

HISTORY GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION
APRIL 16, 2011

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
HISTORY DEPARTMENT
GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

Dear Dr. Sun, Dr. Kawamura, and Graduate Studies Committee Members,

As we close out this academic year the HSGA body would like to communicate several concerns that have come to light over the last academic year in the hope that next year's Graduate Studies Committee will consider addressing some of our concerns. This year has been very busy with budget issues and program changes. It appears that next year will see the department facing additional challenges as we all attempt to adjust to the new university environment. For graduate students, our academic programs and professional development concerns remain our top priority and we remain hopeful that upon graduation we will have acquired an education that will prepare us to take our place in the job market. In addition, the improving quality of the graduate program in history at WSU is important to each of us as we complete our work here because it has a long term impact on our ability to get jobs. The changes that have been made by the Graduate Studies Committee over the last couple of years have substantially improved the program.

Over the 2010-2011 academic year the HGSA body has discussed the concerns listed below. In our most recent HGSA General Meeting it was agreed that a letter to the Graduate Studies Committee articulating these concerns should be crafted. This letter does not represent a list of demands, but simply voices concerns that graduate students have. Most of these concerns are not new and are just reiterations of issues that have been raised previously. In addition, we realize that some of the issues may already be part of the "accepted practices," but we are requesting that they be formalized so that students have similar graduate experiences in regard to prelims and TA workloads. As graduate students we look to our faculty mentors for support, direction, and training. The desire for an annual review expresses the need for an intentional discussion of our coursework, program goals, and teaching experience. And finally, as funding looms large in all of our lives a request for a revision to the program which would include fifth year funding is included. We realize that this is a major request and that it would significantly change the number of TA appointments available. However, it would also attract quality students to the program and significantly improve the quality of dissertations produced by PhD candidates. It is with these things in mind that we submit the following list of concerns.

Annual review—In a letter submitted earlier this semester we requested that the committee consider instituting an annual review for graduate students, which would be conducted by their faculty mentor. Although we have an ongoing conversation concerning our program progress with our mentors, graduate students do not receive input from the persons we work with as TAs and from our course instructors. The department requires that evaluations be filled out, but these are filed away and we as graduate students are not given the opportunity to see this feedback. We request that the committee consider instituting an annual review which would allow us to have access to these materials as a professional development tool. It also would be a useful tool for our mentors, giving them a broader sense of our overall progress and not just our performance in relation to the work we do with them.

Prelim concerns—As the committee considers alterations to the prelim process as part of ongoing revisions to the graduate program graduate students would like to voice some basic issues that have arisen over the years. We did a survey of current post-prelim graduate students and graduates from the program to see what they found useful and what concerns students had. In addition, the HGSA Agenda Committee did research of history graduate programs across the country including Pac 10 schools and a number of the higher ranking history graduate programs. As a result of this research we would request that the committee seriously consider the following information as the current prelim process is re-evaluated. We are aware of the significant work that has taken place over the last few years to update and improve our graduate program. We believe that the following information will be useful in the

continuing process. In addition, although some of these seem like current policy they are not uniformly adhered to, causing the experiences of graduate students to vary significantly.

- We request that students receive their final reading lists at least one semester prior to their exam. For fall exams that would mean by the end of the spring semester and for spring exams by the beginning of the fall semester. Any changes to the lists after this time would be with the student's acceptance of those changes before they are made.
- We request that students be notified of the dates for their exams at least four weeks in advance, including the times and subject schedule.
- We request that students using department computers to take exams have ample time, prior to exams, to use and become comfortable with the specific computer and that these be in good working order.
- We request that a break, which does not count against the exam time, be allotted for each exam and that these breaks are uniform. This is critical when taking the six hour exams.

Students in the past few years have had issues in these areas that added unneeded frustration to an already intensely stressful experience. While it is not our desire that the rigorousness of the preliminary exam process be diminished, it would benefit graduate students if the protocols of the entire examination process were clear.

Graduate student funding—Graduate student funding in the department has been of considerable concern in the light of budget issues. From both faculty meetings and graduate studies meetings it is evident that funding levels will be changing. Dr. Sun and the department have made it clear that changing funding will not impact current students (unless it is unavoidable), but that future levels of funding will be different with the acceptance of fewer graduate students with funding. These changes are to be expected in the current academic climate. However, one consideration that graduate students would like the committee to at least discuss is the possibility of fifth year funding. The four year limit on funding is a department guideline and not mandated by the graduate school. However, as the department seeks to improve the program fifth year funding would be a tool to attract promising students as well as considerably improve the quality of dissertation work produced. It goes without saying that this would cut into the number of positions available, but the improvement of quality research would be a recognizable benefit.

