M.A. IN ENGLISH

SACSCOC FIFTH-YEAR INTERIM REPORT

2007-2011

Mission Statement

The largest department in the College of Arts and Sciences, the Department of English and Communications offers an M.A. degree—the university’s only graduate program in the humanities—which prepares students for further graduate education, teaching, or other careers that demand advanced analytical and communication skills.

The Department has a primary role in the overall University mission of providing “a liberal education for all students,” and in keeping with the University’s commitment to “preserve and enhance ... knowledge,” the Department also promotes scholarly activity (including creative work) and the dissemination of research findings through publications, conferences, seminars, and other means. In the area of public service, the Department enhances the cultural climate of the University and the larger community by sponsoring lectures, readings, dramatic productions, writing awards, and other related activities.

Program Outcomes

Program Outcome I

Increase graduation rate from TBR minimum annual requirement of 5 to 6-8 per year.

Program Outcome II

Produce qualified college composition instructors and well-prepared high school teachers to meet TTU and regional needs.

Program Outcome III

Increase financial and developmental support available to M.A. students.

Program Outcome IV

Enhance student involvement and training in the Writing Center, with increased service to TTU students.
Assessment Methods and Results

Graduation Rate: Graduation figures are stable and directly linked to the number of assistantships awarded by the Department. Full-time students, including graduate assistants, typically complete the M.A. degree within two years. Until spring 2009, the Department had ten assistantships to award; this number was reduced to eight in fall 2009, due to across-the-board College budgetary reductions. Over the period 1996 to 2001, the annual average of M.A. graduates was 3.4. Over the period of the next study (2001 to 2007), the Department awarded an average of nearly six degrees each academic year. From 2007 to 2011, the Department awarded twenty-two M.A. degrees, for an annual average of 5.5 (see Table 2). Six M.A. students intend to graduate in 2011-12.

Table 2. M.A. Degrees Awarded by the Department by Academic Year, 2007 to 2011.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Degrees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-11 total:</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-11 avg:</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the 22 M.A. students who graduated in the academic years between 2007 and 2011, the overall grade point average was 3.93; the lowest was 3.67. Of these 22 students, 59% chose to write a project paper, and 41% opted to write a thesis. 82% held graduate teaching assistantships in the Department at some point during their degree program. 64% of these 22 students finished their M.A. degree within two years of enrolling as graduate students; 95% finished within three years. [Program Outcome I]

Graduate Placement: In general, graduate students in the English M.A. program have performed well. Two post-2007 M.A. graduates are pursuing Ph.D. degrees in English at Middle Tennessee State University. One is pursuing a Ph.D. in Education at Tennessee Tech University, and one is pursuing an M.F.A. in creative writing at Old Dominion University. Several current graduate students and several recent graduates are applying to Ph.D. programs. Recent graduates have read papers at annual meetings and conferences, such as those of the Popular Culture Association, The Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900, the Tennessee Philological Society, and the TTU English Studies Symposium. Nine of the 22 recent graduates (2007-2011) have held adjunct instructor positions Tennessee schools: Tennessee Tech,
Nashville State Community College, Motlow State Community College, Volunteer State Community College, Roane State Community College, and Daymar Institute. One recent graduate attends the Cecil Humphreys School of Law at the University of Memphis; another is a freelance editor. Two teach high school English at public schools in Tennessee. [Program Outcome II]

*Graduate Assistantships*: During the past two years university budget reductions necessitated reducing the number of assistantships in the M.A. program by two. The Department is looking at the possibility of using some development funds to enhance support for graduate students. One recent development may affect the attractiveness of pursuing an M.A. The State of Tennessee has recently abandoned the requirement for awarding a raise in pay for public school teachers for completing a graduate degree. Beginning in 2009-10, the stipend for an English GTA is $7,000 per academic year—an increase from $6,250 for the GTA’s first year and $6,750 for the second. Despite progress on this Outcome, the current stipend rate remains significantly lower than the stipend rate for masters-level graduate assistantships in all other departments in the College of Arts and Sciences ($7,500). [Program Outcome III]

*Alumni Surveys*: For assessing the goals through alumni surveys, the Graduate Studies Committee adopted a new survey based on Tennessee Higher Education Commission standards for the Master’s Degree but the survey has not yet been administered:

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**Survey of TTU Graduating Students and Alumni: MA Program in English**

Directions: The MA program in English at Tennessee Tech is currently undergoing an internal revision, and we would like your input into the process. If you could please fill out the survey below, you could be a great deal of help. Each statement has a scale of 1-5 (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree); please circle one number to indicate your reaction to that statement—if you have no basis to answer, feel free not to respond to that statement. There is additional space beneath that for you to provide additional comments.

