Reviewers
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Graduate English Program
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I. Mission/Goal/Vision
The program's mission is to increase students' proficiency in writing, composition theory, linguistics, literature, and literary theory. The program seeks to produce in its students accomplished teachers in secondary education and community colleges, skilled professional and technical writers, and writing trainers. With its terminal degree in English and American Studies, the program offers an excellent background and foundational skills for further graduate study in pursuit of a doctorate. Expanding its goals from an emphasis on Rhetoric/Composition, the program has initiated a new, broadly conceived track of study, "Borderlands Studies." Once it is more firmly established, the new track promises to offer a program of related interdisciplinary study relevant to the cultural environment of the largely local student body that pursues the program's curriculum.

II. Observations:

A. Faculty
All faculty members we met and talked with indicated that a high level of collegiality existed among members of the graduate faculty. The interviews and the materials we reviewed—which included faculty vitae, course syllabi, theses, and term papers produced in their graduate classes—all evidence an extremely hard working cadre of faculty whose efforts in advancing their research interests, performing excellent teaching, and supplying departmental and university service all exceeded the reviewers' expectations. Given their strenuous workloads, varied academic responsibilities, and expected service, the amount of scholarly productivity among this graduate faculty is highly commendable.

B. Students
The five graduate students we met were all pursuing the track in Rhetoric and Composition Studies and seemed extremely well versed in their main field of scholarly emphasis. Among these five students, there was one new student to the program, while three were second-year students with plans to finish their degrees soon. There was also another older, non-traditional student with this group. They were all extremely enthusiastic about their experiences with the department graduate and undergraduate faculty and with the Rhetoric and Composition program as a whole. Two of them commented that a particular class they had taken in Basic Writing pedagogy and in their TA practicum had represented a life-changing experience, with the rest of the students all nodding in emphatic agreement. Their demonstrable professionalism is clearly a tribute to the excellent training they received from the graduate faculty. These exemplary students, without a doubt, would compare well with their peers in any well-regarded graduate program.

C. Curriculum/Program
Since 2007, this graduate program in English Studies has been in transition. The Program has moved from having Rhet/Comp as its primary emphasis to now offering more flexibility by having three tracks—Rhet/Comp, Literary Studies (American or British Literature), and Borderlands Studies. This shift in curricular emphasis promises to enhance the diversity of course offerings for students and expand scholarly opportunities for faculty members.
D. Facilities & Resources
a. Classrooms: The faculty and graduate students reported having at their disposal “smart” classrooms with a computer for each student in first-year composition classes. Other classroom facilities were similarly equipped with enhanced technology. This exemplary technological infrastructure elevates TAMUCC’s program of teaching first-year composition to a level equal to the best programs in the nation. The opportunity for graduate students in this program to learn to teach writing in such a technologically rich environment is highly commendable.

b. Library Holdings: Faculty and graduate students alike reported that library resources were inadequate to support their research agendas and course projects.

III. Outcome Assessment:
1) The program has long had a mechanism for assessing courses and the graduate program through exit interviews conducted by a faculty member outside of the English department. The program has also gathered additional information from students through other means, which include a Graduate Student Survey issued in Fall 2007. In these assessments, students consistently praised the graduate faculty for teaching excellence, attentiveness to students, collegiality, and accessibility. Students also praised faculty for helping them to prepare for conferences and other scholarly or professional endeavors. However, students mentioned dissatisfaction with the lack of variety in course offerings, library resources, and opportunities for independent course study with faculty. To respond to these concerns, the graduate program in Fall 2007 began offering the above-mentioned three track options as a way of providing wider course offerings.

2) A mandatory Comprehensive Exam in two tracks represents another aspect of the program’s assessment mechanism. Student exit interviews raised concerns about ambiguously worded exam questions, the relationship of their exams to their coursework, the questionable relationship between the outcome of the exams and their actual writing skills, and the lack of sufficient feedback about their performance on the exams. To address these concerns, the graduate faculty has developed a rubric for evaluating the exam, has held meetings covering exam-taking strategies, and has facilitated students with special needs.

3) Graduate students, in addition to taking their Comprehensive Exams, have a thesis or a non-thesis route as options. Pursuing a non-thesis route requires taking a capstone course, which includes a final major project, while the thesis route requires an oral defense. The reviewers’ examination of theses and final capstone projects revealed a commendable level of academic professionalism evinced by the students in a wide variety of topics. These students’ scholarly efforts reflect well on not only the students themselves, but also on their supervising faculty.

