

Annual Academic Assessment Report
M.A. and Ph.D. Programs in English
May 13, 2016

Results of Analysis of Assessment of Student Learning Outcome

Assessment data regarding M.A. and Ph.D. students' comprehensive/candidacy exams, thesis/dissertation defenses, professional presentations and publications, and job placement indicate that the M.A. and Ph.D. Programs in English are achieving all six student learning outcomes and accomplishing all three program goals. (For descriptions of the program goals, student learning outcomes, and means of assessment, see the attached Academic Assessment Plan, submitted spring of 2015.)

1. Exams and Defenses

During the last five years (from the fall of 2011 through the spring of 2016), 48 M.A. students and 36 Ph.D. students completed their programs and graduated. During this time 34 M.A. students successfully defended a thesis to graduate, and 14 M.A. students passed the M.A. comprehensive exam to graduate. For the last several years, M.A. students choosing the thesis option also have had their thesis prospectuses reviewed and approved before being allowed to start writing their theses. Ph.D. students have always been required to write and successfully defend dissertations to graduate. Before being allowed to start their dissertations, these students also must pass a written candidacy exam in a broad area of specialization and an oral candidacy exam in a more narrow area. Overall, students' successful completion of M.A. comprehensive exams, M.A. theses, Ph.D. candidacy exams, and Ph.D. dissertations indicates that the M.A. and Ph.D. Programs in English are achieving Student Learning Outcomes 1 and 2 and Program Goal 1.

The average time to degree for Ph.D. students who graduated during the last five years was approximately 18 semesters (6 years), and the average time to degree for M.A. students who graduated during this time was approximately 12 semesters (4 years). It is important to note, however, that the average time to degree for graduating M.A. students who started the program in the last five years was 6 semesters (2 years). When the directors of the M.A. and Ph.D. programs started coordinating the programs in the fall of 2011, they took steps to reconnect with students who had started the M.A. program prior to 2009 but not yet completed their theses/comprehensive exams, advising approximately 11 of these students through to graduation. Although the graduation of previously discontinued students was a positive development for the department as well as the students, their graduation increased the average time to degree for students who completed the M.A. program over the last five years. Overall, the average time to degree for students completing the Ph.D. program indicates that the Ph.D. program is achieving Student Learning Outcome 5 and Program Goal 3. Analysis of the average time to degree for students completing the M.A. program suggests that the English Department might

consider more flexible and efficient means for M.A. students to complete their final projects and graduate. We hope our new M.A. degree requirements, if approved, will aid in improving our average time to degree.

2. Presentations, Publications, Honors, and Job Placement

During the last three years (from the spring of 2013 through the spring of 2016), students in the M.A. and Ph.D. programs presented papers and published scholarship on a diverse group of authors and a wide range of literary, cultural, linguistic, and theoretical areas. During this time current M.A. and Ph.D. students presented 88 papers at professional conferences and published 19 articles, book chapters, dictionary entries, or creative writing pieces (the publications of one article and two dictionary entries are pending). (Note that we are still collecting publication and presentation information for spring of 2016.) Of special note is that four of the papers received outstanding-presentation-at-conference awards from the sponsoring organizations (the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, the Carson McCullers Society, the College English Association, and the Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association). Overall, the students' significant level of scholarly contribution indicates that the M.A. and Ph.D. programs are achieving Student Learning Outcomes 3 and 4 and Program Goal 1.

Our M.A. and Ph.D. students over the last three years also have had the high quality of their scholarship and their serious dedication to the discipline acknowledged in a range of ways. Honors that they have received outside of the Department of English include 1 Fulbright scholarship to study and teach at a university in Turkey for a year, 4 James J. Hudson Doctoral Fellowships (awarded by the Graduate School), 3 Fulbright College Dissertation Research Awards, 1 National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute Fellowship, 2 African and African American Studies Graduate Fellowships, 1 travel award for an outstanding conference proposal (Center for the Study of Genders and Sexualities), and 3 elections to officer positions for regional or national organizations (secretary of the Nineteenth-Century Literature Committee for the South Central Modern Language Association, Midwest Region's Director of Communications for the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students, and member of the Graduate Student Committee for the Medieval Academy of America).

