

Priorities Statement for 2003-04¹
Graduate School of Arts and Science
New York University
September 3, 2003

Introduction

The reason for issuing an annual Graduate School of Arts and Science (GSAS) Priorities Statement is to outline the major goals and ambitions of GSAS for the coming year for the immediate GSAS community—faculty, students, administrators, alumni/ae, friends—and New York University (NYU) as a whole. Uniting the priorities statements of various years is their overarching sense of the purposes of graduate education and a diverse graduate school. First, as the nerve center of the modern research university, a graduate school serves as a site of advanced inquiry and basic research for faculty and students working in partnership with each other. Second, so doing, a graduate school trains the next generation of researchers, scholars, intellectuals, artists, and teachers. GSAS has a third purpose as well: to become internationally known for the great strength of its academic programs and for a range of innovations in graduate education that are relevant morally, professionally, and pedagogically as well as intellectually. Our mantra for achieving these three purposes is “Great faculty, great students, great ideas.”

Obviously, our priorities for the next academic year, 2003-04, are designed to help achieve these purposes. As we work to realize them, we have benefited and will benefit profoundly from the exemplary leadership of Dean Richard Foley of the Faculty of Arts and Science (FAS) and from developments within New York University as a whole.² Among them is an even deeper interest in graduate education and the well-being of graduate students, led by President John B. Sexton and Provost David McLaughlin. Symbolically, we have placed on our GSAS website a picture of President Sexton standing at a desk in his office that was originally used by Henry Mitchell MacCracken, the founder of GSAS in 1886 and the namesake of our primary doctoral fellowships. These developments also include the establishment of a culture of review and reflection, which should lead to the perpetual renewal of our work.

For the past two years, under the leadership of the Office of the Vice Dean and in consultation with the directors of graduate studies, GSAS has been establishing clear criteria by which to review, reflect upon, and renew our programs and a database to support these criteria. In 2003-04, working with FAS deans and graduate program leadership, we will continue to foster our own culture of graduate self-scrutiny, integrating our processes with the program oversight of the FAS divisional deans.³

The Organization of Our Work

Setting our priorities means mapping the organization of graduate education. Highly decentralized, graduate education is rooted in individual programs. Today, GSAS has 47 with over 200

¹ At the beginning of each academic year, the Graduate School of Arts and Science (GSAS) prepares a Priorities Statement that will guide its actions for that year. The Statement's themes are blocked out in a summer retreat of the GSAS deans. Directors of Graduate Studies (dgses) are invited to contribute discussion items to this event. The dean of GSAS, Catharine R. Stimpson, prepares an initial draft, which is then circulated for comment to GSAS and FAS deans, to the president of the Graduate Student Council, and to other members of the University and GSAS friends. The final statement is greatly indebted to these comments.

² We are grateful to all the FAS deans—George Downs, Peter Lennie, Mary Carruthers, Edward Sullivan (Acting Humanities Dean for 2002-03), Matthew Santirocco, Joe Juliano—for their unstinting support and counsel. Structurally, the relations of GSAS to FAS, like those of the College of Arts and Science (CAS), are complex. Both GSAS and CAS are separately chartered schools, but both depend on FAS for their faculty, much of their budget, and an array of administrative services.

³ GSAS has accepted an invitation to join the American Association of Universities data-sharing network, which will permit us to incorporate new, more comparative data into our self-scrutiny.

separate tracks. Some of these programs offer only a master's degree, but most offer a full range of graduate degrees. No matter how many degrees a program offers, it is responsible for admissions decisions, for academic goals and the curriculum (under the oversight of the Graduate Curriculum Committee and the faculty of Arts and Science), for teaching and advising, and for the excellence of the daily life of the program.⁴ Particularly in the sciences, individual programs also support their graduate students as graduate assistants. The director of graduate studies (the DGS) is the academic officer who oversees graduate education within a program and who is the linchpin of its administrative clarity, integrity, and effectiveness.

Yet, graduate education also has a source of common principles and of productive centralization, the graduate school itself. Relations between programs and school should be creative, respectful, trusting, dynamic, and delicately calibrated, and an on-going, fundamental priority of GSAS is to act with the primacy of these virtues in mind. These relations have been described as those of a matrix, but that makes the graduate school too passive, too much of a place-holder. The graduate school has also been called a holding company, but that is far too corporate a rhetoric. More accurately, a graduate school and the various graduate programs together form a federal system, but one without a written constitution and a supreme court to interpret it. This makes creativity, respect, trust, dynamism, and delicate calibration all the more important.

