Introduction

I begin this response with an apology and an explanation.

As a new Chair just completing his first year, I was not present when these two graduate reviews were submitted. From what I understand, this report was to be filed within two weeks of the Graduate Program Review in 2012 by then-Chair Fred Christoffel. When Ms. Kennedy contacted me, she informed me that the report was a year late, and for that, the Department apologizes.

From all accounts, however, the two graduate reviews were tainted, and a revision was promised to the Dean of the College and the Chair of the Department of Theatre and Dance. The revised documents were never submitted, so the report was never completed.

One of the reviewers, Professor Carlson, explains the misguided process in her final paragraph: “The team faced several difficulties in conducting the review and in evaluating the information provided to us, all exacerbated by apparently dysfunctional communication between various administrative and academic units at TTU.” She goes into great length explaining the two airplane tickets that had to be purchased, rescheduled appointments, and out-of-pocket expenses, honestly admitting, “These inconveniences did not present a positive first impression.”

Dr. Bial seemed similarly frustrated, but by different roadblocks: “It should be noted that the failure of IRIM and the unit to determine (either collaboratively or independently) clear answers to the most basic of metric criteria...represents a serious obstacle to TTU’s stated goal of advancing its graduate programs to the first tier nationally.” But Bial and Carlson’s reports have an exasperated tone, so I can only imagine that their visits were frustrating, not only because of confused travel plans and communication snafus, but also trouble gathering data and meeting with faculty. It was even reported that one or two faculty members were set on sabotaging the review, but this is hearsay.

That being said, there is still much to learn from any graduate program review, and after one-year here, I can see areas which need addressing, many brought up in both reviews. Because I am writing this a full year late, I will divide this brief report into the areas of review that were addressed by Bial and Carlson, giving their particular rankings, and, in each section, I will discuss short and long range plans to strengthen our graduate programs. I had access to these reviews before I took this new position, so I did have them in mind when I began to initiate change. I will discuss that as well in this document.
Program Overview and Vision (Bial: POOR; Carlson: VERY GOOD)

Carlson points out two major problems that she sees in what she defines as a very good program overview and vision. Bial has trouble primarily with demoralized faculty and students who feel they have little to no voice in the department.

1. The Dance Program: Professor Carlson admits that the Dance Program, because it has no graduate degree, falls outside of the purview of the report, but she points wisely to its potential for growth and possible graduate education. At the time of the report, we had not opened our new facility, which has helped already to grow that program. We have also hired a third faculty member and in the fall, will be hiring a faculty member in musical theatre and dance, doubling the faculty numbers in that area at the time of this review. We are preparing a self-study for dance this summer, and plan to apply for accreditation in within the next two years. We hope within five years to be totally accredited, to hire one more faculty member in that area, and to host the major national dance festival at TTU. This should lead, possibly in five years, to an MFA in Dance.

2. Increased Enrollment: Professor Carlson writes that our goal of graduating 15 students with graduate degrees by 2020 is “impossible given the current faculty and current facilities.” We agree and so does the college. The Dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts allowed us four hires this year, two of them tenure-track, and we actually have another tenure-track line in the fall that is the result of a failed search. With extra faculty, we can serve more students and increase our numbers, probably not to 15 (as Professor Bial says, this would make it “nearly twice as large as the next largest PhD program in Theatre in the world”), but at least to a reasonable number.

3. Demoralized Faculty and Ignored Students: Professor Bial describes a faculty who are overworked and demoralized, and students who feel ignored and threatened, although he does admit that they hope the new hire will change the culture in a positive way. I believe that we have, in one year, significantly changed that culture. In my first year, we have increased travel funding for all graduate students and faculty; responded to a 45-point graduate student document by changing 37 policies and carefully considering the others; given students voice on all faculty committees; created student representation on all levels of governance; found extra spaces for classrooms; given students more choice over their assistantships; increased student voice in choosing the season; allowed students to direct on the mainstage; increased productions in the lab during the year, giving more opportunity to direct, act, and dramaturge; rejoined the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival; tripled the number of conferences and international travel opportunities; and found constant space for rehearsal, just to name a few changes.

