

Review of the MFA Results and Report on Curricular Change

MA English

Reviewing results of student comments on the SLU Exit Survey, we find our MA students well satisfied with the quality of their teachers overall, particularly the individual care and attention their teachers give. In the last Exit Survey (1998-1999, 1999-2000), over 71% of MAs judged themselves “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied” with the effectiveness of the faculty as teachers and with the interest shown by faculty in the student’s academic development. In preparation for advanced courses, 71.5% judged themselves “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied,” and 86% were “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied” with the quality of instruction in advanced courses. The Exit Survey also indicates that 71.4% of our MAs are “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied” with the overall quality of their degree program and 85.7% would recommend Southeastern to someone interested in attaining the M.A. in English. As one student commented on the Survey about the hands-on experience in the program, “I worked in the writing center and learned a great deal about the challenges undergraduates were faced with in their writing classes with assignments that required writing.” Another wrote “My advisors/teachers in the English Dept. were absolutely the most helpful/knowledgeable resources I could have hoped for!”

Further providing assessment of our MAs’ competency in language, literature, scholarly research, and criticism, the English Department maintains the policy that all English MAs must pass at least 15 hours on the 600 level, with a total of 36 hours, all of which integrate graded written work and/or a written project involving research. They must pass two required classes: a writing-intensive class and a theory/methods class. They must pass Part 1 of the MA Comprehensive Exam, consisting of an essay written for a graduate class and revised to a publishable level, and Parts 2 and 3 of the MA , Comprehensive Exam, consisting of two timed (2 hour) essays. Part 2 requires a 2-hour timed essay on a synthetic question drawing on texts students read in courses from three broad time periods: ancient, medieval, and early modern literatures; 18th- and 19th-century literatures; and 20th- and 21st-century literatures. Part 3 requires a 2-hour timed essay in response to a question drawn from a set primary text and a list of secondary readings in one of three areas: literary studies, professional writing, or language and literacy.

To help our MAs to gain practical experience in their chosen area prior to entering their professions, we encourage selected students to participate in Internship programs in professional writing (placement in an intern position in business or industry) and language and literacy (a mentor-apprentice teacher training program). In addition, selected students can participate in Graduate Assistantships that provide professional experience in tutoring, journal production, oversight of computer labs, administration, and scholarly research.

In the area of plans after graduation, 43% of those taking the 1998-2000 Exit Survey indicated they already had full-time or part-time jobs before graduation, while 71% gained employment after graduation. Over 28% of our MAs were accepted or were awaiting acceptance into graduate school immediately after graduation, meeting our assessment goal.

To improve our English MAs’ global awareness and multicultural knowledge, the English Department is now conducting a search for one tenure-track position in the

field of World Literature/Classical Literature/Literature of the Americas with stress on issues of race and sexualities from a global perspective. This new position will expand current teaching in global issues in our department and add to the many courses specified in our Assessment Plan focusing on literature and culture from a global perspective: 32 of the English graduate courses deal in the culture, language, and literature of non-Americans, particularly 412/507 (Continental Novel), 476/576 (The >Rhetorical Tradition), 480/580 (Non-European Literature), 634 (Comparative >Lit), and 650 (Cultural Studies in Comparative Literature). Special care is taken that at least one of these global courses is scheduled each semester. Meanwhile, our faculty encourages students to take advantage of the several Study Abroad programs offered by SLU which will provide valuable real-life encounters with the places and people inspiring our literary studies to add to research and classroom experience.

One possible area for improvement, according to student ratings in the Exit Survey, is the encouragement faculty offer with regard to finding employment in the field. In this area, 14.3% gave a rating of “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied,” indicating our department should more actively help our students realize the many fields available to English majors. This problem can also be addressed through careful academic advising.