Today, GSAS has four offices: that of the Dean, who administers graduate education in the arts and science as a whole and serves as its spokesperson; that of the Vice Dean, responsible for academic policies and planning and for staffing the faculty-student Graduate Curriculum Committee; that of the Associate Dean for Graduate Enrollment Services, which handles admissions and financial aid and which staffs the faculty-student Financial Aid Committee; and the Associate Dean for Academic and Student Life, with a broad-ranging portfolio that includes both academic projects and such student life issues as housing, and which staffs the faculty Honors and Awards Committee.

In 2002-03, GSAS conceptualized its activities in a new way.⁵ We divided them into eleven categories of activities that together articulate our purposes, principles, and processes. We then outlined the revenue streams that help to support these activities. Our priorities, outlined below, are now organized around these activities and streams.

The Eleven Categories of Activities

Like any organization, GSAS has on-going activities that shape its everyday life. Temporally, these take place within the calendar of the academic year. Spatially, they center on Washington Square, but, because of modern communications, they touch every corner of the globe. For example, the Dean attends meetings of the FAS faculty and the university-wide Deans' Council. The Office of the Vice Dean processes requests for waivers of the maintenance of matriculation fees. Graduate Enrollment Services responds to requests for information about our programs from students in scores of countries. Academic and Student Life prepares On the Square, our bimonthly newsletter for students and others. The difference between an on-going activity and a priority is that a priority may either be an innovation, which may or may not become an on-going activity, or an activity that now requires a highlighted focus and special attention. For the sake of simplicity, we will arrange our categories of activities in alphabetical order:

1. Administration, committee structure, and support staff. In 2002-03, we added one badly-needed new position in the Office of Academic and Student Life. Because of the university's temporary financial austerity, we are limited in our ability to add new resources. Nevertheless, in 2003-04, we will embark upon a major administrative activity: the design and implementation of a Master's College, which will help to co-ordinate and enhance our master's offerings. This is the most rapidly growing degree in graduate education nationally.⁶ After FAS budgetary issues are resolved, we want to find a formula to

⁴ Organizationally, GSAS houses two sorts of graduate programs: 1) Its "core" programs, housed entirely within FAS; and 2) Its "split" programs, which are housed in other NYU schools but for whose degrees GSAS is responsible. The other schools include the School of Medicine, the College of Dentistry, the Tisch School of the Arts, and the Institute of Fine Arts.

⁵ Our thanks to Joseph A. Rice, the winner of a NYU distinguished alumnus award and the Chair of the GSAS Advisory Board, for his counsel during this exercise.

⁶ We will be issuing a separate paper about a master's college.

return some master's tuition to individual programs. In 2003-04, we will continue to strengthen our tripartite committee structure (our committees on the graduate curriculum, financial aid, and honors and awards), the heart of faculty and student governance within GSAS. We will also expand the various ad hoc groups that help us with our goal of increased diversity in recruitment and retention.

2. Advisory Board. The Board, begun in 1998, consists of alumni, alumnae, and distinguished friends of the School. Formally, it meets once a year, and its advice is sought throughout the year. GSAS will continue to solicit and use its counsel.⁷

3. Alumni/ae Relations. GSAS awaits the appointment of a new FAS Alumni Relations officer. Because great colleges and universities create a lifelong sense of identity with their alumni/ae, we will continue to strengthen alumni/ae relations. One vehicle will continue to be the Dean's Report and Request, the newsletter sent each fall to our nearly 50,000 alumni/ae. Another will be coordinating our Dean's Day, the occasion of our Distinguished Alumni Award, with the University-wide Alumni weekend in April 2004. We want to establish stronger linkages with younger alumni/ae and with our alumni/ae of color.

4. Communications. We will continue to enhance our website, which is becoming our primary vehicle of communications, and coordinating our website with those of individual programs. In addition, we need to design a new hard-copy brochure, because our current one is now dated, and to finish long-promised handbooks for graduate students and for directors of graduate study. Throughout all our communications, we will stress far more strongly the importance of our location in New York, the cultural and financial center of the world.

