

Raiding the Pantry: Problems, Resources, and Creation at Western University

Strategic Planning Submission

Mary Eileen Wennekers, Graduate Student Senator

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March 1, 2013

Dear Fellow SCUP Committee Members,

Following the initial announcement of the intent to develop a new Strategic Plan at Western, through my office as Graduate Students Senator, I initiated a communications strategy to inform graduate students at Western of their opportunity to participate in this process. This strategy incorporated email communication, regular presentations at SOGS council meetings, an “open feedback” channel through which concerned individuals and departments could have their observations and concerns brought forward to SCUP, drop in “office hours”, and a town hall conducted on February 12, 2013.

These consultations identified five key areas where policy renewal is most required:

- Tuition and Funding
- Academic Pedagogy and Digital Learning Potentials
- Experiential Learning Possibilities
- Internationalization
- Research Practices

In response to these consultations and in collaboration with the ideas brought forward by my fellow colleagues, I conducted research into how other institutions had met similar challenges with demonstrable success. The following recommendations, framed within Western’s unique context, are responses to emerging phenomena such as the demand for public relevance of academic pursuits, the need for sound digital education guidelines, the increasing barriers to access faced by international students, and the growing prevalence of public-private partnerships in university research, and the declining morale of doctoral students and researchers. Although this list may read as a set of problems that are symptomatic of the inevitable decline of the university as a public institution, our strengths at Western may well provide us with the wherewithal to shape a trajectory that sees us becoming *increasingly* relevant, *increasingly* able to provide excellent undergraduate and graduate education, and *increasingly* able to produce world class research.

The following report is broken down into five sections corresponding to the five areas identified above. Each section describes the current conditions in this area. It then identifies resources that already exist at Western, and describes how these resources can be augmented and mobilized to catapult our university ahead of the curb in a rapidly changing institutional environment: Many of the recommendations are fairly simple and require very little capital expenditure; others will require the establishment of working groups to develop institutionally recognized best practices; some will cost money; some will save money.

The key recommendations are as follows:

- Keep pace with McMaster, University of Toronto, Brock University, and most major institutions outside of Ontario by instituting “post-residency” fees
- Conduct a consistency and services audit to streamline ensure institution-wide resources and policies are hitting their marks
- Partner with other post-secondary institutions to put pressure on the Provincial Government with the aim of reversing the defunding of post-secondary education

- Incorporate digital technology and improve learning outcomes and student satisfaction through the implementation of “flipped classrooms”
- Mobilize the existing capacities of organizations such as The Public Humanities at Western to create meaningful, community based experiential learning opportunities for humanities and sciences researchers
- Facilitate experiential learning for undergraduate students through enhanced undergrad/grad student research partnerships
- Develop on-campus work opportunities for international students to help stabilize the economic status of our most vulnerable colleagues
- Stake out Western’s identity as one of “dynamic internationalism”: Facilitate cross cultural exchanges in London and abroad through *community-oriented* as well as applied research partnerships; implement international dual degree programs.
- Develop mechanisms to ensure that no international student is required to leave Canada prior to the completion of their degree
- Develop and oversee the consistent implementation of a best-practices policy to govern the university/private sector relationship in public/private research partnerships. This must include a clear policy regarding the ability of graduate students to access research facilities in which the University has significant capital investment *without charge*. It must also include a clear distinction between graduate student researchers and employees of private researchers; in particular, academic freedom and the possibility of performing basic as well as applied research must be rigorously safeguarded.

Taken together, these recommendations aim to contribute to Western’s strategic planning in a way that addresses emerging issues as opportunities to mark our University out as a place of knowledge, invention, achievement, and creation. We already have many of the resources already to provide an unparalleled graduate student experience here; all that is left is to take the next steps.

It is a real pleasure to continue to realize my personal commitment to this University through the strategic planning process, and I look forward with keen anticipation to our upcoming work.

Yours,

Mary Eileen Wennekers
PhD Candidate, Department of English
Graduate Student Senator, Arts and Humanities

Academic Pedagogy and Digital Learning Potentials

To maintain relevancy in the years to come, Western must seize upon the possibilities afforded by digital technology to create more effective and efficient means of teaching.

Recommendation:

- Incorporate digital technology and improve learning outcomes and student satisfaction through the implementation of “flipped classrooms”

Context and Capacities:

In its recent policy paper on post-secondary education, the Ministry of College, Training and Universities asserted:

Technology does more than just facilitate access to data. It can also enable new ways for students to learn from and interact with faculty and each other. Rather than faculty “transmitting” lecture data to students sitting in a hall, digital delivery of course content can free faculty in traditional institutions to engage in direct dialogue and mentorship with students. Technology is driving worldwide changes in education, and it is important that Ontario recognize and respond to these changes so that credentials from Ontario PSE institutions hold their high value. (10)

It is generally understood that the pedagogical practices of the mid-20th century university are now obsolete. Traditional lecture delivery methods fail to realize the shift in knowledge culture being propelled by a generation well-used to digital methods of information. In addition, the increasing enrolment of undergraduate students that is occurring in tandem with the decrease in tenured professorial roles has prompted university administrations to seek a means of providing quality undergraduate education to a larger number of students without maintaining traditional instructor/student ratios.

The recent interest in Massive Open Online Courses crystallizes one possible response to this set of problems. MOOCs, it is sometimes argued, make possible a remarkable decrease in operational costs associated with higher learning: Once a video is made, a professor is not needed – rather, less costly teaching assistants and IT workers can manage course delivery and assess student’s skill acquisition and knowledge retention.

However, there are objections to MOOCs that require serious consideration.

- How can an institution manage the risk associated with the significant initial capital expenditure required to create the content for MOOCs when there is such a limited amount of data describing its pedagogical efficacy?
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- How can an institution justify charging tuition for a method of content delivery that is already freely accessible?
- In an age of rapid advancement in all line of scholarly inquiry, how can MOOCs achieve their promise of cost efficiency while ensuring that the content delivered is not obsolete?
- How can an institution ensure that the front- and back-end labour costs associated with MOOC delivery are kept manageable and within the existing contractual relationships within teaching assistants, tech personnel, and faculty?

Taken together, these concerns represent a serious objection to the sweeping implementation of MOOCs as the predominant method of university education delivery. Nonetheless, it is equally unrealistic to propose that the traditional mode of course instruction ought to be adhered to in a radically different cultural context that that in which it was developed.

