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GRADUATE EDUCATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES: A VIEW FROM FIVE UNIVERSITIES

IN 1983, the MLA Executive Council appointed the Commission on Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics, charged in part with examining the current state of graduate education in the field. As part of the commission's investigations, several members along with the MLA Foreign Language Programs staff visited five universities with doctoral programs in the foreign language fields and spoke with faculty members, students, and administrators.

The sample of institutions, while not wholly representative, was balanced by type of institution and geographic location. The five universities visited (here given fictional names) were North, Central, and South, all public institutions, each in a different region of the country; and Jones and Smith, private institutions of different characters. Sizes ranged from just over 20,000 to just over 50,000 total full-time equivalent enrollment, according to the Higher Education Directory. We visited only large institutions because they produce the greatest number of PhDs in language fields.

Each visit was handled in roughly the same manner. A long checklist of questions, mailed in advance, asked about programs, recruitment of students, student progress, training of teaching assistants, and opinions about the state of the field and about the future. Although we did not cover these questions in our interviews, the questionnaire laid the groundwork for our discussions.

Our faculty hosts were presented with the MLA's tentative assessment that the field is experiencing a change for the better. We already knew that enrollments were rising and job opportunities increasing. Other information reaching us suggested that departments have radically changed their views on what graduate students should be prepared for. We specifically mentioned to our hosts (1) the recognition on the part of many departments that most of their PhDs would spend most of their careers teaching language and general culture, and not their more narrow fields of literary or linguistic specialization, and (2) the decision by many departments to shoulder the responsibility of preparing their PhD students better for these tasks by providing broader academic training, placing greater emphasis on oral proficiency, and offering more extensive training in language teaching. We then asked our hosts: Does your view of the university world agree with ours? What has happened in your institution over the last five years? What is your vision of the future? What problems and challenges do you see facing the profession and how should we deal with them?

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When we met with graduate students from the various departments, we introduced ourselves in the same way. We asked them how they got interested in their fields, why they had chosen their particular institutions for graduate study, and what their career expectations were. In addition, we queried them about their teaching experiences.

Each campus visit lasted several days. Individual meetings with deans, department chairs, other faculty members, and graduate students lasted about an hour.

Our visits showed us that there is little uniformity in the world of graduate education. The universities we sampled lie along a spectrum of philosophies ranging from narrowly specialized scholarly training of graduate students in which language mastery plays an ancillary role to a much broader training that focuses on language as a skill and produces teachers of foreign languages and cultures who are vitally concerned with the basic undergraduate language instruction program. This is not to say that the latter approach does not give students training as literary scholars or that the former does not instruct them in teaching basic language courses, but the two emphases are strikingly different and are clearly reflected in the interests and aspirations of their respective graduate students.

It must be emphasized that breadth of training, preparation for language teaching, and language mastery—the concerns that prompted our visits—were the foci of our discussions. We did not attempt in any way to evaluate the programs preparing students for scholarship, nor did we intend our visits to denigrate that aspect of the PhD program.

North University is a public institution. Its promotional brochures tout it as a "leading research university," and the faculty know that their purpose is to train scholars. As one department chair put it, "Our goal is to achieve the traditional goals better and better."

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In the view of most faculty members, North is of such stature that any tightening of the job market or any move by hiring institutions to seek broader or differently directed training will not affect the employment prospects of North's graduates. The German department, for example, after a recent program review, streamlined the PhD program by further narrowing specializations. In language study, such concepts as the proficiency-based curriculum are almost unknown.

On the other hand, there is some sense at North that all may not be well, that perhaps the academic world has changed and the university must respond. As one department chair said in discussing the academic job market, "There is a reluctant acceptance of the truth of the future for grad students, but we have not yet acted responsibly on it." Another department chair observed that "the system encourages irresponsibility towards the students: the more students you have, the greater your status and money."

Negative attitudes hold toward language teaching as a career. Several department chairs asked, "Why get a PhD to teach language?" One described his own move to North as "essentially to escape teaching beginning language." Another said, "Professors will never teach elementary language." And a third commented, "We do not see our PhDs as having careers as language teachers."