5. Curriculum, curricular development, and teaching support. This is one of the chambers of the heart of graduate education. A graduate curriculum, because it is a part of a research university, is constantly being changed by faculty, who propose revised or new courses and programs—be they disciplinary or interdisciplinary. GSAS eagerly awaits and supports these evolutionary steps. GSAS support takes the form of serving as a consultant on curricular design and the redesign of programs; of facilitating the sharing of experiences among programs; of bringing to bear the concerns and counsel regarding graduate education expressed by various agencies, organizations, and scholars and researchers outside of NYU; and, where appropriate and in partnership with faculty, spearheading an initiative. A priority in 2003-04 will be the exploration of greater links between GSAS and the professional schools in terms of course work, joint degrees, and dual degrees. In addition, the Office of Academic and Student Life has as a priority the continuation of its work with technology and web resources (e.g. electronic submission of dissertations) and its Graduate Student Educational Development Program for graduate students who teach. The Office of the Vice Dean will bring to fruition its exploration of a school-wide, non-credit, on-line course that will provide math preparation for graduate level quantitative work in the social sciences.

6. Facilities. GSAS facilities are a part of FAS-wide space planning. However, GSAS has several priorities for which it serves as an advocate and, when possible, an administrator. One overwhelming priority is graduate student housing. We will move into the second year of our expanded pilot program for housing for first-year doctoral students in Stuyvesant Town, but recognize that the graduate student housing needs are greater than this program. A second priority is to advocate for space at Washington Square for graduate students who commute and may have inadequate on-campus facilities. A third is for more space for the graduate school and graduate activities. We now have valued employees and students working in corridors, or at desks in little rooms that must house two or three people or more.

7. Faculty. Nothing is more crucial to graduate education than faculty. The greater their intellectual and academic prowess, the greater our graduate offerings. Our on-going priority is to support the recruitment and retention of faculty, and to sustain their work on behalf of graduate education and graduate students. More specifically, another priority is to clarify and to make as attractive as possible the crucial position of director of graduate studies.

⁷ Some Advisory Board members serve on the Faculty of Arts and Science Council, which also provides advice, but, unlike the Advisory Board, may be asked for fund-raising help as well.

8. International activities. About one third of our students are international, representing over 100 countries. They are invaluable—as individuals; as members of our community of advanced inquiry; as future scholars, researchers, and teachers; and, with all our faculty and students, as representatives of an ideal of free, cosmopolitan teaching and learning. Our priority is to help these students wherever we can, as a School or as part of national organizations, with the currently restrictive American student visa policies. In addition to supporting our international students, we will focus on our program in Diversity Studies with the University of Cape Town, a model for global academic activity on the graduate level. We will also support a variety of initiatives that will strengthen our global outreach, among them student exchange programs in China, Africa, and Europe, and newly approved graduate programs such as the master's degree in Africana Studies and Economics, which is designed to attract students from Africa who will return to contribute as intellectual, social, and political leaders.

9. Interdisciplinary support. Graduate education balances the disciplinary and the interdisciplinary in a rich variety of ways.⁸ In Spring, 2001, with the help of private donors, GSAS started the experimental Graduate Forum, a university-wide program for 10 graduate students across the university, who form an intellectual community that studies disciplinary and interdisciplinary issues. A success, it has become a national model. In 2003, a bequest endowed the Forum. GSAS will now work to create more such fora.

10. GSAS as a transdisciplinary intellectual center. GSAS ought to be seen across NYU and eventually beyond as a center of pioneering, transdisciplinary intellectual activity. Our support of graduate student conferences is one step along this path. So is our work on the Frumkes Lecture in Philosophy, made possible by Lewis Burke Frumkes, and on the John W. Draper Lecture. During 2003-04, we will investigate how better to realize this ambition. For example, should there be a national prize in Arts and Science that GSAS awards?

