

**16 August 2013**

**To: Glynis Ridley, Chair, Department of English**  
**From: Karen Kopelson, Director of Graduate Studies**  
**Re: DGS/Graduate Committee and Program Report, 2012-13**

**Graduate Committee Members:** Karen Kopelson (Chair); Brian Leung; Karen Hadley; Stephen Schneider; Bronwyn Williams (fall); Debra Journet (spring) [the grad comm. was down a member this year because of having an interim Director of Comp, so we functioned with 5 instead of 6 members]

**Regular Activities:**

The Graduate Committee had its usual slate of meetings and responsibilities this year: individual meetings (progress interviews) with all second-year PhD students; a group-meeting with all first-year PhD students; and MA and PhD admissions meetings.

Additionally, in my role as DGS, I organized the following events:

- fall orientation meeting/pizza party for all incoming PhD students and their peer mentors
- fall orientation meeting/pizza party for all new MA students
- visitation day for all accepted PhD students (see more in admissions below)
- program lunch to celebrate the end of the year and announce awards and new positions
- a host of placement/professionalization meetings and workshops for PhD students going on the job market (Bronwyn Williams chaired Placement and Professionalization this year, so he gets much/most credit here) and also for MA students interested in applying to PhD programs or MFA programs

**Other Accomplishments of the Graduate Committee:**

After several years of making significant changes, the graduate committee did not undertake any curricular or programmatic revisions this year.

**Graduate Program Developments:**

Funding for Graduate Students

In every year of my tenure as DGS we have awarded 5<sup>th</sup> year funding to at least one Ph.D. student. For the second year, we were able to award four, and thus all, Ph.D students in need of 5<sup>th</sup> year funding with some form of it. Because we had no “surplus” internal GTA lines to award this April, this was made possible only by the two new 5<sup>th</sup> year lines funded by the Dean of A&S (with tuition matches from SIGS) and by the Watson Dissertation Completion Fellowships established by former Watson Director, Min-Zhan Lu, and Susan Griffin (my report from last year details both of these exciting funding developments).

It is very important to monitor the success rate of our 5<sup>th</sup> year funding efforts, whether these are internal awards or whether (but especially when) these are awards from the Dean in our four year experimental program. Frankly, the success rate concerns me. Of the two 5<sup>th</sup> year Ph.D. students funded by the Dean’s lines in this first of four years, one finished her dissertation (early, in December) but did not secure a TT, or any, position. However, it is important to note she limited

herself to a regional search. The other funded student neither finished nor secured a TT position, though he did, late in the season, secure a full time instructor position at a local community college. This success rate is roughly consistent with that of the internally awarded 5<sup>th</sup> year GTA-ships (I will present more detailed data on 5<sup>th</sup> year trends in next year's report). In fact, of the 6 Ph.D. students awarded 5<sup>th</sup> year GTA-ships since 2010, only one has both secured TT employment and defended his dissertation *within that 5<sup>th</sup> year* (though he will graduate Dec).

There are, of course, ways to spin this more positively—e.g., one student (internal line) who did not actually graduate until the end of year 6 did secure TT employment in his fifth year and did eventually complete the diss, and similar developments may occur for other students in the future. But I would like to see much more winning data than the above re: fifth year funding—again, especially with respect to those students funded by the Dean's lines if we have any hope of persuading him to continue funding 5<sup>th</sup> year GTA-ships beyond the four years he's committed to (through AY 15-16). I have impressed upon both students and faculty mentors the import of students who receive 5<sup>th</sup> year funding finishing within the 5<sup>th</sup> year, and will continue to do so, but this pressing of the point does not seem to control students actual diss writing processes.

In one other funding development, outgoing Department Chair, Susan Griffin, and incoming Dept Chair, Glynis Ridley, were able to take advantage of a new tuition match offer from the Dean of A&S to extend a new, limited time GTA-ship (currently Sheridan's RA) beyond its original 3 year duration. This is a very exciting development.

### **Admissions Details:**

#### Incoming Cohorts

**PhD:** 7 new students for Fall 13 (4 fellows; 3GTAs)

**MA:** 18 new MA students were admitted for spring, summer, or fall 2012. This number is the lowest # of MA admits in many years; recent years have seen MA admits consistently in the 20s and occasionally as high as above 30. (I will speculate further about this number in the next section.)

**9** of the new Fall MA admits received GTA funding, and we awarded one currently enrolled MA student with funding for her second year, for a total of **10 MA GTA-ships**. This is our exact target number of MA GTA-ships.

#### Applicant Pools and Recruiting

**PhD:** The PhD applicant pool for fall 13 was 33 apps. Though there was a brief blip of higher #s (40-45) for 2010 and 2011, this number is consistent with last year and with most previous years as far back as 10 years. The pool seemed the weakest in several years—in fact, nearly half of the applicants were not even considered viable/wait-listable by the Graduate Committee—but we had an outstanding recruiting year and were able to get our top applicants. I nominated 6 applicants for fellowships and we were awarded 4, and then a 5<sup>th</sup> in a later round. Of these 5, 4 accepted; of our 5 first round GTA offers, 2 accepted (previous 3 years have been one), for a total of 6 out of 10 of our first round offers accepting. The remaining incoming PhD GTA was from spot one on our waitlist. An excellent year. We once again recruited from well beyond the region; we admitted none of our own MA students this year.

