

NEW GRADUATE PROGRAMS IN THE HUMANITIES

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A Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Graduate School of Yale University

The Committee on New Graduate Programs in the Humanities was appointed on February 29, 1968, by John Perry Miller, Dean of the Graduate School of Yale University. It was charged "to review current graduate programs in the humanities and consider the possibility of new degrees or new programs." It was asked to interpret its charter broadly and "to consider ways in which Yale's contributions in the Graduate School for training in the humanistic disciplines may be increasingly helpful to the development of research, college and university teaching, the creative arts, and to other activities such as publishing, criticism, etc." The Committee was not asked to concern itself with the details of existing programs but with "new methods, new programs, or new degrees." In the course of its study the Committee consulted both members of the Yale faculty and the elected representatives of the humanities departments in the Graduate Student Senate.

Introduction

It seemed clear to the Committee that there is widespread dissatisfaction with the state of graduate studies in the humanities. The sources of the difficulty may be variously analyzed, but certainly some of the problems are the following: (1) the length of time required to get the Ph.D. (at Yale a median of 5 years); (2) the question of the relevance of doctoral studies both to the interests which led the student into the program and to the teaching and research which he is going to do after he leaves; (3) the fact that scholarly publication has become, in many instances, an instrument of institutional rivalry and personal professional advancement rather than of genuine intellectual inquiry; and (4) the fact that the very spirit of humanistic culture is often lost in the process of professional discipline. A broad, liberal, humane, and imaginative life-- this is the thing that we most prize and find it most difficult to preserve in the graduate study of the humanities.

No committee report can resolve these difficulties, many of which are embedded in our national life, but the fact that Yale is especially strong in the humanities makes it imperative that we at least confront the situation. The Report which follows is divided into three sections. In the first we propose a significant new addition to humanities programs at Yale; in the second we make two comments on the Ph.D. program; and in the third we propose a new degree for a special body of students.

I. A Proposal for the Establishment of a Center for Humanistic Studies

The paradox of graduate education in the humanities is that it is professional education in a liberal subject. The professional part of this training often gets competently done. The students are well grounded in the information of their particular fields and sufficiently skilled in the machinery of scholarship. But they tend to get locked into their

fields, and they are short on the general sympathies and understandings that are supposedly the product of study in the humanities. Part of the reason for this is related to the structure of the Graduate School. Whereas the undergraduate pursues his major in the context of all the arts and sciences, the graduate student is entirely committed to a single department. Obviously, the whole range of the arts and sciences is too broad a context for the specialized work of graduate school-- but the humanities are not. The Division of the Humanities could constitute the same kind of context for the graduate student as is constituted for the undergraduate by Yale College. What we are suggesting, then, is that the Division, which at present is largely an administrative unit in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, be brought into existence as an active force in the curricular, cultural, and social life of the students. In our view it should constitute an active presence or real context in which every student would do his work so that in the end his degree would be not only a departmental but a humanities degree.

In order to accomplish this, we propose the establishment at Yale of a Center for Humanistic Studies. The Center would be primarily a structure for opening up possibilities of study and research that do not now exist. The emphasis would be upon interdisciplinary activities and educational innovation. In order to avoid the problems which have beset other such Centers or Institutes, there would be no permanent appointments, no fixed curriculum, no special body of students, and no degree. The Center would not be a separate entity which would take on a life of its own but would simply be the humanities departments in their collective aspect. It would be an arena in which persons concerned with humanistic study could meet in a creative interchange.

The functions of the Center would be threefold: (1) to provide facilities for advanced research at the postdoctoral level, (2) to provide a broader and more humane context in which graduate education can occur, and (3) to provide a haven for activities which cannot so easily or properly be accommodated within the departments. Among these would be the study of certain interdisciplinary topics, a concern for the creative as opposed to the academic side of the humanities, and a responsiveness to educational innovation, particularly that suggested by students.

