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Re.: Survey of History Graduate Students Across Canada

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In May 2002 the Graduate Student Committee (GSC), affiliated with the Canadian Historical Association, completed and published on-line the results of their survey of history graduate students across Canada. The survey was conducted between October to December 2001, and we received approximately 265 responses from 31 separate universities across the country (approximately 13% of history graduate students). The purpose of this project was to solicit feedback on what direction the GSC should take in the next few years and to stimulate discussion between various agencies on key issues such as funding, term to completion, quality of programs, supervisory responsibilities, recruitment, etc...

On behalf of the GSC, I would like to present you with a brief summary of the survey results (attached). A more detailed summary and all the results, including evaluations of thirty-one separate history departments across the country, are available on the internet in both English and French: www.cha-shc.ca/gsc-ced/survey or www.cha-shc.ca/gsc-ced/sondage.

After working on this project for over a year in conjunction with the GSC's network of student representatives located across the country, I have come to believe that there remains a great deal of work to be done in encouraging and promoting student participation in professional associations. The problem lies more in students' lack of awareness over the benefits of such activity. The survey raises a variety of questions and concerns about the future directions which institutions can take to improve the quality of graduate programs in Canada. But I remain convinced that promoting participation in professional associations is a worthy and beneficial goal for our respective organizations, and this will be the focus for much of the GSC's work in the upcoming years.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time if you have any further questions.

Yours Truly,

Dominique Clément.

The 2002 Graduate Student Committee (GSC) of the Canadian Historical Association (CHA) survey was developed by Denise Angers (CHA Council), Dominique Clément (GSC, co-chair), Chris Friedrichs (Graduate Advisor, UBC), David Moorman (SSHRC), and Mary Vipond (CHA president). We received 265 responses from 31 separate universities; the representatives from each institution summarized the submissions from their institution for the survey. These evaluations have been examined and summarized below (each individual department evaluation is available on the web: www.cha-shc.ca/gsc-ced/survey/evaluations.htm).

The first series of questions focussed on students' background/skills and awareness of CHA/GSC services. These questions were compiled into statistics/graphs to provide an idea, for instance, on what kind of languages students can conduct research in, their estimated time to completion, and where their funding comes from. This information is available on the internet (www.cha-shc.ca/gsc-ced/survey/stats.html); some of the key results include (out of 265 responses):

- of the languages students felt they could conduct research in there was English (244), French (159), German (18), Spanish (8), Latin (14), and Italian (6), and 18 other languages noted from Greek to Sign-Language
- in reference to the source of their present funding, respondents stated internal (123), external (20), research assistantship (42), teaching ass. (111) and SSHRC (31)
- the most well-known CHA services were the Journal, Bulletin and Conference
- in rating various aspects of their program from 1-5 (five as best), students rated their supervisor (4.4 avg), program (3.9), funding (3.4) and relationship with faculty (3.9)

Through our network of student representatives across Canada, we developed information on available travel grants from individual institutions for students wishing to attend conferences (www.cha-shc.ca/gsc-ced/survey/travel.htm). A list of these representatives is also on-line: www.cha-shc.ca/gsc-ced/survey/rep.htm.

Respondents were then asked seven separate questions in which a written, explanatory response was required. With so many students participating in the survey from so many different universities and regions, there is no way to bring together all of these comments in a such a way that would reflect everyone's concerns and praise. The purpose of this summary is simply to provide a starting point, a moment of reflection upon the general themes (a more thorough summary is available, naturally, on the web: www.cha-shc.ca/gsc-ced/survey/summary.html).

How would you rate the quality of your graduate program?

- limited course offerings
- desire to see the department/faculty become involved in more than supervising theses, leading courses and organizing seminars
- several expressed their hope that aspects of the program could be linked with activities outside the university (ie. conferences), encouraging and supporting

publications, and preparing students for non-academic type work; the fundamentals of publication and the value of academic conferences continue to escape graduate students, particularly at the MA level.

How would you rate the support given to you by your supervisor:

- three key words emerged: freedom, accessibility, and communication
- respondents were particularly appreciative of supervisors pushing them to publish their work, improving their writing style, keeping them informed of relevant conferences and literature, and being open minded towards their work

How would you rate the relationship between faculty and students in your department:

- history departments have a core group of faculty members, often young professors, who actively interact with graduate students
- key words such as ‘respect’ and ‘collegiality’ were used to describe those aspects of the faculty-graduate student relationship that students appreciated the most
- many departments have a segment of their faculty who express their disinterest through lack of participation in department/student events- these individuals were described as unapproachable, and in some cases ‘isolating’
- no section endeared more positive comment than this one

How would you rate the level of funding provided to students in your department:

- the issues raised are already widely appreciated: full funding is most often not enough to cover basic living expenses, high tuition, and the need to fund all students in the department
- respondents commented on the hardships of becoming dependant on summer RA/TA work, the desire for awards of excellence within the department, and the lack of funding for PhDs after four years

Why did you choose your present program:

- general reputation of the entire faculty was an important theme throughout this section, but the specific supervisor was easily the most important reason that most students chose their program
- other reasons why students sought out a particular program included access to sources/ archives, availability of an internship program, funding, completing their undergrad in the same institution, low tuition, field specializations of the faculty, and the encouragement of their honours/MA supervisor.