To: Glynis Ridley, Chair, Department of English

From: Stephen Schneider, Director of Graduate Studies

Date: 10 August 2016

Subject: DGS/Graduate Committee and Program Report, 2015-2016

Graduate Committee Members: Bronwyn Williams, 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 2nd-year PhD students; group meetings with 1st-year and 2nd-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:**

The graduate committee made three changes to the structure of the PhD program. The first involved moving the due date for PhD admissions from January 5 to December 15. This decision was made necessary by the delays with regard to uploading of files created by the Christmas break.

The second change was to the committee membership for dissertation committees; these were reduced from 5 members to 4, specifically by dropping the number of required rhetoric and composition faculty from 3 to 2. The rationale for this change was twofold. First, it removes third readers who may feel less connected to the project, thereby facilitating a more streamlined approach to gathering feedback and gaining committee approval. Second, it allows the department member who is not rhetoric and composition faculty to occupy a position that is more integrated into the committee.

The third change was the revision of PhD exams. This change included moving from a written to an oral format for exams, and the removal of the SRA exam. In place of the SRA exam, students are now asked to produce a more developed prospectus with a thorough literature review. The exam format was adopted in order to have exams more closely approximate the sorts of activities students will engage in as academic professionals. It was the feeling of the committee that oral exams more closely mirror job interviews, talk and conference Q&As, and other conversational work that students will be asked to participate in.

**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. Williams and Turner. 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*

As expected, the Dean of Arts and Sciences has not renewed the fifth-year funding program that was piloted by Dean Hudson. Nonetheless, we have been able to secure an extra line through the business school, and will be able to continue to offer funding to two students requiring a fifth year.

Nonetheless, the fifth year program has caused a series of misconceptions among faculty and students about the nature of the UofL PhD program. Despite the pilot nature of the fifth-year program, faculty continue to believe that our program was a five-year program. This has also been communicated to students, with the effect of causing some unhappiness about funding being guaranteed for only four years. This also speaks to a general lack of familiarity with program parameters and guidelines. If we are to show ourselves to be good stewards of the resources we have—which will be the only way to secure program growth—faculty will need to become more familiar with the structure of the program, and do more to promote its strengths.

This year, we had a number of students opt for a fifth year, despite a lack of financial support. One student secured an assistantship through the business school, and four completed a fifth year without funding. Of those five students, three secured tenure-track employment, and one will work as a full time instructor. The remaining student was already in an administrative position running a regional writing center.

For the 2016-2017 academic year, we will have four more fifth-year students. Two will be funded by the business school, while the remaining two will receive funding in the fall from SIGS.

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. The revisions to the PhD structure should help in this regard, and the availability of limited fifth-year support through the business school will also help support students pursuing quantitative and qualitative research projects. Other solutions may involve having students begin data collection sooner, or discussing how to narrow projects down to “pilot” projects at the dissertation level.

*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 continued working on digital humanities projects in AY 2015-2016. The first of these is a podcasting project that has produced a number of graduate-studenet 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.

*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 spring of 2017, 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.

While I had hoped to have this up and running for the 2015-2016 academic year, the time required to maintain social media proved to be more than I anticipated. I’m hoping to be able to devote more time to this moving forward.

**Admission Details:**

*Incoming Cohorts*

PhD: 4 new students for Fall 2016 (2 fellows and 2 GTAs)

MA: 17 new MA students were admitted for AY 2016-2017. This number remains low, and well below the 25 we would like to admit each year.

10 of the Fall 2016 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 37 applications, which is down slightly from last year. The pool was also slightly weaker than last year, with around 12 students who would have been acceptable for admission. We had disappointing recruiting year, making 6 initial offers and having only 2 of those offers accepted. To some extent this had to do with a crunch on GTA lines, which allowed us to make only 6 offers and necessitated us making new offers only when someone declined a previous offer. This slowed us down considerably in getting offers out and we lost candidates as a result.

MA: The pool for MA applicants seeking GTA-ships (39 applications) was strong overall, and the total number of applications was much closer to what we typically expect. Total applicants for the year was 51. Our incoming MAs are more diverse in terms of where they are coming from, and we had greater diversity in terms of the schools applicants came from. We accepted three of our own BAs into the MA program. We have had some late applications trickle in—well past the July 24, 2016 deadline—so it remains to be seen if those numbers improve next academic year.

*PhD Visitation Day*

PhD visitation day went smoothly this year, and returned to an afternoon program. Dr. Williams agreed to host the graduate reception, which was again more lightly attended by faculty than usual—the recent lack of participation by faculty in graduate recruiting is cause for concern.

The visit was well attended, but did not generate the high number of acceptances as the year before. Two of six students who visited ultimately decided to attend the University of Louisville.

*Diversity*

We were unable to attract minority candidates at the PhD level, owing to a small number of available lines and the need to make offers as lines became available. 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*

**7 PhD Graduates in AY 2015-2016:** Four of these graduate were in their fifth year, and three of those four found tenure-track jobs. The other three students have found tenure-track employment. This leaves us with a 100% placement rate into academic jobs and a 85% placement rate into tenure-track jobs.

One former student 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 need to calculate placement rates based on overall alumni placement rather as well as 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.

**18 MA Graduates in AY 2014-2015**: 2 MA graduates went on to top tier doctoral programs: 1 remained at UofL, one is attending Purdue. Of the remaining MAs who graduated, several went on to other jobs in a variety of fields.

*Thesis option: 4 graduates*

*CP option: 14 graduates*

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.