Not surprisingly, North's large undergraduate language programs have been run either by native speakers who do not have the PhD or, in some departments, by foreign language PhDs for whom the position is a non-tenure-track terminal appointment. Smaller departments—that is, those teaching the less commonly taught languages—have been more likely to assign such duties to a new assistant professor, on the tenure track, in addition to his or her other teaching responsibilities. Such departments recognize the heavy burden this places on a new faculty member who is at the same time attempting to publish enough in a literary field to obtain tenure.

One language supervisor, a PhD trained in literature who has become interested in applied linguistics and does research in that area, is now in the second year of a four-year terminal appointment. She feels that she receives no recognition for the job she does and that, furthermore, just when she will have begun to do a really good job, she'll be out. (At North University, burnout is the reason generally given for not granting tenure to a language supervisor.)

While several departments voiced interest in hiring someone with training in applied linguistics for a tenure-track position and considered research in that field acceptable toward tenure, no such individual was found on the campus. In the past, one department had attempted to employ a person specially trained in foreign language education, but when this person did not work out, it was decided to return to someone who would run the language program while pursuing research in a liter-

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ary specialty. Whether or not the departments reported problems with their elementary programs, most felt that successful supervising required a certain personality type more than it did a particular type of training.

While the training of teaching assistants at North University has improved in the last ten years, it is still not valued by the faculty. Some language departments still have no TA training programs to speak of. There is a universitywide TA training coordinator, but his function is to try to get departments interested in the idea of TA training and to provide funding for them to run their own programs. He has no control over how the money is used. Getting the departments interested has been difficult. As he said, "Instructional development on a research campus is a touchy business."

Central University is another public institution. Until about ten years ago, it was, by many accounts, not an outstanding graduate institution. Since then, it has made great strides, but weak areas remain. Some departments now offer highly respected graduate programs; others have not yet achieved that stature. As a result, departments take a much more pragmatic approach and show far greater variation than at North University. The most high-powered departments exhibit a traditional scholarly orientation. Other departments generally put their energies into educating well a much broader graduate population. A few departments try to do both. What seems to unite them all is satisfaction with being where they are and, in recent years, a sense of rapport with, and support from, the university administration.

Comparative literature and linguistics are two of the strongest departments on campus. According to one comparative literature faculty member, "Nothing has really changed in comp lit. The jobs available do not seem to require any broader training than in the past. If anything, there seems to be more emphasis on theory. Even things one would have expected to have changed—like more emphasis on women's lit or on more east-west material—have not emerged. . . . A course on theories of comparative literature lays out the field for the student. This is what is important."

In contrast the French department has just introduced a new MA program directed toward the population that has been working for a while and feels a need for graduate humanities work unrelated to actual career aspirations. These students are generally somewhat removed from their BA work (which may not have been in the humanities at all) but have much life experience to bring to graduate study. Programs are worked out individually to reach an objective that the student must be able to articulate clearly.

Similarly, a new master's and possibly doctoral program in Asian languages is being considered by the university. As the department chair said, "This program is not designed to compete with the major PhD programs in the field; they are producing enough PhDs as it is.

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It will concentrate on additional language training, with some literature and linguistics. It will have a practical rather than a scholarly orientation, almost like a fifth year of a BA. We envision future employment in government or business for these students."

Language teaching is a respected activity in the Central University language departments. Senior faculty members all teach some language courses and seem to enjoy it. They are comfortable with their mix of language courses and advanced seminars (generally a ratio of 2 to 1). A long tradition of responsibility for training high school teachers may contribute to these attitudes. Enrollments in the MA and MAT programs are steady, and serving this population of students is important to the institution. All the language departments take this activity seriously.

The graduate student population is also largely interested in teaching, whether at the secondary school or university level. We even spoke to a few PhD students who were interested in teaching at the high school level. And while some accepted the teaching of language as a part of the job but emphasized their desire to teach literature, others stated that language teaching was their primary interest.

Central University runs its own undergraduate language programs and TA training programs in keeping with its general philosophy. In the department of Spanish and Portuguese, a faculty member holding a regular tenure-track position supervises the elementary classes. This individual publishes in the field of language pedagogy. The German department offers a methods course taught by a regular faculty member. French TAs must attend a weekly workshop dealing with practical teaching problems. In addition, a new concept, called the teaching apprenticeship, has been introduced whereby a graduate student first takes an advanced undergraduate literature or civilization course and then participates in planning, doing the research for, and teaching at least three classes. The graduate student is then graded on the ability both to research the topic and to communicate the results of that research. While every department has thus created some form of TA training, and all consider it important, the university as a whole does not have a unified approach to the subject.