Faculty report that they are better treated and students are happier. In the future, we plan to continue to embrace change, this year with curriculum, next with production quality. In five years, I’d like to make this a top-ten
graduate program, as evidenced by the eleven professional guests we invited to TTU to work with our students in WildWind Performance Laboratory, which replaced the antiquated Summer Rep Program. I mean to increase the influence of that lab, and take a greater role in finding internships for our students and publications for our faculty.

Curriculum and Programs of Study (Bial: GOOD; Carlson: GOOD (MA and MFA), VERY GOOD (PhD))
Whereas Carlson breaks down her examination of curriculum and programs of study into the MA, MFA, and PHD, Bial examines all of them collectively.

1. The Future of the MA Program: Professor Carlson speaks more in this section about the future of the MA in Theatre within the US, not just TTU, but she does feel that “the generalized nature of the MA at TTU seems to be appropriate preparation.” Her only real question is that she feels that a comprehensive exam and written thesis may be too much compared to other programs. We disagree. An upper level degree, especially one that prepares students for a doctoral program, should be challenging, offering students the opportunity to balance similar responsibilities. Still, we do plan to look very carefully at curriculum in the next year to five years to make all of our degrees as contemporary as possible.

2. Better “Packaging”: Professor Carlson explains that the MFA is fairly unconventional, which we recognize, and that we possibly need to package it more honestly. She calls this at most a “minor inconvenience.” We are, as I’ve said, addressing curriculum this year, but more importantly in this area, we are honestly addressing graduate needs. This past year, graduate reps have discussed issues with the MFA with a newly formed “kitchen cabinet” group of administrators, and we are attempting, in the next five years, to build more of a studio model into the curriculum. Our new Performance Lab truly takes practice into account, and mixed with theory, we hope to imitate almost an architectural model for our classrooms. We embrace her description of a theatre generalist because we feel this truly prepares students for the market place.

3. Department Support for Student Directors and Actors: Professor Bial points out that many students are dissatisfied with the lack of opportunity to direct and/or act as part of their graduate degree program. We have already addressed this. We’ve added two more productions to our season, giving more students the opportunity to direct. We’ve stopped casting the same students for roles in more than one play, giving more students opportunities to act, and we have added a summer lab to give even more chances for students to fulfill degree responsibilities. We plan to continue all of these initiatives in the future, and grow even more.

4. Subprograms with Too Few Faculty: Students complain, according to Professor Bial, that subgroups such as playwriting are taught by only one faculty member. Gradually, because of excellent college and university support, we are changing this. We have a second playwright, a second faculty
member in history/theory/criticism, two new designers, leaving only our 
arts administration program with one faculty member. For now, that is 
appropriate since many of the required classes are actually outside of our 
department, but within five years, we should have at least two faculty 
members in all areas of study.

**Faculty Productivity: (GOOD for both)**
Both Bial and Carlson rank productivity as good, but describe what is true about 
almost every program in the country: Faculty are overworked and underpaid.

1. **Traditional Scholarship:** Bial describes traditional scholarship and national 
   reputations as low in our department. We are currently in the process at TTU 
of actually defining creative scholarship and evaluative techniques for both 
our new President and Provost, and, as a faculty, we are addressing this 
issue. As Chair, I am helping faculty find opportunities for traditional 
scholarship. While the past Chair was a designer, having very few ties to 
publish, my background is both in creative and traditional scholarship. I 
will provide faculty with more opportunities to publish. We also plan to find 
chances for our faculty to work nationwide creatively, and to take on more 
leadership roles in national organizations, once again, following a different 
model that more actively mentors our faculty, helping them to grow 
professionally. We are hiring new faculty who understand the need to exceed 
in both areas.

2. **More Financial and Administrative Support:** We are 
   looking actively for ways to support our administrative positions. Sometimes this comes in creative 
ways—finding stipends, increasing travel money, etc. We are also using our 
graduate assistants more creatively, giving administrators full-time help in 
each area (and thus giving graduate students in arts administration more 
appropriate and beneficial administrative experience).

3. **Tremendous Service Obligations:** To address Professor Carlson’s observation 
   that our teaching load is “heavier than typical for peer institutions,” we are 
hiring more faculty in the hopes that, if the university continues to make its 
bid for Tier One, we may be able to incorporate a reduced teaching load. I 
also work often with the Associate Dean Robert Henry to make sure that 
teaching loads are fair and consistent through our Workload Portal System. 
As I’m sure Bial and Carlson understand, teaching loads are the province not 
of our department but the university at large and the state of Texas.

