

ENSURING GRADUATE SUCCESS IN THE ACADEMY

Council of Graduate Schools
49th Annual Meeting
Thursday, December 3rd, 2009
4:30 to 5:30pm

by

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Preparation: Why McNair Matters

MCNAIR SCHOLARS PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

- ▣ Mentorship
- ▣ Brokering Faculty Relationships
- ▣ Peer Network and Support
- ▣ Research Methods Course and Experience
- ▣ Test Prep
- ▣ Opportunities
- ▣ Community

ACADEMIC ADVISING

- ▣ Application Process
- ▣ Financial Resources
- ▣ Guidance
- ▣ Publication Process
- ▣ Presentation & Professional Skill Development
- ▣ Travel
- ▣ Encouragement
- ▣ Resources

Reality Check

Where the University Fails Underrepresented Students:

- ❑ The Story of John Black
- ❑ Culture (Publish or Perish, Sink or Swim)
- ❑ Mentorship (lack of guidance beyond academic advising)
- ❑ Funding & Familiarity (impersonal investments)
- ❑ Teaching (exploiting students time and talent)
- ❑ Criticism (unconstructive)
- ❑ Support (“Maybe you should take a leave of absence”)
- ❑ Understanding (failure to recognize how the economic needs of family members affects graduate work)
- ❑ Noncommittal (faculty too busy or unwilling or uninterested in working with graduate students)
- ❑ Absence (faculty transitions, sabbatical, tenure process)

Getting Through: Lessons in Retention

What Graduate Deans Can Do to Improve Retention:

- ▣ Insist on programmatic continuity
- ▣ Create an inter-disciplinary culture in which graduate students can thrive
- ▣ Reward and focus on the importance of teaching at research institutions rather than publishing alone
- ▣ Reward faculty with successful students (Build Inst. Legacy: Professors without Successors don't Succeed)
- ▣ Develop faculty advising and mentorship skills
- ▣ Work closely with financial aid offices to insure student's stability while in school
- ▣ Provide other types of opportunities for professional development and employment outside of teaching
- ▣ Maintain a strong commitment to students success so that they can become an asset to their field

Getting Through: Lessons in Retention

What Graduate Deans Can Do to Improve Retention:

- ▣ Make your commitment to diversity clear and unwavering
- ▣ Don't accept more students than you can realistically support throughout the course of their Ph.D. programs
- ▣ Don't expect 1 or 2 token students to do well. Having a critical mass of students is important.
- ▣ Recognize the relationship between graduate and undergraduate diversity
- ▣ Prevent isolation by funding student organizations and giving students a safe space to dialogue, critique their experience, and express grievances.
- ▣ Be transparent about the process and make sure department chairs know what is expected of them with regard to ensuring student's academic success.

Getting There: Lessons in Recruitment

- ▣ Be creative (being more visible with less money)
- ▣ Utilize your biggest asset: current students
- ▣ Think broadly about diversity
- ▣ Recognize the diversity within groups, value it, and bring that diversity to your campus
- ▣ Marketing: Take a lesson from the Obama Campaign
- ▣ Selling points: articulate why students should come to your school over other institutions
- ▣ Be Part of the Pipeline: maintain strong a connection to Academic Achievement Programs from start to finish

Getting There: Lessons in Recruitment

- ▣ Form strategic partnerships with academic enrichment programs
- ▣ Host summer programs that bring underrepresented students to your campus early in their academic careers
- ▣ Waive application fees when possible
- ▣ Offer to assist students with the cost of moving from out-of-state
- ▣ Go to the students who cannot afford to come to you
- ▣ Continue to make students feel welcome after the honeymoon
- ▣ Showcase the success of students who have earned their doctoral degrees
- ▣ Be sure to offer prospective students quality living accommodations and emphasize the extra-curricular pros

The Big Question

- ▣ How will your university make graduate education relevant in a changing global economic environment without making the Arts and Humanities a byproduct of the marketplace or sacrificing the academic freedom of future scholars?
- ▣ **End the University as We Know It** by Mark C. Taylor, Published in the NYT Op-ed Section April 26th, 2009.

“**Graduate education** is the Detroit of higher learning. Most graduate programs in American universities produce a product for which there is no market (candidates for teaching positions that do not exist) and develop skills for which there is diminishing demand (research in subfields within subfields and publication in journals read by no one other than a few like-minded colleagues), all at a rapidly rising cost (sometimes well over \$100,000 in student loans).”