The “flipped classroom” provides a method of blended classroom and digital pedagogy that mobilizes the strengths of both. The instructor of a flipped classroom employs digital technology and videos in place of traditional lecture methods, and then utilizes classroom time to engage in problem based learning which engages the students in collective, interactive application of the concepts involved. It is, in a nutshell, “a blending of direct instruction with constructivist learning” (Bergman et al. 2011). The ways in which this is employed will vary considerably depending on a course’s learning objectives, but the principle remains consistent.

As a method of instruction the flipped classroom has already provided very encouraging results in student learning outcomes. This method offers an objective of continuing to provide the best student experience in a research intensive university: instructor/student interaction is maximized, the bridge between concept and application is explicitly incorporated into course delivery, and the possibilities of digital technology are utilized in a manner that allows students to learn and review foundational content according to their individual learning processes.

The University has already configured a working group to investigate the possibilities of online learning, although until this point it has primarily been concerned with costing and describing the parameters of MOOCs. It would be expedient to recommend that this force investigate the possibility of implementing flipped classrooms. The TSC has also begun to look into best pedagogical practices for the integration of digital media into university teaching at Western.

Many graduate students have been at the forefront of bringing course material to undergraduate students through Facebook, Youtube, and other digital platforms. Perhaps the emerging TA facilitation pilot project could be encouraged to gather these existing practices in order to consolidate existing institutional knowledge in this regard. In addition, graduate student teaching assistants should be enabled to pursue these possibilities in conjunction with their faculties in order to move towards a method of integrated pedagogy that evades excessive start-up investments which have not yet been proven to result in competitive educational outcomes for undergraduate and graduate students. Finally, digital learning should not be conceived of as a means to decrease the University’s commitment to retain enough qualified tenured faculty to meet the needs of its students.

Beyond Internships: Experiential Learning as Community

In response to the perception of higher learning as increasingly relevant in the broader culture, Western must create modes of engagement that revitalize the relationship between higher learning and community vitality, broadly conceived.

Recommendations:

- Mobilize the existing capacities of organizations such as The Public Humanities at Western to create meaningful, community based experiential learning opportunities for humanities and sciences researchers
- Facilitate experiential learning for undergraduate students through enhanced undergrad/grad student research partnerships

Context and Capacities:

The Ministry has recently suggested that the possibilities afforded by online learning platforms will free up infrastructural resources, creating the possibility of increased experiential learning in an academic context:

As more and more academic learning can be moved online, opportunity may exist in the longer term to adjust capital budgets to focus on creating this type of shared space. Funding options could be provided on a performance basis (e.g. number of firms created; number of angel investments in student companies; number of new jobs).

While this proposed policy directive does well to highlight the infrastructural capacities that could result from the implementation of up-to-date pedagogical practices such as the flipped classroom discussed above, it is unnecessarily narrow in its definition of the venues in which experiential learning could take place. The suggestion that experiential learning be assessed solely in terms of traditional business models precludes the opportunities for the enhanced community service and more holistic applications of higher learning that experiential learning offers.

In addition, referring experiential learning to the existing model of unpaid internships is not satisfactory to many of Western's students. It runs the risk of creating a new class of labour in Ontario which is asymmetrically geared towards the benefit of established business interests, a paradigm which does not hold much promise for the realization of holistic education that Western maintains a commitment to, or, quite frankly, for the availability of entry-level paid positions: Why hire someone when there is a battery of obliged unpaid interns presenting themselves as staffing resources?

The graduate department of Anthropology already provides existing opportunities for researchers to take their theoretical knowledge off campus and into the broader community, making it possible for them to actively contribute to the world around them while bringing that knowledge back to the academy. Programs such as these field-schools and Western's Engineers without Borders should be considered as possible models for other fields of scholarship. Western's Alternative Spring Break also presents a method for broader community engagement that should be reconfigured to encourage graduate student participation.

Existing institutions such as the Public Humanities at Western have already achieved considerable success in establishing a more dynamic culture of engagement between the academy and other public institutions. The broader public is keenly interested in having access to the fruits of academic research in the arts, humanities, social sciences, and sciences. Graduate students could meet this demand by participating in a coordinated public education program which provided lectures and classes off campus, which will enhance the popular conception of the value of the University and provide valuable professionalization opportunities for researchers who are launching careers which may take any number of paths after they complete their program.

Finally, graduate students are an institutional resource for the enhancement of undergraduate experiential learning. A working group that investigates existing undergraduate/graduate research partnerships and develops a best-practices policy for governing these partnerships is necessary to establish the ground for a vibrant culture of inquiry both within the University and without.

Dynamic Internationalism

As part of its goal of continued internationalization, Western must address the remaining barriers to access faced by graduate students who do not have permanent residency or citizenship status.

Recommendations:

- Develop on-campus work opportunities for international students to help stabilize the economic status of our most vulnerable colleagues
- Stake out Western's identity as one of "dynamic internationalism": Facilitate cross cultural exchanges in London and abroad through *community-oriented* as well as applied research partnerships; implement international dual degree programs.
- Develop mechanisms to ensure that no international student is required to leave Canada prior to the completion of their degree

Context and Capacities:

Western already boasts a vibrant international scholarship culture. Many of our top researchers have been recruited from all over the world. The intercultural exchange that this provides is a key aspect of graduate student experience and fosters the unconventional approaches that make possible truly innovative research questions and the breakthroughs that these produce. Western continues to provide a variety of support systems to assist international students in achieving admirable research and scholarly aspirations.

However, international students at Western currently face a set of extraordinary financial constraints that at times impose undue hardship and compromise projects and degree completion rates. As of 2010, international students can only apply for permanent residency after they have completed all degree requirements (Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration 2009). International students whose course of study exceeds the four year funding program and who are not able to prove that they can afford the full international fee for a subsequent year of study are required to leave the country, meaning that they may have to leave Western before they have completed degree requirements. This represents a considerable risk to international students who are considering pursuing graduate work at Western, and may deter some from enrolling here (Kapusta and Roadevein 2011). In order to dispel this apprehension, we should provide a guarantee to international students: You will not be required to depart before the completion of your degree.

The current funding model has no mechanism for mending this circumstance, although the institution of post-residency fees discussed below may provide a partial solution to this most pressing of international

student needs. However, there are other avenues that may also be pursued that promise to enrich international professionalization opportunities while alleviating catastrophic financial insecurity.

