges technorhetoric with the study of how underrepresented groups view and use technology.) Given its location in West Texas, this program should focus on recruiting Latino/a faculty and graduate students. The opportunity exists for developing a distinctive concentration in this area, if the faculty are willing to commit to it.
If the MATC/TCR program plans to increase enrollments, it will need more faculty to do so—or risk putting an undue burden on untenured assistant professors. I would encourage the program to approach this question of increasing enrollment cautiously, particularly with an eye toward faculty workloads and also toward the very real problem of overproduction of PhDs for the academic job market.

The English MA/PhD program should, similarly, be careful about expanding its mission and enrollments. My recommendation to this program would be to identify selected areas of strength, decide what it is this program and faculty do particularly well, and concentrate resources strategically in that specific area. Building all areas of the English curriculum at once—linguistics, creative writing, and literature across a number of periods/topics—is likely to result in diffusion of resources and a loss of strength, with no particular improvement overall. The key to the future success of English graduate programs is, I believe, selected strategic development. In marketing lingo, the program needs to locate its market niche. Creative writing seems like a particularly promising area for development.

**GRADUATE STUDENTS**

Overall, the graduate students like the graduate program and feel generally well supported by the program. They generally like the faculty, feel that the curriculum is strong, and that the program overall meets their needs as students and their trajectories as professionals. Numerous students cited the flexibility of the curriculum and the quality of the faculty as particularly strong facets of the program.

The graduate students in the MATC program and the TCR PhD program are especially pleased with their graduate experience. Their survey responses and face-to-face commentary were strongly positive across most categories.

The graduate students would like better preparation for their professional careers—and the English PhD students in particular would like better guidance for nonacademic career paths. The Department already has a professional development program in place, and is planning to make it mandatory. I think this is an excellent plan.

Some graduate students raised concerns about the "mysteriousness" of certain program procedures and practices and hoped for more guidance and transparency and clearer communication about graduate program matters. For example, students were not sure about the procedures for determining who gets to teach upper-level courses; they don't quite understand how the "99 credit hour rule" is applied or enforced (unevenly and inconsistently, they think); information about summer dissertation fellowships seems to have been unevenly distributed to graduate students.

The graduate students have two chief complaints about their experience:

1. Many students in linguistics, creative writing, and literature complain about the ICON/TOPIK approach to first-year composition, feeling that it does not provide them with adequate classroom preparation for future college teaching. Other students definitely see advantages to this program, particularly in terms of how it enhances
teachers’ ability to assess documents. (One student commented that her “assessment skills have improved drastically.”) The faculty echoed this concern. My views about this response are twofold: (a) The purpose of first-year composition is not to enhance employment opportunities for graduate students. Its primary purpose is to provide TTU undergraduates with experience, guidance, and practice in writing so that they will be adequately prepared for professional writing in their fields of study. I feel strongly that the first-year composition curriculum should be designed with this primary purpose in mind, and that the composition experts on the faculty should take the lead on designing the curriculum with this aim in mind. (b) This said, I also believe that the graduate students and faculty in creative writing and literature do have a valid point. The GPTI experience of students in the English program is not preparing them adequately for the kind of teaching they are likely to be doing in their careers. (I think this point applies moreso to the PhD/English students, less so to MA/English students.) What the Department needs to do is find alternative teaching and non-teaching appointments for these students—perhaps sophomore-level literature courses or RAships associated with journals? A compromise position might be one that was suggested in the faculty forum: Allow selected advanced students the option of developing their own versions of first-year composition, with guidance provided by a faculty mentor. However, I go back to point (a) above: The integrity and consistency of the composition curriculum, and the needs of first-year students, should be the primary engine driving curricular design—not the needs of graduate students.

2. Students across all programs complain about the heavy work load. For most of them it amounts to three graduate courses (9 credits) plus two instructional assignments per semester. In my experience with graduate education in rhetoric/composition, this is indeed a heavier-than-average workload. The norm I’m familiar with is more like 2-3 graduate courses per semester, with a 1-1 or 2-1 teaching load. It is a sign of the excellence of the TRC PhD program that it has recruited competitively in spite of the graduate student workload—but that may not hold true in the future unless workload issues are addressed.

