**The Future of the Humanities PhD at Stanford.**

In fall and winter terms 2011/12, a group of senior faculty gathered to discuss the future of the humanities PhD. We asked ourselves: *Can and should the humanities PhD remain centrally relevant – at Stanford, in the academy, and in an increasingly global and cosmopolitan 21st century society*? We collected and reviewed literature bearing on that question, along with some data from the Humanities and Sciences Dean on humanities PhD programs at Stanford. The data focused on time to degree and careers of PhD’s. As a result of our reading and deliberations, our collective answer to the question about the future relevance of the humanities PhD is, “Yes, the humanities PhD *should* remain relevant. And yes it *can* remain relevant, *but only if*…” The rest of this document completes the last sentence.

We believe that the humanities are *unlikely* to remain relevant, unless significant changes are made in how professional humanists are trained. Our review of relevant literature and data, both from Stanford and from outside, has given us a good sense of what these changes are. We believe that Stanford -- with its educational prominence, culture of innovation and its great human and material resources -- should be a leader in driving those changes.

Freshly minted humanities PhD’s face a difficult job market, one in which only a small fraction can expect to secure tenurable positions at the Research-One institutions for which they are primarily, if not exclusively, trained. Many qualified humanities PhD’s do not find permanent positions in higher education. Although doctoral programs often convey the message that the only acceptable career for graduates involves research positions in peer institutions, in fact may PhD recipients pursue very different careers, including faculty positions in primarily teaching institutions, non-faculty positions inside higher education and opportunities outside of higher education altogether, whether in government, non-profits or the private sector.

In light of the massive investment of time, effort, and money, on the part of students and universities alike, it is imperative that this genuine range of career outcomes be recognized and that doctoral programs be designed to prepare students appropriately and expeditiously.

We submit that the humanities PhD can be returned to a position of central importance, at Stanford and in higher education elsewhere, by taking two steps:

1. Rationalizing the investment (on the part of students and the university), by reducing time to degree (TTD).
2. Redesigning graduate curricula to prepare PhD’s for a diverse array of meaningful, socially productive and personally rewarding careers within and outside the academy.

We believe that TTD may be lowered and diversification of career paths will be facilitated by a bold rethinking of humanities graduate curricula. This requires substantial buy-in by the university and by the relevant departments. That buy-in entails two substantial policy changes:

1. Stanford should recognize graduate study in humanities as a full-time occupation during a limited TTD (exact times may vary by department, but the goal should be to push the number down). This requires a university commitment to augmenting existing departmental resources such that every PhD student has 12-month (four-quarter) support during the period of graduate enrollment. Unfunded summers impede progress.
2. In order to be eligible for these new resources, each humanities department should submit a detailed curricular plan, specifying how it will move students through the program in a timely fashion. The new curricular plans must address the question of training students for diverse career paths. We recognize that this diversity may require plans for varied training trajectories including, for example, front-loading the acquisition of certain necessary skills.

Specifics for implementation of the new policies

Responsibilities of students.

1. Students must develop a clear sense of their career options and decide upon, and file with their department in writing, a ranked list of preferences by the end of their second year of graduate study. Their subsequent preparation -- coursework, fourth-quarter (summer) projects, dissertation work -- must realistically support the careers on that ranked list. (The list may be amended in consultation with advisors).
2. Students must use their annual fourth-quarter (summer) funding to complete degree requirements as expeditiously as possible and to prepare for the careers on their ranked list. Some departments may propose offering the option of taking a funded summer prior to the first full year of enrollment in order to facilitate certain particular skills acquisition.
3. Students must choose dissertation advisors, reading committees, and dissertation projects suited to careers on their ranked list.

Responsibilities of departments.

1. First- and second-year curricula must be designed to provide students with strong foundations in the field, and must ready them to make well-informed career choices by the end of the second year. In so doing, they should aim to balance academic training in a particular discipline and field with the provision of broader professional perspectives that may extend beyond the traditional academic setting.
2. Departments must clarify the benchmarks that students must achieve in order to demonstrate good progress, and thus remain in their program.
3. Advising of students must be regular, realistic, and aligned with the career goals of the student.
4. Students must receive regular (annual) assessments of their progress, with specific requirements clearly listed, along with the consequences (including termination from program) for failure to complete requirements.
5. There must be a serious review at the end by the second year to determine which students will advance to candidacy, and which will receive a terminal M.A.
6. Comprehensive (general) exams must be completed by no later than the first quarter of the third year.
7. Per A (above) TA and RA assignments (beyond a one-year required minimum) must be designed to further the specific career preferences of the student.
8. Departments must provide clear guidelines regarding expectations for the dissertation, including considerations for alternatives to the traditional dissertation format, when appropriate for a student’s career goals. Departments much guarantee that students receive timely and effective guidance during the dissertation phase.

In summary, we request that the university make twelve-month funding available during a period shorter than the current TTD. This funding should be made available exclusively to departments that develop convincing plans—in terms of curricula, examination schedule, advising and dissertation options—that will facilitate completion within a specified length of time. We believe this period should be no more than five years. Currently Stanford culture encourages students to take longer than five years with the help of prestigious dissertation fellowship competitions. We believe that financial support should be structured as an incentive to finish earlier, not later.

Any change in funding, however, along the lines we suggest, should be contingent on the presentation by departments of compelling plans to enable students to complete degree requirements in no more than five years and to prepare them for specific career goals. If the requested supplementary funding is granted, we propose that the implementation of the plans be reviewed after five years, and that departments that fail to reduce current TTD forfeit the additional funding.

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