

Priorities Statement for 2004-05
The Graduate School of Arts & Science
New York University
September 2004

Epigraph

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
Has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
But you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
And a person for work that is real.
—Marge Piercy
“To be of use”

Introduction

At the beginning of each academic year, the Graduate School of Arts and Science of New York University (GSAS) issues a Priorities Statement that outlines a plan of work for the coming year and that sketches some common pathways for graduate education in the arts and sciences.¹ This is the Priorities Statement for 2004-05. Its four major themes will be the possibilities and promise of carefully selected curricular commonalities; student recruitment and retention; the variety of our degrees, led by the doctorate; and participation in a culture of review and renewal. Each of these themes will be the subject of a section below, but because the structural context of our work is complex, we will begin with a description of it.

We believe that the work of graduate education is of primary importance in the contemporary world with its stress upon the importance of innovation, knowledge and lifelong learning. Our belief animates and compels us. We cannot botch acting on it. Our ambition remains nothing less than becoming a great graduate school. Our mantra for a great graduate school remains “Great faculty, great students, great ideas.”

Structure of GSAS

GSAS does its work within four major contexts: the Faculty of Arts and Science, New York University as a whole, the national landscape of higher education, and the global landscape of higher education. Within each of them, change is constant and necessary, a stubborn fact that we have often noted in our Priorities Statements. In Summer 2004, Kate Stimpson published an essay, “Reclaiming the Mission of Graduate Education,” in The Chronicle of Higher Education, which surveyed some of the major changes in graduate education. It provides a national background for our work, and can be found on the GSAS website <http://www.nyu.edu/gsas>.²

To many outsiders, and no doubt to many insiders, the structure of GSAS is so intricate that it threatens to unite the characteristics of the incomprehensible and the surreal. As a result, each of our Priorities Statements begins with a brief, and we trust lucid, review of how we structure our work. If any reader is already aware of our structure, we advise skipping or skimming this section and going immediately to the next. But, for those to whom our structure

¹ The GSAS Dean, Catharine R. Stimpson, prepares an initial draft after a summer GSAS Deans’ Retreat. Before the retreat, all directors of graduate studies (DGSes) are invited to suggest agenda items. The draft is then vetted by other GSAS deans; FAS deans; chairs of the GSAS faculty committees; other faculty; the GSAS Advisory Board; and officers of the Graduate School Council. The final draft, always much indebted to the comments by these various readers, is circulated to all GSAS students, faculty and staff, the University Leadership Team, and other interested parties as relevant. Although Kate Stimpson prepares the final draft of the Statement, its authorship has become collective.

² GSAS also belongs to two national graduate education organizations: the Council of Graduate Schools, on whose board Kate Stimpson now sits, and the Association of Graduate Schools, which will meet at NYU in September 2004 and which is the graduate dean branch of the Association of American Universities.

seems new or mysterious, GSAS has four deans, each with a staff: the office of the Dean, now Kate Stimpson, who administers graduate education in the arts and sciences as a whole and serves as its spokesperson; the office of the Vice Dean, now Jim Matthews, who is responsible for academic policies and planning; the office of the Associate Dean for Graduate Enrollment Services (GES), now Roberta Popik, who handles admissions and financial aid; and the office of the Associate Dean for Academic and Student Life (OASL), now David Slocum, who has a broad-ranging portfolio that includes both academic projects and student life issues. In addition, GSAS had three invaluable standing faculty or faculty/student committees: Curriculum, which works with the Office of the Vice Dean; Financial Aid, which works with GES; and Honors and Awards, which works with OASL.

Founded in 1886 by the great American educator Henry Mitchell MacCracken, GSAS is one of the oldest graduate schools in the United States,³ a chartered and degree-granting school within NYU. Its counterpart for undergraduate education is the College of Arts and Science, the first of the chartered and degree-granting schools within NYU. GSAS and CAS work closely together, e.g. on the joint BA/MA degrees, which are increasingly popular. Both CAS and GSAS are deeply and inextricably connected to the Faculty of Arts and Science (FAS), under the admirable leadership of Dean Richard Foley. FAS provides their faculties, most of their financial resources, and logistical and administrative support. In addition, GSAS works with offices of the University Administration (for example, Development and Alumni Relations or External Relations) and with the other 10 schools of NYU that offer graduate degrees. We share with them interschool courses, programs, and degrees. Today, we have 29 interschool degrees on the doctoral and master's level.

