Response to the 2011-12 Graduate Program Review

1. Graduate Program in Technical Communication and Rhetoric (TCR)

The bulk of the external review of the TCR graduate program was positive. But the reviewers did identify certain areas for improvement. This section details our responses to and actions on recommendations directed by the external review report toward the TCR graduate programs.

1) The evaluation expresses concern over the need to foster internships “in industry, government, and non-profit organizations.” We have begun building a robust set of relationships with industry with an eye to initially establishing an external advisory board, followed by standing internships made possible by these connections.

2) The evaluation describes the TCR faculty as overtaxed and urges the administration to expand faculty lines. We have been successful this past year in replacing a faculty retirement, thus keeping faculty numbers in TCR at 15. One faculty member left late this spring, so we will return to the job market this coming year, when we expect to be able to hire ourselves back to our initial size of 16. Resources to hire at least four more full-time tenure-line faculty in TCR program would go a long way to fully resolving the external review committee’s concern here.

3) The report questions the number of MA students in TCR, specifically the rather small size of our MATC program. We certainly agree with the evaluators on the need to strengthen the MATC program, and have begun to budget for advertising and other outreach designed specifically to double, at the least, and quadruple, more ideally, the MATC program. Regarding the cultivation of good relations with our alumni, we are happy to report that we have already strengthened strong ties with our MA and PhD alumni this past year. We are currently assisting a group of alumni to form a scholarship and an alumni network, and hope to have a kick-off for this in FY14.

4) The evaluators chide us for not supporting our faculty with adequate technology. Since the time of the evaluation, however, we have instituted an ADIA fee that is designed to support faculty. The policies and procedures around ADIA expenditures were finalized in May 2013. Some of these procedures include replacing faculty computers every three years, providing the department’s labs with a modest budget and a research assistant, and upgrading one technology-based classroom each school year.
2. Graduate Program in Literature, Creative Writing, and Linguistics (LCWL)

The review of the LCWL program contained several positive points. The overall impression of the committee was also that the program should repair a perceived preference for faculty needs over student needs, and address tensions over divergent perceptions of the mission of the graduate program. In response, we have taken steps to address some of the specific suggestions made in the report.

1) The Graduate Studies Committee has begun to examine a restructuring of the MA curriculum to allow additional courses in theory or comparative literature in order to prepare students for curricula that emphasize diversity and international awareness. We have also been informed by the Graduate School that concentrations are now able to be indicated on a student transcript; this could lead us to a research track for students aiming to go on to a doctoral program and a non-research track for secondary school or alt-ac students, which could alleviate some of the issues generated by keeping 5390 as a core requirement for all students.

2) In addition, the LCWL side of the department will begin offering online graduate courses in Spring 2014 as pilot courses for an eventual online MA in English for non-academic or alt-ac students. The DGS in LCWL receives at least a dozen inquiries per semester about online courses and has been in contact with at least two or three interested students; we will run the courses as an alternate delivery mode for our existing program, and if demand keeps up, we will modify the degree as necessary for teachers and other students with specialized needs.

3) The DGS in LCWL has begun to keep a database on current and recent students, as recommended, in order to make more data available for informed decisions. One desideratum might be a dedicated student assistant to help the DGS in contacting recent graduates to keep the database up-to-date.

4) There has been a recent addition to our interdisciplinary offerings: a certificate in Medieval and Renaissance Studies, which has allowed students from other departments to take English courses and for English students to prepare for advanced study in early periods.

5) Departmental administrators will keep more careful track of faculty duties that carry workload credit. While these credits have not always been enough to add up to a release, this data collection has laid the groundwork for documenting duties that can eventually lead to reduced teaching loads.

There are, however, two items in the report with which we take exception.

1) In English, a successful academic job search often takes two or three years; as a result, determining the hiring rate strictly by jobs received right out of graduate school does not do justice to the record of this program. In 2010 alone, we placed six doctoral students, seven more in 2011 (which would not have been known to us at the time of the review),
and three more out of four graduates in 2012-13. There were also two students who had short-term or non-academic jobs in 2010 who found full-time employment in 2011, but were not counted in the data given to the committee (again, this information would not have been known at the time). The database mentioned above will help to make this statistic more precise as time goes on.

2) While a unified vision of the purpose of the degree programs is highly desirable in the abstract, the reality is that while particular programs Literature, Creative Writing, and Linguistics are must operate as semi-autonomous entities, yet we award only two kinds of degrees—a research MA and a research PhD, both in English, not linguistics or creative writing. The differing methodologies and expectations of these three fields virtually guarantee that there will be difference of opinion on what the core should be.

The LCWL program has now begun a serious conversation with the aim of turning our differences into strengths and finding the essential areas where these different emphases can mutually support rather than conflict with each other. Thus, it is not advisable to use variant sections of core courses to solve this issue. As long as we offer research degrees, and this is what is appropriate in an aspiring research university, there will have to be a research-focused English core.

3. The Graduate Programs in the Department of English

In the Department of English as a whole, in five years from now we will develop fully into a nationally-recognized research department. Our aim is not to put undue emphasis on catering to boutique constituencies but rather to foster and build upon the synergies of our current graduate programs. We very much appreciate the remarkable support we have had in the last year from the College of Arts and Sciences in recruiting first-class tenure-line faculty. The new ADIA regime of course fees has given us an important injection of funds for instructional opportunities at the graduate level, as well as enhanced facilities and equipment. Our plan is to move in concert with the university in its future academic ambitions. We will do our part to keep this momentum toward scholarly excellence going as we move forward together to the first tier.