December 12, 2003

Dr. Paul R. Meyer  
Director of Academic Affairs  
Universities and Health-Related Institutions  
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board  
P. O. Box 12788  
Austin, TX 78711

Dear Dr. Meyer:

Needless to say, all of us who participated in the on-site review for the proposed Step I PhD program in Hispanic Studies during November 6 and 7 were very pleased by very positive report that was subsequently provided by Professors E. Michael Gerli and Francisco A. Lomeli. This letter addresses the major concerns expressed in their external report. As you suggested, this response is a joint effort by Texas A&M University and the three collaborating campuses: Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, and Texas A&M International University at Laredo. Representatives from each campus have reviewed and approved this document by e-mail. A hard copy signed by the appropriate officials at each campus will follow.

Curriculum

The reviewers recommend (p. 2) that Gender Studies and Border Studies (broadly defined) be more fully integrated into the curriculum. The Department of Modern and Classical Languages at Texas A&M University plans to develop new courses in these areas, and faculty at the partner campuses will also develop courses in these areas. In addition, the heads of the departments of History—which has been developing a focus in Border Studies—and Modern and Classical Languages at Texas A&M University have begun preliminary conversations about implementing a graduate minor or certificate in Border Studies/Hispanic Studies. Additional discussions will occur with the Women’s Studies Program and with other departments (e.g., Sociology, English) that have faculty doing work in Gender Studies and Border Studies. The catalog description of the proposed PhD program will note these emphases.

Library Resources

The reviewers also suggest (p. 3) that the program begin building collections at all campuses around a specific bibliographic research core. Given the large gaps in holdings at all institutions, but especially at the collaborating campuses, the HISP program faculty will need to identify resources that are critical for their teaching and research. However, the faculty and librarians will work together to coordinate their acquisitions and to identify core areas that need to be developed. One such core might be Gender/Border Studies.
Texas A&M University already plans to give priority to these areas during the first year of its library acquisitions to support the program (at least $500,000 over the next five years). The Kingsville campus has committed to $8,500 over a five-year period for building library resources (see Dr. Juarez’s letter of 12/2/03, copy attached).

The Mary and Jeff Bell Library at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi has been collecting materials related to Mexican American Studies for decades. Many faculty members in Arts and Humanities have been involved in this collection, including heavy involvement of the faculty who will participate in the Hispanic Studies doctorate. Over the past seven years a special infusion of $60,000 has further enhanced the Mexican American collections. Expenditures continue at a rate of at least $2500 per year. In addition there are special collections that include the Kilgore collection (Texana), Dr. Hector P. Garcia Collection (Mexican American Civil Rights), Dr. Cotilde Garcia (her personal papers related to Mexican American Civil Rights and health issues for Hispanics), Nettie Lee Bensen Collection (over 1000 volumes donated by the University of Texas, most being in Spanish and all being related to Mexican or Mexican American issues), and others. Scholars from other institutions regularly travel to Corpus Christi to use our library resources. For example, the Dr. Hector P. Garcia PBS documentary (Justice for My People) relied heavily on material from the Mary and Jeff Bell Library at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi.

Attached is an updated report (i.e. since 2001) from TAMU on library holdings for the Ph.D. in Hispanic Studies. It also contains a plan for increasing and maintaining library holdings over the next 5 years. In brief, the University will spend approximately $61,400 on books, databases and periodicals in support of the Ph.D. in Hispanic Studies over the next five years. This figure does not include the Department of Language and Literature's allocation from the university. In January, the head of that department will recommend to the departmental faculty that 30% of the yearly allocation of funds go toward increasing their book collection in Hispanic Studies for the next five years.