Although a graduate school is a source of common principles and productive centralization, the heart of graduate education is the program, be it disciplinary or interdisciplinary. The director of graduate studies (DGS), the academic officer who oversees graduate education within a program, is a wellspring of its administrative clarity, integrity, and effectiveness. GSAS is a large graduate school, but by no means a behemoth compared to some of the larger public research universities. We now have 47 academic departments and programs offering 43 doctoral and 58 master's degrees as well as over 106 separate fields of study.

Individual programs are responsible for their academic objectives, admissions, the curriculum (subject to the approval of the GSAS Curriculum Committee and the FAS faculty), teaching and advising, and the general excellence and energy of daily life. The majority of our programs are housed within FAS and the Courant Institute, but others are within the Medical School, the Institute of Fine Arts, and the Tisch School of the Arts. These programs have a dual relationship to GSAS and to their home school.

Some have described the relations between GSAS and the programs as a matrix, but that makes the graduate school too passive. Others have called GSAS a holding company, but that rhetoric is too non-academic. Perhaps most accurately, a graduate school and the various graduate programs together form a federal system, but one without a comprehensive, written constitution. As we wrote in our 2003-04 Priorities Statement, relations between School and programs work when they are creative, respectful, trusting, dynamic, and delicately calibrated.

Outside of NYU, GSAS belongs to the Inter-University Doctoral Consortium (IUDC). This is enormously important. Now consisting of New School University, Columbia, Fordham, CUNY, Princeton, Rutgers/New Brunswick, SUNY/Stony Brook and NYU, the Consortium asks its members to open up their credit-bearing doctoral courses to students from consortial schools. The Consortium provides academic vitality, curricular breadth, and a structure for cross-university collaborations. If one is to think far ahead, consortial schools might offer some degrees together—but only under rigorously defined conditions, among them the initiation and concurrence of the concerned faculties and schools, and the demonstration that a joint or dual degree would combine resources in ways that would make the academic whole more than the sum of its parts.⁴

Curricular Commonalities

Faculty, students, and staff within GSAS have in common the work of exploring, generating, and transmitting ideas; educating the next generations of scholars, researchers, artists, intellectuals, and teachers; and creating an ethical community of advanced inquiry. For very good academic reasons, individual programs often collaborate. They share ideas, faculty, and students. Programs together also create interdisciplinary curricula that

³ Our financial aid packages for doctoral students, known colloquially as MacCrackens, are named for Henry Mitchell MacCracken.

⁴ GSAS has already done some modest experiments with joint or dual degrees offered by two separate institutions, e.g. a dual doctorate in French through NYU and L'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS).

offer a variety of stand-alone, joint, or dual degrees.⁵ GSAS is already internationally distinguished for its interdisciplinary degrees, for example in American Studies, Hebrew and Judaic Studies, the John W. Draper Interdisciplinary Program in the Humanities and Social Thought, Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, and Neural Science. In 2003-04, New York State approved our most recent, a doctorate and a master's in Computational Biology, a program led by Professor Tamar Schlick and supported by a \$4,000,000 five-year Integrated Research Graduate Education and Training grant (IGERT) from the National Science Foundation.

Of the many questions that we ask about graduate education, at least three now demand our focus. Together and separately, they call upon us as researchers and educators.

The first question is well-known nationally and at NYU, where, as we noted above, we have long been recognized for our interdisciplinary graduate degrees. In a time of shifting and blurring intellectual boundaries, how do individual departments and programs both maintain their intellectual identity and work productively together? This question has become well-known, and faculty and students are accustomed to interdisciplinary inquiry, even if they may not practice it themselves. The challenge is not to create the idea of interdisciplinary work from scratch, because it is alive and well, but to sustain and constantly re-invigorate the balance between the disciplinary and the interdisciplinary. Significantly, graduate students are asking for a greater sense of intellectual community not only within graduate programs and not only among graduate programs, but in addition to the programs per se. As a graduate student leader wrote in response to an earlier draft of this Priorities Statement, we need "a bond within the university and fellow students beyond the classroom...(a) feeling of 'we're all in this together'." So far, GSAS' primary vehicle for establishing a cross-university and cross-school intellectual community, in addition to the communities within and among degree-granting programs, has been the Graduate Forums. The first was established, thanks to private donors, in January 2001. Happily, in 2004-05, a second will be under way, in collaboration with the Institute of Fine Arts and its director Professor Mariët Westermann, to focus on the subject of visual cultures. Once again, we are grateful to private donors for their help in establishing a forum. In the future, we would like to see even more of these intellectual sites evolve.