4) The program’s success can also be measured by other outcomes, which include student publication, participation in academic conferences, successful grant writing, awards, and community service. Another measure of student accomplishment is reflected by the fact that 17 former TAMUCC English graduate students were accepted by prestigious Ph.D. programs, and two students have secured tenure-track positions at Del Mar Community College and at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens. In addition, twenty one students have been employed by South Texas colleges and universities after graduation.
IV. Conclusions:
A. Strengths:
Among the many strengths found in the English Graduate Program, the faculty’s dedication and commitment to their program’s development and to their students’ professionalism truly stand out. Despite heavy teaching loads and service requirements, faculty members have achieved a commendably high degree of scholarly activity, as represented by publications (books and articles), conference presentations, and professional service at state and national levels. Moreover, several faculty members have assumed important University leadership positions across campus. Faculty members also participate in community service initiatives, such as the University Author’s Day and Young Author’s Camp. Perhaps the program’s biggest strength is reflected in and through their graduate students’ demonstrable professionalism and their contagious enthusiasm for teaching and scholarly research.

B. Weaknesses:
The weaknesses of the program include the following:
1. The lack of variety of course offerings.
2. The lack of ethnic diversity in faculty and students.
3. The Borderlands Studies track was initiated without securing sufficient faculty members to teach in this track.
4. In the refiguring of the graduate program into a three-track program, which removed the Rhet/Comp track as a requirement, the planners failed to consider the ramifications this shift would have on the allocation of TA assignments among students in the three tracks. One possible ramification is that Rhet/Comp students will be favored in receiving TA assignments. Will students in the Literary Studies and Borderlands Studies tracks have to take an extra nine hours of Rhet/Comp to be TAs?
5. Insufficient Funding for many initiatives in the Program:
   a. A lack of financial aid in the form of scholarships and teaching assistantships for students.
   b. Insufficient travel funding for both faculty and students to attend conferences and to conduct academic research.
   c. A lack of adequate library resources.

C. Recommendations:
1. The variety of course offerings could be assured by formulating a two-year schedule of course offerings available to both faculty and graduate students. This schedule should attend to the rotation of courses required by all three tracks so that at least one course per semester is offered in Rhet/Comp, Borderlands Studies, and Literary Studies in both British and American literatures. While some flexibility in the rotation is inevitable, a preset and predictable rotation will assure a needed variety of course offerings.
2. Ethnic diversity in recruiting new faculty should remain a high priority for all three tracks, especially Borderlands Studies. In order to attract and secure the most desirable candidates, the reviewers recommend that the English Department begin advertising positions and interviewing candidates before MLA. Ethnic diversity among students in this Program can be achieved by more active recruitment in undergraduate courses across the disciplines, which engage issues related to all three graduate tracks. To insure growth in the program, recruitment of ethnic minority undergraduates in other South Texas universities as well as across the American Southwest also should be more actively pursued.
3. Since the Borderlands Studies track was initiated without sufficient faculty representation of this cultural demographic to offer a sufficient variety of courses and expertise in Borderlands Studies, a priority in hiring should address this need to hire an individual representing this cultural demographic.

4. The Graduate Faculty should meet to negotiate an equitable distribution of Teaching Assistantships and scholarships in all three tracks so that non-Rhet/Comp students are fairly represented in the allocation. The faculty should assign the Graduate Committee the task of producing a policy statement insuring that these positions and scholarships are allocated in an equitable and more transparent manner.

5. To rectify funding-related issues, the Reviewers recommend the following:
   a. Entities that grant funding for scholarships and TA appointments must be urged to identify and notify scholarship recipients in a more timely manner in order to recruit and retain the highest quality student candidates for the Program. Teaching assistantships and scholarships should be allocated and awarded to the most worthy candidates in all three tracks.
   b. Greater travel funding for faculty and students to attend conferences and to conduct academic research will elevate the stature of graduate program.
   c. The Department should aggressively pursue the $30,000.00 of Higher Education Funding (HEF) identified by Dean Richard Gigliotti, targeting the gaps in library resources to support high level research in the three tracks of the program.
   d. Funding for a position in Instructional Development, supplementing the Faculty Renaissance Center’s resources, to be employed in aiding the English faculty in creating technology-based electronic materials for their courses, is highly recommended.