Publishing, Not Perishing: The English Ph.D. Program at the University of South Florida

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OTHER DEPARTMENTS . . . OTHER WAYS

This column provides department chairmen the opportunity to share with their colleagues new curricular approaches, innovations, departmental experiments, and other matters of mutual interest.

PUBLISHING, NOT PERISHING:
THE ENGLISH PH.D. PROGRAM
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

John R. Clark and Helen H. Popovich
University of South Florida

This report describes a program that has almost been forced to avoid the typical or traditional fixities of graduate studies in English. To put it bluntly, we have acquired our experience from a brand new Ph.D. program in those "impossible years," the recessional seventies. At the outset, therefore, we want to assert clearly, lest we be misunderstood, that the following remarks are not intended to serve as a green flag, waving dozens of eager universities onto the overcrowded Ph.D. track, and, what is worse, permitting our academic factories to discharge from their production lines hundreds of burnt-out and unemploy-able degree holders. Rather, we wish to suggest that existing Ph.D. programs need either to concentrate their services or to provide more of them, to broaden their vision and expand their range of operations.

The University of South Florida, a comprehensive urban university, opened its doors in 1960. It was authorized to offer the M.A. in English and the M.A. in Teaching English in 1967 and to offer the Ph.D. in English in 1971. In the seven years since the Ph.D. program began, more than eighty students have been enrolled. Nine have completed their doctoral work, and all nine have found full-time employment—teaching at the college level.

Thus, although its scale is small, South Florida's Ph.D. in English has remained healthy, has even flourished, even though the university is not widely known outside the Southeast, even though the department's budget has been cut to the extent that it can grant only half as many teaching assistantships as it did six years ago, and even though there is a generally acknowledged oversupply of English Ph.D.'s. Our ability to attract doctoral students and to place them in teaching positions when they receive their degrees has been enhanced precisely because the department has gone beyond the traditional graduate school in its recruiting efforts and in the development of a sharply focused, two-pronged program that emphasizes both teaching and publishing. Nationally, given the job crisis, the debate still continues: whether to retain a "traditional" degree program or to become vocationally oriented. The answer appears simple: we must do both.

With low enrollments for the first two years, South Florida's English Ph.D. program barely limped along. In 1973, however, with the Board of Regents threatening to abolish "unproductive" programs in the state university system, the department realized that to protect its Ph.D. it would have to take a more active role in attracting new students.

A brief analysis of our masters program revealed that many of our first students had been place-bound English teachers, so we proceeded more deliberately to take advantage of the university's urban setting and aimed our recruiting efforts at the potential M.A. and Ph.D. students in the greater Tampa Bay vicinity. Within seventy miles of the university, an hour and a half's driving distance, there are some fifteen colleges, a dozen community colleges, and more than fifty high schools. Each of these institutions employed English teachers who had not begun their doctoral studies, and some who had not even started their master's work, and who therefore constituted our largest body of potential graduate students. To a considerable extent, we refocused our program to meet their needs and then made a concerted effort to tell them about it.

We designed and printed an attractive brochure that outlined the requirements for each of the English graduate programs, indicated the kinds of financial aid available to graduate students, described the procedure for applying to the graduate school and the graduate courses offered by the department. In addition, the brochure listed the graduate faculty, including their ranks, the schools from which they received their last degrees, their areas of expertise, and their major publications, and provided a free mail-in postcard on which the potential student could request application forms, a catalog, and additional information about the program.

Then the chairman, the associate chairman, and the director of graduate studies got in touch with the chairmen of the various colleges and community colleges and the high school language arts supervisors in the area to inform them of the program, to enlist their support in encouraging their teachers to upgrade their credentials, and to schedule times when we could meet individually with their respective faculties to discuss graduate studies in English at South Florida. Most of one spring and summer was spent in this promotional work. By fall the department's M.A. enrollment had more than doubled, and the doctoral
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enrollment had grown sufficiently so that we could realistically expect to graduate at least three or four Ph.D.'s per year. To keep the enrollment at this higher level, the department has continued to distribute its brochure widely; and before each registration period it sends the high school, community college, and college English departments in the area a quarterly newsletter describing in detail the graduate courses in English that will be offered during the forthcoming term. Last year the department assumed the editorship and responsibility for publishing the *Florida English Journal*, the magazine of the Florida Council of Teachers of English, which has more than thirteen hundred high school teachers as subscribers.

But successful recruiting alone was obviously not enough to keep a graduate program healthy. In this era of reduced teaching opportunities in English at the college level, the department also felt the need—and obligation—to assume the initiative and the responsibility for making its graduates competitive in the job market. To this end, we adapted our program to accommodate the part-time, nonresident student, developed an intensive intern program in college teaching, made significant changes in the traditional research and bibliography course, worked actively to get student manuscripts into print and student papers onto the programs of professional associations, and established awards for outstanding teaching and research among the students.

Since many students in the program have full-time teaching positions, the department schedules most of its graduate courses to meet only one evening a week. In addition, it devises short-term summer courses to correspond with the summer vacation schedules of community college and public school teachers. In fact, summer offerings are alternated in such a way that a person can obtain a doctoral degree by attending in the summers only. The department also offers directed-reading and independent-study courses so that students living beyond easy commuting distance can progress toward their degrees even during terms when they cannot be on campus.

