GRADUATE STUDY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

HOW TO BUILD AN ACADEMIC CAREER IN THE HUMANITIES

GREGORY COLÓN SEMENZA

Graduate Study for the Twenty-First Century

This page intentionally left blank

Graduate Study for the Twenty-First Century

How to Build an Academic Career in the Humanities

Gregory M. Colón Semenza

With a Foreword by

Michael Bérubé

palgrave
macmillan

GRADUATE STUDY FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

First published in 2005 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN™
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010 and
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England RG21 6XS
Companies and representatives throughout the world.

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN is the global academic imprint of the Palgrave Macmillan division of St. Martin's Press, LLC and of Palgrave Macmillan Ltd. Macmillan® is a registered trademark in the United States, United Kingdom and other countries. Palgrave is a registered trademark in the European Union and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-4039-6936-1 ISBN 978-1-4039-7934-6 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781403979346

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: October 2005

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Acknowledgments

Usually persons fortunate enough to write this type of book base their right to do so on the amount of time they've served in academe; surely you've seen the book jackets I'm talking about: "Professor Genius has served as Director of Graduate Studies at Ivy-Bedecked University for 71 years." Especially in light of such a fact, I would like to thank Farideh Koohi-Kamali, my editor at Palgrave Macmillan, who listened so carefully when I suggested to her that today's graduate students might have something to learn from a more recent survivor of both graduate school and the humanities job market. I should also like to thank Melissa Nosal at Palgrave, who urged me to contact Farideh in the first place, and Mr. Maran Elancheran for his work overseeing the production of the book.

Three individuals in particular have been immensely supportive of this project, agreeing to read the entire manuscript and sharing their honest feedback along the way. I am grateful to Robert Hasenfratz and Jerry Phillips, true friends and dedicated members of the UConn summer writer's group, and Kathryn Hume, author of a remarkable book on the academic job market (read it), and one of the most generous individuals I know.

I am especially honored by Michael Bérubé's willingness to contribute a foreword for this book. Professor Bérubé has been, from the beginning, a tireless advocate of graduate students and an honest and ethical voice in the whirlwind.

Other individuals who warrant special mention: Sean Grass, a wonderful friend, colleague, and the bottomless source of inappropriate humor; my department head, Bob Tilton, who has made life good at UConn; Liz Jenkins, whose career has been dedicated to helping graduate students; and Jack Selzer, who taught me something about how a graduate program should be run.

To others who offered materials, support, and inspiration along the way: Ray Anselment, Doreen Bell, Richard Bleiler, Brontë Berger, Patrick Cheney, Josh Eyler, Guiseppina Iacono, Laura Knoppers, Rose Kovarovics, Ana María Gómez Laguna, Niamh O'Leary, Karen Renner,

Dave Rice, Matt Semenza, Garret Sullivan, Polya Tocheva, "Toonce," Hans Turley, Mary Udal, Reginald Wilburn, Linda Woodbridge, and the participants in my English 497 workshop, who were *forced* to read this book while it was still a work in progress.

Finally, to my truest friend and my wife, Cristina, for her unconditional support, her beautiful mind, and for Alexander—four weeks old today, and the most unbelievable joy I've ever known.

Storrs, CT
September 5, 2004

Preface

I was determined, while still a graduate student, that I would someday write this book, but I had no plan to do it so early on in my professorial career. To be honest, I envisioned myself turning to it near the end of a long career; as a wiser, older man, I could reflect on decades of experience and write *the* book that would answer all of the questions worth asking about graduate school. Alas, like all young and foolish men, I've been more impetuous. Having received my Ph.D. at Penn State in 2001 with a specialization in Renaissance Literature, I've been happily employed for the past four years as an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Connecticut. In my capacity at UConn as a graduate faculty member and, more recently, Director of Graduate Studies, I've taken advantage of numerous opportunities to test many of the materials and ideas I had always hoped to include in this graduate school book. After publishing my first book in 2003, one of my colleagues asked why I didn't simply go ahead and finish what we lovingly referred to as "the grad school thing"; rather than regarding my relative youth as a liability, she explained, I should emphasize the point that graduate students need advice from those professors whose experiences have been closest to their own. Since one of the arguments of my book is that graduate school at the turn of the twenty-first century is very different than what it was 20 or even 10 years ago, she had little trouble convincing me to go ahead with it.

So why do we need another book about graduate school? Generally speaking, *Graduate Study for the Twenty-First Century* faces direct competition from four previous studies. For the past 15 years, the best book on the market has been *Getting What You Came For: The Smart Student's Guide to Earning a Master's or Ph.D.* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1992). Authored by a biology Ph.D., the book's greatest virtue is its comprehensiveness, but at the same time, its attempt to cover every aspect of the graduate experience (110 pages on "getting in" and obtaining financial aid, chapters on the historical development of MA and Ph.D. programs, etc.) means that specific matters such as lesson planning, conferencing, and publishing are treated in insufficient detail.

