

Priorities Statement for 2005-6
The Graduate School of Arts & Science
New York University
February 1, 2006

Introduction

Each academic year the Graduate School of Arts and Science puts out a “Priorities Statement” that outlines its hopes and ambitions for the coming academic year.¹ Some of them, such as making some progress on the urgent need for appropriate and affordable graduate student housing, persist from year to year. Others reflect a new initiative. This statement has four themes:

- Governance
- The globalization of graduate education
- The Common Course Initiative and other program enhancements
- The furtherance of community

This statement also announces another step towards better graduate student housing: in 2006-7, any entering GSAS doctoral student funded through the MacCracken program will have access to our subsidized housing program.

Underlying our hopes and ambitions is a consistent mission: to continue to build a graduate school of arts and science that has great faculty, great students, and great ideas. The purpose of a graduate school, central to the modern research university, is to make discoveries and generate theories and ideas; to exchange ideas among its constituencies and members and the public; to educate the next generation of scholars, researchers, intellectuals, artists, and teachers; and to sustain an ethical and diverse community of advanced inquiry that embodies the principles of academic freedom, integrity, and mutual respect among its members. It is a characteristic of the university that big events, new ideas, and stubborn controversies happen here. Recently NYU has been the site of a conflict over the issue of the unionization of graduate assistants, and it is important to GSAS that our academic mission and values frame our discussions and disagreements.

Governance²

An acutely sensitive subject during the conflict over graduate assistant unionization, academic governance has historically provoked and provokes a variety of reflections, and the University’s exceptionality as an institution is partly the reason why. Clark Kerr, one of the greatest educators of the 20th century thought deeply about it, but could write about it with a light touch. In his autobiography, he noted:

“Academic governance...is often an ‘omnium gatherum.’ The mock-Latin expression refers to ‘an unlikely collections of items of a heterogeneous nature.’ And this collection is in perpetual motion---an unstable compound with an occasional threat of decomposition.

“The governance of a university may have aspects of a democracy...of a corporation...of a guild...of a monarchy...of a bureaucracy...of a political party...of an oligarchy...and of a market.”³

¹ Catharine R. Stimpson, the Dean of GSAS, does an initial draft of the statement after a GSAS Deans’ retreat, which is then circulated to various people in GSAS for comment. The final “Priorities Statement” incorporates their responses. Normally, a GSAS Priorities Statement appears in the first part of the fall semester, but because of the volatility and uncertainties of the fall 2005 semester, we postponed issuing it until the spring semester.

² The September-October 2005 issue of the GSAS newsletter, On the Square, previewed the following section.

³ Clark Kerr, The Gold and the Blue: A Personal Memoir of the University of California, I: Academic Triumphs. Berkeley and Los Angeles: UCalifornia Press, 2001, p. 225.

Kerr correctly sees how varied university governance is, but within GSAS we might share some beliefs about its purposes. Among them are the making of academically valid decisions about teaching, learning, and the curriculum; about who will teach and learn and design the curriculum; about the allocation of scarce resources; about giving voice and presence to a number of constituencies; and about matters of discipline (the violation of our norms and codes) and of grievances (the belief that one's rights under these norms and codes have been violated).

As NYU knows, from 2001-5, aspects of the life of graduate assistants across the university, one group of graduate students, were regulated by a contract between a union, the United Auto Workers-Graduate Student Organizing Committee (UAW-GSOC), and NYU. In August 2005, NYU, after a long period of university-wide debate, featuring a spectrum of views and proposals, decided not to enter again into collective bargaining with UAW-GSOC. This led to a variety of responses, including the graduate assistant strike that UAW-GSOC began on November 9. The decision also gave even greater impetus to the possibilities of new models of academic governance at NYU. In fall 2005, the Student Senators Council (SSC) appointed a Graduate Student Working Group, its members drawn from selections by the student governments of each NYU school, by the student senators, and from nominations and self-nominations.⁴ The Working Group has a mandate to explore two issues, student grievance procedures and a possible statement of graduate student rights and responsibilities. In January 2006, the Graduate Affairs Committee of the SSC issued for comment a proposal for a new Graduate Student Organization.⁵ As well, in December 2005, the Graduate Affairs Committee launched three subcommittees, each composed of representatives from schools across NYU and including GSAS students, that address issues of housing, healthcare, and effective communications. GSAS wants to be helpful in strengthening academic governance, and is grateful for the presence of its directors of graduate studies and committee members among the faculty and of the senators, the Graduate Student Council that seeks to reach out to all graduate students, and committee members among our students.