Students completing the M.A. and Ph.D. programs during the last three years received a variety of teaching and nonteaching positions. Job placement was unavailable for 8 of the 35 students who completed the M.A. program from 2013 through spring of 2016 (4 of the 8 graduated spring of 2016, so we are still in the process of collecting information on them), but of the 27 graduates of the M.A. program for whom there was placement information, 13 received nonteaching positions, 8 received teaching positions, and 6 started new degree programs. Of the 13 nonteaching positions, 3 were corporate-director or corporate-manager positions, 3 were writer-editor positions, 1 was a corporate administrative-assistant position, 1 was a position for a university-level academic counselor, 1 was a director of communications position, 1 was a position at a video marketing start-up

company, 1 was a social media marketer/producer position, 1 was a library assistant position, and 1 was an IT support specialist position. Of the 8 teaching positions, 7 were at the secondary level, and 1 was at the primary level. Of the 6 new degree programs, 5 were Ph.D. programs in English, and 1 was an M.A. program in teaching. Job placement data was unavailable for 4 of the 27 students who completed the Ph.D. program from 2013 through spring of 2016 (2 of the 4 graduate spring of 2016, so we are still in the process of collecting information on them), but of the 23 graduates of the Ph.D. program for whom there was placement information, 18 received teaching positions, 4 received nonteaching positions, and 1 started a doctoral program in Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies. Of the 18 teaching positions, 17 were at the college/university level, and 1 was at the secondary level. Of the 17 teaching positions at the college/university level, 12 were tenure-track positions at the level of assistant professor, and 5 were non-tenure track positions at the instructor level. The 4 nonteaching positions received by graduates of the Ph.D. program were associate broker at a real estate company, assistant director of a university program, academic records assistant in a university office, and a position with the U.S. Department of Education. Overall, the students' successful level of placement into teaching positions, nonteaching positions, and new degree programs indicates that the M.A. and Ph.D. programs are achieving Student Learning Outcome 6 and Program Goal 2.

3. External Committee Review

In the spring of 2013, an external committee of three faculty members in English from other institutions visited the English Department and reviewed all its programs, including the M.A. and Ph.D. Programs in English. The external committee's report included two important suggestions about the M.A. program: 1) that its "coverage model at the graduate level, however commendable in principle, may be out of sync with national trends in the discipline and with the current TT faculty size," and 2) that the department should consider (also because of national trends and tenure-track faculty size) "eliminating the M.A. thesis requirement and, perhaps, substituting for this requirement a seminar or workshop in revising seminar papers into journal articles" or "scholarly papers that might be included in applications for doctoral programs."

Any Changes to Degree/Certificate Planned or Made on the Basis of the Assessment and Analysis

The English Department routinely folds new assessment results into the administration of its graduate programs and has been using the above results in a variety of ways to continue monitoring and strengthening the M.A. and Ph.D. Programs in English. For example, in considering the external committee review, the department formed a Graduate Reform Committee of eight faculty members and one M.A. student, and the committee revised the degree structure of the M.A. program to include a generalist concentration as well as a new specialist concentration, a thesis option as well as a new portfolio option, a portfolio workshop course required for students who choose the portfolio option, and an introduction to graduate studies course required of all incoming M.A. students. These revisions to the M.A. program

should make the structure of the program more flexible and more in line with current best practices and the size of the faculty in English. In particular, the option to complete a portfolio for the program's final research project and the addition of a portfolio workshop course should help M.A. students complete their degrees in a more timely fashion. We submitted these proposed changes to the M.A. program last spring through the University's Program Management system, and these have now been approved through 21 of the 22 stages of the approval process. At this point, we are waiting on only the Catalog Editor's final approval, and we anticipate making the revised program structure available to our incoming M.A. students fall of 2016.

Furthermore, the department's Professionalization Committee has been considering assessment results in planning and implementing workshops and other activities for M.A. and Ph.D. students. For example, the placement of M.A. graduates into a balance of secondary-level teaching positions and corporate positions is positive confirmation that the committee's inclusion of careers outside, as well as inside, academia is helping students respond productively to the current state of the academic job market in the humanities. Moreover, the department has started offering a graduate-level course on career options outside the conventional path of teaching as well as a course through which the department can facilitate graduate internships in areas such as grant writing, editing, and publishing. These new workshops and courses are, of course, being offered in addition to courses and workshops designed to prepare students for professional activities such as presenting conference papers, publishing article, and going on the academic job market.

The Director and Assistant Director of the M.A. and Ph.D. programs have also been using the assessment results to improve strategies for advising students and disseminating information about the programs. For example, the directors developed a new platform and new content for the department's website pages on the M.A. and Ph.D. programs--which will continue to be revised as the M.A. program changes are put into effect and we continue to balance our emphasis upon academic and alternative-academic professional preparation. To support graduate students in completing their program on schedule, a new advising web page was added in 2015 that includes information on "M.A. Requirements and Timeline," "Ph.D. Requirements and Timeline," and "Exams, Prospectuses, and Reading Lists." To encourage students to continue making significant scholarly contributions in their areas of research, new web pages were also added last year on "Graduate Student Awards, Publications, and Presentations" and "Professionalization Resources." To continue supporting students in their preparation for professional careers inside or outside of academia, a new page on "Career Resources" was added.

