



Dana Club Meeting Minutes
Friday, September 15, 2006 5:30 pm
Kline Geology Lab 102

- I. Introduction
 - a. President called the meeting to order.
 - b. All present introduced themselves, including Department Chairman, Dave Bercovici, and Director of Graduate Studies, John Wettlaufer.
 - c. Phone numbers and birthdays were collected from those present and willing to contribute them. The phone list was assembled and distributed on Monday September 18, 2006.

- II. Comments from the Chair

The Chair as outgoing DGS gave an overview of the requirements for the new qualification process. He offered to meet with second year students to go over specific questions and requirements. He reminded second year students to work with their advisory committees and the Registrar (Bobbie Dulong) to schedule their first preliminary presentations at the end of October.

- III. Comments from the DGS

The DGS asked second year students to limit the abstracts for their preliminary presentations to 1 page.

- IV. Comments from the GSA rep(s)

As the current Graduate Student Assembly representative (Phil Skemer) was not present, last year's GSA rep, Madalyn Blondes briefly explained that the purpose of the Assembly is to identify and address the needs and concerns of graduate students. They communicate these issues to the administration. All graduate students are welcome at GSA meetings, which are held every other Wednesday at 7 pm in the Hall of Graduate Studies room 119.

- V. Sports teams

Sports team captains introduced themselves and their teams. All graduate students are encouraged to participate in intramural sports. No prior sporting experience is necessary.

Megan Andrews – Volleyball, games held Sunday mornings

Erik Sperling – Soccer, games held Sunday afternoons

William Landuyt – Softball, games held Sunday afternoons
?? – Basketball, games will begin later in the year

- VI. Colloquium committee
Erik Sperling, head of the Colloquium Committee, explained that the Colloquium Committee invites speakers for Colloquium each Wednesday and organizes their visits. He encouraged people to join, especially representatives for Surface Processes and Tectonics and Paleooceanography/Biogeochemistry/Paleoclimate. Please contact Erik should you wish to join Colloquium Committee.
- VII. McDougall Center
McDougall Fellow Eben Rose explained that the McDougall Center offers a variety of academic services and social activities for graduate students. The McDougall Center distributes a weekly email listing upcoming activities. He collected email addresses for those who wished to be added to the distribution list. If you are not receiving this email and would like to, please contact Eben.
- VIII. The 2-4 Project and Dean's Committee on Department Reform
Eben Rose explained the purpose of the 2-4 Project, which is to help graduate students make the transition from coursework to dissertation research. He later sent out a full description of the project (attached). For an assessment of department performance visit <http://www.yale.edu/graduateschool/academics/data.html>.
- IX. Department Fall Field Trip
Ondrej Sramek provided a reminder and overview of the Department Field Trip, which was held very successfully on Saturday, September 23, 2006.
- X. Dana Club Talks
The decision to continue the lunch time Dana Club talks was deferred until next semester.
- XI. Dana Club skit
Some interest was expressed in producing a Dana Club skit this year. Tim Raub suggested that it could be combined with a wine tasting or other social event and undergrads and/or faculty could also participate. The decision on this was deferred until spring semester.
- XII. Jobs
- a. Faculty Lunch Setup -> Tyler Lyson and Jakob Vinther
 - b. Lounge Sink, Refrigerator Cleanup -> Melanie Parker
 - c. Colloquium Beer/Snacks -> Xiaoyue Du
 - d. Coffee/Tea Setup -> Thomas Hegna, Tara Mayeaux, Carlos Szembek, Kazu Otsuka

- e. Vans -> Dan Peppe
- f. Website Upkeep -> Garrett Leahy; if you have any content, take it to him

XIII. Monetary issues

- a. Budget update from Una
The Dana Club currently has no money and owes about \$200 to various people. We receive a yearly endowment in December and periodic disbursements from the vending machines in the basement. The Chair has offered to bail out the Dana Club and a proposal will be submitted soon for funding for activities this semester.
- b. Do we want to continue the Happy Hour?
It was agreed by an informal poll that the Happy Hours were a good investment and will be continued. The first Happy Hour will be a joint venture with EEB and Forestry on Friday, October 13, 2006.
- c. Do we want to keep getting magazines even though they never seem to end up in the lounge?
It was agreed by an informal poll that the magazines were also a good investment and subscriptions should be continued. When it is time for renewal a vote will be taken to determine which magazines we should subscribe to. It was suggested that we look into student New York Times subscriptions, as the regular subscription is quite expensive. It was also pointed out that the magazines disappear from the Dana Club Lounge because they are left on the tables and get thrown away with the other refuse. Please remember to put the magazines back in the bin in the corner after reading them.
- d. Any other ideas for activities you would like to see?
Another activity that was discussed was the possibility of a tailgate party at Harvard for the Yale-Harvard football game. Bryan Woods offered to organize this.