Several opportunities for summer research internships and work-study positions contracted through the University will be created as Western moves towards achieving a programme of increased public relevancy. These work-study positions will provide an opportunity for students who would otherwise be ineligible to work in Canada to supplement their minimum funding. They will also transport Western's renowned diversity off campus, providing students with other perspectives the chance to contribute to and gain from the community of London outside of strictly academic endeavours. Finally, this program is required to shelter international students from the hazards presented by undocumented labour, which is an unreported but significant practice among international students who have no access to external funding and face ancillary fees that reduce the \$12,000/year minimum funding below feasible levels (Wennekers 2012). This current condition must also be addressed: SGPS must conduct a departmental audit to ensure that no international student is assessed fees that place their net income below the arguably inadequate minimum guarantee.

Internationalization is a matter of dynamic local and global relationships. By objectively realizing this proposition, Western can mark itself out as a distinctive destination for international students. Facilitating international, dual degrees between Western and other research and scholarly destinations will also create channels for cross-institutional and cross-cultural collaboration and will further enhance our reputation as a world-class center for knowledge acquisition and production.

Enhancing Research Value in the Context of Public/Private Partnership

Increasingly, “research” is conceptualized in governmental policy as a means to the ends of commercially viable manufacturing. As an academic community, Western has achieved significant breakthroughs in areas that manifestly benefit the quality of life of a broad swathe of people. At the end of a long process of research, this often takes the form of reportable discoveries; however, as an institution we must commit to the recognition that the process that results in these breakthroughs is a part of a broader spectrum of scholarly endeavour. To cut off the other avenues of inquiry that nourish more quantifiable results would be the equivalent of killing the proverbial goose.

Recommendation:

- Develop and oversee the consistent implementation of a best-practices policy to govern the university/private sector relationship in public/private research partnerships. This must include a clear policy regarding the ability of graduate students to access research facilities in which the University has significant capital investment *without charge*. It must also include a clear distinction between graduate student researchers and employees of private researchers; in particular, academic freedom and the possibility of performing basic as well as applied research must be rigorously safeguarded.

Graduate students are attracted to research as a method of achievement: We are able to create analyses of and solutions to the problems we see in the world. The conditions that facilitate our achievements are particular to a *scholarly* environment, where we investigate problems in a manner that is not accessible to us in privatized research and development projects, which, of necessity, are oriented towards immediately realizable commercial utility. The University is a place for us to pursue both basic and applied research, and it is imperative that this potential continue to exist in this phase of our careers.

A series of studies have determined that the lack of a clear and implemented policy that safeguards academic integrity in public/private research projects results in an impoverished scope of inquiry. In a metadata analysis of these studies “consistent evidence also demonstrated that industry ties are associated with both publication delays and data withholding. These restrictions, often contractual in nature, serve to compound bias in biomedical research. Anecdotal reports suggest that industry may alter, obstruct, or even stop publication of negative studies.” (Bekelman, Li, and Gross 2003: 462).

The Canadian Association of University Teachers has produced a set of guiding principles for university collaborations (CAUT 2012). These should be adopted by Western as a guarantee to all researchers that they will be free to pursue innovative experimental design, and certain that the findings that these experiments produce can be made public without contractual hindrance. This will serve a dual function: It will attract graduate students and foster their pursuit of the basic and extraordinary research projects

that fuel true innovation, and, it will enhance the reputation of the findings published by researchers affiliated with Western, since these will be unclouded by any suspicion of unchecked bias.

In accordance with this principle, the status of graduate students who are engaged in public/private research projects should be clearly distinguished from that of the private partner's employees. In addition, student access to laboratory equipment should be safeguarded in order to ensure that those engaged in these projects do not find themselves personally responsible for the cost of access to jointly-invested in research facilities.

At a more holistic level, Western must continue to uphold a commitment to scholarship that does not produce patentable, objective "products". Research in the humanities and social sciences are forms that "do not rank well on systems of measurement that judge the importance of research on the profit and gained by applying the results" (See Appendix, p.), but are vital to our continued success and to a healthy society.

Renovating Existing Tuition and Funding Structures

The issue of financial resources continues to be at the forefront of graduate student concerns. Financial constraints affect the mental health, the physical health, the quality of research, the ability to disseminate that research in an international context, and time-to-completion rates of graduate students in general and here at Western specifically. In an era of provincial fiscal constraint, Western must find ways to address the impediments that inadequate funding levels create.

Recommendations:

- Keep pace with McMaster, University of Toronto, Brock University, and most major institutions outside of Ontario by instituting “post-residency” fees
- Conduct a consistency and services audit to streamline ensure institution-wide resources and policies are hitting their marks
- Partner with other post-secondary institutions to put pressure on the Provincial Government with the aim of reversing the defunding of post-secondary education

Context and Capacities:

The Ontario Government recently asked in its white paper on postsecondary education, “What action could government and university take to ensure that PhD students graduate in a reasonable timeframe?” (15).

“Below Subsistence, Beyond Subsistence: The Cost of Student Poverty At Western” (Wennekers 2012) established that financial insecurity contributes to longer-than-desirable time-to-completion rates (Wennekers 2012). As of Fall 2012, graduate students holding “full TAships” made \$12,182 in 2005 dollars (Wennekers 2012: 4) and spends, on average, 46% of their monthly income on housing (Wennekers 2012: 8). Although the mean average of total income for Western graduate students in 2011/2012 was \$17, 854, the by-far majority of respondents to PSAC Local 610’s membership survey in Winter 2012 reported their income as \$12,000 – that is, the minimum guaranteed funding bracket is the most common situation for graduate students here (17).

Many graduate students in this situation, will, if legally able (and sometimes even when they are not) take on external employment to supplement their income. This inevitably affects the amount of work done annually on dissertation projects as well as the quality of that work. Those of us who rush to finish as soon as possible may choose to truncated projects and to pursue “low-risk” research that may not produce the world-class innovations towards which we as an institution aspire. In any case we will not realize our ability to produce the optimum publication output needed to enhance Western’s presence on the international research scene. In all likelihood, and even if these choices are made, most graduate students will continue to pursue their work outside of the funding period, or, if they can’t manage this financially, drop out before they finish, rendering the previous investment made by Western in their

scholarly development underrealized. And this is if you have landed immigrant or citizenship status or the wherewithal to pay an extra year of international tuition; if not, you might be leaving Canada without a degree. This experience is not anomalous: The last comprehensive study of average TTC rates in Canada, conducted ten years ago, found that it takes on average between five to eight years to complete a doctoral degree (Elgar 2003).