Major activities relevant to humanities students, such as seminar paper writing and departmental service, are simply ignored. While *Getting What You Came For* is the only book to address specific problems faced by minority students, it limits its discussion to racism, failing to address the single biggest obstacle faced by minority students, which is the burden of unfair departmental and university service. *The Ultimate Grad School Survival Guide* (Peterson's, 1996) offers sound advice about *most* of the important issues (again ignoring several major subjects such as departmental service and academic writing), but, as mentioned earlier, its excessive focus on the application process and its "soundbite" approach results in overly brief discussions of the serious issues facing today's graduate students: for example, MA and Ph.D. exams are treated in three paragraphs; conferencing, book reviewing, article publishing, and book publishing are all treated in one extremely short section. *The Grad School Handbook* (Perigee, 1998) dedicates 180 of its 232 pages to "getting in," and the remaining 50 seek only to *describe* a typical graduate program. The book fails to offer advice on such basic topics as course-work, exams, presentations, professional development, or the job search. Finally, *Playing the Game: The Streetsmart Guide to Graduate Study* (iUniverse, 2003), approaches graduate study from what can only be regarded as a comedic perspective. Authors "Frank" and "Stein" attempt to demystify the graduate experience by cracking jokes about it, which isn't necessarily a bad idea. Unfortunately, the tone is so cynical and flippant and the substance so thin that most graduate students—who must feel that the academic life is more appealing than the book's authors do—will find relatively little in *The Streetsmart Guide* that can be taken seriously.

Five characteristics distinguish *Graduate Study for the Twenty-First Century*. First, this is a book designed solely for graduate students who wish to become professors on the tenure track; it does not spend time on alternative career paths for terminal MAs or Ph.D.s. Second, the unique focus on building a professorial career means that this book dedicates a significant amount of attention to professional development issues, including publishing, attending conferences, and job searching. In a straightforward and non-condescending manner, it emphasizes how a smart and informed "streamlining" approach to graduate study and teaching can lead to both a meaningful (and relatively short) graduate career and the sort of professional accomplishments that will make you a standout on the job market. Third, *Graduate Study for the Twenty-First Century* is the only guide that recognizes the specific needs of students in the humanities. It does

not assume that the concerns of a history student (or professor) are the same as those of an individual specializing in chemistry or engineering. Fourth, this book deliberately counters the tendency of the aforementioned guides to present an image of graduate school as unrelated to and unaffected by the brutal realities of late-twentieth-century and twenty-first-century politics and corporate economics. One gets the impression from many previous graduate school guides that academe is no different today from what it was 50 or 75 years ago. Finally, this book operates at a level of detail simply not found in any of the aforementioned works. Focusing in depth on such important practical matters as selecting the right seminars, making the most of exams, and constructing effective CVs, teaching portfolios, and job applications, the emphasis of this book is very much on *how to* succeed in graduate school.

A Note on Terminology

In order to keep the advice I offer here as immediate and personal as possible, I use the second person familiar pronoun far more often than I would ever allow my undergraduate students to do. In order to prevent awkwardness in the prose, I alternate male and female pronouns by chapter; for example, whereas chapter 1 uses the terms "she" and "her," chapter 2 uses "he," "his," and "him," and so forth.

Foreword

At some point in the early 1990s, a handful of my assistant-professor colleagues at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and elsewhere decided that what the profession needed was a handbook on How to Be a Graduate Student. Not another guide on applying to graduate school, but a wholly new genre, a guide to *being in* graduate school (filled, of course, with advice on getting out of graduate school as well). Our dissertation defenses were only a few years behind us, and we had that new-recruit reformer's zeal: we knew, in fresh retrospect, what had and hadn't worked in our own graduate school careers, and now that we had assumed the responsibility of teaching and training graduate students of our own, we could see how the system rewarded the students who already knew (more or less) what they were doing with their programs of study, and how it flummoxed the students who weren't quite sure what they were doing, or who weren't quite sure how to go about doing it better.

Our discussions of How to Be a Graduate Student didn't take the form of wishing for "better" graduate students or "better prepared" graduate students. Although I was—and still am—stupefied by the phenomenon of graduate students who sit in seminars and never say a word, at the time we were primarily concerned with creating better graduate *programs*. When I arrived at Illinois, for instance, I quickly learned that the English Department had no placement director for new Ph.D.s; there was a director of graduate studies, to be sure, but no one who oversaw and guided the students who were actually looking for jobs. Instead, I found a cohort of graduate students who had been advised—why and by whom, I never learned—that their letters of application to English Department search committees should not exceed one page. "But, but, but," I stammered in surprise, "that gives you only a few sentences in which to describe your dissertation and your teaching record. Or do you save the synopsis of your research for the dissertation abstract?" The students told me that they weren't sending out dissertation abstracts, either. *Holy hamstring, Batman*, I thought—these students weren't giving themselves any chance

(more precisely, they had been told not to give themselves any chance) to describe the research they'd been working on for 2 or 3 years, and they weren't giving search committees any sense of what their dissertation was arguing, and how, and why. So I went directly to the department head, full of new-recruit reformer's zeal, and volunteered for the position of placement director. A few years later, I teamed up with Cary Nelson to advocate improvements in graduate education and to support nationwide efforts to unionize graduate students. But I never got around to writing anything about How to Be a Graduate Student.