1: Strongly Disagree
2: Disagree Somewhat
3: Neutral
4: Agree Somewhat
5: Strongly Agree

1. In this program I received personalized instruction.
   
   1 2 3 4 5

2. In this program I received personalized advisement.
   
   1 2 3 4 5

3. In this program I received personalized guidance from faculty.
   
   1 2 3 4 5
4. The level of instruction offered had a level of sophistication distinctly above that of undergraduate instruction.

5. The core of planned coursework was appropriate to the field of study.

6. This program allowed me to acquire the appropriate tools, techniques, and methodologies of the discipline.

7. This program allowed me to develop a basic knowledge of the research function in the discipline.

8. This program allowed me to learn how new knowledge is created in the discipline.

9. This program allowed me to learn how to think and act independently in the discipline.

10. This program allowed me sufficient room for a broad academic experience.

11. The capstone event of this program (thesis or project paper) allowed me to demonstrate my ability in the discipline.

12. This program allowed me to develop the communication skills appropriate to the degree and the discipline.

13. Coursework within this program allowed me to demonstrate and apply my knowledge of the discipline.

14. The comprehensive exam allowed me to demonstrate my breadth of knowledge in the field.

15. The comprehensive exam allowed me to integrate what I learned.
16. The workload for Graduate Teaching Assistants was both sufficient and fair.

1 2 3 4 5

17. I feel that the method of taking the comprehensive exam was fair and appropriate.

1 2 3 4 5

18. I feel that in this program I was adequately prepared for my teaching duties.

1 2 3 4 5

19. Please use the space below and any additional sheets necessary for any further comments:

Graduate Student Tutoring: Prior to the 2006-07 academic year, English graduate teaching assistants tutored in the writing center only during their first year; once they earned 18 credit hours, they taught two sections of composition. Beginning in fall 2006, second-year GTAs were assigned one section and additional tutoring hours in the Writing Center. This shift allowed the Writing Center to nearly double its hours of operation, from around 15 hours to around 30 hours each. Additionally, tutoring quality improved, since the additional 2nd-year GTA tutors were building on the previous year's tutoring experience and simultaneously gaining experience as classroom teachers. With the reduction from 10 GTA ships to 8, the operating hours of the Writing Center have likewise diminished. Even with 8 GTA tutors, the Writing center is available to students at nearly 30 hours each week. [Program Outcome IV]

Learning Outcomes

Learning Outcome I

Students will demonstrate a broad and integrated knowledge of literary history, theory, and pedagogy.

Learning Outcome II

Students will be prepared for success in Ph.D. programs in English.

Learning Outcome III

Students will be prepared for success in other areas of advanced graduate education.

Learning Outcome IV

Students will be prepared for careers in high school and community college teaching.

Learning Outcome V
Students will be prepared for careers outside academe that require advanced analytical and communication skills.

**Assessment Methods**

**Learning Outcome I**
This is assessed primarily by means of the thesis and the project paper requirement, and by the comprehensive examination required of all MA students at the end of their coursework.

**Learning Outcome II**
This can be assessed only by the success of actual students who have gone on to English PhD programs.

**Learning Outcome III**
This can be assessed only by the success of actual students who have gone on to graduate programs in disciplines other than English.

**Learning Outcome IV**
This goal is assessed by the success our students have in competing for jobs at the high school and junior college level, and how well they succeed in those positions.

**Learning Outcome V**
This goal is assessed by the success our students have in competing for jobs in business, government and not-for-profit fields, and how well they succeed in those positions. More data should be gathered relevant to this goal.

**Assessment Methods and Results**

All students in the M.A. program must write a thesis or a project paper. Either is supervised by a committee of three members of the graduate faculty and must be defended orally before that committee and any other departmental faculty who wish to attend. These theses and project papers are kept on file in the Department.

1) All students in the M.A. program must take a written comprehensive examination. This exam is devised and assessed by the student’s graduate advisory committee.

2) Faculty in graduate courses assess student progress through a variety of means. Most require research papers or some substantial piece of writing such as an annotated bibliography. Many faculty require oral reports on supplemental reading and/or on critical works. Many require written examinations covering the material presented in the course. Thus, student progress and student ability to communicate are measured frequently and appropriately. Copies of
syllabi from recent graduate courses are on file in the main English office. These syllabi reveal the variety of student outcomes assessment methods practiced by the graduate faculty. Further, faculty frequently encourage graduate students to submit papers to conferences and for publication.