The most immediate way to mitigate this stress is to ensure that all graduate students receive transparent and consistent offers of enrolment that make clear to them the resources and funding that they can reliably depend upon if they choose to come to Western. This way students can plan for contingencies, which, in the long term, will likely have a positive effect on TTC rates. SGPS is already doing great work in standardizing and overseeing this process; it may be of value to consider whether or not there is capacity within SGPS to perform an institution-wide funding practices audit to ensure consistency and to create a one-stop financial planning resource where students can access information about other means of income, including non-governmental external awards and bursaries. It will also be necessary to ensure a standard procedure across the institution regarding tuition payments following the submission of theses: During consultations it came to my attention that some departments charge a full semester's tuition for any student who submits their thesis any later than six weeks before the end of the previous term, a practice that appears to be unique to Western. Finally, Western is building excellent interdisciplinary graduate student programs like the Health Information Sciences degree, but it is important to have a clear and consistent standard for which programs assess professional- as opposed to research-degree tuition.

By far, the most common assertion my consultation process unearthed was the necessity to re-introduce post-residency fees. After coursework and proposal defenses have been accomplished, many universities require only partial tuition from students who are pursuing the latter research-intensive phase of their programs. This is partly in recognition that at this stage of their academic career graduate students represent a "net gain in resources" (CFS 2012), providing high-quality research and teaching assistance, and producing work that enhances their institution's reputation. It is also in recognition of the basic truth that a student out of the funding period will necessarily have to work outside of their program, further extending time-to-completion.

In most provinces, including Ontario until the 1990s, graduate programs charged students reduced fees once they had met certain requirements (generally, once they had commenced the research phase of their project). This is still the case in many Canadian institutions (UBC, Simon Fraser, U of A, U of C, McGill, and Dalhousie, for instance), and, more recently, post-residency fees or similar measures have been re-instituted in one form or another at Brock, McMaster, and U of T (CFS 2012). In these contexts, reductions in fees are usually correlated to the end of the funding period, although most graduate students who responded to the call for consultation believed that this should be the case for students with ABD status. But, regardless, Western is not keeping pace in this regard, and may well be losing potential talent to other institutions as a result.

Graduate students recognize as a whole that tuition policies are heavily influenced by provincial dictates, and understand that at present our institutions are in no position to abolish tuition or even reduce it significantly. However, respondents expressed the belief that their research would be enhanced, their projects could be completed to their satisfaction, and they could better contribute to their university, local, national, and international community should post-residency fees be re-introduced (see Appendix). This, in turn, represents a gain for the University as a whole in terms of measurable outcomes: Graduate students facing less catastrophic upper-year tuition expenses might well be able to afford to attend world-league conferences and to commit time to producing high-calibre publications, and there is also every reason to speculate that this would significantly improve time-to-completion rates. Post-residency fees would also help mitigate the experience of some lab researchers who are assessed tuition due to research delays beyond their control while ensuring that no major study is disrupted by the untimely forced departure of a primary researcher. And, this fee structure would *significantly* enhance Western's ability to attract top-level international students (and, particularly, American researchers) who would see this policy as an elimination of the deportation-before-completion hazard that currently dogs their heels (see Kapustin and Roadevin, 2011).

Western's increasingly active and agile Alumni Association might well find this a campaign able to mobilize donor interest. The combination of building Western's reputation *and* vastly improving the graduate student experience here could represent a compelling and highly concrete goal for potential contributors.

Post-residency fees are immediately beneficial, but, pragmatically speaking, are a transitional measure to address the current crisis of the underfunding of graduate programs in Ontario. The current method of requiring institutions across Canada to engage in an implied competition for access to a continually shrinking pool of provincial funds is a zero-sum game. It is also one which, taken along its current trajectory, creates a state of permanent crisis which does not inhere in any discernable objective social necessity. Here existing capacities and resources may not yet be well established, but could conceivably be developed in the altered provincial political context.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The consultation process initiated by the Office of the Provost has initiated what will be a very exciting and fruitful period of discussion as we work towards a long-term plan for Western. The challenges that this discussion has identified are seeded with opportunities for long-term renewal. By seizing these as chances to take our existing capacities to the next level, we can contribute to Western's future as an increasingly relevant, creative, and dynamic institution with a strong role in our local, national, and international community.

Western graduate students are attracted to here for numerous reasons: its navigable and collegial administrative culture, the opportunities for professionalization provided by organizations like the Teaching Support Center, its world-class research facilities, its strong record of truly interdisciplinary collaboration, demonstrable in programs like the newly established Health Information Sciences degree, and, its strong commitment to undergraduate and graduate teaching as a core institutional value.

More recently, the promise shown by the rejuvenated Alumni Association, the upcoming TA Facilitator pilot project, and the rapidly emerging relevance of the Public Humanities at Western, to name a few, indicate that we have already within our culture the wherewithal to move in leaps and bounds in the years to come. This is our best way to avoid falling into the trap of espousing the purely corporatist, utilitarian version of university education which is increasingly being accepted as an inevitability in hard financial times. It is not, this vision; the defunding of postsecondary education is not an irreversible trend, but, even in current circumstances, there are ways to actualize the immense potential represented by our community that are not contingent upon provincial funding. We are in a rare position where we have more capacities than we know what to do with – the sum total of our knowledge, energy, and experience represents an unquantifiable resource that evades capture by metrics calculated solely as a measure of GDP. This includes the teaching, research and community-building capacities that graduate students at Western are itching to realize more fully.