And now I don't have to, because Gregory Colón Semenza has written the ideal book on the subject. By "ideal" I mean simply this: it is sane, circumspect, and sagacious. I also mean to suggest that its sanity and circumspection are every bit as valuable as its sagacity. Semenza knows that no two humanities departments are alike, and that there is almost as much variation among graduate programs as there is among graduate students. He remembers well how terrifying it is to face your first class as a teacher, and he knows how difficult it is to try to explain to your parents—or your loved one's parents—what you're doing (and hoping to do) with your life. He knows what it's like to balance the demands of profession and family, and he knows what it's like to mediate among differently-minded members of a comprehensive-exam committee. Best of all, he knows how the academic professions really work, right down to the invisible but critical minutiae of departmental committee service and the tricky question of when it's all right to ask a journal editor what happened to the essay you submitted last spring. The result is that *Graduate Study for the Twenty-First Century* might just be the least idiosyncratic—that is, the most reliable—book I have ever read about academe and its inhabitants.

If you're thinking about joining academe and its inhabitants, I simply cannot press this point strongly enough—because if there's one thing that makes career advice worthless (or worse), whether you're a prospective graduate student, a harried ABD, or a new assistant professor, it's idiosyncrasy. And academe, being academe, is full of it. I recall vividly the closing moments of one dissertation defense in which a committee member, addressing the question of how the candidate could best revise her work for publication, turned to the rest of the committee and said, "about how much of the dissertation, would you say, should wind up in the finished manuscript?" Before I could reply, "well, it all depends on the dissertation, and this one's quite strong," he revealed that the question was not really a question, as he

graciously answered it himself: "that's right, about forty percent." (To this day I savor the "that's right.") Fortunately, I happened to be the director of that committee, and could advise the student later that evening, "ix-nay on the orty-fay ercent-pay—you simply need to tighten the last two chapters and write a new conclusion. Come talk to me next week." Or I might mention the colleague who advised a student not to submit an essay to the journal *Cultural Critique* because he'd never heard of it. Or the colleague who advised her students to request letters of recommendation from full professors, and only full professors. In each of these cases, students got terrible career advice, and the only reason I know about this terrible advice is that the students came to me and asked, "is that right?" To which, of course, the short answer is no—and the longer answers can be found in these very pages.

That's not to say that Greg Semenza hasn't established his own distinctive and salient voice in the course of writing this book. On the contrary, from start to finish, *Graduate Study in the Twenty-First Century* reads as if it's written by a trusted friend and mentor—someone stern enough to tell you that if you're not going to read a Victorian novel on your own you shouldn't be in graduate school; someone patient enough to walk you through the process of submitting proposals and drafting papers for conferences; someone sympathetic enough to let you in on what I call the "first pancake phenomenon," namely, the fact that it's nearly impossible to get a course "down" the first time you teach it. Moreover, Semenza has done well to have framed this book as what he calls a " 'working class' approach to graduate study," since no matter where you're thinking of applying, dear reader, no matter where you may be studying now, the vast majority of jobs in the academic profession are to be found neither at Yale nor at Oberlin. Recognizing this fact of life is crucial for anyone who aspires to a career in academe—as is realizing that one can have a perfectly satisfying, stimulating academic career elsewhere than at Yale or Oberlin.

Indeed, one of the most remarkable features of this book is its clear-sightedness about the actual state of the academic job scene. Semenza does not blink away the legions of adjuncts, part-timers, and day-laborers who toil in the groves of academe; on the contrary, he's woven into his discussion of the academic profession a bright thread of warning about the degree to which academic jobs themselves have been deprofessionalized. This feature of academe is sometimes all too obscure to long-tenured faculty, some of whom have lost touch not merely with the realities of graduate education but with the working

conditions of almost half of the academic workforce. In this respect as in many others, Semenza is quite right to remind us that (as one of his colleagues put it, in the course of encouraging him to write this book) "graduate students need advice from professors whose experiences have been closest to their own." It's not that most of us older folk, after 10 or 20 years, begin to lose our reformer's zeal; some of us never do. But as people like me enter their mid-forties and their mid-careers, they inevitably lose even the memory of the sense of what it's like to get that first article acceptance, what it's like to present that first conference paper, what it's like to send out those first couple dozen letters to search committees knowing full well that less than half of new Ph.D.s in your field will wind up with tenure-track jobs. (Indeed, very few people in my own Ph.D.-candidate cohort in the late 1980s had presented papers at *any* conferences, and only a tiny handful of us had published essays before entering the job market. Already that period, recent as it is, looks distant and sepia-tinged.) Tenured professors like me know, most of the time, how fortunate we are to have our jobs, and we remember, most of the time, why we love them: for the sheer intellectual stimulation of working with ideas and with works of art; for the diurnal, daunting challenge of teaching and the profound satisfaction of teaching a great class with profoundly satisfied students; for the relative autonomy of our labor conditions, and for a form of labor that is among the least alienated and alienating known to humankind. (Yes, I tell students, it's a 60-hour week, but you get to choose *which* 60.) But we too often forget just what we did to get these jobs, and how conditions have changed since we got them. Semenza, to his credit, retains a visceral sense of all these things, and as a result his book is suffused not with an air of survivor's guilt but with the bracing conviction that both new Ph.D.s and entry-level graduate students need all the help they can get from the people who got that first article acceptance, learned the conference ropes, and wound up on the tenure track.