TA policy—Over the last few years the World Civilizations program has undergone a significant overhaul. As part of that the World Civilizations Committee has crafted a formal TA policy. In addition, and unknown to most of us, during the 1994-1995 academic year a Conflict Resolution Committee was proposed by HGSA and passed by the faculty. Over the fifteen plus years since this program was accepted this information was lost. Due to the changing sizes of classes and the ambiguity of the history departments TA policy, graduate students would like to request that the Graduate Studies Committee, in cooperation with the History Department as a whole, adopt a formal TA policy incorporating aspects of both of these documents. Policies that clearly outline the duties, responsibilities, and limits to the job TAs perform would provide a more effective work environment for all parties. As basis for this policy attached to this letter are the two documents discussed above.

As graduate students it is our hope that our department's intellectual atmosphere will continue to be dynamic and that we as a department will, even in these very trying times, maintain our strong feeling of community. The HGSA would like to thank both Dr. Sun and Dr. Kawamura for the work they have done on behalf of graduate students in our department. We would also like to thank the Graduate Studies Committee for their hard work to improve and update our program. The items mentioned above are meant to let the committee know some of the concerns that graduate students have in the hope that the Graduate Studies Committee for the 2011-2012 academic year will consider these as they prepare their agenda for the upcoming academic year.

Job description:

A teaching assistant is a professional academic-in-training, whose role is to assist the instructor with grading, teaching, monitoring, and tutoring in the section to which he or she has been assigned. A teaching assistant is also the primary liaison between the instructor and the students in the section, and as such plays an important role in the smooth running of the section as well as in its management.

Specific duties of TAs include:

1. Becoming familiar with the syllabus and all course materials, including textbooks, primary sources, websites, etc.
2. Attending class each day and taking notes.
3. Keeping regular office hours each week (3 hours) and responding to student emails in a timely fashion.
4. Assisting the instructor with media setup and preparation, and with class handouts.
5. Taking attendance.
6. Arranging study sessions, when desired by the instructor, prior to exams and/or papers.
7. Grading quizzes, exams, and/or papers carefully and thoroughly.
8. Lecturing in class at least once a semester.
9. Maintaining a professional demeanor at all times with students and with the instructor.
10. Keeping a record of all grades, and supplying final grades to the instructor.

Instructors will post final grades.

At no time during the semester will TA duties require more than 20 hours of labor per week: labor in excess of 20 hours is prohibited by university policy.

Guidelines for Instructors with TAs in the World Civ program:

Because graduate students frequently carry heavy course-loads of their own, it is the policy of the World Civ program that instructors use TA labor judiciously. Just as student needs must be taken into account when designing course assignments, so too must the demands of graduate coursework on the time of graduate students. The World Civ program encourages instructors to think of TAs as both mentees and as crucial assistants in a teaching team, and to use TA labor in ways that will help TAs learn to become effective teachers.

In order to balance the relationship between TAs as laborers and TAs as teachers-in-training, the World Civ program recommends the following guidelines:

1. Instructors should clearly articulate their expectations for classroom management, grading deadlines, and grading criteria to their TAs at the beginning of each semester. Ideally, instructors will meet with all TAs from each of their sections as a group at the beginning of the semester, and then will meet periodically to discuss problems and issues over the course of the semester.
2. When planning assignments, instructors should set grading deadlines for TAs that allow them time to complete them thoroughly and carefully, and that do not make it impossible for them to complete their own coursework. Ideally, TAs should be allowed two weeks to grade papers and exams, and one week to grade quizzes.
3. Because World Civ classes are so large, instructors should give careful thought to all graded work assigned: ie. can quizzes be moved to an online environment where they can be graded more quickly? Can the number of exams and papers be reduced without compromising student assessment? In addition, graded work should be spaced appropriately throughout the semester, so that TAs are not saddled with grading multiple assignments at once.
4. Since TAs are training to be teachers themselves, instructors should allow each TA to compose and deliver *at least* one lecture to their section every semester. This kind of training—as well as the feedback instructors can then give—is critical to TA training.
5. Instructors should be willing to provide TAs regular and constructive feedback regarding performance in terms of lecturing, grading, and classroom management.
6. Under no circumstances should TAs be asked to inflate grades or to ignore plagiarism. TAs who are asked to do so have the right to refer these requests to the World Civ Committee.
7. For reasons of consistency and professionalism, it is undesirable for instructors to regularly change student grades they have received from the TA. This can be avoided by carefully setting out grading criteria at the beginning of the semester, by discussing the criteria for each assignment, and by monitoring the grading process (asking for grade range; reading highest and lowest graded exams and papers) throughout the semester. In addition, instructors should make clear the process and chain of command by which students with grievances regarding their grades must go through.
8. Instructors have the responsibility to provide TAs with all course materials, including textbooks, novels, readers, etc.