Recommendations:

- Keep pace with McMaster, University of Toronto, Brock University, and most major institutions outside of Ontario by instituting “post-residency” fees
- Conduct a consistency and services audit to streamline ensure institution-wide resources and policies are hitting their marks
- Partner with other post-secondary institutions to put pressure on the Provincial Government with the aim of reversing the defunding of post-secondary education
- Incorporate digital technology and improve learning outcomes and student satisfaction through the implementation of “flipped classrooms”
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- Mobilize the existing capacities of organizations such as The Public Humanities at Western to create meaningful, community based experiential learning opportunities for humanities and sciences researchers
- Facilitate experiential learning for undergraduate students through enhanced undergrad/grad student research partnerships
- Develop on-campus work opportunities for international students to help stabilize the economic status of our most vulnerable colleagues
- Stake out Western's identity as one of "dynamic internationalism": Facilitate cross cultural exchanges in London and abroad through *community-oriented* as well as applied research partnerships; implement international dual degree programs.
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- Develop and oversee the consistent implementation of a best-practices policy to govern the university/private sector relationship in public/private research partnerships. This must include a clear policy regarding the ability of graduate students to access research facilities in which the University has significant capital investment *without charge*. It must also include a clear distinction between graduate student researchers and employees of private researchers; in particular, academic freedom and the possibility of performing basic as well as applied research must be rigorously safeguarded.

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Appendix

I. Western Anthropology Graduate Society

Report: The Western Strategic Plan

To: The Senate Committee on University Planning,

On February 15th, the Anthropology Department of Western University held a departmental meeting to discuss the Western Strategic Plan. Below are some of the issues and concerns raised by our graduate students during the meeting. We hope that you will give these concerns your attention. The Anthropology Department of Western University is a small department, probably one of the smallest departments in the Social Sciences Faculty.

First and foremost, we are concerned that the funding that the Anthropology department will receive will be against our emphasis on the four-field approach. The emphasis in this strategic plan on results based research and projects that can offer commercial and managerial applications allows the department a unique perspective from which to judge the effectiveness of the re-structuring options. This style of re-organization favors those anthropologists and graduate students engaged in archaeological and bio-archaeological research more directly and threatens to make socio-cultural research an endeavor much more difficult to fund. In many cases, the results of socio-cultural research are found in co-operative engagement with local communities, political trends generated by keen cultural critique, and social equity movements such as those focused at ending violence against women, minority populations, and in creating a more effective and profound understanding of other cultures by fostering greater dialogue. These forms of research do not rank well on systems of measurement that judge the importance of research on the profit gained by applying the results. While this may benefit some in the department by shifting the focus of funding towards projects that they are already involved in, this move puts the breadth of the discipline at Western in jeopardy.

The emphasis on the four-field approach in the program at its root suggests that neither archaeologists nor ethnographers and socio-cultural experts are prepared to analyze or collect all types of data in isolation from one another. Rather, a great breadth of human experience must be brought to bear on the questions that we ask if they are to be of any import. Failing to fund the specializations that focus on contemporary peoples, current social and political issues, and the synthesis of data from a variety of sources limits the effectiveness of the department and places it in a difficult position in regards to attracting new students and researchers. The over-emphasis on technical forms of education and results based research found in this plan obscures the value of social engagement and critical thinking. Anthropology as a discipline sits at the crux of these considerations by engaging with material artifacts,

language, people, and the vast variety of cultural forms that have existed throughout human history and pre-history, in many different ways. Anthropology requires a breadth of research styles and limiting funding to those forms of education that provide the most measurable research results threatens the discipline as a philosophical and political endeavor.

Another issue raised during the meeting has to do with funding of PhD students in our department. Many believed that a restructuring of the funding program is necessary, where PhD students should receive reduced funding due to being a few years into their research and not necessarily in need of the facilities or laboratories as they had once done as they are now in the writing stage of their thesis. This reduced funding would then possibly leave more money for graduate students in our program who may in fact require money for laboratory fees, travel, etc. Should the cost of tuition decrease and as a consequence the funding be decreased, we hope it would decrease proportionally.

Some of the students raised concerns that our department should receive funding so as to further encourage experiential learning. One cannot be taught anthropological theory, thought, and practice merely sitting behind desks, but also requires students to become active in their community, to seek field work experience, lab work experience, and volunteer experience. Our department already offers two very successful fieldschools: the Peruvian archaeology fieldschool, as well as the Madagascar fieldschool catered to both socio-cultural and physical anthropology students. We hope that these fieldschools will continue to receive funding and support from our university.

These were the concerns raised during the Anthropology departmental meeting, and we hope that these will be seriously considered and given fair attention.

Sincerely,

Graduate students of the Anthropology Department.

II: Society of Biology Graduate Students

February 16, 2013
Society of Biology Graduate Students
Department of Biology
Western University
London, Ontario, Canada

Re: **Western's Strategic Plan**

Dear Western's strategic plan committee,

On behalf of the Society of Biology Graduate Students (SOBGS), we thank you for the opportunity to provide information, feedback, and ideas about the new strategic plan. Biology graduate students were solicited for feedback about the strategic plan by the SOBGS Chairperson, Mathew Vankoughnett, and the Principal Representative to the Society of Graduate Students for SOBGS, Brian

Sutton-Quaid. The following is a summary of the concerns and issues that were received and should be addressed in the new strategic plan.

Do the mission, principles and priorities articulated in Western's current strategic plan remain relevant, and how might they be revised to better serve the University in our current context? The principles and priorities articulated in Western's current strategic plan remain relevant. However, they need to be reevaluated with regard to the needs of graduate students. Graduate students are the major research workforce at the University. They need to be respected as such, and remunerated at a rate no less than the local poverty line *after* tuition has been accounted for.

Western will enhance the quality of its undergraduate and graduate programs by:

The quality of undergraduate and graduate programs has decreased over the years. Many classes are at or over capacity and graduate student teaching assistantships are becoming more demanding as a result. *More undergraduate students = more assignments to grade.* Often, graduate students cannot realistically complete their teaching assistant duties within the hours allocated, and they are unfairly penalized for honesty about the situation. This has forced teaching assistants to grade assignments more quickly by decreasing the quality of their grading, which necessarily leads to decreased quality of feedback for undergraduate students. Not only does this increase the stress for the graduate students, but this also damages undergraduate success because they are not getting the best pedagogical feedback to allow them to improve.

Graduate students are also experiencing economic hardships that distract from their primary task of researching. The teaching assistant and research assistant funding model remunerates below the poverty line, and then graduate students are expected to pay approximately one third of that income back as tuition. This leaves many students unable to make ends meet and forces them to seek additional employment outside of their research and teaching assistantships. It is critical for Western to recognize and correct this contradiction in expectations and treatment of graduate students.

The yearly number of awarded external scholarships for graduate students has decreased over the last 5 years. If Western wants to maintain a high quality graduate student experience then more internal funding, awards, and scholarships are needed to compensate for this decline.

