

Review of the MFA Results and Report on Curricular Change MA English: Effective April 2010

Reviewing results of graduate 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 (2008-2009), over 87.5% 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, 77.5% judged themselves “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied,” and 87.5% were “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied” with the quality of instruction in advanced courses. The Exit Survey also indicates that our MAs are very satisfied with the overall quality of their degree program and would recommend Southeastern to someone interested in attaining the Master of Arts degree in English. As one student commented on the Survey, “I would highly recommend the Master’s program in English. The passion of the professors is evident in the classroom, and in the demands they place on your writing. The classes are organized in such a way as to create as many workshop and small group situations as possible. This combination makes for a demanding and ultimately rewarding experience.” Another student responded: “Southeastern’s English MA gave me the opportunity to study various areas of interest. While I was in the Creative writing concentration, I was able to take classes in Literature, Publishing and Education as well. I believe because of this, my own education was well-rounded and comprehensive.”

Further providing assessment of our MAs in English competency in language, literature, scholarly research, and criticism, the English Department maintains the policy that MAs in English must pass a writing-intensive course for one professional area of English. MAs in English must also pass at least 15 hours of graduate coursework at the 600 level, courses which require at least one written project involving research, within a total of 36 hours of graduate coursework. MAs in English must pass Part 1 of the MA Comprehensive Exam, consisting of an essay written for a graduate class and revised to a publishable level as judged by a grading committee and director from the graduate faculty. Students completing a thesis may use the successful defense of that thesis to satisfy this requirement. MAs in English must pass Part 2 of the MA Comprehensive Exam, consisting of a timed (3 hour) essay on a question that requires student knowledge of a major work and ten to twelve important critical studies directly related to that work, in one of three areas: literary studies, professional writing, or language and literacy. MAs in English with a concentration in Creative Writing, Language and Literacy, or Professional Writing must successfully write and defend a Master’s Thesis as part of their program. Students must also pass two required courses: a writing-intensive course and a theory-methods course.

To help our MAs 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 internship position in business or industry), language and literacy (placement in internship position in teaching) or the teaching of college writing (mentor-apprentice program teaching assistantship and teaching fellowship). In

addition, selected students can participate in graduate assistantships that provide professional experience in tutoring, journal production and publishing, oversight of computer labs, administration, and scholarly research.

The Exit Survey indicates that the encouragement faculty offer with regard to finding employment in the field is much improved. Previously, 14.3% students gave a rating of “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied,” in this area indicating our department should more actively help our students realize the many fields available to English majors. The percentage of students who judged themselves “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied,” on the 2008-2009 Exit Survey has risen to 62.5%.

In the area of plans after graduation, 100% of our MAs were employed or accepted into doctorate programs, meeting our assessment goal.

To improve our English MAs’ global awareness and multicultural knowledge, the English Department has recently hired a visiting professor who regularly teaches our courses on literatures of the African diaspora; the Department also regularly offers numerous courses focusing on literature and culture from a global perspective. Special care is taken that at least one of these global courses is scheduled every semester. Meanwhile, our faculty encourages students to take advantage of several Study Abroad programs offered by Southeastern which will provide real-life encounters with the places and people inspiring our literary studies to add to research and classroom experience.

One possible area of improvement according to ratings in the Exit Survey is in the availability of the required courses related to majors. This problem can be addressed through careful academic advising, ensuring that students are aware of the usual rotation of classes upon admittance to the program, so that the student might plan future semesters with course availability in mind, and by conducting compulsory follow-up consultations to discuss students’ progress throughout the program.