Fedler, Clifford

From: Kenady, Marlene
Sent: Friday, April 21, 2006 9:35 AM
To: Fedler, Clifford; Borrelli, John
Subject: FW: Report from Eve Bannet - English Graduate Program Review (FYI)

TTU Department of English Outside Report

Literature, Linguistics, Creative Writing

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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