The cost of living has increased faster than the rate of inflation over the last ten years, however, the stipend given to graduate students has not been increased to compensate for this change in cost of living. This is particularly true for tuition. A part of the strategy to enhance graduate programs should be to implement a *postresidency fee* plan where tuition fees are reduced as graduate students meet certain goals. For example, once a graduate student defends their research proposal, tuition should be lowered. Similarly, tuition should be lowered when course work and comprehensive exams are completed. This incremental decrease in tuition fees will not only decrease stress and financial burden for many students, but it will motivate graduate students to finish their classes and exam requirements as soon as possible, which will encourage timely completion of their degrees. In addition, Western should offer rewards for graduate student's finishing their theses on time. For example, if a student finishes on time (4 years for Ph.D. or 2 Years for M.Sc.) then a monetary reward should be offered for this achievement. This will offer more incentive for students to finish on time. Other academic institutions in Ontario that currently implement some form of *postresidency fee* plans include the University of Toronto, McMaster University, and Brock University.

This demonstrates not only that a *post-residency fee* structure is both plausible and achievable, but also that Western is falling behind in this area relative to other local institutions.

As Western looks to expand its brand, professional course-based masters programs appear to be on the rise. However this is a concern for many graduate students in research-based masters programs. It is critical that Western clearly differentiates between course- and research-based degrees so that confusion between the two is unlikely. Furthermore, professional course-based programs would be better served as collaborations with local college institutions. Online courses are also on the rise, and Western will have to compete with free online courses in the market for educating the population. Western should know that it is charging considerable tuition for a service provided for free by groups like coursera.org, seemingly with the only benefit being the Western brand.

Western should respond to this new “free-market” by implementing and marketing more hands-on-learning and interactions between students and educators so that individuals can conceptualize the benefits of paying to attend university. Western should also genuinely respect the current marketing that “Not all discoveries can be made in the lab” and make the logical connection that 'not all learning can be done online'.

Once again, SOBGS thanks you for allowing us to provide information that will be used to shape the new strategic plan. We expect that you will take the concerns of the graduate students seriously. The graduate student experience at Western can be improved dramatically and we look forward to reviewing a new strategic plan which will address the following concerns:

1. Graduate student economic hardships.
2. Differentiating between professional course-based masters and research based masters programs.
3. The rise of online courses

Thank you,

Mathew Vankoughnett
Society of Biology Graduate Students
Chairperson
e-mail: mvankou@uwo.ca

Brian Sutton-Quaid
Society of Biology Graduate Students
Principal Representative to
the Society of Graduate Students
e-mail: bsuttonq@uwo.ca

III: Individual Submission: Kevin Godbout (Comp. Lit) and David Blocker (History)

Dear Senate Committee on University Planning Members:

I have two major suggestions/recommendations to provide to the current Senate Committee on University Planning. The first concerns graduate student residency fees, and the other concerns experiential learning.

There is simply no financially justifiable reason for graduate students who have completed their coursework and comprehensive examinations to be paying full-tuition in the third and fourth years of their degrees. Graduate students do not utilize the full network of University resources at that time, and are committed to completing their dissertation projects. In fact, this high rate of tuition forces many graduate students to take a second job, which delays the completion of the dissertation. Furthermore, the financial strain of higher tuition makes it difficult, or impossible, for our students to compete at an international level and share their research at international conferences. Post-residency fees, which are still in place at many major Canadian Universities, would reduce the strain on the OSAP system and protect both domestic and international students, and their families, from unreasonably high tuition costs. I would further argue that tuition fees for international students should also be brought down into a post-residency fee program. The government currently pays only 30% of the funding required to operate Universities, and therefore, there is no reason for any international student to pay more than double domestic fees. Graduate students are willing to pay for a quality education and they deserve tuition fees which reflect their use of the University system they pay into.

As for experiential learning, this can be a good, in and of itself. The opportunity for internships can provide experience(s) that might greatly benefit graduate students in their future professional careers. But, these internships must be *paid*, and furthermore, graduate students who undertake such internships, whatever their form, should have a say in how these internships are formalized. The IVEY business model may work for IVEY, but each faculty and department produces a diversity of approaches to scholarship, and this diversity of research discussions makes Western stronger. In no way should any form of unpaid internships be recommended or imposed upon graduate students and collaborations with industry leaders should never be organized in a way that could exploit the research work of graduate students for profit. To reiterate, work experience relevant to a graduate student's degree is vital, but this experience must offer to the student fair remuneration. Furthermore, graduate students and their departments should have the majority of oversight as to how these experiences are framed and offered.

Kevin Godbout

David Blocker

IV: Individual Submission: Dr. Katy Fulfer (Philosophy)

For your SCUP report, I have the following comments.

(1) If internationalization is going to remain a university goal, more support resources need to be provided for international students.

Our study permits limit us to work on campus, but it can be difficult for international students to get work on campus. International graduate students are the only students ineligible for work study. I raised this issue at a GEC meeting in 2010, but never received any follow-up. Dedicating some positions, especially in the summer, for international students would be a huge benefit.

Further, to renew study permits, we need to be able to prove financial stability. This can be extremely difficult for a student who must prolong studies past the funding period. Not to mention higher ancillary fees due to UHIP payments . . .

Here is an article two of my colleagues wrote about some problems international students have. One of the authors transferred to a PhD program in the UK with better funding options. <http://www.universityaffairs.ca/phd-studies-in-canada-a-dilemma-for-international-students.aspx>

(2) I am skeptical of using industry partnerships to fund graduate studies. These partnerships seem extremely valuable in the sciences, medicine, business, and perhaps some areas of information studies (provided students are properly compensated for contributing to for-profit enterprises). However, they seem less valuable or viable for students in the social sciences, arts, media studies, and education. Relying on industry will not be sufficient, we need a diversity of funding sources, including from the government.

Thank you,

Katy Fulfer

V: Motions Passed By the Philosophy Graduate Student Association

Thanks for all your hard work around the SCUP meeting and making sure grad students' voices are heard in this important process.

