Response to Task Force on Graduate Education

Dear Dean Keller and Members of the Task Force on Graduate Education,

We appreciate the effort made by the Task Force and recognize the inherent challenges of evaluating such a large number and diverse set of graduate programs. Their assessment has provoked useful discussion among our faculty and, in combination with the Departmental review we are undergoing this spring, will stimulate important changes to the quality of our program.

However, for the record, we feel we must take issue with a number of points:

1) Few students in each focus area. Anthropology currently has 48 enrolled graduate students: 24 in sociocultural anthropology (including linguistic anthropology), 15 in archaeology, and 8 in biological anthropology. These figures are roughly proportional to the number of faculty (8 in sociocultural anthropology, 6 in archaeology, and 3 in biological anthropology). Given the size of the faculty and our shift, in recent years, toward a more competitive, closely mentored, and better funded cohort, we feel that the graduate program has the appropriate number of students within each focus area/subfield.

2) Long TTD. While current statistics for Anthropology programs nationwide are hard to come by, the Survey of Earned Doctorates in the academic year 2002-2003 indicated that Anthropology had the highest TTD of all doctorate recipients of the Social Sciences at 11.9 years (Source: [http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/infbrief/nsf06312/nsf06312.pdf](http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/infbrief/nsf06312/nsf06312.pdf)). This would suggest that our TTD of 6.8 years is well within the normative range nationally. Unlike many graduate students, Anthropology students must secure their own funding to conduct fieldwork, they usually need to develop foreign language skills, and they spend an extensive period of time overseas (or in often unpredictable field situations). Because publications make students more competitive for post-graduate employment, our students also dedicate time toward writing peer-reviewed articles. This naturally adds time to their degree clock, but we feel this is an essential component of high quality graduate training. We will continue to work hard, nevertheless, to ensure that our students keep on track through close monitoring.

3) Funding minimally adequate. The vast majority of Anthropology students admitted in recent years have been offered 5 years of funding, and this has allowed us to secure more competitive students, as indicated by increasing average GREs and successful Presidential and Deans Graduate Fellowships. As students develop their dissertation projects, faculty actively work with students to prepare competitive grant proposals to fund their fieldwork, which usually involves research overseas. Students have been quite successful in obtaining the most competitive grants in Anthropology, such as from the National Science Foundation and Wenner-Gren Foundation.

4) Completion/retention. We feel that a rigorous graduate program should experience some attrition. We should also note that when one of our faculty recently left the university for another program, she took 3 students with her, and these numbers contribute, somewhat misleadingly, to the attrition rate.

5) Placement. One of the unique qualities of an Anthropology graduate degree is that it allows for placement of students in diverse settings, including governmental agencies, cultural resource management, as well as teaching and research institutions. We are working hard, nonetheless, to improve the placement of our students by enhancing their professionalization while in our program by continuing to offer opportunities to teach their own classes, with faculty supervision, and by encouraging grant-writing and publishing.

6) Lack of focus. As noted, our department has experienced some loss in faculty in recent years, particularly in sociocultural anthropology. We are, however, interviewing for a tenure-track position in sociocultural anthropology, which should help consolidate this traditional subfield strength.

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