**MA:** The pool for MA applicants seeking GTA-ships (42 apps; nearly identical to last year) was amazingly strong, and so it is perhaps not fully surprising that we did not recruit many of our top choices. We made 7 first round offers (and soon moved to 9) and, of these, 3 accepted. This is a good percentage but, by the end, we went to the very last spot on our wait-list. Of our 9 incoming GTAs, 3 are our own BAs; 2 others are either local or from the immediate region. But we also did recruit from well beyond the region (as far as California) and from some very fine schools. There is nothing atypical about this distribution—in fact, it's a good distribution—what is atypical, as mentioned above, is the low number of admits overall, due to a very small number of students accepting from the January pool with no funding and to the extremely low number of students applying on rolling-admissions and/or for summer or spring admissions.

I am unsure as to what we might attribute this sharp decline, but I do know from recent reports that it is consistent with the drop in graduate enrollments university wide (prior to this year, English Dept trends were not consistent with lower graduate enrollments university-wide). Perhaps the economy has recovered enough that graduating BA students are actually seeking and finding employment upon graduation rather than pursuing further education. Or, perhaps we need to think about stronger recruiting efforts at the MA level, if we decide lower enrollments are a bad thing. One potential positive is that students who come in off rolling admissions and in “off” terms often tend not to be our strongest MA students, so smaller classes may mean stronger MA students. For now, I say this is just a trend to watch.

#### PhD Visitation Day

As usual, we invited all PhD applicants to whom we had made first round offers to visit campus for a full and exciting day of events on a Friday in February. The visit was well attended (only two of 10 invited students did not come), and all went smoothly as usual. Bruce Horner, doctoral candidate Nancy Bou Ayash, and I gave a panel presentation as the scholarly talk; Mary P. Sheridan was kind enough to host the always fun and lively evening reception. Former Grad Program Assistant, Karen Habeeb, coordinated all travel and lodging and catering arrangements beautifully as always, and peer mentors and other graduate students helped out tremendously.

#### Diversity

I am thrilled and, frankly, relieved, to report that, for the first time in 5 years, we were able to recruit and admit an African American student to this year's PhD cohort. While we were not able to take advantage of either SREB or SIGS Ethnic Minority Assistantship funding for this applicant, we were fully happy to fully fund her ourselves. This year's application pool, however, did not see the number of (viable) international applicants we've been seeing in most recent years, and I do not believe we have any minority (or international) students among our incoming MA class. As usual, we need to continue our recruiting efforts for diversity.

#### **Graduation and Placement:**

**8 PhD graduates in AY 2012-13:** One of these 8 was already in a TT position from the previous year. Of the remaining 7, only 2 secured TT employment, though one other secured a much-desired term position at his first choice institution. Of the remaining 4 graduates, one is already employed in a term position out of state and did not go on the market; one limited herself to a regional search and did not secure any position; one decided to abandon his academic aspirations late-search and went into the business world; one will be going on the market this year.

Controlling for those factors, and limiting to graduates who actually conducted a full national search through the end of the process, we could interpret what sounds like a 28% placement rate into TT jobs/43% into academic jobs as a 100% placement rate into academic positions and/or a 66% placement rate into TT positions.

However, it is also important to consider placement by figuring in not just the year's graduates, but who was actually on the market, which includes former students who graduated some time ago or current students who have not yet graduated even though they were on schedule to. Calculating in this way, we had 9 students on the market this year with 4 securing TT employment and 2 others securing either term or full time instructor positions. This would convert to a 44% placement rate in TT positions or 66% placement rate into academic positions. Again controlling for students who did not conduct or abandoned a national search, then we have a placement rate of 85% (6 of 7) into academic positions and 57% (4 of 7) into TT positions.

Though I have not calculated placement rates in quite this much mathematical detail in previous reports, I am confident looking over those reports that this year's pattern is roughly consonant with all academic years since at least 2009-10 and possibly 2008-09, with the exception of AY 2011-12 when we could claim the desired 100% placement rate into TT positions for those students conducting full searches.

The point is, that no matter how you slice it, the days of this program being able to claim its formerly and long touted 98% placement rate into TT positions are gone, as I have been saying for some time. (I would estimate something like 75-85% is more honest.) And while it is both comforting and entirely sensible to think this downturn is a consequence of the economy and job market factors—the Rhet-Comp market has contracted and clogged somewhat and it is increasingly common for graduates to find term positions first and then move into TT positions, as a few of our recent graduates have done—it is nonetheless important for us as individual faculty members and as a program/department to think about professionalization and mentoring and wonder if there is anything we might do better or more. I personally think we do a great job in these areas so I don't have specific recommendations or even specific concerns, just a general concern about falling placement rates which may lead us to ask some questions in the coming year(s). And, of course, these #s should also renew our concern about the need for 5<sup>th</sup> year funding, and the need for students to make good/better use of it.

**24 MA graduates:** 2 MA graduates went on to (top tier) doctoral programs; one in literary studies (Rice U) and one in Rhet-Comp (UT-Austin). One of our MA students left the program because she was accepted into a Ph.D. program in Creative Writing, Univ of Utah.

**Thesis option:** 10 graduates (4 creative; 6 critical)

**CP option:** 14 graduates; 11 critical; 3 creative

Again, the thesis option shows itself to be making a comeback returning to the roughly 40%/60% split with the CP option that was common for several years before the CP option rose to above nearly 70% during AYs 09-10 and 10-11.

### THE END

KK, YOU did nothing SLO for this year or really any year? You have the repts now and though they are total BS maybe you should include in future. For now, F it/