Preface

The description of the Professional Development Curriculum in the TTU Department of English Graduate Student Handbook opens by acknowledging that nationally “just 35% of new PhD recipients in English find tenure-track jobs.” The 2006-11 placement data for the MA and PhD in Literature, Creative Writing, and Linguistics confirms that graduate students in these fields face a depressed job market:

- 5--Tenure-track (TTU, Abraham Baldwin College, Murray State University, Amarillo College, University of Montana)*
- 16--Non-tenure track (full-time and part-time, of which 3 are at TTU)
- 5--High school
- 7 –Other (sales, publishing, media, of which 3 are at TTU)

These market realities should frame all discussions of mission, curriculum, faculty, students, and resources for the Literature, Creative Writing, and Linguistics program.

* Although not within the time frame of the self-study, the 2012 placement data reportedly includes a number of tenure-track placements.

Overview and Mission--satisfactory

According to the graduate program self-study, the MA in all English programs produces “sophisticated users of research,” while the PhD produces “effective creators of research.” The program in Literature, Creative Writing and Linguistics (hereafter Lit/CW/Ling) specifically identifies, “as a major facet of its mission,” teaching “the fundamentals of research” and encouraging “the use of scholarly methods.” But survey data as well as discussions with faculty and students reveal sharp disagreements about the centrality of “research” to the program mission, about the kinds of research methods students need to learn, and about the kinds of publication for which they are preparing.

The MA and PhD in English are divided into three concentrations: Literature, Creative Writing, and Linguistics. Students concentrating in Literature may further specialize in Comparative Literature; Nineteenth-century Studies; Book History; Film and Media; and Literature, Social Justice, and the Environment. Differences, especially between the concentrations in Literature and Creative Writing, indicate a lack of unified vision for MA and PhD in English. Furthermore, the structural division into three concentrations,
with five sub-fields, suggests that faculty specialization and teaching preferences, rather than student need, may be shaping program vision.

**All future planning hinges on clarifying the mission of the Lit/CW/Ling degrees—both MA and PhD. Bridging the current impasse will require turning attention away from internal disputes toward what students need in order to succeed in the current depressed job market, and substituting data for opinion.** What kinds of teaching and publication are being required of recent graduates where they are currently employed? One of the stated program goals is to “Develop a database of program graduates.” This database could include information about teaching and publication requirements. On the surface, the placement data cited above suggests that graduates must be able to teach a broad range of composition and literature courses, with the occasional opportunity to teach in the student’s area of specialization. But this assumption should be verified by data.

In addition, data on Literature, Creative Writing, and Linguistics concentrations might be gathered from comparable programs listed in the self-study: especially Auburn University, Iowa State University, and Virginia Tech University, whose programs are comparable in size to TTU’s. (Universities that offer the PhD in Creative Writing include the U of Denver, Florida State, Ohio U, U of Houston, U of Utah-Salt Lake, U of Illinois-Chicago, USC, U of Cincinnati, U of Missouri-Columbia, U of Nebraska-Lincoln, U of Georgia). Once this data has been gathered and discussed and the mission of the TTU Lit/CW/Ling program clarified, the results should guide decisions on specific goals stated at the end of the self-study.

The following questions are offered to help frame these discussions:
- Is there a market for a PhD in Creative Writing, or will students be better prepared for available jobs with a PhD in English, with broad training in Composition and Literature, and a specialization in Creative Writing?
- Is there a market for an MA with a teaching emphasis?
- Is there a market for online graduate courses in Literature and Linguistics?
- Given the academic job market, is an increase of PhD graduates in Lit/CW/Ling warranted?