I can add but one piece of advice to Semenza's guide. It's something about academe that I didn't learn until I had been an assistant professor for a couple of years, whereupon I realized that I had been operating on the principle for almost a decade without knowing it. The principle is this: in this business, as in so many others, you should want other people to trust your judgment. That's basically what "success" comes down to: whether you're writing a seminar paper, refereeing a manuscript for a university press, teaching a class, drafting a committee report, inviting a speaker to campus, or publishing your research, you'll know you've made an impact if your colleagues say, "good call." They can say "good

call" in any number of ways—by praising your analysis of *Moll Flanders*, late Wittgenstein, or early Jacksonian democracy; by hiring you on the basis of a fine writing sample and a stellar campus visit; by asking you to serve on a search committee; by asking you to help run the department. But in each case, the structure of the process remains the same: you say X about Y, and person or persons Z evaluate X, which means they evaluate you, which means they evaluate your mechanisms of evaluation. And the more completely those persons Z trust your judgment, the more often you'll be asked to exercise it. Even here, however, as Semenza duly notes, you need to be careful and to pick your spots—lest you wind up on dozens of department, college, and disciplinary committees simply because people know you can be counted on to be a discerning and capable committee member. After all, part of exercising good professional judgment entails knowing those committee assignments you'd be better off without, even as you dedicate yourself to being a good departmental and professional citizen. But with that caveat, the principle holds: the baseline reason for which we praise other people in this business, and for which we try to promote them and their work—whether they're graduate students, junior colleagues, or anybody else—is that we've determined that they have good professional judgment not only about the material that constitutes the basis for their research and teaching but also about the very mechanisms of professional evaluation themselves.

I realize that this is not so much a piece of advice as a piece of meta-advice, but I hope it will help to serve to introduce Greg Semenza's work. And in that spirit, I'll turn things over to him, with these final words of advice to you:

> Trust this guy. He knows what he's talking about, and his judgment is unerring.

MICHAEL BÉRUBÉ

Introduction

Professional development and long-term career planning are no longer optional activities for graduate students in the humanities. Because of a fiercely competitive job market (only one in three Ph.D.s will earn a tenure-track position), college and university officials see few reasons to hire new Ph.D.s unless such persons are able to demonstrate significant publication, research, and teaching records. In light of this fact, we might reasonably ask whether graduate education has changed significantly enough over the past quarter-century to accommodate our graduate students' professional and practical needs. Since an already bad job market has managed to worsen in a relatively short period of time, and since an entire pre-Boomer generation of university professors hangs on the verge of retirement, we should probably confront one of the more troubling and undeniable paradoxes of twenty-first-century graduate education: that MAs and Ph.D.s who must publish, attend conferences, and teach upper-level courses are regularly taught by professors who did none of these things as graduate students and, in some cases, even as assistant professors. While most graduate faculty members surely understand the serious problems facing their students today, there remains a major gap between the lip service often paid to addressing the problems and the implementation of real-world policies and practices designed to alleviate them.

Since I was still a Ph.D. student just 4 years ago, I understand all too well the psychological toll that preprofessional pressures can exact on a typical student in today's academic climate. At a certain point in one's graduate career, simple awareness of what one needs to do to obtain a job can turn to paralysis in the face of having actually to do it. In almost every seminar, you will be encouraged by your professors to publish articles. At every social event, you will overhear stories about the experience of attending conferences and delivering papers. After each semester, you will be forced to ask yourself whether your teaching evaluations are up to par with those of your colleagues. Throughout your graduate career, you will be bombarded by devastating statistics about the job market, many of which will seem custom-made to deepen your own personal anxieties. And despite all of these

G.M.C. Semenza, *Graduate Study for the Twenty-First Century*

reminders about *what* you will need to do to succeed, only rarely will someone actually stop and explain to you *how* you might do it.

As mentioned in the preface, this book is different from other graduate school guides in its focus on how to develop an academic career; merely *surviving* graduate school is hardly the goal of most MAs and Ph.D.s. Recognizing the unique problems faced by humanities graduate students, this book seeks to compensate for the inadequate professional training provided by so many graduate programs in the United States and Canada. Unlike other guides, whose authors seem to assume that every reader is a student at Harvard and, consequently, a shoe-in on the job market (which is a bad assumption, anyway), *Graduate Study for the Twenty-First Century* faces head-on the practical obstacles to success for students who will have no obvious advantages on the job market. Because I imagine an audience of recently admitted or already enrolled humanities students, the book does not weigh the pros and cons of attending graduate school, discuss the process of selecting appropriate programs, or deal with how to apply for graduate school. Nor does it spend time outlining nonacademic career options for terminal MAs or Ph.D.s. Whereas several of the existing graduate school handbooks do treat subjects such as dissertation writing and even publishing, their excessive focus on whether and where to go to graduate school also means that they pay insufficient attention to the issues that matter most to the tens of thousands of graduate students who know exactly what they want, having already made up their minds to pursue the MA and then the Ph.D. Rather than teaching you simply how to be a graduate student, then, this book teaches you how to use graduate school as a preparation for what you really seek: a successful academic career.