During the semester in which the thesis or project paper and all coursework are completed, the student is required to pass a comprehensive examination. The questions for this examination are devised by the student’s graduate advisory committee. This written examination consists of two parts, the first related to pedagogy and the second related to the student’s thesis or project paper. The student’s graduate advisory committee grades the comprehensive exam on a pass/fail basis. The date and time for the thesis defense are made public, and all members of the graduate faculty of the Department are invited to attend. Upon successful completion of written comprehension exams, the student presents a seminar based on research for the thesis or project paper. The seminar, which will be held following the written examination and the oral defense, is open to all members of the English department. For thesis students, the graduate advisory committee formally approves and accepts the student’s thesis on behalf of the Department at the student’s successful completion of the thesis defense. For project paper students, the graduate advisory committee formally approves and accepts the student’s project paper on behalf of the Department at the student’s successful completion of the seminar. [See the following link http://www.tntech.edu/english/macompexams/ for the comprehensive examination.]

In general, graduate students in the English M.A. program have performed well. Two post-2007 M.A. graduates are pursuing Ph.D. degrees in English at Middle Tennessee State University. One is pursuing a Ph.D. in Education at Tennessee Tech University, and one is pursuing an M.F.A. in creative writing at Old Dominion University. Several current graduate students and several recent graduates are applying to Ph.D. programs. Recent graduates have read papers at annual meetings and conferences, such as those of the Popular Culture Association, The Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900, the Tennessee Philological Society, and the TTU English Studies Symposium. Nine of the 22 recent graduates (2007-2011) have held adjunct instructor positions Tennessee schools: Tennessee Tech, Nashville State Community College, Motlow State Community College, Volunteer State Community College, Roane State Community College, and Daymar Institute. One recent graduate attends the Cecil Humphreys School of Law at the University of Memphis; another is a freelance editor. Two teach high school English at public schools in Tennessee.

The department has monitored the program and made a number of changes periodically. Advising has been placed solely with the Director of Graduate Studies and the number of independent study courses has been reduced to control the overall content of the graduate student’s coursework.

Graduate students have been utilized more in the Writing Lab during the past three or so years. Recently the university opened a Learning Commons in the Library in which all the lab assistance work is done, including the Writing Lab. All first-year graduate assistants are mentored by full-time faculty members who have the graduate student observe their classes, with a different mentor each of two semesters. The Director of Composition conducts a continuous
program of workshops and teaching evaluation for adjuncts and graduate teaching assistants. All faculty who are teaching classes, including adjuncts, teaching assistants, and tenure/tenure-track faculty must undergo student evaluations. Adjuncts and teaching assistants are further evaluated by the Director of Composition. All the information which the department has received from schools and colleges about its M.A. graduates has been quite positive.

The M.A. in English has survived a number of conditions that have hampered its growth as evidenced in the narrative above. Financial support for assistantships has not improved greatly, the department was unable to hire new Ph.D. literature faculty for a number of years. The hiring of a linguistics professor, an early modern British professor, and the anticipated hiring of a late modern professor should fill in some gaps that will improve the program. The program will begin testing the graduate survey instrument. The faculty continues to be active in scholarship and publishing, as well as mentoring graduate students.
To: Observation Mentors and First-year Graduate Teaching Assistants  
From: Director of Composition  
Date: 27 November 2007  
Re: Mentoring of First-Year Graduate Teaching Assistants

All first-year graduate teaching assistants (TAs) are required to participate in several types of activities that will prepare them for teaching courses during the second year of their assistantships (and for teaching after they earn their MA degree). These activities include tutoring in the Writing Center, weekly TA group meetings, composition program workshops, response groups, and two semesters of mentored observations in a variety of courses. This spring, first-year TAs are each assigned full-semester stints in ENGL 1010 or 1020 courses.

Observation Mentors are full-time faculty members who teach composition courses and who wish to participate in the mentoring program. Only one TA will be assigned to a course at a time.

Course observations and mentorships work best when both parties know what to expect from each other. Weekly meetings about the course provide an opportunity for the mentor and the TA to develop a rapport that may sustain an ongoing and meaningful discussion about teaching. Below are general expectations and responsibilities of TAs and Observation Mentors.

Responsibilities of each first-year TA during the semester

- Attend every class meeting of the assigned observation course.
- Schedule two hours each week for office hours for students in the assigned course.
- Actively participate in various instructional aspects of the course.
- Complete various assignments based on class observations as part of TA group requirements.
- Meet weekly with the Observation Mentor to discuss course goals, plans, rationale, and assessment. Weekly meetings should not exceed an hour in length.