Speaking with the dean one gets a sense of the support Central University's language departments receive from this level of the administration. Every issue mentioned by department chairs was echoed by the dean. This dean meets regularly with the language department chairs as a group. One subject under discussion is a proficiency requirement. Another is TA stipends. There is no talk of universitywide TA training.

A visit to the dean's office confirms the view that Central University cares about language teaching but is not committed to that goal alone for its language departments. In those departments that have less of a scholarly orientation, improving language teaching is linked

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to strengthening the department overall. As the dean said, "If we just teach language better, everything else will follow."

Jones University, a private institution, has taken the ideological stand that it is important for language faculty to be trained in pedagogy. The institution shows its commitment by maintaining a position at the assistant dean's level charged with the supervision of language instruction.

According to the dean to whom that supervisor reports, the consortium to which Jones University belongs is trying to strengthen both undergraduate language education and the training of TAs. At Jones University in particular, proficiency standards are being considered for the language requirement. (The university is a regional center for training in proficiency testing.) There is a pedagogy requirement for all graduate students. The proficiency orientation, specific sets of teaching strategies, and similar patterns of TA preparation apply to graduate students in both the commonly taught and the uncommonly taught languages.

While the departments differ in how they have organized the supervision of their elementary language instruction, they all share a commitment to using regular ladder faculty together with individuals trained in teaching. In one department, this supervision is carried out by a senior professor who also teaches a few hours in the course. Most of the class hours are taught by native speakers who have been trained as teachers and appointed to long-term faculty positions. Another department is hiring an applied linguist who will be responsible for supervising elementary language instruction.

The graduate students with whom we spoke professed a strong interest in the teaching aspect of their future careers. On the other hand, attendance is often poor at the longer, voluntary workshops for TAs sponsored by the office of language instruction.

At present, the training of graduate students in academic subjects is not particularly broad, but there is some feeling around the university that it should be. One administrator said that training in the field "should emphasize both language learning and culture, besides literature, and prepare grad students to deal with these subjects in a scholarly manner." Another department chair said, "We must recognize language teaching as an important intellectual skill in and of itself." He added that "we cannot follow the practices of the past and continue to turn out well-trained and useless PhDs."

Jones University is also attempting to change the way graduate students are initiated into the profession. One departmental poll showed that the students felt a need for a much more explicit introduction into the profession, including a sense of what it means to be a faculty member. The department is trying to fill the void with counseling. Students disagree on how successful this effort has been.

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The commitment of Jones University to foreign language instruction and broad cultural knowledge can also be seen in other branches of the university. A prestigious professional degree program has adopted a new track integrating an international orientation with its traditional training. As one of the program administrators commented, "We need to turn out people who have in their heads what educated people in other cultures have in theirs."

At South University, the third public institution we visited, broad training and teaching skills are of nearly universal concern. There is a centralized program of TA training. One department chair stated that the TA training program, along with the impressive availability of graduate student stipends, is among his department's strongest attractions. The faculty of one of the Asian language departments said that the focus on TA training and the courses on language pedagogy given in the department were unusual, perhaps unique, for Asian language programs in the United States.

South University is also in the forefront of new concepts in foreign language education. Proficiency, for example, is the byword for both undergraduate and graduate students. One manifestation of this is the new proficiency exam that the German department is implementing for its MA candidates.

Each department at the university has a foreign language coordinator. Many of these are PhDs in foreign language education. They have regular tenure-track appointments and are expected to publish in the field of foreign language pedagogy. Other faculty members in the departments seem pleased with this organization. The foreign language coordinators meet frequently and are known to cooperate well.

Graduate students confirmed most of what the faculty told us. They were all excited by, and interested in, their teaching opportunities. They felt that the TA training they received was superb, particularly because it was geared toward language teaching. Some TAs felt that the proficiency orientation in their department should even be strengthened. Their only complaint was that there is no training for other types of teaching.

Perhaps the strongest evidence for the universality of these attitudes at South University is the way in which one department's concerns stood out. Some members of this department were dismayed about the stress on TA training rather than on scholarly concerns. They advocated a traditional graduate program and felt that if standards were only maintained, everything else would fall into place. Their analysis of the crisis in graduate study cited low faculty salaries as the critical factor in attracting good minds to the professoriate.