Organization

The organization of the Center would be as follows: There would be a Director who would be a member of the Yale faculty and who would be selected for his standing in his own discipline, his commitment to the idea of the Center, and his ability to organize and administer a stimulating program. He would be assisted by a Governing Board consisting of six individuals who would share with the Director the responsibility for appointments and general policy. Both the Director and the Governing Board would be appointed by the Corporation on the recommendation of the President after consultation with the appropriate deans, chairmen of departments, and chairman of the Advisory Committee on the Humanities. Their terms would not exceed three years. The work of the Center would be subject to periodic review by the Advisory Committee on the Humanities,

and an evaluative report would be made to the faculty after the Center had been in full operation for five years.

The various standing committees which would be necessary to conduct the programs of the Center would include both graduate students and faculty. These committees would work closely with the Directors of Graduate Studies and Chairmen of the humanities departments.

The participating personnel of the Center would consist of the following groups:

(1) Senior Fellows (2-3) - distinguished visiting scholars who would contribute to the program by giving a few lectures, conducting brief (4-6 week) seminars, and meeting informally with faculty and students.

(2) Fellows (10-12) - young postdoctoral scholars who would either (a) be doing research on a project consonant with the ideals of the Center or (b) learning a field other than that in which they took their doctorate. All would make some contribution to the life of the Center but in a way that would be clearly defined and limited.

(3) Writers, Critics, and Artists (2-3) - persons creatively involved in the arts who, in addition to doing their own work, would make some contribution to the Center which might vary from giving readings to conducting workshops or teaching a graduate or undergraduate course. Though artists, musicians, and dramatists would find their natural affiliation with professional schools, persons of this sort who were particularly articulate about their art might be appointed ~~to~~ Fellows in the Center. In such cases appointments would be made in consultation with the professional Schools of Art and Architecture, Music, and Drama, as well as with the appropriate departments in the Graduate School. Such appointments would be one means (to which it is hoped others would be added) of associating the professional schools with the work of the Center. Cooperation might also be possible with the undergraduate residential colleges in the appointment of visiting instructors of experimental courses.

(4) Visiting Fellows (number unspecified) - scholars who were visiting Yale either under the auspices of a department or for their own research could be appointed Visiting Fellows. The Center would provide a hospitable environment in which they could do their work and a medium through which others could benefit by their presence.

(5) Associate Fellows (10-12) - Yale faculty members who would serve as host fellows to the program. They might be wholly or in part identical with the faculty members serving on the standing committees, and they would be chosen partly with reference to the fields in which the postdoctoral fellows were doing their research.

All appointments would normally be for one year, though occasionally for two.

In order to give focus to some of the programs of the Center, the Governing Board would select, well in advance, a topic, interdisciplinary in character but reasonably specific, which would be the area of investigation for that particular year. At least one of the Senior Fellows should be an authority on some aspect of this topic, and in the case of a few of the postdoctoral fellows, preference might be given, other things being equal, to candidates whose line of research or field of study at least impinged upon the area. With the cooperation of the University libraries, galleries, and professional schools, exhibits, concerts, lectures, and dramatic productions might be arranged which would reinforce this aspect of the program.

Postdoctoral Fellowships

The first function of the Center would be to provide facilities for advanced research at the postdoctoral level. Postdoctoral fellowships are obviously essential if the young scholar is to capitalize upon his training and produce a significant contribution to knowledge. Such fellowships are just beginning to be established in the humanities, but they are certain to be a significant development in the future. Yale should take a lead in providing this resource.

The Center and Graduate Education

A second and perhaps more important function of the Center would be to provide a larger and more humane context in which graduate education can occur. In particular, the Center would enable students to explore interdisciplinary and even interdivisional topics which cannot be treated adequately under the rubrics of existing departments. It would also take them outside of their discipline at a time when they need to gain perspective and enable them to fertilize their own work by ideas from other sources. Not least, it would simply bring together the students and faculty of various departments and allow them to cooperate in a joint enterprise.