**Curriculum and Programs of Study--satisfactory**

All concentrations in the Lit/CW/Ling MA and PhD share a common core of required courses:

**MA in 4 concentrations: British & American Literature, Comparative Literature, Creative Writing, Linguistics**
- History and Theory of College Composition (3 hrs)
- Research Methods or Critical Methods
- Writing for Publication

**PhD in 3 concentrations: Creative Writing, Linguistics, Literature**
- History and Theory of College Composition (1 hr)
In surveys and discussions, both faculty and students highly praised the required Professional Development Program (taught as “English as a Profession”). This two-year program, organized by the Associate Director of Graduate Studies, offers a sequenced series of specific workshops and presentations that guide students toward the timely completion of their degrees and a successful entrance into the profession. The charts of average time-to-degree (MAs—2 yrs.; PhDs—6 yrs.) and this year’s reported success in placing graduates suggests that the Professional Development Program is having a positive effect.

Three of the core courses, however, are the subject of controversy.

- The Writing for Publication course is described in the TTU catalogue as “Designed to teach students in graduate programs how to write clear and effective articles for professional journals in their field.” Some members of the Creative Writing faculty, however, believe that concentrators in Creative Writing need a course focused on preparing “manuscripts for submission to professional journals, agents, and/or publishers in their genre” rather than on “scholarly publishing” (alternative course proposal provided to the review committee).

- The Research Methods course is described in the TTU catalogue as a “Survey of research methods in literature and languages, providing experience with enumerative and analytical bibliography, bibliographic theory, and textual criticism.” Some faculty and students in both the Creative Writing and Linguistics concentrations, however, believe that this course emphasizes book history and textual editing more than the research competencies needed for graduate study in Lit/CW/Ling.

- The History and Theory of Composition course is required for all entering MA students, but entering PhD students only take a one-hour version of this course. Some faculty and students report that the course is not clearly related to their teaching and grading in the required first-year composition courses.

Decisions about the mission of the Lit/CW/Ling program should guide a review of these core courses. Clarification of the type of research that is necessary in the positions for which TTU graduates are preparing must determine the shape of the courses in Writing for Publication and Research Methods. Likewise, if most graduates will be expected to teach composition and design composition courses, then their curriculum and teaching assignments should prepare them to understand the relationship between history, theory, and practice in the teaching of composition.

In addition to these core courses, all Lit/CW/Ling programs require a range of courses in British and American Literature. The courses entitled Studies in Multicultural American Literatures and Studies in Post Colonial Literature, both of which may be repeated when topics vary, can be used to satisfy these requirements. With these substitutions, the
literature curriculum offers a broad range of courses, with one notable exception, which graduates need in order to teach the increasingly diverse student populations in American high schools, colleges, and universities. The notable exception is a course focused on women and literature. Neither the Department of English nor the Women’s Studies curriculum offers graduate courses focused either on the representation of women in literature or literature written by women. Furthermore, English does not offer any cross-listed courses, and, aside from Comparative Literature and Linguistics, faculty members do not teach in interdisciplinary units. As the English program mission is discussed, faculty members may want to reimagine the kinds of graduate literature courses (some perhaps with an interdisciplinary component) that will prepare graduates to teach in schools, colleges, and universities with diverse student populations.

The programs of study for both the MA and PhD in the Literature, Creative Writing, and Linguistics concentrations have clear timetables that move students through the program expeditiously. As described in The Graduate Student Handbook, the timing for the selection of directors and committee members, for regular advising, and for exams and defenses is reasonable. Both students and faculty, however, report that, in practice, the timetable is not always followed. Some students described advisors who fail to answer emails promptly, are not available for conferences, and delay returning written drafts. Some faculty members described an excessive workload caused by heavy service on MA and PhD committees (as distinct from directing theses and dissertations) that is not compensated by course release.

The MA thesis and the PhD dissertation for concentrators in Creative Writing is a manuscript of original work in the student’s chosen genre, with one chapter that places the student’s work in the field (although this chapter is not described in The Graduate Student Handbook). Faculty members differ on the specific requirements for this chapter (research based? “craft essay”?), and on the quality of recent examples of this required chapter. As the mission of the Lit/CW/Ling program is clarified, requirements for this chapter should be specified.