Smith University, a private institution, defies classification. Each department has its own place along the TA training spectrum. The unifying principles are the diver-

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sity and flexibility of Smith University's degree programs and a clear consensus on the inadequacy of graduate student support.

The PhD program in French allows for narrow or broad training as the student desires. Most graduate students chose this institution precisely because of its flexibility, which includes the option of doing much of one's graduate work abroad. While the graduate students all hope for careers as university faculty members, few had given much thought to the future. The French department employs a language coordinator in a tenure-track position. This individual has a PhD in a literary field but now does research in pedagogy in addition to literature. TA training is taken seriously. In addition to requiring a week-long preparatory training seminar, the department plans to introduce a graduate course on pedagogical techniques.

Like the French department, the department of Spanish and Portuguese offers many options for degrees, and its students can also do a significant portion of their graduate studies abroad. Here, too, elementary language instruction is run by a faculty coordinator. The position is tenure track, but the research on which tenure will be based is in a literary field, not pedagogy. The coordinator runs several three-hour workshops for the TAs every semester, each covering a particular teaching problem. Presemester TA training, however, is restricted to a day-long session. Students in Spanish and Portuguese strongly dislike the idea of teaching language as a career. As one of them said, "We all know that you don't need a PhD to teach language."

The chair of the Near Eastern languages program expressed a definite interest in more broadly based training and greater oral proficiency. In contrast, the position of coordinator for the Hebrew language program, though currently filled by a linguist, is not on tenure track. The Arabic language program is coordinated by a regular faculty member who has added these duties to his normal load. There is no TA training, and none of the recent PhD recipients had found jobs primarily as language teachers.

The comparative literature department shows its individuality by offering a program that, unlike the usual theory-oriented program, is broadly based and eclectic. But with respect to preparation for teaching, the program is traditional. In fact, it offers students almost no teaching experience at all. As the chair said, "It has always been true that PhDs in comp lit don't learn the material they need to teach undergraduates, let alone how to teach. They need a broad-based education for the first five or six years of their careers. Research and training don't coincide for perhaps the first ten to fifteen years of a professional career."

In addition to making these five in-depth visits, we spent one day at a fourth public institution, EastWest University. Its TA training is at a point of crisis. Cur-

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rently all TAs receive several days of workshops before the semester starts. After that, supervision varies from department to department. In the German department, the position of language supervisor is on tenure track, but lack of sufficient publications has so far prevented anyone from obtaining tenure. The language supervisor in the French department is tenured, but the particular individual has grown tired of the work and is reluctant to continue. In the Russian department, the task of language supervision was taken on willingly by an already tenured faculty member, who appears to be handling it successfully.

The dean at EastWest University has made a radical proposal concerning TA training and, in fact, the existence of TAs. He would like to eliminate all teaching assistantships and introduce three-year non-tenure-track lecturer positions to cover all elementary language teaching. The qualifications for these positions were not specified. Such a move would give graduating PhDs no teaching experience at all.

EastWest University is more certain about the academic training it provides its students. Administrators

are seriously concerned about the job prospects of graduating PhDs and are paying some attention to preparing students for job hunting. But this concern has not translated into any changes in the philosophy of graduate education. As one chair said, "Broad training is necessary only if the student's specialization is a more obscure one."

Clearly the impressions received from these university visits are subjective. In addition, we have no way of knowing the general applicability of the patterns we observed. Lacking such a perspective, we can only conclude that universities have chosen to cope with their problems in different ways according to both the self-image and the reality of the individual institution.

While the outcome of this study does not point to an obvious and convincing plan of action, we prepared this report because we feel that an assessment of the current state of graduate education in the foreign language fields, however incomplete it may be, is a necessary precursor to any further deliberations.

Business French Survey

Judith G. Frommer (Harvard Univ.) has recently published the findings of a nationwide survey on business French courses in American colleges and universities. The results of this survey and other studies show that there are at least 109 courses in business French in United States institutions of higher learning. All the courses are relatively new; they are not limited to any one geographical region, and they are offered mainly by large state universities. For further information consult the Fall 1985 issue of *French for Business and International Trade*, the bulletin of Le Réseau des Professeurs du Français des Affaires aux Etats-Unis. Address subscription requests for the bulletin to the editor, David O'Connell, Dept. of French, Univ. of Illinois, Box 4348, Chicago 60680.