Guest Editor's Introduction

Graduate School, Graduate Students, Graduate Teaching

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Is graduate school "broken"? I ask this advisedly, because the idea of broken institutions has become a tired cliché. Even so, the question conceals deceptive complications. To start with, you can only declare something broken if you know how it's supposed to work in the first place.

Most academics, from graduate students to senior faculty and administrators, harbor assumptions about what graduate school is supposed to do and what graduate students are supposed to do within it. Few of us have examined those assumptions closely, partly because they're usually interwoven with how we chose graduate study and then were socialized into the profession ourselves. And we rarely examine those assumptions in our conversations with each other.

One of the most prevalent of such assumptions is that graduate school is supposed to prepare graduate students to become professors. (In keeping with the disciplinary focus of *Pedagogy*, I focus here on graduate school in the language arts—that is, literary, linguistic, and rhetorical study. But the assumption of future professorial employment is by no means limited to those fields.) If that assumption were the only measure of what graduate school and graduate students are supposed to do, then graduate school really is broken. That would be an easy call, in fact, because thousands of faculty members are currently in the business of preparing thousands of graduate students for jobs that don't exist—or, more precisely, we're teaching them to want jobs that only a few will get, and in the process, we are ignoring the prospects that actually exist for them.

The root problem is that virtually all graduate students receive their training in research universities, where their teachers and advisers—that

Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture
Volume 15, Number 1 DOI 10.1215/15314200-2799116

is, their role models—naturally perform the jobs of professors in research universities. Not every graduate student aspires to the position of his or her adviser. But plenty do, and lots of advisers are flattered enough by their admiration to encourage the quest. Unfortunately, it's unrealistic to want to be your adviser: there aren't enough jobs at research universities to sustain that reproductive model. Instead, most academic jobs are at colleges and universities whose main mission is teaching, not research—and there aren't enough of those jobs to go around, either.

But graduate school is more than an instrument to funnel graduate students into employment, professorial or otherwise. Certainly outcomes are vital, but they lie at the end of an entire graduate education. As we reflect on that education—and yes, assess it—we should keep in mind that academia is conservative with a small "c." That's not necessarily a bad thing. Higher education would be less effective if it were driven by fads. Still, the basic structure of graduate school in the United States has changed little since the proliferation of research universities beginning in the late nineteenth century. That's conservative even by academic standards. Actually, it's more than conservative—it crosses the line to "rigid."

We have all trained in the old ways by definition, but the generation gap is wider today. That is, the distance between the education of today's graduate students and their teachers (including, presumably, some of the readers of this introduction) is greater than that between today's professors and those who trained them. The pace of change these days may daunt the faculty more than the students. To believe oneself socialized and trained, and then to see one's basic and most essential postulates (such as the idea that PhD students should all be considered professors-in-training) challenged, or even overthrown, might encourage a professor to turn groundhog and retreat to the burrow to wait out a cold winter.

But graduate students know better than their teachers that we are all professional learners. We can and should learn what we need to know in order to make graduate school a rewarding vehicle for professors and students alike to sail forward in these uncertain seas. Graduate school is a process. That process may not be unified—meaning that the stages within it may not always make sense together—but its parts are tightly fused. So all of what happens in graduate school needs to be looked at together, and that's a main organizing principle of this special issue. The table of contents accordingly follows what I'd call the life cycle of a graduate student, from classwork (and outside-the-classroom learning) through the dissertation and the job market,

to an economist's study of outcomes, followed by two different concluding calls for change.

Everything that happens in graduate school is a form of teaching. When a graduate director sets up area reading groups for incoming graduate students, that's teaching. When an adviser goes over a student's cover letter and curriculum vitae (or resume) during a job search, that's teaching. It's also teaching when a journal editor recruits graduate students to report on the proceedings of a conference for publication, a practice that Augusta Rohrbach describes in an essay that follows.

These myriad teaching opportunities are the subject of this special issue. Such a resolutely pedagogical focus provides a refuge from the question I began with: we don't have to agree about whether graduate school is broken in order to talk about how to improve it pedagogically. Graduate programs, and the lives of graduate students, will improve if we teach graduate school better.

I'm aware that I'm begging a certain ideological question here. One could easily argue that it's impossible to talk about improving graduate teaching—or, indeed, to define what "good" graduate teaching is in the first place—without taking a political stand on the effectiveness of the graduate school enterprise. Marc Bousquet, in his commentary in these pages, expresses his concern that graduate school may be experiencing a "structural shift" that we (contributors and readers both) have to attend to more closely. It is certainly true that all may be changing utterly, but we also have to live and work in the system while it's changing.

A reading of the essays that follow could easily place them on a spectrum of opinion about how broken graduate school is, and how much of it can—or ought to be—salvaged and built upon. My response to that prompt, as I will make clear, centers on pragmatics and dialogue. On the one hand, I suggest that in a field of inquiry as untrammeled as graduate teaching, it behooves us to generate as many views, practices, and analyses as possible. Second, it likewise benefits graduate school and graduate students to place those views into dialogue with one another going forward. My position, then, is that we need, first of all, to start a sustained conversation about graduate school in the United States and elsewhere.

The literature on graduate teaching is remarkably sparse, and most of it has been generated in the field of education. There are reams of scholarship on undergraduate teaching, and for good reason: most of us teach undergraduates most of the time. We might expect that graduate teaching

would receive more attention but for another of those suspicious assumptions that structure the enterprise: the widespread belief that it's not necessary to pay much attention to graduate student learning because graduate students essentially teach themselves.