The Graduate School should work with the Department (a) to determine ways to reduce/alleviate the GPTI workload; (b) to provide more teaching experiences outside of the ICON/TOPIC program, particularly for linguistics, creative writing, and literature students; (c) to provide more non-teaching RAships for graduate students (which will enhance their marketability and, thus, the reputation of the graduate program); and (d) to figure out ways to support graduate students for a full twelve months. **This is perhaps the #1 resource issue for the graduate program overall—I see this point as the #1 priority for resource allocation, and the principal way that the University and Graduate School could help the graduate program in English.**

**CURRICULUM**

Overall, the graduate course curriculum seems dated to me. I admit that my reaction is based on limited data: course titles and descriptions from the academic program catalog (p. 163), which of course does not necessarily reflect what actually happens in the classroom. My guess is that the classes themselves are more cutting edge than the titles/descriptions suggest. But the titles/descriptions are the same ones I might have
seen from an early 1990s program catalog, particularly in the MATC and TRC programs. I noticed that several special topics courses had been offered in recent years, in areas such as new media design and intercultural communication. Those special topics titles represent the curriculum of the future—and so the Department might consider updating the curriculum, or at least the catalog representation of the curriculum. The program needs more emphasis on digital rhetoric, visual rhetoric, HCI, multimedia composing, new media design, intercultural/international communication, and the like. I'm guessing that the existing courses already do that work—because the faculty research is cutting edge in these areas—but it is difficult to tell that from the catalog descriptions.

The online program for MATC and TCR is certainly an important, cutting-edge component of the graduate program. My one worry about the program is this: What assessment mechanisms are in place for testing the effectiveness of the online MA and PhD programs? Are there assessment outcomes for the online courses? What data exist to demonstrate that this program does an adequate job of educating MA and PhD students? It seems vital that the program implement an assessment protocol to determine whether the program is indeed working as intended/hoped. My principal worry is about the online PhD program: Can you have a responsible online doctoral program that adequately prepares its students for academic positions? What about the professional socialization process necessary for doctoral students on an academic trajectory—can an online program provide that? The program should be collecting assessment data to answer such questions, which are hugely important for the field of technical communication. Texas Tech is definitely in a position to provide leadership in this area to the rest of the field—but without adequate assessment data, the validity of the program is likely to be questioned.

**ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

The Department needs to have a serious conversation about whether a major structural change would be an advantage or a disadvantage overall for all components of the program. By "major structural change," I am referring either to a departmental split (i.e., creating separate departments for literature/creative writing and composition/technical communication) or moving programs out of the department (e.g., making first-year composition a University program rather than a departmental one; moving graduate programs from the departmental level to the college level).

A key criterion guiding this discussion ought to be this: Is there a curricular common ground, a common identity, and a set of shared intellectual foundations and values that is worth keeping together and building? In my experience in English departments, there do exist such points of connection: e.g., between film studies and multimedia design; between creative writing (particularly creative nonfiction) and professional writing; between cultural/ethnic studies and rhetoric theory; between linguistics and rhetoric. But the faculty has to see the value of those connections and want to work together to develop them. The negative form of this question is: What gets lost if the two groups split? From my very brief observations and discussions, it seems that there is very little common ground among faculty or programs: The graduate programs have no common courses; there seems to be very little intellectual rapport between the two main groups of faculty (literature, composition). This lack of connectedness is not per se a problem if
both groups have their distinctive roles to play and curricula to oversee. However, the problem is the current inequity between the two groups—the program with fewer faculty needs additional hires to continue to compete on a national level, the program with more faculty doesn’t need additional hires to maintain its mission. This inequity is a significant source of tension within the Department, and not one that is likely to go away, particularly if faculty teaching loads and opportunities for contributing to graduate education become more inequitable over time, as seems likely to happen.

I believe that the MATC/TCR program and faculty would thrive as an independent department, particularly if the program and faculty develop stronger curricular and research connections with communication studies. In fact, to continue to maintain its national prominence, the program probably needs to develop such connections. I believe, too, that the English MA/PhD program would do better as a standalone department/program, but only if the program is given sufficient support and encouraged to develop its distinctive and important missions—both the regional mission of its graduate program and the curricular mission of its undergraduate teaching (i.e., the undergraduate English major, general literature courses in the core undergraduate curriculum).

- submitted 04.12.06