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May 7 2002

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), 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, 71.4% judged themselves "Satisfied" or "Very Satisfied," and a full 100% were "Satisfied" or "Very Satisfied" with the quality of instruction in advanced courses. The Exit Survey also indicates that 100% of our MAs are "Satisfied" or "Very Satisfied" with the overall quality of their degree program. As one student commented on the Survey, "All of the members of the department were extremely helpful and continuously aided me in numerous ways. The professors always made themselves available for questions, and they consistently helped me in my attempt to gain knowledge of literature."

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 9 hours of graduate coursework at the 500 level and 15 to 18 hours of graduate coursework at the 500 level, all of which integrate graded written work and/or a written project involving research. 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 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, 28.6% of those taking the 1998-1999 Exit Survey indicated they already had full-time or part-time jobs before graduation, while 71.4% were beginning to seek employment. Over 28% of our MAs were accepted or were awaiting acceptance into graduate school immediately after graduation, meeting our assessment goal.

Improving our English MAs' global awareness and multicultural knowledge, the English Department has recently hired two new tenure-track professors, one specializing in World Drama and the other in Literature of the Americas. They will only add to the many courses specified in our Assessment Plan focusing on literature and culture from a global perspective. 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 availability of required courses. In this area, 42.9% gave a rating of "Satisfied" or "Very Satisfied," indicating our department must evaluate the types of course offerings each semester to assure required courses are readily available. This problem can also be addressed through careful academic advising, so that the student might plan future semesters with course availability in mind.