As with most pernicious pearls of false wisdom, this one has accreted around a grain of truth. Why so? Let's start with the collective understanding that graduate students will eventually learn to become specialized scholars themselves. (That's the main pedagogical purpose of dissertations.) Furthermore, many graduate students are self-directed, and it's plausible to suggest that such students gravitate toward graduate study because of the unusual intellectual independence it offers. Inspired graduate students need only be nudged in a certain direction and they will head off and bring back treasures that you didn't know lay out there. Anyone who has had the good fortune to teach self-motivated students like that knows how pleasurable—and, well, easy—it can be.

As a result, most graduate students are treated like weeds most of the time. We let them take root in the educational backyard and live on whatever rain may fall. Some of them thrive, to be sure—weeds can be hardy. But not all of them fare as well as they might, and many of them wither for want of cultivation.

The ability to learn without being taught ought not to be the measure of educational survival and success. Graduate school should not disadvantage those who may not learn as smoothly, or as easily, at certain stages of their studies. To teach effectively to graduate students across the range of their graduate careers requires more thought, more observation, more experimentation. We spend a lot of time, as we should, analyzing how undergraduates learn. But how do graduate students learn? That field needs to be sown.

It will take some time to create a culture of graduate education that privileges teaching. Such a change must start with a realization that it's necessary and that it's worth doing—because it will result in some major changes in what we do. To reflect on graduate curricula in the same holistic, contextual way that we do undergraduate curricula, for example, will take effort, if only because we have little institutional or disciplinary history of doing so. To think about the form of graduate education in relation to student outcomes will be even harder.

In the meanwhile, we have to work with what we have. Accordingly, the authors whose work is contained in this cluster face the ground before us. That ground is shifting faster than perhaps it ever has. Between the changes wrought by technology and the shifting economics of the profession (read: the

drying up of an already withered academic job market), it's fair to say that we are facing a new world.

That new world conveys certain benefits. For one thing, digital technology offers more options to graduate teachers and graduate students. Foremost among them is the enhanced possibilities of collaboration and of creating online teaching and learning communities. The language arts have been slow to embrace collaboration for a number of related reasons. First of all, we've been raised on the myth of the solitary author who toils away in the attic, emerging after years with a work of genius, written in deathless prose. Even though lots of us were brought into the profession through the portal of composition teaching, which emphasizes collaboration, we maintain the ability to compartmentalize that knowledge. Whenever we ask, "Which part of this is his?" (and I can bear witness that versions of that question still come up in personnel meetings), we show the continuing persistence of our originary myth.

Second, it has historically been harder for humanists to collaborate than scientists and mathematicians. Most scientists are socialized into their professions through laboratories, which are hotbeds of collaboration. Mathematicians, who can do their problem solving in real time (with the technical matter of "writing up" coming later), schedule visits with one another so that they can work together. The case of humanists reminds me of the title of a documentary that I saw years ago: "Piano Players Rarely Ever Play Together."

Now, of course, technology makes it much easier for humanists to collaborate. Many of the essays in this cluster originated as collaborations. In fact, I put some of the partnerships together myself. My call for papers brought forth multiple proposals on the same subject in a few instances. In two of those cases, I asked the parties involved to join forces. This was not a matter of trying to spare prospective contributors the pain of rejection; instead, I wanted to see what would happen when scholars were thrown together to write, beginning only with a common interest in a topic. As a result, the reader of this cluster will encounter several collaborations involving authors who met in the process of writing together. I have appreciated their cooperation (both with each other and me) on many levels—not least because their work together literally exemplifies the possibility of dialogue about common problems facing the graduate school enterprise. Their collaboration is, you might say, a pedagogical demonstration in its own right.

Technology enables much more than collaboration, obviously. It has transformed research and enabled new forms of scholarship, including digital dissertations (about which see Melanie Lee's essay in this issue). As Lee's case

suggests, it's easy to fall asleep and wake up in the costume of the Old Guard. Our job as teachers—and members of an institution—is fundamentally to update the way we were taught and to pass it on.

All of which brings us to the practical keyword: professionalization. We have begun to speak at length about what it means to professionalize graduate students. That's a good conversation to join—notwithstanding Bousquet's and David Schmid's useful cautions in their responses—if only because it suggests a welcome responsibility for what will happen to graduate students when they leave graduate school.

Professionalization—or the disciplined submission of the self to the demands of organizational hierarchy—is no behavior-come-lately. It originated in monasticism and entered the university around the twelfth century. The idea of "disciplining" oneself has a special resonance in contemporary times, though, because the disciplines (as categories that define areas of study) were invented relatively recently. (University departments, for example, are barely a century old.) So today, we scholars discipline ourselves to enter disciplines. From the graduate student's point of view, professionalism may act as a guide to successful self-fashioning (as David M. Ball, William Gleason, and Nancy J. Peterson suggest in their essay here). On the other hand, as A. W. Strouse points out in his queer reading of professionalism, one person's guide might serve as another's constraint. One size does not necessarily fit all.

And what about professionalizing the professors? Perhaps all of our disciplinary talk of professionalizing graduate students amounts to the easy way out—because if we talk about molding students for success, we elide any need to talk about molding their teachers. How might graduate professors professionalize themselves? We can start by committing ourselves to find and develop new ways to help graduate students learn—and new things for them to learn.

Reasonable people are bound to disagree with each other about how to do this. My editorial goal here has been to create dialogue about such change and leave resolution for later. I take no explicit stand on how much or how fast, because that's a discussion we should have together. Accordingly, I hope that the reader takes all of these approaches together, as part of a more sustained consideration of graduate teaching—and the graduate enterprise generally—than we have been taking up to now. We need to consider the whole ball of tangled string, but at the same time, we should not lose sight of specific strands within the ball. Let us now roll it into our shared future.