XIV. Any other business

It was requested that the President see Pam Buonocore to find out how to get the vending machines filled and services.

Renewing the Ph.D. . . . at Yale

The 2-4 Project

We believe that it is time to reassess our Ph.D. programs in a highly focused way, concentrating on the critical years between the completion of course work and very substantial research on Ph.D. dissertations--years 2-4 in most programs. We want our Ph.D. programs to show greater flexibility, imagination, and responsiveness to shifting intellectual needs, student aspirations, and broadening professional opportunities and demands. Anecdotal evidence and our participation in formal programs, such as the Woodrow Wilson Foundation's "Responsive Ph.D." initiative and the Ph.D. Completion Project funded by the Council of Graduate Schools, suggest that delays in years 2-4 push back direct dissertation research and writing and hinder entrance into professional life by impeding dissertation completion. Problems and successes in years 2-4 strongly influence final outcomes, most obviously in the receipt of the Ph.D. but equally profoundly in serving as students' principal models for success in their first professional positions inside and outside academia.

We therefore invite all departments to evaluate their Ph.D. programs in the fall of 2006, using the questions and suggestions below as guidelines for assessment and change. The Graduate School recognizes that the individuality of departments and programs will stimulate different responses to some of the issues suggested here. At the same time, we hope that departments and programs will tackle difficult questions because they are real and, in fact, offer opportunities for improvement. We ask that you think creatively about the futures that your students face professionally and personally rather than defend what always has been done. Mainly, we simply ask that you look at your programs in light of the desired end—Ph.D.s who are competitive in tough job markets, intellectually resilient, and even more fascinated by research and teaching as they begin independent professional life than they were when they entered graduate school.

The transition from the 2nd to the 4th year of study

In years 2-4 most Ph.D. students move from formal class work to independent scholarship. Science students complete lab rotations and exams, choose an advisor and a lab with and in which to work, write a dissertation prospectus, and begin independent research and writing. Most humanities and social science students finish their last courses, take exams, write a prospectus, and also begin teaching. When all goes smoothly, science, humanities, and social science students have advanced to candidacy by the end of the third year and are deeply engaged in dissertation research in the fourth year. The Graduate School is concerned to help students negotiate these processes as fluidly and effectively as possible.

Although inherent disciplinary differences and departmental requirements make it difficult to generalize, the time to candidacy has remained steady and relatively high, and students too frequently require extensions of the candidacy deadline. The concern is that every extension in the middle of a program risks lengthening the time to complete the Ph.D. But even when deadlines are met in a timely fashion, anecdotal evidence also suggests that students often

encounter the most serious obstacles of their graduate experiences during these middle years. In too many instances, students are simply ill-prepared to begin the independent work required of them. The goal of the evaluative measures outlined below is to help students embark on the independent work of advancing to candidacy efficiently and with confidence so that the researching and writing of the dissertation is neither unduly delayed nor fraught with anxiety.

Areas of concern in the humanities and social sciences

We wish to focus on several critical areas on which to improve the experience of students in years 2 through 4.

- Mentoring. Does the mentoring in the department provide adequate guidance and feedback?
- Course work. Does course work train students to move to exams efficiently as well as conduct independent research and formulate a dissertation topic? Have students been graded realistically? Does course work prepare students to become independent researchers and writers, moving beyond criticism of the contemporary discipline?
- Program structure. Does the configuration of exams, prospectus-writing and first-time teaching enable students to make optimal progress during these years?
- Collaborative frameworks. Students beginning research sometimes feel isolated and unsure of how to proceed. Does the department have collaborative frameworks to allay this isolation?
- Evaluation. Are the department's early evaluative structures too porous so that students reach the dissertation stage without having met essential challenges and, sometimes, even requirements?
- Expectations. Are the department's programmatic expectations clearly stated and publicized to students early on?

Areas of concern in the sciences

Students in the sciences tend to move relatively quickly into dissertation research. There are, nonetheless, some concerns shared with the humanities and social science departments. These include issues of effective mentoring, clear and frequent evaluations, and clearly communicated expectations. Two distinct features of the science programs would benefit from substantial evaluation.

- Program structure. Does the configuration of research rotations and special projects provide sufficient experience for both faculty and students to make lab placement decisions?
- Evaluation. Are the research experiences formally evaluated and are results communicated to students in writing as recommended in the Engelman Committee Report? Does the department or program have a clear mechanism for evaluating research performance and potential early on?

Solutions

Some issues might be addressed centrally by the Graduate School, although none of these possibilities could be implemented without considerable discussion in and with departments and

programs. Items of discussion might include the subjects below, with the understanding that changes in requirements would apply only to newly admitted students.