The graduate program also offers two certificates—one in Linguistics (12 hours) and one in Publishing and Editing (15 hours). No data was presented on the numbers of students who have received these certificates. Some PhD students reported that they wanted to obtain a Publishing and Editing certificate in order to increase their employment opportunities, but that the required courses were not offered frequently enough to gain the certificate in a timely manner.

Faculty Productivity—very good

With only a few exceptions, the Lit/CW/Ling faculty members are admirably productive. They publish in appropriate scholarly journals (e.g. English Literary Renaissance), important reviews and magazines (e.g. The Iowa Review), and well-known university and trade presses (e.g. University of Florida Press and Routledge). Despite a very small travel budget, they regularly make presentations at national conferences (e.g. Modern Language Association of America) and read their work at venues that increase the national visibility of TTU (e.g. Brooklyn Book Festival). In order to support its productive faculty, the Department of English has decided to replace expensive
telephones with email and SKYPE, and to dedicate the resulting savings to faculty travel. An increase in the departmental travel budget would have a significant impact on the national visibility of the TTU graduate program, allowing faculty to make contacts that enable future publication and the placement of graduate students in tenure-track jobs.

The number and prestige of prizes (e.g. John Ciardi Poetry Prize) and fellowships (e.g. National Endowment for the Humanities) awarded to the faculty testifies to the quality of faculty research and creative writing. One professor has been named to the university’s highest honor, the Horn Professorship.

In addition to their continuing research productivity, the teaching workload required to sustain the Lit/CW/Ling MA and PhD is quite heavy. Often serving on multiple MA and/or PhD committees, faculty members must conduct annual reviews of every graduate student, read preliminary and final prospectuses, prepare and read exams often in multiple areas for each student, read MA theses and portfolios and PhD dissertations, and conduct oral exams and defenses. The yearly 18-hour workload requirement for all professors is calculated by an elaborate formula that assigns different weights to undergraduate and graduate teaching, directing theses and dissertations, serving in administrative or editorial positions, etc. In discussions and surveys, faculty members express concern that the workload is not divided equitably. More transparency (perhaps publishing the Chair’s calculations) might dispel some of the suspicion about inequitable workloads. The current policy of awarding reduced teaching loads to new assistant professors is an excellent way to integrate them into the department as they develop new course preparations and launch publishing careers.

The self-study lists as one of its planning goals “Expand offerings of large lecture sections.” If these large lecture sections also included breakout sections led by graduate students, then this plan could serve several purposes. Currently, graduate students teach most sophomore level introductory literature sections; thus few undergraduates, except those who decide to major in English, encounter professors. In large-lecture sections, linked to the required literature pedagogy course, professors could lecture to beginning literature students (perhaps attracting some to become English majors) and work closely with graduate students who are learning to teach the skills of reading and writing about literature. This large-section assignment should count, at least, as much as a graduate seminar in the faculty workload calculations. The use of large sections at the introductory literature level might also help the department to move toward achieving its stated goal to “Reduce standard teaching load for tenure-line faculty to 2-2.”

Quality and Quantity of Graduate Students and Graduates--good

The self-study reports that the graduate student applicant pool has become large in recent years, the acceptance rate is low, and the quality of students admitted is high (average GRE verbal scores are in the 560s; average GPA is over 3.5). Despite these qualifications, only five graduates between 2006-11 received tenure-track appointments (one at TTU); sixteen received part-time or full-time non-tenure-track academic positions; five became high school teachers; and seven worked in sales, publishing, media, etc. (three at TTU). Unless the program develops a plan to target specific markets
for its graduates, no increase in the size of the MA and PhD in Lit/CW/Ling seems warranted at this time.

Discussions with faculty and survey data revealed tensions over graduate admissions procedures. It was unclear whether or not there exists an admissions quota for students concentrating in Literature and students concentrating in Creative Writing. Greater transparency on how admissions decisions are being made might ease some of these tensions.

