

To: Glynis Ridley, Chair, Department of English  
From: Stephen Schneider, Director of Graduate Studies  
Date: 19 August 2015  
Subject: DGS/Graduate Committee and Program Report, 2014-2015

Graduate Committee Members: Bronwyn Williams (Fall 2014), Bruce Horner (Spring 2015), Brenda Brueggemann, Matthew Biberman, Karen Hadley, Stephen Schneider. Bronwyn Williams, Director of the Writing Center, was on leave in Spring 2015. Kiki Petrosino, Director of Creative Writing, did not serve on the graduate studies committee this year; for this reason, the committee ran with five rather than six people.

### **Regular Activities:**

The graduate committee completed its normal slate of meetings and responsibilities this year: individual progress meetings with 2<sup>nd</sup>-year PhD students; group meetings with 1<sup>st</sup>-year and 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students in the spring about exams and degree progress; an informational meeting about the general qualifying exam for the PhD program; and MA and PhD admissions.

### **Other Accomplishments:**

It is worth noting that Annelise Gray, our senior program assistant was awarded the outstanding staff award for 2014.

The graduate committee made two sets of changes to the current graduate program guidelines. The first change was the suspension of the language requirement for two years, or until such time as reading exams are once again easily available through the Classical and Modern Languages department; should two years elapse without exams once again being available, the graduate studies committee will need to revisit this issue.

The second changes was to attendance requirements for thesis defenses. Both sets of changes were accepted by the department in Fall 2014.

### **Graduate Program Developments:**

The graduate program ran the following events:

- Orientation meetings for incoming MA and PhD students and their peer mentors
- Visitation for PhD recruits
- 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 on the job market

These events would not have happened without Annelise Gray's diligent work to organize them all on the front end. Placement and professionalization meetings were organized by Drs. Boehm, Turner, and myself. Finally, the general qualifying exam for the PhD program was composed and administered by Drs. Williams, Sheridan, and Johnson. The graduate program would not function without the work of these people and their efforts.

### *Funding for graduate students*

It seems unlikely that the Dean of Arts and Sciences will continue to fund the two fifth-year lines that former Dean Hudson had made available. While the graduate program is looking into the feasibility of securing fifth-year funding or reducing PhD teaching loads, the current data available doesn't support the continuation of the fifth-year lines.

The main difficulty is the continuing marginal success of the fifth-year pilot program. In her 2012-2013 program report, former DGS Dr. Kopelson had already flagged the problems associated with the fifth-year program. These difficulties continue, particularly the dilation of time-to-completion for the majority of PhD students and the failure of fifth-year students to secure tenure-track jobs.

That said, this year did show more positive results. Four students applied for and received 5<sup>th</sup>-year funding. Of those four, three found tenure-track jobs; one student previously funded for a fifth year (in 2013-2014) has recently secured a full time position that has the potential to become tenure-track.

The rhet/comp faculty have begun meeting to look for ways to streamline the PhD program in response to this change, but a larger problem remains for students looking to do qualitative or quantitative research for the dissertation. In these cases, little time remains following exams for students to collect data and write a good dissertation; there certainly isn't time for a student to generate a compelling writing sample or publish from their dissertation project.

One solution might lie in allowing students with these sorts of projects to apply for the business college consultant position, with that position serving as a fifth-year funding opportunity. Other solutions may involve having students begin data collection sooner, or discussing how to narrow projects down to "pilot" projects at the dissertation level.

Suffice to say, these conversations are ongoing and will likely take the next year or two to finalize.

### *PhD progress reports*

We are now completing progress reports for all PhD students, at the request of SIGS. This will provide us with the opportunity to complete data-based reviews of the graduate program, and to pinpoint areas where we might improve or revise the program's structure. These reports are currently completed by the students themselves, and include space for comments by a student's faculty mentor or academic advisor.

### *Digital Humanities Initiative*

The graduate program began exploring to digital humanities projects in AY 2014-2015. The first of these is a podcasting project that will hopefully produce not only regular graduate program podcasts, but also training materials for other students hoping to do podcasts. The second project is making use of GIS software to create maps of "Literary Louisville" and civil rights activity in Louisville. Hopefully we will also make a map of "Shakespeare in Kentucky" to launch during the Shakespeare's First Folio visit in 2016.

In the meantime, the graduate program is also pursuing grant money to expand on digital humanities projects.