World Civ Policies Regarding TAs and TA Training

1. All TAs are required to attend a TA orientation at the beginning of fall semester every year. TA orientation will be piloted in the spring semester of 2010. Topics covered include professionalism, how to grade effectively, communication with instructors and students, how to maintain a log of student grades, dealing with ESL students.
2. TAs will have a separate student evaluation form in addition to the evaluation form filled out by their instructor. TAs will have access to both forms.
3. TAs will fill out a feedback form for their instructors at the end of each semester.
4. Conflicts between instructors and TAs that cannot be resolved through individual communication will be arbitrated first by the Director of World Civilizations, and then by the chair of the History Department.
5. All TAs and instructors shall receive a copy of the TA job description and the guidelines for instructors at the start of every semester.

Conflict Resolution Committee

Policy and Procedures

Final Draft

The Conflict Resolution Committee (CRC) is to serve as an impartial mediating body for the purpose of resolving conflicts between history graduate students and faculty members when all other internal processes have been exhausted. This committee will be ad-hoc and informal, and its meetings will be determined upon demand. As a mediating body, the committee will propose recommendations and resolutions aimed toward the satisfaction of both parties.

I. Purpose:

1. CRC will serve as a mediator and, after due considerations, propose recommendations to the Chair of the History Department, the Graduate Studies Advisor, and to the HGSA.
2. Such recommendation will be made after both parties have expressed their concerns and have been satisfied, as far as possible, with the committees resolutions.

II. Members:

1. CRC will be composed of four equal members, consisting of two (2) graduate students and two (2) faculty members. At the discretion of all involved, a person not connected to the department may attend.
2. HGSA will serve as the facilitator for graduate students. The graduate student(s) who have grievances and who have taken all appropriate actions to resolve conflicts with the faculty member(s) and have failed to come to a satisfactory resolution, can request to the HGSA Agenda Committee to convene the CRC.
 - a. The Graduate Studies Representative will then notify the History Chair that the CRC has been requested.
3. The History Chair will serve as the facilitator for faculty members. The faculty member(s) who have grievances and who have taken all appropriate actions to resolve such conflict with the graduate student(s) and have failed to come to a satisfactory resolution, can request to the History Chair to convene the CRC.
 - a. The History Chair will then notify the Graduate Studies Representative that the CRC has been requested.
4. The HGSA graduate studies representative will serve as the standing member of the committee unless there exists a professional or personal conflict with either the graduate student or faculty member involved in the conflict. The second graduate student member to the committee will be appointed by the Agenda Committee with the approval of the HGSA.
5. The History Chair will appoint two faculty members to the CRC. Appointment of both members will be made with consideration to avoid

any possible professional or personal conflict with the student or the faculty member involved.

6. To promote impartial evaluations, the composition of the committee shall not include: 1) the major professor of the student; 2) the professor whom the student is a T.A., R.A., or grader; 3) the chair of the department; 4) students in the same major field as the graduate student involved; 5) the faculty member's T.A., R.A., or grader.

III. Procedure

1. Once the CRC is convened, the person, or persons, bringing the complaint will speak with the CRC members. The CRC will then hear arguments and facilitate discussion with the concerned parties either separately, or at the same time.
2. Suggestions will be made to both parties and resolutions will be discussed.
3. The CRC will compose a collective written recommendation that may also include specific dissenting recommendations, that will, with the permission of either interested party, be forwarded to the Department Chair, the HGSA Agenda Committee, and the Graduate Studies Advisor.
4. Recommendations can be taken to outside parties for consideration, at the discretion of either of those involved, if the conflict is not resolved within the CRC.