In conjunction with the History Department, we've applied for an NEH Next Generation Humanities Ph.D. Planning Grant for the period of August 2016-August 2017. If we win the grant, it will enable us to revamp our Ph.D. curricula and degree program to prepare our students for a wider range of future employment opportunities. We hope to cultivate strategic partnerships with nearby nonprofits, corporations, and foundations unique to the Northwest Arkansas area that will lead to training and employment opportunities for our Ph.D. graduates.

Finally, we have developed a new Graduate Student Handbook, which thoroughly covers program requirements, resources, and information about faculty, as well as our evaluation of graduate student progress and exams, prospectuses, and reading lists. We plan to circulate it to M.A. and Ph.D. students in the fall.

Any Changes to the Assessment Process Made or Planned

We plan to continue the assessment process we've been developing over the last several years. The development of a focused Strategic Initiatives Committee, chaired by Dr. Geoffrey Davis and made up of both faculty and graduate students, will serve to focus efforts on implementing graduate student concerns as pinpointed by the GSE survey conducted last summer.

Academic Assessment Plan M.A. and Ph.D. Programs in English Submitted Spring 2015

Program Goals

1. Students in the M.A. and Ph.D. programs should acquire specialized knowledge and develop academic skills in preparation for making scholarly contributions to their fields of research.
2. M.A. and Ph.D. students should also gain professionalization skills and knowledge in preparation for going on the job market or applying to other graduate programs.
3. M.A. and Ph.D. students should be able to complete their degrees in a timely fashion.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. M.A. students should be able to write and defend an original thesis of 50-75 pages or to pass a written comprehensive exam.
2. Ph.D. students should be able to write and defend an original dissertation of 250-350 pages and to pass a written candidacy exam covering a broad area of specialization as well as an oral candidacy exam covering a more narrow research area.
3. M.A. and Ph.D. students should be able to develop, submit, and present papers for professional conferences.
4. Ph.D. students should also be able to develop, submit, and publish journal articles.
5. M.A. students should be able to complete their degrees within 2 years, and Ph.D. students should be able to complete their degrees within 6 years.
6. Graduating M.A. and Ph.D. students should be able to secure employment, or to pursue additional education, that will aid them in developing professional careers.

Process for Assessing Student Learning Outcomes

1. Timeline:

Assessment data regarding M.A. comprehensive exams, M.A. thesis defenses, Ph.D. candidacy exams, and Ph.D. dissertation defenses are collected and analyzed throughout the year as the exams and defenses are scheduled. Data regarding M.A. and Ph.D. students' conference presentations and journal publications are collected and analyzed at the end of each year, as is information about the placement of graduating students into jobs and new degree programs. At the end of each year, an academic review report is also generated for, and sent to, each student. Additionally, in conjunction with university assessment efforts, an external committee evaluates the M.A. and Ph.D. programs every five years.

2. Means of Assessment:

An advisory committee of three faculty members assesses the comprehensive exam written by each M.A. student who chooses the program's exam option.

An advisory committee of three faculty members assesses the thesis prospectus of each M.A. student who chooses the program's thesis option, and a thesis committee of three faculty members assesses the student's performance at his or her thesis defense.

An advisory committee of three faculty members assesses each Ph.D. student's knowledge of a broad area of specialization during the student's written candidacy exam.

An advisory committee of three faculty members assesses each Ph.D. student's knowledge of a narrow area of specialization, typically the area to be pursued by the student in his or her dissertation research, during the student's oral candidacy exam.

A dissertation committee of three faculty members assesses each Ph.D. student's performance at the student's dissertation defense.

The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) and Assistant Director of Graduate Studies (ADGS) collect and analyze assessment data about M.A. and Ph.D. students' conference presentations and journal publications.

The DGS and ADGS collect and analyze assessment data about the placement of graduating M.A. and Ph.D. students into jobs and new degree programs.

In preparing students' academic review reports, the DGS and ADGS assess each student's overall progress in completing program requirements (coursework in English studies, coursework and proficiency exams in foreign languages, comprehensive exams and thesis defenses for M.A. students, candidacy exams and dissertation defenses for Ph.D. students). Each academic review report indicates whether a student is making satisfactory progress and, if

not, what the student should do to make better progress, and the report is sent to the student as well as to the dean of the Graduate School.

Every five years, in conjunction with university assessment efforts, an external committee of three faculty members from English departments at other institutions evaluates the M.A. and Ph.D. programs and submits an assessment report to the department chair college dean.

3. Using and Reporting Results:

A graduate reform committee considers the assessment results in evaluating and revising the requirements and curricula for the M.A. and Ph.D. programs, and a graduate professionalization committee considers the results in planning and implementing professionalization activities for students in the programs. The department chair takes the results into consideration when scheduling and assigning graduate classes, and the DGS and ADGS use the results to improve their strategies for advising current students and for disseminating information about the M.A. and Ph.D. programs to current and prospective students. The DGS and ADGS are scheduled to submit a report on the program assessment findings and their applications to the department chair, college dean, and university provost on June 1, 2015.