The second question is being asked with increasing intensity. At a time when we have so much research and teaching and administration to do, how can we most effectively and wisely do all that is asked of us? More specifically, as we plan our undergraduate and graduate curricula and the teaching responsibilities they entail, how can we best staff our courses? And even more specifically, how can we avoid mismatches between our responsibilities and our best energies? For example, can we avoid curricular redundancies that absorb too much energy? Might programs think of creating some common courses, for example, or of sharing certain introductory courses, with the responsibility for teaching them rotating among departments? In 2004-05, we will ask an ad hoc faculty committee to work with the Graduate Curriculum Committee on the possibility of some academically engaging common courses.

A third question is only now emerging, but will not disappear. At a time when students enter graduate school with an ever-widening diversity of backgrounds and preparation, how can we insure that all have and share the advanced skills they need to succeed here? GSAS has begun two pilot programs to address this question, which we will monitor in 2004-05 and expand if desirable. The first, established with the advice of a faculty committee in Summer 2004, is a preparatory non-credit course in mathematics for graduate students before they enroll at NYU in the social sciences. This was given on CD-ROM with the help of a graduate assistant. The second program is writing for graduate students. For several years, we have experimented with a graduate student writing program in the Draper Program, which has proved to be popular and effective. In Summer 2004, this experiment developed into a non-credit course in two well-received summer sessions for potential graduate students, whether NYU was their destination or not. We intend to explore expanding these offerings.⁶

Student Recruitment and Retention

The presence and activity of outstanding faculty is primary in attracting students. Fortunately, FAS will continue to steepen its already extraordinary trajectory of faculty hiring and retention that adds to the accomplishments of those figures who are already here. If a great faculty is necessary and fundamental to graduate

⁵ A stand-alone degree, e.g. a doctorate or master's in American Studies, is offered by an individual program; a joint degree by two or more programs acting in concert and designing a single curriculum; a dual degree by two programs acting independently and designing their separate curricula, both of which a student takes, generally with some overlapping of credits.

⁶ Kate Stimpson has written frequently about her concept of "General Education for Graduate Education," which would fit under the general rubric of cross-school courses that provide greater preparation for graduate education.

education, it is not sufficient. Other factors also matter. The willingness of faculty to offer timely and consistent mentoring is crucial. So are ways of ending student isolation (e.g. dissertation support groups or electronic chat rooms) in areas where work is traditionally done individually and alone. GSAS will ask all programs to review the yearly progress of students until graduation to make sure that the students whom we are happy to recruit will stay through to the end and receive their degrees.

Institutional reputation is still another factor. It is an unfortunate reality that institutional reputation may lag behind institutional achievement, strength, and creativity. We must continue to work to lessen the lag time between our reputation and our realities. Location is still another factor. It is a fortunate reality that we live at the heart of one of the world's great cities, with all its fertility and ferment. This overwhelming advantage of location has its downside, most obviously in housing and cost of living. In 2004-05, we will be renegotiating our pilot program with Stuyvesant Town to provide subsidized housing for entering doctoral students. This has proved to be a useful step in helping our graduate students with affordable and appropriate housing, but we need to move from leasing space that we then subsidize to owning a FAS/GSAS facility for entering doctoral students. Our big dream, of course, is to persuade NYU to build a graduate student community, which includes families which provides housing as well as a vibrant intellectual setting.

Important though institutional reputation, location, and housing are to the recruitment and retention of students, perhaps the most important factor after faculty is financial aid. In 2000-01, GSAS initiated financial aid reform that brought nearly every entering doctoral student a 5-year financial aid package, commonly known as MacCrackens, that includes a good stipend, tuition, fees, health insurance, a \$1000 start-up payment, and a \$4000 Dean's stipend supplement for students from underrepresented United States minority groups. 2004-05 will be the fifth year of financial aid reform, and will mark the passage through GSAS of the first cohort to have five years of financial aid. This will provide the Office of Graduate Enrollment Services a timely opportunity to work with programs on the by now time-tested administration of their financial aid portfolios.⁷