11. Student recruitment, retention, and well-being. Students are another great chamber in the heart of graduate education. In terms of applications to study at NYU, GSAS has had a double-digit increase for each of the last three years. In 2003-04, we will offer our application on CD as well as implement an on-line applications process. In terms of admissions, we will study our admissions practices to see if they help achieve our goal of greater diversity, and if not, why not. We will also make sure that all our efforts to achieve diversity, utterly important to us as a moral and academic goal, conform to the 2003 Supreme Court decision about affirmative action. Overall, we hope to improve in all our programs our ratio of admitted students to enrolled students, i.e. yield. We will work with individual master's programs about targeted growth, but do not expect doctoral program growth except very marginally and then in accord with FAS academic planning. The Office of the Vice Dean will finish its studies of retention of students. It is foolish to hope that every enrolled student will complete a graduate degree. Life is too full of contingencies. However, we need to know how and why students leave. So far, our preliminary findings show that doctoral financial aid reform, instituted in fall 2002, has helped with retention. We still need more financial aid, and our priority here is funding for fellowships, especially dissertation year and summer research support.⁹ Finally, student well-being depends, GSAS believes, on effective student governance. In 2002-03, our student senator was particularly active, and the Graduate Student Council (GSC) renewed itself with a superb portfolio of activities, including the design of a Graduate Student Award for Excellence in Graduate Student Teaching and the selection of its first winner, Professor Eero Simoncelli. One of our highest priorities is to continue to work with an energized, imaginative, well-run GSC.¹⁰

⁸ For greater elaboration, see Catharine R. Stimpson, "General Education for Graduate Education," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49, 10 (November 1, 2002): B-7, and Catharine R. Stimpson, "Words and Responsibilities: An essay on graduate education and the humanities," written for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2003, available at www.carnegiefoundation.org/CID/essays/CID_humanities_stimpson.pdf.

⁹ We are grateful to Kevin Brine, a trustee, for his funding of a model program of summer research support in the English Department.

¹⁰ We are also supportive of more specialized individual student groups, such as the Chinese Culture Club and the Graduate Student of Color Network (GSCN).

Supportive Revenue Streams

Graduate education can be expensive for students and for FAS. The costs to FAS increased after GSAS began to fund the first five years of doctoral work. Obviously, GSAS could not survive without major subventions from FAS. Nevertheless, we contribute financially to graduate education in three ways.

1. Tuition and fees. Tuition for master's and certificate programs is a source of revenue. A priority is to work with individual master's programs on the number of students each should enroll while making these programs as academically strong and serious as possible, in possession of appropriate recruitment tools, and helpful to students. We are adamant that each and every master's program must be first-rate. The fact that a master's program produces revenue is no reason whatsoever to transmogrify it into a cash cow.

2. Philanthropy. Enhanced alumni/alumnae relations are a key to enhanced philanthropy. However, we hope that as an academic center, we will be strong and innovative enough to appeal to a variety of philanthropists. Our 2003-04 priorities for support are student financial aid, and those activities that increase our capacity for being an interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary center of academic and intellectual activity. (These two words are often blurred, but the former refers to using the perspectives of several disciplines at once while the latter refers to work that seems to go beyond disciplinary perspectives.) We are also seeking help for a modest emergency fund that will temporarily support students doing research outside of America who must abruptly return to America because of political or health conditions beyond their control, e.g. if there were to be an equivalent of the recent outbreak of SARS in the near future.

3. Grants. The support of graduate education also depends on grants that faculty and students win from outside agencies. We have been and will remain supportive in any way we can be of grant-seeking activity. In Summer 2003 we learned that two faculty members (Professor Tamar Schlick and Professor Terry Harrison) had won big, highly competitive IGERT (Integrated Graduate Education and Research Training) grants, each for five years of support, each totaling nearly \$4 million, from the National Science Foundation. A priority will be helping as we can to administer these IGERT grants.

Many higher education institutions also benefit from ancillary income, i.e. income from university-based activity that may not be directly related to academic work. GSAS has never thought about ancillary income. In 2003-04, a priority is to begin to do so.

Conclusion

A final priority is to remember our dreams—in the midst of everyday work and annual priority setting. We continue to dream of building a graduate student community, an elegant architectural masterpiece, resonant with aesthetic integrity, that will house our students, their partners and families, with rooms for decent living and grand conversations. We continue to dream of a graduate school to which the great university and city that are its home will look for ideas of depth and daring. And we have these dreams because of another, a dream of a community of advanced inquiry, restless but peaceable, free, diverse, just, cosmopolitan, a community of research and learning embarked upon for their own sake but also for the sake of—dare a priorities statement say it—human betterment.