- More stringent honors requirements than those in place
- Change in the current H, HP, P, and F grading system
- More efficient examination system
- Written evaluations of overall performance in years one and two
- Departmental or field colloquia during the preparation of exams and the prospectus
- First and even second dissertation chapter conferences at set intervals
- Creation of a departmental dissertation seminar or seminars meeting weekly or bi-weekly, taught by faculty, especially for students in the writing stage that might count as 1 deferred course in the required curriculum, also effectively reducing the regular seminar requirement by 1
- Regular yearly departmental workshops on professional expectations in the discipline, ranging from publishing to grants, teaching, and family and professional life issues
- More flexible financial aid package that would enable students to move the teaching years to the most beneficial times (see below)
- A reduction of time to candidacy in 7-term departments to 6, based on the provision of much increased summer funding
- Some linkage of admissions targets to total program size

Solutions responsive to the needs of each discipline and that are created by individual departments after substantial discussion probably offer the best opportunity for effective improvement in Ph.D. programs. At the same time, some departmental issues will intersect with broader Graduate School policies and practices, and departments and the Graduate School will need to be aware of these confluences.

At the departmental level, we recommend the following:

- Careful examination of mentoring practices within the department and consistent guidelines about the importance of faculty meetings with students and providing timely feedback on written work
- Examination of the type and amount of course work required. This is probably the single most crucial area in which departments and programs can improve the experience of their students. Such a re-examination would not necessarily entail a reduction in the total amount of course work, but rather, a reconfiguration of when course work occurs (e.g. moving some course work to post-candidacy in the form of a dissertation seminar). It might also entail course work aimed more specifically at preparing students for field exams and independent research, particularly in the second year. Course work should also introduce students to the exigencies of shaping a proper topic and creating an argument, using large amounts of material.
- Evaluating the examination system. If students rather regularly do not complete examinations and the dissertation prospectus in the third year, faculty should reconsider current examination practices. Are the exams too convoluted? Delaying exams usually delays dissertations.

- Configuration of program. Should the Graduate School make its funding package more flexible in the humanities and social sciences? For example, these departments might reconsider the order in which students complete course work, teach for the first time and prepare exams and the prospectus. Right now, the usual model is to begin teaching in year three, just when students are also preparing for exams and the prospectus. Might some students do better by teaching in the second year as they complete the last year of course work, as has long happened in the History of Art (an exception to the general humanities and social science pattern)? In addition to leaving more time available for the preparation of post-course work requirements, it would enable students to reserve a year of funding without teaching for post-candidacy research in the fourth or fifth year.
- Opportunities for students to attend research groups and to present their work in more formal ways to their peers and faculty.
- Discussion of the current evaluative structures in place in the department. The departments and programs should be sure that they provide sufficient formal evaluation of students in years one, two and three, up until students submit their first dissertation progress reports. Expectations should be clearly defined from the outset. Even as they enter the program, students should be made aware of the points at which they will be evaluated and on what basis these evaluations will be made. A student should never feel unsure about his or her standing in the program. Following the recommendation of the recently completed Engelman Committee report, the Graduate School will expect all departments to provide each student with a progress report at the end of each academic year in which the student is registered.

Procedures and Implementation

Formatted

Evaluating your program will require several steps, and the procedures may, and probably should, differ somewhat from program to program. At a minimum, we recommend the following:

- Appoint a committee to design, oversee and implement the review.
- Meet with students separately by cohort and/or subfield, and also meet with them as a total group. Be sure that students understand that you really do want to hear from them and to learn from them what they believe is and isn't working, what is frustrating, and what is successful. Recognize that students may be shy about expressing negative feedback and provide them the opportunity to speak with faculty members individually as well as in a group.
- Meet with the full department faculty to discuss student feedback and each of the issues raised in this review document.

How you arrange your meetings will depend in good part on the size of your program. Small programs will handle the information gathering phase of the project differently than large programs.

You also might usefully consult a new book: Michael T. Nettles and Catherine M. Millett, *Three Magic Letters: Getting to Ph.D.* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006). Nettles and Millett assess the careers of 9000 graduate students in 21 Ph.D. programs and stress how discerning institutional changes, persistent follow-through, and effective faculty mentoring

can substantially improve Ph.D. completion and graduate student success. In short, planning and effort make a difference.

Once you have gathered all of your materials, please submit a report to the Dean of the Graduate School outlining the particular areas on which your program will work and the steps you intend to take to achieve these changes. We have attached here a report recently submitted by the Political Science department after its own internal review. The Political Science review has been well received by faculty and students in the department and is meant simply as a guideline or example of what has worked in one Ph.D. program. Your report should include both what needs fixing and what works. If you are doing something that is successful, let us know so that we can share it with others.

Again, changes in requirements would apply only to newly admitted students, while everyone could take immediate advantage of curricular, mentoring, and other improvements your review produces.

Finally, your report should be circulated to all of the faculty and students in the program so that everyone has a clear understanding of the outcome of your review and a clear set of expectations about what the next steps will be.

Schedule

Departments should begin their reviews very early in the fall semester with a December completion deadline.

Formatted