I want to be honest up front about the fact that this book advocates a sort of "working class" approach to graduate study. Since I pursued my doctorate at a large state university, I was painfully aware as a student that I would need to distinguish myself professionally in order to be competitive in a job market teeming with Ivy Leaguers and Stanford graduates. Ironically, it was this potentially disabling realization that inspired me to keep working. If there's one point I want you to take seriously in this book, it's that whereas the recent emphasis on preprofessionalism can be understood as merely terrifying and damaging, few developments have done more to advance the cause of a more meritocratic system in academe. Now, obviously, we should not ignore the various social factors that continue to condition who goes to graduate school. But, whereas 30 years ago, a state university Ph.D.'s chances of being hired by a major institution would have been limited

due to class biases and popular myths about academic pedigree, today's graduate students are more likely to be hired on the basis of their actual qualifications. Potential employers may continue to suspect—erroneously—that a doctorate from Wisconsin is not the same as one from Columbia (is the inference that Wisconsin professors are holding back important information?), but they will have a very difficult time ignoring a Wisconsin student who has published two articles in the best journals in her field. Simply put, professional achievements such as publications and grants can be great equalizers in a rigidly hierarchical and traditionally unfair system. If you regard pressures to develop professionally as merely a burden, you may founder in graduate school; regard them as opportunities for leveling the playing field, and you may go very far.

In case this elite/nonelite scenario seems overly divisive, I want to stress that biases work both ways in academe. The job crisis of the last 20 years has meant that there's no guarantee that top-20 graduates will be hired in top-20 programs; no one in today's academic market, in other words, can simply write off two-thirds of the colleges and universities in this country. Many Ivy League Ph.D.s find themselves being systematically excluded from certain job searches, however, because of unfair assumptions regarding their willingness to profess in nonelite college and university settings. In fact, job placement has become an extremely difficult matter for faculty and administrators at many prestigious universities, where placement rates have in many cases sunk below those reported by institutions usually ranked lower. Whereas the very best students at universities such as Yale and Penn continue to land the most sought after jobs in the country, many Ivy League candidates find themselves in something of a double bind: lacking the professional qualifications necessary to land the most prestigious jobs in the country, they also are shunned by employers at other institutions, who fear that their new assistant professor may bolt for a "better" job at the first chance she gets. Especially for those candidates who wish to teach in small colleges or public institutions—which happen to constitute the vast majority of higher educational venues—such assumptions can be extremely frustrating and very difficult to overcome. Just as students at lower-ranked institutions are sometimes able to research their way into a particular sort of job, these individuals can strengthen their job candidacy by developing teaching and service records reflective of their sincere commitment to the ideals of liberal arts colleges or, at least, less research-oriented universities.

Though I continue to state throughout this book my conviction that preprofessionalism can be regarded as liberating and empowering,

I have no intention of downplaying here the dangers inherent in the professional development model of graduate education. Most important, new graduate students should keep in mind that the main purpose of a graduate education is the accumulation of knowledge in an advanced area of study. To the degree that the presentation of conference papers or the publication of articles contributes to your colleagues' or your own understanding of a particular subject, professional activities are wonderfully useful, even crucial, components of the academic life. When they are pursued merely for their own sake—or when the desire of the pursuer to build a certain type of career becomes more important than the desire to learn and grow intellectually—the very integrity of the humanities enterprise is severely compromised. Also, graduate students must be careful to avoid the equivalent of stunting their growth or burning themselves out by trying to do too much, too soon. Although this book suggests that MA students have much to gain by learning early in their careers what is required to become a professor, such students should remember that it will likely take years before the presentation of a paper at a major conference or the publication of an article are realistic goals. The first aim of every graduate student should be to know something extraordinary or at least something ordinary deeply. The second should be to learn how to discuss that subject clearly and persuasively. Only at this point will it be constructive for one to pursue such an ambitious goal as publication. (In chapter 2 of this book, I suggest an ideal timeline for approaching such professional activities). Finally, an overemphasis on professional development can lead to overspecialization, which, in turn, can cause more problems for you on the job market. A very small percentage of universities (about 10 percent) are classified by the Carnegie Foundation as "Research Universities."[1] With a few exceptions, the other 90 percent of colleges and universities tend to privilege teaching and service above research. At many of these colleges and universities, faculties are relatively small; whereas a person writing a dissertation on Shakespeare might only teach Shakespeare at a research university, she would likely be responsible for teaching all English literature through the eighteenth century at a liberal arts college. Students should make it a point to start becoming experts in their respective fields of specialization as early as year one, especially if they plan to pursue a serious research career, but they also should keep in mind the fact that most potential employers are interested in candidates with a broad knowledge of a particular discipline. This book focuses on strategies, therefore, designed to make you as appealing as possible to the widest range of potential hiring institutions.

The tone of this book is direct and, at times, deliberately and systematically provocative. Whereas I am quite willing to meet cultural expectations for rhetorical moderation in my regular academic writing (we all give in, eventually), I've written this book in the voice of a teacher, and I've decided not to edit out what may often seem to you like overly strong opinions. For example, in chapter 4, I offer the following advice to lazy literature students who fail to complete their reading assignments for class: "if you find yourself lacking the energy to read a George Eliot novel on your own, leave graduate school now." While I would defend the sentence here on the grounds that there is, of course, a wider context in which it needs to be understood, it would perhaps be dishonest of me to deny that it's somewhat strongly worded. And yet, as I learned in the classroom years ago, first as a student and later as a teacher, human beings respond to strong ideas and opinions, and they tend to learn extremely little from colorless observations and statements of the obvious. If nothing else, my goal in offering this book is to stimulate serious discussion of issues too often ignored in the course of a graduate education, and so I see no reason to pretend that we will, or even should, agree about all of the ideas it puts forward.