The self-study reports that “The diversity of the student body is high, drawing from a large pool of applicants from around the country and the world, with highly varied experiences and backgrounds.” But the 2005-10 data for the “Demographics of Enrolled Graduate Students” in the Lit/CW/Ling MA and PhD programs reports little ethnic diversity: total (81-97)—Asian (1-2 per year), Black (1-2 per year), Hispanic (3-8 per year). One professor who specializes in Latino/a literature reported an interest in recruiting more Hispanic graduate students.

According to the latest data published on the web site, “All students holding a TA or GPTI appointment in the Department of English have substantial portions of their tuition and fees waived. In addition, graduate assistants receive a stipend and other benefits as nine-month employees of the University. During 2008-2009, the stipend for TAs is $13,200, for GPTIs at the M.A. level $13,700, and for GPTIs at the Ph.D. level $15,100.” These stipends seem low when compared to comparable programs, but perhaps waivers and cost-of-living adjustments make these stipends more competitive than they seem. The web site further states, “The Department of English is proud to have stipends among the highest in the Big XII.”

In the past, graduate student stipends have been supplemented by a variety of TTU fellowships and summer dissertation fellowships. But both students and faculty reported that some of these fellowships are being phased out. PhD students currently receive some minimal travel funds. Supplementing these funds would help students compete more successfully in the current job market.

Teaching assignments for Lit/CW/Ling graduate students typically require 20 hours of work per week. They begin by teaching the first-year writing courses—serving as Document Instructors, who evaluate the work of 70 students per semester, and/or Classroom Instructors, who meet one or two sections once a week. Discussions with both students and faculty members, as well as survey data from both students and faculty, indicate concern that the current system of first-year writing teaching may not be providing students with appropriate training in bringing composition theory into their practice of composition teaching. Since Lit/CW/Ling graduates will be required not only to teach composition, but also to design composition courses, they may need to become more fully invested in the program, in both design and implementation.

According to The Graduate Student Handbook, all PhD students teach in the writing program for, at least, one year before teaching a sophomore level literature or creative writing course. Discussions and surveys, however, indicate concern that this schedule of teaching assignments is not consistently followed. In addition to fairness, the concern is
that students who by-pass teaching in the first-year program are insufficiently prepared to evaluate the writing required in the sophomore level literature courses.

Facilities--excellent

The Department of English is housed in a beautiful, new building that contains administrative offices, individual offices for faculty, shared office space for graduate teaching assistants, a LetterPress Lab, a Multiple Literacy Lab, a Usability Research Lab, its own computer servers, and multi-media classrooms.

Library resources that support the Lit/CW/Ling programs include full-text databases of literary, cultural, historical texts such as America’s Magazines and NINES, Nineteenth-century Scholarship Online; specialized bibliographies such as Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts; and digital archives of scholarly articles such as JStor and Project Muse. The library web page for English students learning to conduct research is user-friendly.

During discussions, no faculty member or graduate student mentioned deficiency in library resources, and a faculty member specializing in Book History has worked with the library to develop its online collections.

The Department employs one full-time employee to manage all computer hardware and software, as well as the web site. The web site is often, however, out of date (e.g. the latest Graduate English Society page refers to events in 2008, the graduate student stipend information is for 2008-9, and the announcements on the Graduate Study in English page lists placements for 2009).

Recommendations

- Gather data on
  - teaching and publication required of recent successful graduates of TTU
  - placements and core required courses in comparable programs.
- Use this data to clarify the mission of the MA and PhD in English, or to decide to create separate degrees in Literature, Creative Writing, and Linguistics. (It might be useful to involve an unbiased third party, the Graduate Dean or Associate Dean, in these discussions.)
- Use the clarified understanding of mission to review core required courses, curriculum diversity, and specifications for the dissertation.
- Gather data on whether or not there is a market for an MA with a teaching emphasis and for online Literature and Linguistic courses.
- Increase transparency in faculty workload, graduate student teaching assignments, and admission decisions.
- Consider creating some large-enrollment undergraduate courses, taught by professors using graduate students as leaders of breakout discussion sections.
- Increase travel funds for both faculty and PhD students.