Responsibilities of each Observation Mentor

- Meet at least weekly with the TA to discuss course goals, plans, rationale, and assessment. Weekly meetings should not exceed an hour in length.
- Provide guided opportunities for the TA to participate under your supervision in various
Appendix B
Memo to Teaching Mentors and Second-Year Graduate Teaching Assistants

To: Teaching Mentors and Second-year Graduate Teaching Assistants

From: Director of Composition

Date: 20 August 2007

Re: Mentoring of Second-Year Graduate Teaching Assistants

All second-year Graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs) who are teaching composition are required to meet weekly with a Teaching Mentor. Regular, one-on-one interaction with a Teaching Mentor is a critically important component in the department’s efforts to provide professional support for TAs. Any faculty member with experience teaching composition may be asked to serve as a teaching mentor to a TA. This memo outlines the responsibilities, procedures, and goals for an effective teaching mentorship program. Additionally, an attached sheet provides details about mentoring assignments.

Overview: Mentoring works well in informal dialogue about issues important to both parties involved. TAs will benefit from constructive, supportive feedback regarding all aspects of their teaching. Additionally, TAs will benefit from frank discussions of the mentor’s own teaching practices and theories. Weekly meetings provide an opportunity for the teaching mentor and the TA to develop a rapport that may sustain an ongoing and meaningful discussion about teaching. In order to provide exposure to a variety of teaching orientations and to foster a broader sense of community in the composition program and in the department, each TA will be paired with a different mentor each semester.

Course Documents: The primary function of the teaching mentor is to provide support for the TA. Because the mentor will need to be informed about the TA’s course, the mentor should request that the TA provide him or her in advance with course documents (including copies of policy statement and important handouts). The mentor should assist in planning and troubleshooting as the TA designs assignment sheets and project syllabi, so it’s important for the mentor to request drafts of these documents before they are used in the classroom and for the TA to draft documents in advance.

Weekly Meetings: The mentor and the TA should schedule weekly meetings of 30-60 minutes. Weekly dialogues might address major assignments, lesson plans, handouts, activities, response and assessment strategies, grading criteria, goals and learning objectives, classroom management issues, successes, and problems. In addition, discussions may involve official procedures and professional issues, including IDEA evaluations, midterm progress reports, grade reports, and such legal issues such as privacy, harassment, liability, and plagiarism.

Teaching Observations: In addition to weekly dialogues, the teaching mentor should observe the TA in action. If possible, the mentor should observe the instructor twice. One visit should be an announced observation of a class meeting. The other visit could be an observation of student conferences, an
unannounced classroom visit, an observation of a lab class meeting, or a class meeting of a different section. The idea is for the mentor to see the TA involved in a variety of teaching scenarios. The mentor should discuss his or her impressions and suggestions with the TA after each observation.

**Student Evaluations**: At the end of the semester, the mentor should receive the TA’s completed student evaluations (Composition Program Instructor Evaluations, rather than IDEA evaluations), which should then be forwarded to the director of composition.

**Semester Report**: At the end of the semester, the teaching mentor composes a report that details the TA’s strengths and areas in need of improvement. This official report should be based on the mentor’s classroom observation(s), the course material designed and used by the TA (policy statement, assignment sheets, etc.), and the TA’s student evaluations. Copies of this report are sent to the TA, the department chair, and the director of composition.

**Checklist**: The attached checklist can serve as a cover sheet for the semester report. The mentor should indicate that he or she has seen the TA’s course documents and indicate the date(s) of teaching observations. The mentor’s semester report and the TA’s student evaluations should be enclosed with the checklist.

**Director of Composition**: Besides serving as a teaching mentor, the director assigns mentor/TA pairings, maintains all mentoring and TA teaching files, and serves as a resource person for mentors and for TAs. All concerns and questions regarding mentoring should be addressed to the Director of Composition.
Teaching Mentor Checklist

Fall 2007

Teaching Mentor: _________________________ TA: _________________________

Teaching Mentor: Please start a file for the TA so that you can consult all his/her course material easily. Complete this cover sheet/checklist and send it to the director of composition, along with your semester report and the TA’s student evaluation sheets, by the end of finals week.

The TA has shared copies of the following course documents:

_____ Policy Statement

_____ Semester General Syllabus

_____ Project 1 Assignment Sheet / Syllabus

_____ Project 2 Assignment Sheet / Syllabus

_____ Project 3 Assignment Sheet / Syllabus

_____ Project 4 Assignment Sheet / Syllabus

_____ Project 5 Assignment Sheet / Syllabus (if there is a Unit 5)

_____ Teaching Observation 1: announced (indicate observation date: ____________)

_____ Other Observation (indicate date: ______________)

_____ Student evaluations: Composition Program Instructor Evaluations (enclosed)

_____ Semester Report (enclosed)

_____ Copies of Semester Report have been sent to TA, to director of composition, and to Department Chair