The last thing we need is more deception and dishonesty about the current state of affairs in graduate education. Few, if any, professional commitments are more serious than those made by individuals who embark upon the path to a Ph.D. in the humanities. Rare beings in a society driven by the pursuit of wealth and personal gain, humanities graduate students almost always begin their careers with the most noble of intentions. Since the average time for completing the Ph.D. is 9 years in the humanities, and since many graduate students accumulate significant debt during that time (debt that will not be easily paid off on a professor's salary), and many others won't be hired on the tenure track, it is incumbent upon all in higher education to review current practices and policies.[2] The sort of institutional dishonesty about which I'm speaking only rarely takes the form of outright lies; more often, it amounts to a refusal on the part of administrators and faculty to address the practical needs of their students.

Specifically, too many faculty members continue to treat their students as mere "apprentices," despite the fact that graduate students in most modern universities design and teach their own classes, serve on departmental and university committees, and conference and publish regularly. The error is somewhat understandable, but not entirely excusable. Pressure to maintain the traditional "apprenticeship" model of graduate education is imposed mainly from above, since high-level

administrators and university attorneys, determined to prevent graduate student unionization and thereby maintain an increasingly massive and inexpensive labor force, require and advise that teaching and research assistants be classified as apprentices, not professionals. To refer to an individual who is thrown into a classroom with little advanced training on the first day of her graduate career as an "apprentice," however, is to redefine rather completely the meaning of that term.[3] To say that students who must publish prior to graduation are "apprentices," for example, is to imply that we will actually educate them about the publication process as it pertains to academic journals, and university and trade presses. The simple fact that tends to get lost in the confusion of university politics and corporate economics, however, is that graduate programs not only admit annually far more students than the market can accommodate—and for all the wrong reasons—but also that they do painfully little to prepare these students for the realities of academe in the twenty-first century. The costs of these lies are reflected partly in the numbers. A *Chronicle of Higher Education* cover story from January 16, 2004 reveals that attrition rates in U.S. Ph.D. programs are at an all-time high, between 40 percent and 50 percent (higher for women and minorities).[4] Above all else, the statistic highlights waste of time and resources by universities and, more important, of money, time, and energy by graduate students. Such numbers speak to the general feelings of alienation and aimlessness experienced by so many graduate students. And they speak to the general failure of universities—faculty members included—to take adequate responsibility for their students/employees. As Michael Bérubé and Cary Nelson have argued, "Faculty members who devote no energy to graduate training have a relation to graduate employment that is almost wholly parasitic: their own salaries and privileges are sustained by exploiting teaching assistants."[5]

So let's be honest for a moment and consider the vicious cycle that's producing the current crisis in graduate education. Universities admit annually more graduate students than the market can accommodate in an effort to staff their undergraduate classes. Whereas in the past, most of these classes were taught by tenured or tenure-track faculty members, university officials eventually caught on that graduate students and adjuncts could do the same type of work for far less money and few, if any, additional benefits. Further, because neither graduate students nor adjuncts have tenure (i.e., academic freedom and job security), they represent a workforce that can be easily managed and manipulated by their employers. Since the late 1970s, the percentage of full-time tenure-track faculty members has steadily

decreased as graduate students, adjuncts, and part-time faculty members have taken over their duties. In fact the U.S. Department of Education reports that since 1981—a period during which the population of college students has grown exponentially—the percentage of full-time faculty members has decreased from 65 percent, which is bad enough, to only 56 percent.[6] So get this: in the past 20 years or so, universities have systematically reduced tenure-track lines by replacing tenurable professors with "apprentices" who seek nothing other than to be hired on the tenure track! An additional irony is that administrators and state legislators have few incentives for addressing such problems as Ph.D. attrition rates since attrition is precisely what keeps the job market from becoming more flooded than it already is. Perhaps most troubling, though, is the very real threat posed to academic freedom as tenure-track jobs continue to disappear in both our public and private colleges and universities.

The only realistic long-term solution to this national, systemic problem may be graduate student (and adjunct) unionization. More than 30 graduate student unions are currently recognized as collective bargaining agents by their universities and state or federal legislatures; at least 20 others have recently affiliated with unions and are in the process of seeking legal recognition as collective bargaining agents.[7] While many conservative commentators and university administrators continue to argue that graduate student unionization will lead directly to the downfall of higher education in the United States, basic common sense and numerous historical precedents have suggested precisely the opposite: the superior wages and benefits earned by members of graduate student unions promise at least two positive side effects: first, by raising the costs of graduate student labor, they force universities to think twice about admitting too many applicants, who will then flood the job market a few years later; second, by limiting the financial benefits of hiring graduate students rather than assistant professors, they slow down and may eventually help to prevent the current corporate assault on tenure. Unless one is able to claim with a straight face that unionized students in such prestigious graduate schools as Berkeley, UCLA, Michigan, NYU, Rutgers, and Wisconsin (with the first union, organized in 1966), seem to be struggling as a result of having unionized, arguments against the move to protect the rights of a badly exploited labor force seem totally unpersuasive and unethical. Even in cases where union movements have eventually failed, activist graduate student bodies have tended to benefit from the concessions offered by their universities in their attempts to block unionization. "If we can't beat them into submission, we can at least pretend to treat them

fairly," would appear to be the line taken by many administrations. The unionization issue is undoubtedly complex but, as a graduate student in today's market, you should at the very least make it a point to become educated about the major issues pertaining to the unionization movement. Faculty members, regardless of how they feel about unionization, should stress to their graduate students that they have a right to organize and that reprisals from either the department or the university are illegal (and not in the best interests of anyone). The eventual fate of the graduate student union movement will have serious implications down the road for everyone involved in higher education.