### *Social Media Presence*

Finally, in an effort to increase our recruiting visibility and our communication both within and beyond the graduate program, we've set up a social media architecture making use of Wordpress, Facebook, and Twitter. This should be up and running by the start of class for Fall 2015, and will provide us with a means of distributing announcements, sharing information, and acknowledging the achievements of students and faculty in the UofL English Department.

## **Admission Details:**

### *Incoming Cohorts*

PhD: 8 new students for Fall 2015 (4 fellows and 4 GTAs)

MA: 18 new MA students were admitted for AY 2014-2015. This number remains low, and well below the 25 we would like to admit each year.

11 of the Fall 2015 MA admits received GTA funding, and we awarded 1 currently enrolled MA student with funding for her second year.

### *Applicant Pools and Recruiting*

PhD: The PhD applicant pool for fall 2015 was 41 applications, which returns us to the higher numbers we saw in 2010 and 2011. The pool was stronger than in previous years, with around 20 students who would have been acceptable for

admission. We had an excellent recruiting year, making 10 offers and having 8 of those offers accepted. To some extent this success is due to the fact that we had three strong candidates from our own MA program; but for the most part, our excellent acceptance rate was due to extraordinary faculty recruiting. We recruited nationally for the PhD program, accepting 3 internal students and 5 from across the country.

MA: The pool for MA applicants seeking GTA-ships (29 applications) was strong overall, though the total number of applications was much lower than we would have liked. Many of our MAs are from the region, and we had multiple applicants from single schools. We accepted one of our own BAs into the MA program. We have had some late applications trickle in—well past the July 24, 2015 deadline—so it remains to be seen if those numbers improve next academic year.

### *PhD Visitation Day*

PhD visitation day went smoothly this year, though much of the program was moved to the morning to accommodate LCLC activities in the afternoon (there was an atypical overlap between the two events). PhD recruits were able, however, to attend afternoon conference sessions, and to participate in the graduate student lunch that happens on Friday of the conference. Drs. Horner and Lu agreed to host the graduate reception, which was more lightly attended by faculty than usual—likely owing to competing conference and departmental events.

The visit was well attended, with all but one student electing to visit Louisville. Of the nine who visited, eight chose to attend the University of Louisville.

### *Diversity*

We were able to attract one minority candidate at the PhD level, and were fortunate enough to get a diversity fellowship for her as well. Our MA remains rather lacking in diversity, and once again we had a lack of viable international students in the PhD applicant pool.

### *Graduation and Placement*

**5 PhD Graduates in AY 2014-2015:** Four of these graduates were in their fifth year, and three of those four found tenure-track jobs. The other two students have found employment as full-time lectures at large state universities. This leaves us with a 100% placement rate into academic jobs and a 60% placement rate into tenure-track jobs.

One former student moved from a term appointment to a tenure-track job, while another secured a term appointment that has tenure-track potential. This does not substantially alter our placement rates, though it does demonstrate that University of Louisville graduates continue to actively seek and find tenure-track employment,

and that we may need to calculate placement rates based on overall alumni placement rather than by academic year.

While these rates suggest that we are likely holding steady at the 75% TT placement rate identified in the 2012-2013 program report, it remains true that the graduate faculty will likely need to continue to think carefully about mentoring and professionalization heading into the future.

It is likely that the progress reports now required by SIGS will help us think through issues of professionalization and time-to-completion in a more robust way. To that end, Annelise has been working on constructing a database that might be used in both diagnostic and predictive capacities as we set about doing further program review.

**22 MA Graduates in AY 2014-2015:** 6 MA graduates went on to top tier doctoral programs: 3 remained at UofL, one is attending Purdue, one is at South Florida, and one is at New Hampshire. Of the remaining MAs who graduated, several went on to other jobs in a variety of fields. But perhaps most importantly, these graduation numbers include some students who have been around for quite a while. With only a couple of exceptions, we look set to maintain a four-year time-to-completion for self-funded students.

*Thesis option: 1 graduate*

*CP option: 21 graduates (18 critical (86%) and 3 creative (14%))*

As is obvious, the vast majority of students elected to work on culminating projects—likely because these are viewed as less work. This has led to some problems with the quality of completed CPs, which some faculty member believe are often not ready to be submitted or discussed. This is an issue to address in the coming years.