The Center would fulfill this function in two ways. First, it would offer a program of lectures, conferences, short courses, and discussions which would attempt not simply to add to the already overburdened University calendar but rather, with the cooperation of departments, to consolidate some of these miscellaneous events into coherent programs with greater educational impact. Secondly, it would offer a small number of interdepartmental seminars (perhaps initially no more than three or four) for which academic credit would be given. These courses would be designed to have a broad appeal, either by virtue of their subject-matter or their method, to students in various disciplines, and they would normally be elected by students during their second or third year. An attempt would be made to give them an innovative character, and since they would be developed by the standing committees of which students would be members, it is presumed that they would reflect current student interests.

It goes without saying that students would elect these seminars only with the permission of the Director of Graduate Studies of their own department. If the seminars were to be taught by a member of the Yale faculty, the Director of the Center would have to negotiate with the department in question for the release of the instructor from other duties. If they were to be taught by a visitor, the appointment would have to be approved by the department or departments most concerned.

Though departments would participate in the activities of the Center only to the degree that seemed appropriate to their own situation, it is hoped that they would embrace the principle which it embodies of allowing students to introduce a lateral as well as a vertical dimension into their studies. In some cases this might extend beyond the opportunities of the Humanities seminars into what amounts to a minor in other departments. For example, a student in English literature with a strong interest in the 18th century might be allowed to take courses in other literatures of the period and in 18th century history and art, with a corresponding re-

duction in the requirements in his own field and an introduction of these topics into his oral examination. For exceptionally able students, interdepartmental programs might be arranged. These might either be formal programs such as those in Medieval Studies and Economic History, or they could be individually tailored to the student's need. It should be emphasized that the Center would not offer a degree program, nor would it have any jurisdiction over departmental or interdepartmental degree programs.

The Creative Arts and the Humanities

Yale has a long tradition at the undergraduate level of fostering an interest in creative writing. At the graduate level, however, it has never offered courses, for reasons which are perfectly understandable. Apart from the question whether creative writing can be taught, there is the fact that it is a professional rather than an academic skill. The other creative arts, of music, art and architecture, and drama, have their separate professional schools, but because the technical element in writing does not loom so large, there has never been any question of establishing a professional school for writers. On the other hand, the Departments of Music, the History of Art, and the History of the Theater are as purely academic as the Department of English. Creative writing has therefore quite naturally and perhaps quite appropriately been omitted.

It is clear, however, that there is an increasing demand in the Graduate School for some outlet for creative energies. It even seems possible that one of the major shifts in emphasis in humanistic studies in the next generation will be towards greater creativity. There is no reason to suppose that this will be confined to the English Department or even to literature. It is likely to affect the kind of work done, particularly the dissertation, in all humanistic departments. Therefore, while it is perfectly clear that the main business of the Graduate School is in training teachers and scholars, it is also clear that the need felt by students to be close to the creative edge of their subject is a legitimate one and should be satisfied. For this reason we recommend that the Center undertake, in conjunction with the appropriate departments, an exploration of the ways in which creative energies associated with the study of the humanities can find legitimate expression in the curricular or extracurricular life of the Graduate School. Creative writing should be a particular but not the exclusive concern of such an investigation.

The Divisional Structure

It should be clear that the establishment of a Center for Humanistic Studies tends to confirm a restructuring of the University along divisional lines which is already in process elsewhere in the University. The most obvious examples are the recent establishment of an Institute of Social Science and the decision to develop the Library along divisional rather than graduate/undergraduate lines. The effect of creating these vertical structures cutting across the lateral divisions of Yale College and the Graduate School will be to help bridge the gap between undergraduate, graduate student, young faculty member, and senior scholar. This has

already been envisioned as desirable in other programs.

In summary, the principles embodied in the Center are: (1) that of the unity and essential interdependence of the various departments of humanistic learning, (2) that of research and teaching going hand in hand at all levels of the enterprise, (3) that of the academic and the creative reinforcing and enlivening one another, (4) that of educational experimentation in connection with established programs, (5) that of a community of scholars of all ages and in various stages of advancement engaged in a process of mutual helpfulness and stimulation.

The Need for a Building

A Center for Humanistic Studies such as we have described cannot be achieved at Yale until we have a proper physical facility. Study space, offices, meeting and lecture rooms, lounges and dining facilities are essential to a community which exists in large part around the oral exchange of ideas formal and informal settings. Yale should begin planning now for the development of a graduate humanities center which will supplement the inadequate space in the Hall of Graduate Studies.