**Quality and Quantity of Graduate Students and Graduates (Bial: GOOD; Carlson: 
VERY GOOD)**
Both Bial and Carlson describe a dearth of student opportunity and the need for 
better recruitment, among other issues. They also recognized problems based on 
the lack of data received. Because of the many points addressed in these sections, 
and the massive change undergone this year, I will address these point by point, 
illustrating how the environment has changed with new leadership.
1. Mainstage and Lab Directing Opportunities: Professor Carlson explains that only faculty direct on the mainstage and, students, in the lab. Also, she and Bial point out that there are too few productions to give students the experience they need. This is already no longer true. We have a faculty member directing in the Lab next season, and a student directing on the Mainstage. We will continue this trend in the future. Both reviewers discuss the fact that playwrights are not being produced, so next year, we are producing eight new students works. We’ve increased the lab shows to accommodate this, and also provide opportunities in our new lab.

2. A More Coherent Recruitment Plan: We have taken this to heart. We send students and faculty to recruitment fairs all over the country, have rejoined the Kennedy Center American Theatre Festival to make sure our name is well known in the region and nationally, recruit at national sites such as SETC and ATHE, and send students to the O’Neill Theatre Center, the most prestigious place for recruiting in the country.

3. Scholarly Conferences: In one year, we have tripled the number of MFA and PHD students who attend scholarly conferences, and plan continually to privilege student travel nationally and overseas; our college is especially supportive of overseas travel. At ATHE in 2013, for example, we have more students presenting than any other school in the country. We have three this summer at the O’Neill, and many of our playwrights are being read at institutes and theatres all over the country.

4. Low Financial Support: With the promise of national and international travel funding, and with an increased scholarship base, we are aggressively providing more for our student body.

5. Culture of Fear: Professor Bial writes that “students overwhelmingly report reluctance to bring problems to the attention of administration.” This was one of the biggest problems that I addressed in my first year as Chair, and, as any of our students will explain, this culture has changed significantly in one year. We have made all of the decisions about funding, directing, etc. transparent; students serve on all appropriate committees; and I have several student advisors who serve as liaisons between the student body and the faculty. We are student-centric, so no student now could claim that he or she was powerless. We share all appropriate administrative decisions and budgeting issues with our graduate students. This was not the case before.

Facilities and Resources: (Bial: UNSATISFACTORY; Carlson: POOR)
Both Bial and Carlson point to what we already know—we need a new facility. The Dean and the University are aggressively pursuing a new building, and we are increasing our community outreach to help in this endeavor. Both reviewers point to poor rehearsal space, too few administrative staff, an unhealthy costume shop (poor ventilation), and too few classrooms.

Based on NAST and our accreditation deferral we addressed as much as we could this year to alleviate the five problems that they encountered, echoing the ones from Bial and Carlson. NAST has agreed we have addressed all but one problem, a
costume shop without proper ventilation. To meet accreditation standards, we did the following (among other innovations that I could share with you in our NAST document if you so wish) and plan to continue in the upcoming years. These are only the elements in response to Bial and Carlson, not the entire accreditation changes.

1. We found another, large dedicated classroom
2. We have made spaces all over campus available for student rehearsal almost 24 hours a day
3. We are better using our TA/GA/GPTI’s to help to run the department and to offer suggestions
4. We promoted from inside a new Business Manager and hired a more experienced Assistant.
5. We remodeled the annex for new faculty and found more spacious graduate student offices.
6. We have increased our library liaison work and made sure that interlibrary load works more effectively for us.

As I mentioned before, we are actively planning for a new building, and will look in the next five years, before this building is completed, to find an alternative to the cramped shop and costume shop ventilation problems. That is NAST’s final directive.

**Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to address our immediate and future plans for the Department of Theatre and Dance. We care deeply about our graduate education, and we are embracing change to make our department one of the top schools in which to obtain an MFA, MA, or PHD degree. Our College is supportive and forwarded thinking, and our students and faculty, much happier than they were a year ago. The circumstances regarding the review visit were indeed unfortunate, but we have taken their careful critiques to heart, nonetheless, and will use them to better our student environment.