When students do enroll in the doctoral program, they are required to take a course in the teaching of upper-level classes in composition or literature. (M.A. students are required to take an equivalent course in teaching lower-level classes.) The student selects two professors with whom he wishes to take his internship then helps write the syllabus for each of their classes. delivers some lectures, assists in designing and grading the examinations, counsels students on writing term papers, and assists in grading these papers. The professor instructs and supervises the graduate student in the methods of preparing and presenting the course material. Throughout the term the professor discusses the student's performance and offers constructive criticism designed to increase the student's teaching effectiveness. At the conclusion of the term, all students are required to write a paper evaluating the internship—an assignment that makes them focus on teaching as a combination of skills that can be learned and improved on. A beneficial side effect of this internship is that it provides each graduate with two established professors who, in letters of recommendation, can speak knowledgeably about the candidate's teaching abilities.

But to compete in today's market, Ph.D.'s need to do more than become effective teachers. They also need to demonstrate their ability to publish. South Florida's English department has taken three major steps not only to develop this ability in its graduate students but also to foster the habit of publishing.

First, we have revised the traditional research and bibliography course and have required all students to take it on entering the graduate program. In the normative vein, the bibliography course familiarizes the student with all the standard reference tools: the dictionaries, bibliographies, concordances, and, particularly, the crucial books and journals concerned with the study of English and American literature. The student is trained to use microfilm, special collections, rare books, and interlibrary-loan facilities.

But the course also helps the student acquire skills that are outside the usual syllabus. Thus, the course includes information about, and training in, professional activities. For example, the students are disciplined in writing adept *curricula vitae*; guided in composing job application letters; coached in interview techniques; and acquainted with the MLA *Job Information List*, the Chronicle of Higher Education, and similar job information sources. They are introduced to the Scholar's Market, the Writer's Market, the bibliography of "V.I.P. Publications" in small journals devoted to a single author, the International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses, directories of periodicals publishing scholarship in literature, and innumerable journals that publish notes and short essays. Then they are given advice about preparing and submitting manuscripts for publication. Students are asked to read a variety of articles and reviews and to critique them by evaluating their logic, scholarship, organization, cogency, and style. Finally (and this is an assignment made at the outset of the course), the students are asked to submit, at the end of the course, two papers that they have polished and prepared for publication: a scholarly or critical article and a short note. All the papers are read with an eye to revision for publication, and the students are encouraged to submit the better papers to appropriate journals. Hence, from the beginning of their graduate studies, the students are trained in serious scholarly writing—and motivated to find publishers for their own manuscripts. In this course, therefore, the students learn early on what graduate
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Curious enough, there will be many objections to a department that openly both caters to the training of competent teachers of literature and fosters immediate, or "premature," publishing. Perhaps doctoral programs have existed too long in a rarefied and refined atmosphere. For if the university does not train its apprentices to think, to teach, and to write about language and literature, then we cannot begin to guess what it does believe it should be doing. Doubtless, graduate education in this country has too long been modeled on an analogy with the abstract conception of "pure science." The American intelligentsia, at any rate, have long been ill at ease with the utilitarian and pragmatic emphases of their own society. Yet, if we recollect that the original intent of the Academy was to produce philosophers; that the Ph.D. was initially a scholarly degree, with its dissertation intended to serve as a published sample of the candidate's work; that, once employed at a university, the new degree holder is immediately judged as teacher and as publishing scholar—if we remember all these facts, it might well seem that far too many university factories produce in their doctorates men and women who do not know how to teach or to write. We are not pleading or arguing here for criteria that favor teaching competency and demonstrated publishing ability, for the matter is entirely out of our hands. Everywhere in academia these criteria already are the established requisite standards.

The success of these efforts can be measured by the accomplishments of the students. The average South Florida Ph.D. in English has published one or two articles, a couple of abstracts, and three to five book reviews and has read at least one paper at a professional conference. One of our more active students has read four papers, has published two articles and ten book reviews, and has recently secured a book contract. Another has read four papers, has won four awards (two for scholarly papers), has published four articles and three book reviews, and now has three additional articles under consideration by major journals. A recent English Ph.D. who is a full-time associate professor in the college of business and a specialist in business communication wrote her dissertation on management theory in the Strangers and Brothers series of novels by C. P. Snow. On reading the preface, Snow said, "I found this fascinating, interesting, probably the most interesting thing ever written about my work." At present this study is being considered for publication by a major university press.

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1 For an account of the jobless at the 1977 MLA Convention, see "Those Doctoral Dilemmas," Time, 9 Jan. 1978, p. 57.
3 The department entertained the chairmen from the local colleges at a luncheon on campus. In addition, when the high school English supervisors conducted their countywide spring meetings of English faculty, the chairman and associate chairman attended the sessions, provided numerous handouts, and arranged for professors to visit high schools to talk further with faculty and even to give specialized class lectures.
4 Students with creative interests and talents may substitute for one of these assignments a work of fiction or poetry. They, too, are informed about publishing outlets and encouraged to submit manuscripts.
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