I am pleased to inform you that two motions in this regard have now been passed by the Philosophy Graduate Students' Association. The wording of these motions is as follows:

Motion 1: *"WHEREAS students with ABD status use departmental resources to a lesser extent than those who do not have such a status and WHEREAS it is common practice at comparable institutions that the former pay reduced tuition fees; BE IT RESOLVED that once graduate students have received ABD status, tuition fees should be reduced."*

Motion 2: *“WHEREAS international students who win external scholarship funding, particularly OGS, end up with less in-pocket funding than domestic students with equivalent awards due to scholarship caps imposed (by the Province), and whereas Western purports to support an internationalization policy; BE IT RESOLVED that when international students win external awards, they should not be disadvantaged financially with respect to domestic students who win equivalent awards.”*

We would be grateful if you could bring the above motions, as official motions of the PGSA, to the attention of the members of the Senate Committee on University Planning. Our sincere hope is that they will be seriously considered and discussed by the said committee.

With best wishes,

Stephanie Kapusta and Bill Cameron
PGSA Co-presidents

VI: Graduate Health Information Sciences Students Association

February 15th, 2013

Dear Senate Committee on University Planning,

We, the membership of the Graduate Health Information Sciences Student Association (GHISSA), are writing to discuss an issue pertaining to the equity of our tuition fees.

Our program is the Health Information Sciences (HIS) program. It is a new collaborative program between the Faculty of Information and Media Studies (FIMS) and the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) that started in September of 2011. The HIS program is a category I program as per the definition provided on Western University's Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies webpage http://www.grad.uwo.ca/current_students/student_finances/program_categories.html which states that category I programs are “Doctoral and master’s programs that prepare students for entry into doctoral programs”. Currently however, we are categorized as a category II program or “professional master’s program” which includes programs such as Journalism and Nursing, which are directly linked to employment. The difference in tuition between a category I and category II program is considerable, approximately \$836. (http://www.registrar.uwo.ca/student_finances/fees_refunds/pdfs%20fee%20schedule%20/Fall%202012%20Fee%20Schedule%20Grad%20Canadian.pdf).

Similar programs in FHS such as the graduate program in Health and Rehabilitation Sciences are considered category I and not category II programs. Many of our faculty and courses are cross listed between our counterparts in FHS. As such we do not believe our tuition expenses accurately reflect our educational training. We would like to convey this issue to the attention of SCUP and consequently the University Administration to see if we can come to some sort of fair agreement on tuition amounts concurrent with our funding packages and education outcomes.

The growing demand of health information science makes this issue more concerning for us as we do not want to deter future students away from the program merely due to disparities between tuition fees. Our goal is to simply stand for equitable tuition. The HIS program is unique with respect to the teaching and diversity of enrolled students. Western has a long proud history of emphasizing interdisciplinary studies between faculties and we believe the HIS program is at the forefront of what interdisciplinary studies can achieve at Western. Thus, adjusting our tuition fees is important to current students but we also feel it is in the best interests of the university as Western continues its strong, push towards health research.

Sincerely,

Bhavin Prajapati (GHISSA President) & Andrea Campbell (Treasurer)
on behalf of all the HIS Students

VII: Individual Submission: Jessica Reilly (Theory Centre)

I was hoping some of the following might be contemplated by the Senate committee:

- i) charging full-time 'residency fees' past course work and comps completion (which is basically a *very expensive* library card, email account, and gym membership) decreases the chances of students finishing once they are outside of their funding packages
- ii) the creation of support options for students past year four (since they know 4 years is not the average PhD completion time)
- iii) addressing the reasons why female PhD students are more likely to leave the academy than their male counterparts and what sort of support initiatives can be created to see that women offered admission at Western see their degrees through until completion of the dissertations.
- iv) But, you say, where would they find the funding for this initiative???? Although this is cheeky (but, in many ways, I am dead serious) here is one place to start: *Amit Chakma should take a pay cut*. If the university is going to implement and defend the need for austerity measures in its ability to function, then it should apply to all levels of the university. No university president should make practically twice what the Prime Minister of Canada makes (even if we hate the prime minister). Chakma is already provided with a home by the university, and if his over \$500,000 salary was reduced to, say, \$250,000 a year (which is still an *extremely* comfortable yearly income to live off of), these saving could, for example, be used to create a scholarship program for students outside of their funding packages.

Okay, that is my two cents. See you soon-ish and thank you for all your hard work on this project!!!

Jessica

VIII: Individual Submission: Anonymous

Feedback:

When I got the opportunity to join Western with a full scholarship, I was enthusiastic and happy for new journey... that I am going to do research in Canada.

Western has been supportive in terms of various facilities and student groups to solve many issues faced by graduate students. Library has been amazing with databases required for research and literature review.

Course work was also good with flexible timings.

Everything was fine and on track until I started preparing for my PhD comprehensive exams in 2nd year, which got delayed for about a year and half. Reason was, I was not getting examiners to help me with comps.

My supervisor tried a lot. Later my supervisor got me 2 examiners from another university situated in a different place. Only after that my comps was conducted and it took all of 3rd yr of PhD.

Why research is getting delayed?

The equipment required to start research was not available and I had to wait for some time to get started.

My supervisor delegates the job to the research Assistant in lab who takes care of every research project. Reminders are sent and discussed in meetings face to face to help the students.

But, students do not have much help from the lab, be it participant recruitment or support while doing research. Student research is not a priority to lab research/funded research. If the RA and student are working on the same patient population then the patient is first recruited for lab research not for the student research. It is hard to complete the sample size and finish the timelines in such situation because there are many ongoing researches in the lab.

It may not be same for everyone here, but this has been my personal experience in short.

My main concerns:

So how can a student complete research on time? What should a student do when things which he/she is not responsible for (like examiners/equipment/patient recruitment or help with research at lab) are the reasons to extend her deadline and hence a delay in defence? Why should she pay fee for something which she is not responsible for?

No one audits the student research or takes feedback from us and what difficulties we face? We are afraid to speak out because we do not want to have any issues when defending thesis.

Supervisor is supportive and good and they have their own limitations/work load. They delegate the work at lab and rest leave everything to the students.

I don't even know if the things I mentioned are really any issues to raise concern, but as an individual I can say that this has been the worst experience in my school life as far as research is concerned. Back home I never had such issues.

I request to have some regular audits by the ethics department related to student research or by a research audit committee in departments to check. Also please consider the exact reasons for delay in completing thesis or program and do consider a concession in fees for students or extension in timelines. I get scholarship at Western and I appreciate that Western supports students well. Let's not waste the efforts by the university and the students. I do not want to discontinue the program because I can't pay fees, I want to contribute to the research and fulfill the responsibilities I have to. Research is not one person's job, it's a team effort and team work, which I never got to taste. Hoping for best and I will try my best to do things within my capabilities. I felt I should share this with you. Good luck for the meeting.