II. The Ph.D. Program

A. Interdepartmental Degree Programs

If the Center for Humanistic Studies tends to encourage interdisciplinary research, it is likely that it will generate an interest in new interdepartmental degree programs. It is our view that such programs should not be housed within the Center but that, like American Studies and Medieval Studies, they should take up residence (whenever they are qualified to do so) within the existing structure of the Graduate School.

The administration of such programs is attended with obvious difficulties, and we feel that the establishment of new programs should not be undertaken lightly. On the other hand, it is obvious that areas of specialization can be defined in various ways and that there are advantages, both to graduate education and research, in marking out new areas where the proposed sector represents a substantial and coherent body of knowledge in which the University already has unusual strength. Without prejudicing the later designation of other areas, we believe that there are two such which merit attention at the present time.

The first is that of Renaissance Studies. Yale is strong in this field though there are one or two new appointments that would need to be made. As evidence of interest in the field, we note that there are now in existence, in this country and Canada, eight Institutes or Centers for Medieval and Renaissance Studies and that there is under consideration the formation of an Association of such Centers. We recommend the appointment of an ad hoc committee of Renaissance specialists to consider the desirability of such a program.

The second area which merits attention is defined by the establishment at Yale of the Paul Mellon Art Gallery and Center for British Studies. This will bring to the University an extremely rich collection of British

paintings from the time of the Renaissance to the mid-19th century, together with a supporting library of books on British history and civilization. The greatest strength of the collection is in an area for which Yale is already well known, the 18th century. While it is too early to suggest specific ways in which this facility might be used, and while it is obvious that it will provide a rich resource for the Departments of History, the History of Art, and English, its interdisciplinary character suggests that the Director of the Center for Humanistic Studies and the Dean of the Graduate School should consult with the Director of the Gallery to ensure that legitimate opportunities for new graduate programs are not neglected.

B. A Timetable for the Ph.D.

Graduate departments in the humanities, like those in other fields, find themselves under two opposing pressures. On the one hand, because of the high cost of graduate education, the need for college teachers, and the flagging energies of the student under a prolonged course of study, they are under pressure to reduce requirements so as to get the student through to his degree in a reasonable period of time-- not more than four, or in exceptional situations, five years. On the other hand, the desire to produce scholars who are well-grounded in their discipline, who have mastered the techniques of advanced research, and who have the leisure to make the extended investigation necessary to produce an excellent dissertation leads to the elaboration of a program which requires many more than four years to complete. If it were always the better students who took longer and the poorer ones who went through more quickly, this would not be a bad system, but in point of fact it is usually just the reverse. The poorer students take longer simply because they are not so efficient, or possibly because the requirements are really in excess of what they are able and want to do. We suggest that there is a need to recognize that not all graduate students should be put through the same program of study because not all of them are going to be creative scholars in their field. Even in the best of the Yale departments it is probably true that only a small fraction of those who complete their degree ever publish anything that is truly distinguished. The rest make some contribution and are doubtless fine teachers and good citizens, but they are not creative scholars. On the other hand, for the small minority who are, there is a real difficulty in finding the time during the early years of teaching to do research. We believe, then, that the solution to this dilemma is a combination of a reduction in the Ph.D. requirements to a more modest dimension plus the institution of a postdoctoral program in the humanities to encourage high-quality research. The postdoctoral program has already been proposed in connection with the Center for Humanistic Studies. We turn here to the question of a timetable for the Ph.D.