**Faculty Workload Issues**

The external reviewers had significant concerns about the faculty workloads at the partner campuses. Each campus has drafted explicit guidelines regarding workloads and release time for faculty who develop and teach HISP graduate courses:

**Texas A&M-Corpus Christi:**

The College of Arts and Humanities at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi has adopted a rule that leads to a one-course reduction in teaching load for graduate faculty who demonstrate research activity through publication in appropriate venues. The University can accommodate additional research releases for faculty actively pursuing research and involved in the doctoral program.
Texas A&M-Kingsville:

The policy for teaching loads and release time at Texas A&M Kingsville is that the lecture contact hour value of a doctoral course is multiplied by 2. Thus a doctoral level course listed as 3 credit hours yields a teaching credit of 6 Teaching Loads Credits (TLC). Since the normal teaching load in the Department of Language and Literature is 4 courses or 12 credit hours per semester, this means that a faculty member teaching a doctoral level course will have a three-course load for the semester in which the course is taught, possibly the graduate class plus two sections of a lower-level Spanish course.

With the completion of three dissertations directed by the faculty member, a three-hour reduction of teaching load for one semester is possible.

Additionally, a faculty member who also serves as Graduate Advisor may get a one-course reduction in teaching load.

At best, a faculty member who teaches a doctoral course and is also the Director of Graduate Students will have a load of two courses in the semester in which the doctoral course is taught.

Texas A&M International (TAMIU):

The course load for TAMIU faculty members teaching a course at the doctoral-level will be as follows: 1) One course release the semester prior to teaching the course, excluding summers; and 2) one course release during the semester in which the course is taught. With the completion of three dissertations directed by the faculty member, a three-hour reduction of teaching load for one semester may be possible.

TAMIU is planning on offering SPAN 5300/HISP 6300 -Theory of Literary Analysis via distance learning during Fall 2004 with Dr. William Nichols as the faculty of record. One HISP course at the 6000-level will be offered every year. It should be noted that the faculty at TAMIU are updating the 5-year course plan for the Program, and will have the revised plan in January, 2004.

Student Financial Support

The external reviewers urge that the administration provide competitive financial support, ideally “zero-cost” to the students (p. 3). Unfortunately, limited financial resources make it impossible at this time for the University to offer financial incentives similar to those offered by the ten leading doctoral programs. That said, it is possible to offer competitive packages to the best applicants in the pool. In addition to reasonably competitive graduate-assistant and fellowship stipends, TAMU doctoral students are eligible to enroll in, and to receive the State Group Insurance Contribution (SGIP) for, the TAMU health insurance program. Though it is
impossible to offer tuition waivers to all doctoral students, the University and College of Liberal Arts currently provides full or partial tuition scholarships to a significant number of high-achieving doctoral students. If the proposal is approved, the Department of Modern and Classical Languages will receive an allocation of tuition-remission funds to help recruit and retain the best students. Also, TAMU Merit Fellowships, which are competitive with similar fellowships at other leading doctoral institutions, are awarded to 30-50 new graduate students each year, and new HISP doctoral students will be eligible to be nominated for these awards.

Student and Faculty Participation

The external reviewers observe (p. 4) that distance between the participating campuses poses certain problems for student participation. This concern is addressed in part by the fact that students at each of the campuses will be able to take the courses either on site or via distance learning. Moreover, the students' faculty committees will be in constant communication and will have the flexibility to make special arrangements for the students as needed. For example, some funds can be set aside for students who must travel to another campuses library to do research. Also, the program faculty and administrators believe it will be possible to arrange at least one meeting or event each semester that would bring all the doctoral students together in one location. Faculty exchanges, symposia, and so forth will also be explored, but resources are at present very limited for such initiatives.

Of course, if you have any questions or need further information, do not hesitate to call me or the contacts at the partner campuses.

Sincerely,

Larry Oliver
Professor of English and
Associate Dean

cc: Dr. David B. Prior
    Dr. William L. Kelly
    Dr. Charles A. Johnson
    Dr. Rick Giardino
    Dr. Craig Kallendorf
    Dr. Manuel Martin-Rodriguez
    Ms. Jeanette Phariss