The Globalization of Graduate Education

The concepts of globalization and anti-globalization are so much used and abused that anyone who deploys them must first offer a provisional definition of them. When we speak of the globalization of graduate education, we refer to these dynamically linked activities: 1) The increasingly rapid circulation and exchange of ideas and people around the globe; 2) The resistance to these phenomena, often on the part of national governments that seek to control flows of information. For example, after 9/11/01, United States immigration policies made it more difficult for non-U.S. scholars and students to obtain visas to join U.S. academic institutions; 3) Challenges to the primacy of the U.S. research university that was established for a variety of historical reasons after World War II. These challenges are arising from regions. For example, the "Bologna Process," initiated in the 1990s, is fostering the various higher education systems of Europe to converge towards a more transparent transnational system and common framework, increasing the mobility of students among European universities. Challenges are also emerging from individual nations that are either seeking international students (for example, Australia) or building their own systems of higher education and infrastructure of advanced research (for example, China and India).

Given this situation, how does one build a global graduate school? Over the past few years, GSAS has had two priorities. The first has been to continue to be a magnet for international students. About 40% of our student body is international. Primarily, being a magnet means having superb academic programs, among the best of their kind, attracting students because the programs are so good. Although great academic programs are necessary, they are not necessarily sufficient. We also seek to establish a friendly and welcoming atmosphere, working with the Office for International Students and Scholars and others to smooth the path for the international students who bring us their talent, promise, and perspectives. The second priority has been to help students do graduate work abroad, be it course work or research. In 2004-5, we were happy to be able to establish the Torch Fellowship Program with the support of two donors, Ron Katz and Libby Roth, a program that we hope will grow. Torch Fellows do their dissertation research internationally, in a spirit of multilateralism, with special consideration being given to students who may be returning to their ancestral regions or homelands.

⁴ The Working Group includes the following GSAS students: Michael Brown, Institute of Fine Arts; Vinay Gupta, Biomedical Sciences; Michael Palm, American Studies; and Christine Scott-Hayward, Institute for Law and Society. The 2005-2006 officers of the GSAS Graduate Student Council are Kimberly Moran, Biomedical Sciences, president; Sarah Fabes, Biomedical Sciences, vice-president; Kimberly Twist, European Studies, vice president; Eve MacKnight, English, treasurer; Ying Xiong, Economics, secretary. The GSAS senator is Bhavin Pandya, Economics; the alternate senator Vinay Gupta, Biomedical Sciences.

⁵ The proposal is available at <http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/OASL/GraduateStudentOrganizationProposal.pdf>

Working with faculty, who govern academic and curricular matters, we now would like to explore creating even more connections with international universities. This can take the traditional forms of faculty and student exchanges for teaching or coursework, but it can encompass as well collaborative research projects, mentoring and advisement, teaching and writing opportunities, and, if logistical barriers can be overcome, joint or dual degree programs. GSAS has given a handful of dual degrees in the past with French universities, and the Sackler Institute has an arrangement with the University of Milan, but if faculties concur, and in collaboration with other NYU global activities, we can imagine designing more such degrees in more regions.

The Common Course Initiative and Other Program Enrichments

The curriculum is the place where a faculty fuses what it thinks ought to be taught, what ideas and theories and paradigms and methods, with the setting of the classroom and seminar and laboratory. Both what is taught and where it is taught are subject to change as we develop new ideas and theories and paradigms and methods, and as new students join our classrooms, seminars, and laboratories. One of the most interesting curricular developments of the post-World War II academy is its increasing globalization. For example, Professor Tom Bender of our History Department has helped to lead the internationalization of American Studies. Our English Department is working with Anglophone Literature as well as British and American Literature; our French Department with Francophone as well as French Literature.

All this, which marks the growth of the graduate curriculum, is exciting and important. However, the graduate curriculum has another, arguably more problematic feature. Graduate education tends towards the centrifugal, that is, to move away from a center. This happens because graduate education is, legitimately, rooted in specific programs and because it becomes increasingly specialized as a student moves from a master's degree to a doctoral degree that ends with a thesis or dissertation. The unity of graduate education is then located in the nature of the degrees that a graduate school confers, in the sense of purpose that a graduate school articulates, and in such common rituals as graduation. For some, this is unity enough. For others, however, a great graduate school needs to have more coherence as a community of advanced inquiry.⁶ Several GSAS activities, such as the Graduate Forums, which consist of graduate students drawn from across the university, are meant to enhance coherence.