One popular, alternative method for addressing the graduate student job crisis amounts basically to a Band-Aid where a tourniquet is needed. I'm talking about attempts by departments to offer job training for Ph.D.s who decide, almost always out of desperation, to seek employment in nonacademic professions. While workshops on nonacademic employment opportunities seem like a nice idea—and shouldn't be *discouraged*—we should be honest about the fact that they serve the sole purpose of cleaning up a mess that should have been prevented in the first place. I am quite willing to wager that no Ph.D. student enters a program in the humanities to become an editor, a freelance writer, or a lab technician.[8]

As always, more innovative educational initiatives may be the only practical solution for today's graduate students—but not in the sense that they will make the larger problems we've been describing go away any time soon. Speaking realistically, unless the increasing corporatization of the academy can be halted, and unless graduate students and adjuncts can win the right to bargain collectively in both public and private university settings, the problems are unlikely *ever* to go away. By educating yourself about how the current system works, however, and seeking to reform (mainly non-curricular) departmental practices so that your professional needs are met more effectively, you can at least maximize your chances of success in the current market. As a sincere believer in the idea that cream, if given the chance, still will rise to the top (even in this awful market), I offer in this book the information I believe you will most need to know in order to excel as a future professor in the humanities. Here's that much-needed apprenticeship, in other words, that you may find lacking in your department.

Graduate School for the Twenty-First Century is organized into 12 chapters that cover the graduate experience from the first seminar to the first job. While you may be tempted to jump around from chapter to chapter or skip directly to chapters that you assume will be

most relevant, I would encourage you to read the entire book in the order that it is presented. Because the book seeks to explain the vital connections between each stage of the degree process, highlighting especially how one particular phase or activity can be used as preparation for the next, later chapters will be less useful on their own. For example, although chapter 10 focuses on "Publishing," it builds directly on ideas presented in chapter 1 (on the publication industry and pressure to publish), chapter 2 (on when to publish), chapter 3 (on how time management strategies can make publication more likely), and chapter 5 (on the research process). By the time you finish this book, you should understand where all of the pieces of the puzzle belong; then it will be your job to put them together.

I would like to close this introductory section by commending your decision to pursue an academic career. Although the sort of corruption usually discussed in relation to "other" industries has undoubtedly begun to rear its ugly head in the hallowed halls of academe, I still believe there are few jobs more important or fulfilling than a university professorship in the humanities. The problems touched on so briefly here have, in fact, made even more apparent the crucial role in our culture of dedicated intellectuals and educators such as yourself. As a modern graduate student wrestling with modern problems, you'll need to fight harder than most of your academic predecessors ever had to do in order to keep in mind the heroic nature of the enterprise upon which you've embarked. And if you take no other advice away from this book, I hope you'll at least remember to maintain faith in the transformational power of humane knowledge.

Chapter 1

The Culture of a Graduate Program

Few undergraduates know or care all that much about how their major departments operate and, in truth, their ignorance probably has no negative consequences. Only rarely are they ever invited to participate in the administrative or curricular management of a department. To succeed in graduate school, however, students must learn quickly about how academic departments—and the individuals who run them—are organized and governed. In the worst cases, ignorance about such factors can lead graduate students to act in ways extremely damaging to their reputations and careers. Based on the premise that both successful graduate study and professional development begin with an understanding of academic culture per se, this chapter provides nuts-and-bolts information on a variety of general subjects, including:

- The daily life of a typical humanities professor
- The tenure and promotion system
- The hierarchical structure of a typical department
- The major characters in an academic department
- The politics of academic life
- The intensity of graduate study

By describing in relatively concrete terms the undeniably complex habitat of the humanities scholar, the chapter aims to make you confident in your ability to participate fully and "safely" in the life of your department.

The Departmental Hierarchy

Keeping straight all of the people in a university department often proves a job in itself at the start of one's graduate career. Though

G.M.C. Semenza, *Graduate Study for the Twenty-First Century*

faculty members and departmental administrators must deal regularly with the "higher-ups"—the presidents, provosts, and deans of colleges—graduate students need only rarely involve themselves in extra-departmental affairs (this is a fact, not a recommendation or endorsement) and are unlikely to have much contact with such individuals. Even though some people love to talk about the university as an ideal, democratic space, removed and free from the corrupt practices and structures of the business world, the fact is that academe has in recent years become nearly as corporatized and hierarchical as a typical Fortune 500 company. And like individuals working in the business world, academics need to understand the ways in which power is distributed, exercised, and balanced if they are to enjoy successful careers. Here's how things are typically organized.

