Task Force on Graduate Education: Selective Excellence

Program Ratings and Rationale

Program: English M.A., M.F.A., Ph.D.
Rating: Exemplary

English offers an array of graduate programs, including the MA and PhD in Literary Studies, and the MFAs in Non-fiction Writing and Creative Writing. The English Department is ranked 15th among public institutions by US News and World Report. The English doctoral program has a strong and high quality applicant pool. The program is selective with its admissions and enjoys a diverse student body. Students are recognized as being highly competitive for internal and external awards. Funding is dependent largely on TA ships and student awards. Historically, median TTD (7.0 yrs) and %completion (42%) of the PhD have been below average, but improvements are being made. Placement is very good with 88% of students who graduated in 2003-08 finding initial placements in academic positions. The English program benefits from the high quality MFA programs and the various connections that it has across campus (e.g., Center for the Book, International Writing Program, etc). Continued improvement in the TTD and completion standards is encouraged for the doctoral program. English is working well with internal sources of support (Grad College SIF program), but expansion of funding opportunities is also encouraged. With the strength of the collective English graduate programs, it would seem an opportune time to develop external funding and especially private fund-raising mechanisms.

The MFA program in Creative Writing (also known as the Iowa Writers’ Workshop) offered the world’s first graduate degrees in Creative Writing and has been the number one program for 73 years. The program enjoys a very strong reputation. There is very high demand for this extremely selective program. Creative Writing graduates are successful in garnering national recognition for their work. For example, in 2007-08, Workshop graduates were represented among the winners of the National Book Awards, the Pulitzer Prizes, the MacArthur Fellowships, the Whiting Foundation Awards, the Guggenheim Fellowships, and the National Book Critics Circle Awards.