Recognize the Need for Change

- “The emphasis on narrow scholarship also encourages an educational system that has become a process of cloning. Faculty members cultivate those students whose futures they envision as identical to their own pasts, even though their tenures will stand in the way of these students having futures as full professors.
- The dirty secret of higher education is that without underpaid graduate students to help in laboratories and with teaching, universities couldn’t conduct research or even instruct their growing undergraduate populations. That’s one of the main reasons we still encourage people to enroll in doctoral programs. It is simply cheaper to provide graduate students with modest stipends and adjuncts with as little as \$5,000 a course — with no benefits — than it is to hire full-time professors.
- In other words, young people enroll in graduate programs, work hard for subsistence pay and assume huge debt burdens, all because of the illusory promise of faculty appointments. But their economical presence, coupled with the intransigence of tenure, ensures that there will always be too many candidates for too few openings.” ~ Mark C. Taylor (*Mark C. Taylor, the chairman of the religion department at Columbia, is the author of the forthcoming “Field Notes From Elsewhere: Reflections on Dying and Living.”*)

Recognize the Need for Change

“IF American higher education is to thrive in the 21st century, colleges and universities, like Wall Street and Detroit, must be rigorously regulated and completely restructured. The long process to make higher learning more agile, adaptive and imaginative can begin with six major steps:

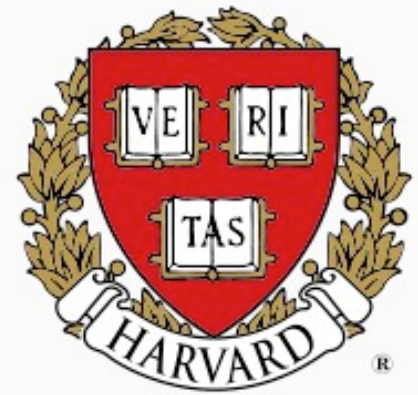
- **1. Restructure the curriculum**, beginning with graduate programs and proceeding as quickly as possible to undergraduate programs. The division-of-labor model of separate departments is obsolete and must be replaced with a curriculum structured like a web or complex adaptive network. Responsible teaching and scholarship must become cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural.
- **2. Abolish permanent departments**, even for undergraduate education, and create problem-focused programs. These constantly evolving programs would have sunset clauses, and every seven years each one should be evaluated and either abolished, continued or significantly changed. It is possible to imagine a broad range of topics around which such zones of inquiry could be organized: Mind, Body, Law, Information, Networks, Language, Space, Time, Media, Money, Life and Water.
- **3. Increase collaboration among institutions**. All institutions do not need to do all things and technology makes it possible for schools to form partnerships to share students and faculty. Institutions will be able to expand while contracting. Let one college have a strong department in French, for example, and the other a strong department in German; through teleconferencing and the Internet both subjects can be taught at both places with half the staff. With these tools, I have already team-taught semester-long seminars in real time at the Universities of Helsinki and Melbourne.

Recognize the Need for Change

- ▣ **4. Transform the traditional dissertation.** In the arts and humanities, where looming cutbacks will be most devastating, there is no longer a market for books modeled on the medieval dissertation, with more footnotes than text. As financial pressures on university presses continue to mount, publication of dissertations, and with it scholarly certification, is almost impossible.
- ▣ **5. Expand the range of professional options for graduate students.** Most graduate students will never hold the kind of job for which they are being trained. It is, therefore, necessary to help them prepare for work in fields other than higher education. The exposure to new approaches and different cultures and the consideration of real-life issues will prepare students for jobs at businesses and nonprofit organizations. Moreover, the knowledge and skills they will cultivate in the new universities will enable them to adapt to a constantly changing world.
- ▣ **6. Impose mandatory retirement and abolish tenure.** Initially intended to protect academic freedom, tenure has resulted in institutions with little turnover and professors impervious to change. After all, once tenure has been granted, there is no leverage to encourage a professor to continue to develop professionally or to require him or her to assume responsibilities like administration and student advising. Tenure should be replaced with seven-year contracts, which, like the programs in which faculty teach, can be terminated or renewed. This policy would enable colleges and universities to reward researchers, scholars and teachers who continue to evolve and remain productive while also making room for young people with new ideas and skills.



Thank You



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