I appreciate that you chose to represent us. Thank you for your consideration.

IX: PSAC Local 610



**GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS UNION
WESTERN UNIVERSITY
Somerville House, Rm 1313
London, ON N6A 3K7
Tel: 519-661-4137 Fax: 519-850-2998**

February 18th, 2013

To whom it may concern,

Re: UWO Strategic Mandate

PSAC Local 610 is concerned about the role electronic platforms will play in the delivery of TA services. Preliminary discussions with members who are required by contract to perform TA related duties in online environments reveal the potential for considerable overwork. In particular, the drafting of material for online course environments coupled with the awkward nature of accessing and grading assignments through electronic platforms require additional expenditures of time beyond those normally considered within our standard duties.

Sincerely,

Gabe Elias
President
president@psac610.ca

X: Individual Submission: Rita Gardiner (Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research)

As part of its strategic plan, Western may wish to rethink the amount of tuition that grads have to pay in their fifth year. It strikes me as wrong that when grads are not doing course work, and who are probably in the most part not on campus, that they have to pay the same fees. Other prestigious universities such as The University of Alberta operate on a sliding scale for tuition. Western could consider a similar model. That would improve scholarship, as grads would be less inclined to rush to complete their doctoral thesis in order to avoid the next tuition payment. Until last year, students had access to OGS for a fifth year's funding. But if graduates do not have this opportunity in the future, student debt load will increase. Given that the job outlook is so dismal, this would be one way that Western could demonstrate student-centered approach, while at the same time, improving overall scholarship, critical for a university desiring to be on the world stage.

Thank you,

Rita

XI: Graduate English Society

Thoughts on Western's Strategic Plan

1) Research priorities

-There is a lot of uncertainty in terms of public policy and funding in Ontario, especially for the Arts & Humanities. We think there should be some commitment made towards raising awareness of the type of research being done in areas such as community, culture, and history, in addition to the sciences and technology. Emphasizing Western's strength in "Philosophy of Science," for instance, is a step in the right direction, but it still implicitly subordinates arts and culture to science and technology concerns. Overall, Western seems to branding itself as more of a polytechnic institute than a university, and in doing so, it overlooks the excellent contributions being made by academics here in the arts and humanities.

-We in the Humanities are fervently opposed to the university's increasing prioritization of commercialized research. While the long-term impact of the commercialization of research is yet to be seen, our concern rests primarily with types of research somehow deemed "less" commercial: it is undeniable that potential losses exist in this area if the university continues to privilege industry partnerships over other methods of scholarly research. Furthermore, we worry that prioritizing commercialized research leads to misconceptions and mischaracterizations of which types of research

are more “worthy” than others. It is our opinion that research directly bankrolled by industry threatens the free and open exchange of academic thought.

We in the Humanities are fervently opposed to the university’s increasing prioritization of commercialized research. While the long-term impact of the commercialization of research is yet to be seen, our concern rests primarily with types of research somehow deemed “less” commercial: it is undeniable that potential losses exist in this area if the university continues to privilege industry partnerships over other methods of scholarly research. Furthermore, we worry that prioritizing commercialized research leads to misconceptions and mischaracterizations of which types of research are more “worthy” than others. It is our opinion that research directly bankrolled by industry threatens the free and open exchange of academic thought.

2) Pedagogy

-We believe that Western should support TA training initiatives, both on the departmental and inter-departmental levels.

3) Funding models

-This Strategic plan’s stated initiative to attract more externally-funded grad students is promising. However, we also think Western should provide more internal funding to domestic and international students alike. We have noticed each year that our tuition fees are increasing, but the amount of WGRS we receive does not increase in proportion to that.

-Building off the previous point, we’re excited by Western’s stated commitment to “providing the best student experience among Canada’s leading research-intensive universities.” However, it is worth noting that for graduate students, having the “best student experience” and being in a “leading research-intensive” environment are usually one and the same.

-Western graduate students, particularly in the Humanities, are at a disadvantage on the academic job market due to the current four-year funding model. Not only does this model result in graduate students attempting—often unsuccessfully—to complete the dissertation by the end of their fourth year, it also prevents these same students from developing their professional portfolios in the form of publications, front-line teaching assignments, and service work. The simple truth is that four years of funding does not support the graduate student who needs a fifth year to complete the program. This student is forced to find employment outside of the university; this only further inhibits the student’s dissertation work, and (s)he still pays tuition each term—a remarkable obligation given that the student is too busy working elsewhere (in employment and on the dissertation; in our department, fifth year students lose the benefit of on-campus office space) to draw on university resources in any impressionable way. In its attempts at being a leading research-intensive university, Western’s Strategic Plan should include a fundamental re-examination of its graduate funding policies in order to be comparable with other research-intensive institutions in North America. Moreover, the obligation for graduate students to pay full tuition after their residency requirements have been met should be reconsidered; this, too, is a practice that other universities have scrutinized and, in several cases, amended.

4) International Students

-Western has indicated as part of its Strategic Plan that it is interested in increasing international student enrollment. However, international student fees are disproportionately higher than those of domestic students. If Western is committed to having more international students, we believe it should, both for practical and ethical reasons, make itself more accessible to these students, whether through lower tuition fees, or more scholarship/bursary/internal funding opportunities.

5) Other

-The University should continue to make an effort to consult students and faculty in key policy decisions. In the past, issues such as the signing of the agreement with Access Copyright have made student and faculty feel disempowered because they felt as though their concerns were being ignored by the administration.

-The attempt by the Vice-Provost's office to solicit advice from university stakeholders regarding the Strategic Mandate is a step in the right direction; however, the survey used to collect feedback might have contained more specific, directed questions that would gauge the respondent's satisfaction. Many colleagues of ours felt, when reading this survey, that they didn't know where to start in their answers, and, pressed by their other time commitments, would back down and say nothing. The university should continue to seek advice from these groups in increasingly pro-active ways.

-The expansion of doctoral programs and the increasing of student enrollment must be matched with the appropriate professionalization programs.

Darren Monteith
Jeremy Greenway

Co-chairs, Graduate English Society