We are, however, acutely aware of what more we must do if our financial aid is to remain competitive with peer graduate schools on the doctoral level. In the sciences, programs may be held hostage to the vicissitudes of government support for graduate education. If this happens, we will need to confront the difficulties of federal shortfalls. In the social sciences and humanities, some programs would like to expand their graduate programs and, as a result, would like to have more MacCracken fellowships from GSAS. (Because doctoral students must be admitted with five years of guaranteed support, presuming that the student makes satisfactory academic progress, admissions and financial aid are inseparable from each other.) Other programs would like to readjust the ratio of years of fellowship support to those of graduate assistant support within the 5-year package. Every doctoral program in the humanities and social sciences needs more summer and dissertation support. Here we are in real danger of falling behind our peer institutions.

Because of the generosity and initiative of two private donors, Ron Katz and Libby Roth, GSAS will be offering a pilot program for dissertation support in 2004-05. Called the Torch Fellowships, it will offer support for dissertation research abroad, with special consideration to students who be doing research in and about their ancestral homelands. In addition, the Torch Fellowship will provide an honorarium to the institution in which a student is working—a library, for example, or state archives, or a civic institution. The great underlying idea of the Torch Fellowships is that graduate student scholarship and learning can be an essential way of “giving back” to the places from which we have come and of increasing international understanding and multi-lateral co-operation. The Torch Fellowships have the potential to become a national program, but for the moment, they will begin at NYU, to be administered by the Office of Academic and Student Life, and advised by the Honors and Awards Committee and representatives of the FAS Global Distinguished Professors.

Nature of Our Degrees

Like our peer institutions, we offer three degrees: the doctorate, the apex of graduate achievement; the master's, into which students enter for a variety of motives; and the certificate, offered in conjunction with another degree, a demonstration of competence in a subject. In the past few years, GSAS has put the bulk of its resources in strengthening the doctoral degree: financial aid reform, subsidized housing for entering doctoral students; more

⁷ 2004-05 will also be the last year of the current contract between NYU and the United Auto Workers that sets wages and benefits for many graduate assistants. It would be premature to address this issue now.

money for recruitment and communications; an enhanced Graduate School Educational Development Program for graduate students who teach, which will begin offering a two-year Teaching and Learning Certificate in 2004-05.

The doctorate will remain the apex of graduate achievement. (Interestingly, a national conversation is beginning about the nature of the dissertation, a conversation that some of our faculty may wish to join.) However, as previous Priority Statements have said, master's programs are rapidly growing nationally. This is so because they are meeting strong intellectual, academic, and social needs. Structurally, GSAS offers two sorts of master's programs: first, those housed within departments that have doctoral programs (e.g. in Psychology or Mathematics or History); and second, those that we call "stand-alone," which either exist independently (e.g. Museum Studies or the Draper Program) or are housed with departments that have no doctoral programs (e.g. Religious Studies or Russian and Slavic or Journalism). For many months, GSAS has been discussing a Master's College to help to enhance our master's offerings, and which we will implement in 2004-05. However, preceding and accompanying implementation will be discussions with individual programs in order to make sure that their master's degrees fit with their overall academic hopes and to explore how a Master's College can best serve these hopes. (The text of a "Proposal for a Master's College," which outlines this initiative in more detail, is available by contacting my office by phone 212-998-8040 or E-mail gsas.dean@nyu.edu).

In 2004-05, we also finish designing a rewards plan for master's programs that will then be implemented in 2005-06. The general idea is to return a proportion of master's tuition revenues to departments and programs in order to enhance graduate academic quality and excellence. If the master's program is housed in a department that offers both doctoral and master's programs, the department will receive a percentage (admittedly modest) of the tuition it has generated to be spent as it sees fit to strengthen graduate education. Stand-alone master's programs will have their return customized in order to meet their specific academic needs. More financial aid for master's students is sure to be a priority of many programs.

Culture of Review and Renewal

As anyone who cares about her or his work knows, the process of working is never really over. We scrutinize our work, sometimes cheerfully, sometimes anxiously. We listen to what others think about it. We start again, change course, redo and do over.