Administrators

Departments are directed either by a "Head" or a "Chairperson." Technically, the difference is that whereas heads usually are appointed by the dean of the college, chairs are typically elected by, or at least supposed to be representative of, the faculty, though I should mention that lots of departments use "head" for either form of government. The implications of the appointment process can be quite serious, as you can imagine, since that process potentially defines the difference between autocracy and democracy in a given department. In most cases, a wise department head will try to represent the majority of faculty even though the dean happens to be his official boss. In most departments, "executive committees" are set up to advise the head or chair and, depending on how their role is defined, balance the power of the department head/chair. Some heads/chairs involve themselves directly in the governance of the graduate program, and some choose to grant near-autonomy to the director of graduate studies. Over the course of your graduate career, you may actually have very little contact with your head or chairperson, but you should at least make sure that he knows who you are.

The "Associate" head or chairperson is both an advisor and a supervisor of certain important administrative tasks such as the scheduling of undergraduate classes, the distribution of graduate teaching assignments, and the hiring of adjuncts. The associate head/chair may also serve *ex officio* on any number of departmental and college-level committees, including courses and curriculum and the department executive committee.

The "Director of Graduate Studies" is very likely to be the highest-ranking administrator with whom you will work on a regular basis. The director is responsible for establishing graduate course schedules,

issuing exams, training job market candidates, managing the graduate admissions process, and overseeing each student's progress through the MA and Ph.D. programs, among other things. There is considerable disagreement in academic circles about how the role of the director should be defined: as taskmaster, confidante, or something in between these two extremes. On the one hand, the graduate director's job is to be an advocate for you; on the other hand, he is an officer of the institution. You probably will be able to intuit upon meeting your director what sort of relationship yours will be. Always remember, though, that graduate directors are not appointed simply to field complaints, though this is a part of their job; you should go to your director to seek advice about everything from how to succeed in seminars to how to survive on the job market.

Faculty

Generally speaking, there are three ranks of professors in most universities. Though a full professor obviously is more highly ranked than an assistant professor, I begin here with the latter in order to emphasize the promotional movement upwards. But first, a quick word about terminology: after the dissertation defense, a Ph.D.'s friends typically begin calling him "Doctor," which is officially accurate only after the degree is conferred. The word "professor" is used to describe persons contracted officially as full, associate, assistant, or visiting professors by colleges or universities.

Assistant Professor: "Assistant Professor" is the utterly inappropriate term ("beginning professor" would be more accurate) used to describe professors who have yet to be tenured or promoted to the associate rank. In most cases, assistant professors are recently defended Ph.D.s who don't really ever "assist" with anything. Having successfully conquered the job market, these individuals sign onto a six-year long trial—the so-called probationary period—during which they are expected to teach a normal course load (though sometimes it is reduced), conduct research, and serve on departmental and university committees.[1] At the end of this probationary period, the candidate will submit a complete file, which will be reviewed at various levels within his own university and by approximately four to eight peer reviewers outside of it (in some elite universities, files are evaluated by as many as twenty outside reviewers—a truly absurd practice). If the candidate has performed his responsibilities satisfactorily, he will be granted tenure.

Tenure decisions are made by a number of departmental and university committees set up to check and balance one another.

In most cases, the initial recommendation for tenure is offered by the promotion and tenure committee, which consists of about five or six tenured members of the candidate's own department. These committee members are responsible for reading through and discussing each candidate's file—including the external reviewers' evaluations—and determining whether or not the individual should be granted tenure. Once the committee offers its recommendation, it must also be approved by the department head/chair and sometimes must be voted on by the faculty at large. After the department approves of a particular candidate's case, it's time for the higher administrators to weigh in on the matter. First the dean (and Dean's Committee) of the college, then the provost or chancellor, and finally, the Board of Trustees all must evaluate the file, which can be rejected at any stage in the process. The most important stamp of approval comes from the dean's committee since, in most cases, these are the people actually responsible for firing people. Depending on whether this committee is representative of a humanities college, a liberal arts college, or a liberal arts and sciences college, its members will come from more or less different academic backgrounds and disciplines. College of liberal arts and sciences committees can be problematic since they subject candidates' research to evaluation by science professors, who often have an inadequate understanding of how research in the humanities should be judged (science candidates are subjected to the same unfair evaluation by humanities professors, of course). Only when the file is approved at all the highest levels will the candidate be granted tenure.

In public university settings, starting assistant professors in the humanities earn a salary of approximately $45,000 in public universities and $50,000 in private ones.[2] Considering the superior educational background of a Ph.D., most outside observers would be shocked, of course, to learn of the disproportionately modest salaries paid to professors; while I certainly wouldn't argue with them, I would stress the importance of recognizing that professorial jobs do include other financial perks. Academic jobs almost invariably bring with them excellent health benefits and competitive retirement plans. In many institutions, additional benefits include money for travel to conferences and archives, opportunities for teaching and research grants, and excellent child care facilities and benefits. Furthermore, a professor's earning potential can be quite good at a competitive university; especially where faculties are unionized, merit pay opportunities can result in significant and regular salary increases. Just as important, it goes without saying that college towns and academe in general tend not to attract budding entrepreneurs and yuppies; a professor would