The Yale Graduate School is already committed to a serious effort to achieve a four-year Ph.D. We believe, however, that some departments can do even better. There seems no reason why, in departments where there are no difficult new languages or other special techniques to learn and where the student is pursuing the same subject in which he majored as an

undergraduate, something like the following timetable is not possible: (1) a total of 13 term courses, of which 8 would come in the first year, 4 in the first term of the second year, and one in the second term of the second year; (2) a general examination at a fixed date toward the end of the second year; (3) research and writing of the dissertation during the summer after the second year, all of the third year, and if necessary, the summer following the third year. The assumptions underlying this timetable are the following: (1) that in many departments time is lost in elementary courses of the first year and that students could be moved more quickly into research; (2) that there is a very considerable quantitative element in the general examination which could be drastically reduced; (3) that the dissertation should be viewed not as an original contribution to knowledge but as the first systematic exploration of a subject which, when fully developed in postdoctoral years, would become an original contribution to knowledge.

Not all students will be able to adhere to this schedule. Those who enter with foreign language problems will not, and neither will those who desire extensive teaching experience. Neither is there any reason why a student who comes alive under his dissertation rather than sagging under it should be asked to reduce its scope. Such students will take four years. But under the present system they would have taken five to six, and the others would have taken four. A three-year degree ought to be possible for at least a quarter of our students and a four-year degree for most of the rest.

This proposal will require a radical rethinking of degree requirements and a radical reorientation towards the meaning of the degree. In order to help departments toward this reorientation it is suggested that they be asked, every five years, to submit to the Degree Committee in the Humanities a list of all their requirements for the Ph.D. and that the Director of Graduate Studies be subject to call to appear before the Committee to justify those requirements which extend the program beyond the three or four year limit.

III. A Proposal for a New Doctorate in the Humanities

There are a growing number of graduate students in departments of literature who wish to combine the academic study of the subject with practice in creative writing. They are aware that their development as writers will be fostered by a knowledge of the literary and cultural tradition and also that their academic studies will benefit by association with the creative process. At present such persons often continue through the Ph.D. and make their writing purely an avocation. In view of the fact, however, that there is a great need in colleges and universities for people who are trained to teach literature on its academic side and who at the same time possess an ability to teach and practice creative writing, it seems desirable, for those few who do not envision themselves as research scholars, to open up the possibility of developing more fully the creative side of their talents. It is proposed, therefore, that students who complete the regular Ph.D. program up to the dissertation (i.e., who qualify for the M.Phil.) and who after a period of not less than two years have achieved public recognition as creative writers by virtue of their published work may submit the evidence

of this work to the Graduate School and petition for the degree of Doctor of Literary Arts (D.L.A.). It is intended that the degree be in recognition of work of serious artistic merit, comparable in quality and substance to the Ph.D. dissertation, and that it establish the young scholar-writer as a person qualified to teach literature, either on its academic or creative side, at the college and university level. While poetry, fiction, and drama are the forms principally had in view, the proposal would not exclude biography, history, criticism, translation from foreign languages, and other forms of expository or interpretive writing which, while not qualifying as original research, present their materials in a literary form of more than usual interest.

The procedure proposed for the award of the degree is as follows:¹
the candidate who feels that he qualifies for the degree may petition the Registrar of the Graduate School, at the same time submitting two copies of the published work for which the degree is to be awarded together with any reviews, testimonials, or articles about him which he wishes. This material would come before a Degree Committee on the D.L.A. to be appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School from among the members of the humanities departments. The Committee would assign readers from within or outside of Yale but at least one of whom would be a member of the department in which the candidate had received his M.Phil., and on the basis of their reports would make its recommendation to the Graduate Faculty. The Faculty would pass upon the recommendation in the usual way. In the event that a candidate's petition was rejected he would not be permitted to petition again until a period of two years had elapsed and until substantial new work could be presented. He would not be permitted to petition more than twice. It should be clear that there is no residence requirement for the D.L.A. beyond that for the M.Phil. and that no fellowships will be awarded for work to be done towards this degree. A candidate would not be eligible for both the Ph.D. and the D.L.A. It would be at the option of each department whether it wished to participate in this program or not.

Victor H. Brombert

A. Dwight Culler, Chairman

Robert J. Fogelin

Geoffrey Hartman

Elting E. Morison

Jaroslav Pelikan

December 5, 1968

¹Note: The general idea of the D.L.A. degree is supported by all members of the Committee, but the proposed procedure for awarding the degree is not supported by Messrs. Brombert, Morison, and Pelikan.