Working with faculty over the past few years, the Office of the Vice Dean has developed a set of lenses through which programs can look at themselves. The measures are: the size and quality of the applicant pool; yield rate on offers of admission; student publications, awards, and outside fellowships; student attrition and completion rates; time to degree; academic and professional placement; and program evaluations by students and external rankings. Like all leading academic institutions, GSAS is also subject to national rankings. Some of them are journalistic, most notably U.S. News and World Report.⁸ The most rigorous, thorough and reputable is the National Research Council survey of graduate programs in the arts and sciences, engineering, and agriculture. This survey is now scheduled for 2005-06, and we must spend 2004-05 preparing for it. It will collect data about our students, faculty, individual programs, and university-wide support of graduate education. It will also obtain peer ratings of our programs. These will be of interest to many parties, including students. The importance of this survey to the reputation of our programs and of graduate education as a whole cannot be stressed strongly enough. Provost David McLaughlin will chair a Steering Committee, and in the fall we will no doubt select a group of pilot programs to test the NRC's draft questionnaire. Only by completing the survey completely and accurately can it measure our current strengths.

Continuing Activities

This Priorities Statement focuses on initiatives for 2004-05, but this in no way diminishes the importance to us of on-going activities, which we have discussed in previous "Priorities Statements." Among the most important will be:

—Enhancing our diversity. We are very proud of being an international graduate school, proud because of the talents of our international students and because of our belief that great ideas and research have no national boundaries. Depending on the year, between 40 percent and 45 percent of our students come from outside the United

⁸ In addition, individual programs may have groups or people that rank them. In Spring 2004, Kate Stimpson had her 5-year decadal review, and found the Review Team's work most helpful.

States.⁹ Like graduate schools across the country, however, we suffered a drop in international applications after 9/11, in great part because of the administration of U.S. visa and immigration policies. Thanks to the activity of higher education community and our own efforts, and thanks to the understanding of some offices within the U.S. Department of State, visa difficulties may be easing. However, the U.S. as a whole must still be seen as a crucial if not the crucial center of graduate education, a position that is being challenged by Europe, Australia, and other countries that are building systems of higher education. Neither graduate education in general nor individual schools can loll on our post-World War II laurels.

As for our representation of national diversity, our record is not yet good enough. We are too close to national averages, when we should be surpassing them handily, and too few programs are genuinely diverse. In a variety of ways, we will be working with individual programs to explore new recruitment strategies and admissions practices that might inadvertently marginalize minority admissions. In addition, we will be revamping our Opportunity Fellowships, funded by the University and FAS but administered by our Office of Graduate Enrollment Services, to earmark a proportion of them for our demonstrably most underrepresented minority groups.

—Continuing to build GSAS as a center of transdisciplinary activity, for example the Lewis Burke Frumkes lecture, which brings a renowned philosopher to campus to speak to philosophers and non-philosophers alike. The 2004 Frumkes lecturer will be Noam Chomsky, the great linguist. He will appear on November 15.¹⁰

—Working with the Graduate Student Council to sustain student governance and relations among the Council and GSAS. In 2003, the Council established and gave for the first time its welcome award for Graduate Student Teaching and Mentoring. At our 2004 Convocation the award went to Professor Neal Brenner of Sociology.

—Deepening relations with alumni and alumnae. Our ambassadors outside of the university, they are proof of the quality and mettle of our programs. In Spring 2005, we will again make a Distinguished Alumni Award, which in 2004 went to Congressman Rush Holt, who has his doctorate in Physics from NYU and who is now a leading voice for science and education in the House of Representatives. In 2004-05, our priorities will be to organize our more recent alumni and alumnae, to recognize the achievements of our alumni and alumnae of color, and to increase the connections between our alumni/ae and current students.

Conclusion

As a graduate school, we do not fire vessels or vases, although our Classics and Archaeology programs may study an amphora and our Anthropology or Art History or Museum Studies programs a Hopi vase. Our work is with ideas, theories, facts, truths, myths, and with people who wish to learn and teach. Some might say we deal with intellectual and human capital. This is often messy and muddy, but we strive for clarity and for a passionate, imaginative commitment to our work that neither subdues nor disdains but rather prizes rationality and rigor. We look forward to being with our companion schools and with our faculty, students, staff, alumni, alumnae, and friends as we embark upon 2004-05 with our immodest hopes for great faculty, students, and ideas.

⁹ We are grateful to the NYU Office of International Scholars and Students (OISS) for being the best of partners.

¹⁰ We are grateful to the Frumkes family for their support of this event.