

Program in American Studies Report in Response to the Graduate School's 2-4 Initiative

After a thorough and energetic round of discussions among faculty and graduate students throughout this academic year, the American Studies faculty has voted 12-0-0 to adopt three principal changes to the graduate program in response to both the 2-4 initiative and the external review of the program which took place one year ago.

- Revised, enhanced, and more carefully articulated scheme for graduate advising
- Establishment of a year-long Prospectus Workshop, required for all third-year students
- Institution of a Dissertation Conference to follow up on the Prospectus Colloquium at an appropriate juncture in year 4 or 5

Elaborations on these changes follow.

Part One: Advising

Based upon the perceived gaps in our current advising scheme, and based on best practices as they have emerged organically from the natural flow of the program from coursework to exams/prospectus to dissertation, we are implementing the following scheme of advising responsibilities and obligations.

Years 1 and 2: DGS is principal advisor; secondary advisors include the instructor of the new introductory seminar, "American Scholars," and one faculty member assigned to each incoming student.

Years 3 and 4: examination and prospectus committee members assume the role of principal advisor.

Years 5 and beyond: Dissertation director assumes the role of principal advisor, while other committee members serve as secondary advisors.

The duties and expectations for each of these roles are spelled out below. A version of these descriptions will be included in the program's handbook for graduate students beginning in the Fall of 2007.

1. Duties of the DGS

A. Primary Advisor for Years 1 and 2, Secondary Advisor Thereafter

—course selection:

- *help acquaint students with appropriate course offerings and faculty
- *help students think about the longer-term relationship between course work, exams, and dissertation

- *help students strike the balance between exploration and. focus
- *help students to pace themselves and monitor their workload

–help 2nd-year students to begin thinking sooner rather than later about their potential fields and examiners

–help students to be aware of the various intellectual and financial resources available, both through Yale and through organizations like the ASA, OAH, AAA, or various granting agencies

–in general, help students to think about relationship between their long-term goals and trajectories on the one hand, and their immediate tasks and responsibilities on the other, and help them to keep their eye on both

–help students to recognize and understand the full range of their possibilities for teaching assignments

–help dissertation advisors organize “mock job-talks” for those students on the market who wish to give them

–collect information from faculty on all first- through fourth- years at the end of spring term, and provide each student a brief written appraisal of their standing in the program (this is now required of all DGS’s by the deans), taking special care in addressing those students who are distinguishing themselves either at the high or low end

–serve as the first stop when an administrative or bureaucratic problem arises, or when a problem arises between a student and a particular professor

–act as advocate for graduate students vis-a-vis the deans

B. Calendar of Annual DGS Advising Events (workshops, panels, etc.):

SEPTEMBER:

Orientation: presentation of the handbook and introduction to the contours of the program from coursework through prospectus, years 1-3

Teaching workshop (Alfie Guy, Director of the Writing Program), years 3-4

OCTOBER:

The ins and outs of publication, all years

NOVEMBER:

Writing for Conferences, When, How, and Why, all years

DECEMBER:

Mock interviews and job-talk rehearsals, years 5-7

JANUARY:

Writing the prospectus, and fellowship and grant applications, years 3-5

FEBRUARY:

Alumni Panel: Life after Yale

MARCH:

Designing fields and preparing for exams, year 2

APRIL:

The Job Market: crafting the cover letter and CV; the interview and selection process, years 5-6

II. Duties of secondary advisors, years 1 and 2

The instructor of “American Scholars” and the appointed advisors for each incoming student will make themselves available to offer counsel on the many philosophical questions that arise as students conceptualize their program--striking the balance between focus and venturesomeness in course selection, for example, or the various things that “interdisciplinary” can mean in terms of coursework and method. In our informal deliberations, faculty came spontaneously to refer to these as “pastoral” advisors, as distinct from the DGS whose job includes making sure that t’s are crossed, I’s dotted, and requirements met.

III. Duties of the Oral Examination Committee

–help students make full use of their relevant course work in crafting their fields

--help students think about the relationship among their four fields

–as they draft their lists, help students to think not only about “coverage” of a particular area or the requisite “canons” of a given subfield, but also the requisite preparation for both teaching and research later on

–introduce students to diverse reading strategies

–help students to recognize the implicit meta-conversations that characterize a field, and the generic practices that go into “mastering” a body of scholarship

–help students to understand both *your and their* objectives for the exam, and how best to prepare for your section of it

–meet regularly and track students’ progress in the run-up to the exam, holding “mock exams” as

needed

–help students begin to think about the relationship between this body of reading and their own prospectus and dissertation

--see to it, after the exam, that the students' field lists are added to the program's orals field library

IV. Duties of the Prospectus and Dissertation Committee

–help students identify and understand the literatures and audiences they are engaging, and the nature of their own contribution

–help them to see the relationship between the project itself and their own scholarly identity, and to make appropriate choices

–help students hone a focused, workable prospectus without spending too much time on things that can only be known once the real work has begun

–help students develop a blueprint for the logistics of their research, including how most effectively to manage the secondary and primary research, and how to organize their archival travels and searches

–help students develop a blueprint for proceeding, including the most efficient order in which chapters will be attacked

–help students develop a workable long-range plan complete with manageable intermediate goals

–help students recognize when the time has come for them to begin writing

–promptly read and comment on all written work

–help students to understand and develop their project as a unified whole rather than as a string of inter-related essays, and also to understand the difference between a completed dissertation and a published book

IV. Duties of the Dissertation Director

In addition to all the items in III. above:

–be cognizant of your role and responsibilities as the student's *closest* reader

–act as the student's principal advocate vis-a-vis prospective employers, publishers, and—where appropriate—other scholars whom you may know in the field

–help the student to recognize when a given opportunity (conference, encyclopedia entry, article) would be a help, and when a hindrance, to his or her overall goals

–help the student know both when to begin and when to quit (they only infrequently know exactly the right time to do either one, one notices)

--establish expectations and communication among committee members

–help the student to be thoughtful about, and plan carefully for, the timing of his/her entry on the job market, and discuss this issue with full committee

--convene a Dissertation Conference of the student and his/her full committee at a time appropriate to the student's progress and needs (see Part Three below)

–help the student in navigating the transition from Yale to employment, including dispensing practical advice on his/her statement of purpose, CV, etc.; helping to set up a mock job-talk if one is requested; and—in those cases where it is called for—helping the student to sift and weigh his/her various options and to understand the professional stakes involved in this or that decision

Part Two: Prospectus Workshop

Upon Completion of coursework, students in their third year of study are required to participate in a year-long prospectus workshop. Open to all students in the program and joint departments, the workshop will serve as a forum for the discussion of selecting a dissertation topic, refining a project's scope, organizing research materials, and evaluating work in progress. Intended to complement the work of the prospectus committee, the workshop is designed as a professionalization experience that will culminate in students' presentation of the dissertation prospectus at the prospectus colloquium.

The workshop will meet once a month on Mondays, 12:00 – 1:30 in HGS 105.

Part Three: Dissertation Conference

At a mutually agreed-upon point in year 4 or 5 (usually upon completion of one of the first three chapters), the full committee is required to convene with the student, as in the initial prospectus colloquium. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the overall trajectory of the student's research and writing, to offer advice and commentary on any new directions which the work might have taken since the first colloquium, and to help the student chart his or her course toward completion. In those cases where the student is no longer in residence at Yale, the American Studies Program will pay necessary travel expenses to enable this conference.