Yet, we would like to ask in 2005-6, can we do even more? In the past, faculty has offered some interdisciplinary courses that cut across graduate programs and even schools. Would it be possible to have faculty co-operate on offering even more courses that appeal to students across programs and courses? How might this work intellectually and logistically? Or, another possibility, could a faculty member offer a special credit-bearing course on a significant theme, perhaps with distinguished guest lecturers, that would attract students from across the graduate school? Or, still another possibility, could GSAS, working with programs, offer even more courses that prepare post-baccalaureate students, from NYU and elsewhere, for graduate work? In summer 2004, Professor Riaz Khan designed a pilot summer course, "Preparation for Graduate Study: Writing." Its enrollment doubled in summer 2005. In summer 2004 GSAS and a group of faculty members also established the Computerized Distance Learning Preparatory Course in Pre-Calculus and Calculus for the Social Sciences.

In order to investigate these possibilities, and others, GSAS is happy that Professor Judith Miller, the Chair of the French Department, has agreed to chair a faculty committee on "Common Course Initiatives" that will work with the Graduate Curriculum Committee. The Committee, which consists of faculty and students, has general oversight over GSAS academic policies and practices.

In fall 2005, the Faculty of Arts and Science (FAS), to which GSAS and the College of Arts and Science (CAS) belong, undertook two initiatives that deepen such best practices in graduate education as insuring that the kinds and amount of teaching graduate assistants do further their academic progress and professional development. Going into effect in spring 2006, the first initiative—which had been under discussion with students, chairs, and faculty, especially in some departments—is to set a limit of one stand-alone course per semester for graduate student teachers. The second was a decision of the FAS Policy and Planning Committee (P & P), an elected faculty committee, to appoint a Task Force that will consist of faculty and students and that will explore the relation of graduate student teaching to students' academic progress and professional development, and report to P & P during spring 2006. GSAS looks forward to the work of this group.⁷

⁶ Kate Stimpson has written about this issue, beginning with her essay, "General Education for Graduate Education," first published in The Chronicle of Higher Education, XVIX: 10 (November 1, 2002): B-7.

⁷ Committee co-chairs are Professors Bambi Schieffelin and Xudong Zhang.

The Furtherance of Community

The furtherance of any community can take a variety of forms, depending on the nature of a particular community. 2005-6 is seeing the enhancement of at least six activities that GSAS has previously undertaken but that constantly need work and new sources of energy.

1. Diversity. Our international students are one invaluable aspect of our diversity. The representation of United States minority groups is another. Because we have never been satisfied with the magnitude of this representation, we are expanding our efforts to include a pilot program to enhance recruitment and retention. It should also strengthen ties between our master's and our doctoral programs. We will offer an additional, four-year MacCracken support line to one doctoral program that successfully recruits a minority student from one of our master's programs. Associate Dean Roberta Popik and the office of Graduate Enrollment Services will administer this pilot program.
2. Graduate Student Housing. In 2005-6, we entered the fourth year of the Stuyvesant Town Project, which offers subsidized housing to entering doctoral students for their first year. Graduate programs have selected the entering students to whom such housing has been offered. For the doctoral class entering in Fall 2006 under the MacCracken program, subsidized housing will be offered to any entering doctoral student who chooses it.⁸ Associate Dean J. David Slocum and the Office of Academic and Student Life has the Stuyvesant Town Project in its portfolio.
3. Master's College. For two years, GSAS and its community have been planning a master's college, which will crucially assist with the recruitment and retention of master's students and work for the enhancement of their academic life. A priority in 2005-6 is to select a director and transform plans into reality. Notably, with the help of Vice Dean T. James Matthews and the Office of Academic Affairs and Planning, our faculty has initiated and is initiating a number of promising master's and certificate programs.
4. Orientation. In fall 2005, the Office of Academic and Student Life put together a new, day-long orientation program for new master's and doctoral students. According to the evaluations, it was strikingly successful, and we will increase comparable activities.
5. Post-graduate degree careers. Graduate education is an arduous progress towards a degree that should have value and worth. The reform movement in graduate education, beginning in the 1990s, stressed the variety of careers to which a graduate degree might lead. The NYU Career Services Office will work even more vigorously with GSAS to advise graduate students about careers, and set up programs with our alumni and alumnae, who exemplify what a GSAS degree can mean after it has been won.
6. Communications. Early in the fall 2005 semester, the chair of a leading department said, "Communications around here have a very short half-life." Conscious of this reality, we have revamped our newsletter, On the Square. It will now be issued once each semester in an expanded format, and between issues, we regularly issue updates, news bulletins, and information relevant to graduate students on our website. This ought to result in even more timely and useful information.

Conclusion

This "Priorities Statement" has not and cannot touch on all the activities of GSAS and its 48 programs with their 220 separate tracks. We encourage everyone to consult with our GSAS website for a description of them and of the many activities of our faculty and students. We look forward to the rest of 2005-6 and to a journey that is smooth at times, rough at others, but also creatively and rigorously seeking to pursue inquiry as far and as deeply as we can.

⁸ We are assuming that we will continue to be able lease apartments from Stuyvesant Town.