September 30, 2019

William J. Karpus, PhD
Dean of the Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Dear Dean Karpus,

Thank you very much for providing the summary of the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee’s (GFEC) discussion of the ten-year program review of the MA/MS/PhD/Doctoral Minor in Anthropology. We are pleased to learn of GFEC’s assessment of our department’s strengths, and appreciate the recommendations for addressing some of the challenges facing our program.

The faculty members have discussed these recommendations. In this letter, I provide responses to each of those recommendations.

- “Seek more funding to increase the fraction of graduate students with financial support”
  - **Response:** We aim to fund as many of our students in residence as possible, and generally fund a sizable portion with teaching assistantships, project assistantships, and lectureships. For instance, in the spring semester of AY 2018-19 we had a total enrollment of 56 graduate students, of which 23 (41%) had support from our department. Of the remaining 33 students, 12 had secured funding from other departments. Our students are interdisciplinary and are quite successful in securing teaching positions in other departments that have downsized and ended up not having enough of their own graduate students to TA for their courses and meet their curricular needs. Among the students in our program who did not have university support, some were away conducting their dissertation fieldwork and some were working in other capacities with access to financial support.
  - Many of our graduate students need skills in foreign languages in order to accomplish their field research; our students are very successful at obtaining FLAS funding, which provides them with a stipend and tuition remission.
  - We have used increases to our departmental budget to expand our support of graduate students in the form of TAships beyond our baseline allocation.
  - We regularly partner with the FIG program in the fall semester to offer FIG-only discussion sections that are supported by funding from the FIG program, offering opportunities for teaching assistants.
  - As a response to the successful Day of the Badger in spring 2019, we have a modest increase in our resources that can be used to support graduate student travel for professional conferences and research.
A number of our faculty also secure support from external sources such as NSF, which they use to support students in their research and fieldwork.

- **“Implement measures to improve communication with, and among, graduate students”**
  - Response: The director of graduate studies (DGS), along with the graduate coordinator, will formally meet with AnthroCircle graduate student representative(s) once per semester. In addition, the DGS will also hold meetings that invite all of the department’s graduate students to attend. Finally, a departmental “semester check-in form” was updated and revised in May 2019. The new form, which is designed to ensure regular and face-to-face communication between graduate students and faculty advisors, will be effective in Fall 2019.

- **“Designate the director of graduate studies as the faculty liaison for AnthroCircle”**
  - Response: The DGS will act as a faculty liaison for AnthroCircle’s graduate student members.

- **“Continue to implement new assessment plans”**
  - Response: In May 2016, the department embarked on a multi-year assessment plan for the graduate program. An annual assessment is carried out to evaluate the status of the program each spring. Each year, the Graduate Studies Committee examines data on enrollment, course progression, and degree completion. The committee creates a report with findings and suggested recommendations for changes/additions to the program. Recommendations are reviewed and approved at the final Faculty Meeting of each year.
    - Major learning goals are examined in each of the years. In the most recent academic year (2018-19), for instance, the committee assessed the following learning goal: “Formulates ideas, concepts, designs, and/or techniques beyond the current boundaries of knowledge in one of the three subfields above in the preliminary exam and dissertation.”
    - For academic year 2019-20, the learning goal to be assessed is: “Carry out original anthropological research and produce publishable work in the field including the writing of a dissertation; have a command of one or more foreign languages suited to their research when appropriate; actively compete for major intra- and extramural research grants; follow ethical principles of the discipline; and teach effectively as assistants to professors in the department.”

- **“Increase TA appointments to 50% positions and improve TA training”**
  - Response: By reallocating STS funds and tapping into an increase to our budget due to enrollment expansion, we have increased TA appointments to 50% for all courses with discussion sections, effective Fall 2019.

- **“Include a funding guarantee for the first four or five years in the admission letter sent to all applicants admitted to the program”**
  - Response: Our department has had several robust discussions about the benefits and challenges in offering 4- or 5-year guarantees in admission letters, and has concluded that the 3-year guarantee is most appropriate for our program.
The discipline of anthropology and our graduate program depend heavily on extended field research. Students who do not complete extensive original fieldwork will be disadvantaged in post-graduation market opportunities. The majority of our students need to conduct fieldwork for extensive periods of time (in some cases a year or more), and many begin to do so in their third or fourth year of the program. This, combined with the external variables involved in planning and carrying out such fieldwork (i.e., securing funds, permits, travel visas, etc.), makes it difficult for the department to predict when students will go into the field and would make it difficult for us to plan on when they would be able to utilize their 4th or 5th year of funding (assuming they would be allowed to take a break in their funding guarantee to go to the field).

Our department is reliant upon Teaching Assistantships to fund our graduate students. Our TA budget allows us to make a maximum of 17 guarantees and at any given time, all of these are in use. Offering 3-year guarantees provides us with the most flexibility for both graduate student academic needs and departmental pedagogy (in the form of Teaching Assistantships).

Many of our graduate students are successful at obtaining FLAS funding, which takes them out of the TA pool, freeing up TA positions for students who are not on guarantee or who have passed the 3-years of their guarantee. Thus, we in effect do provide many of our students with 4 or 5 years of funding, although we do not guarantee it.

Ultimately, we would very much like to be able to offer 4- or 5-year guarantees. However, we would need to know that such support can be offered with some degree of flexibility. It would be beneficial for both the student and the teaching mission of the department if certain years of guaranteed support could be “banked” and used at later points in a student’s tenure. If we knew that we could count on the Graduate School or the College to provide us with TA bridge funding in semesters or years where we have more students in residence on guarantee than TA lines in the budget, it would also be beneficial. Without such flexibility, it may lead to slower PhD completion rates for students with a 4+-year guarantee, since they might delay their fieldwork to make the most of their financial package.

Thank you, again, for providing us with these invaluable comments and recommendations. We look forward to hearing the results of GFEC discussions regarding our responses to its recommendations. We greatly appreciate your consideration and efforts.

Sincerely,

Nam C. Kim
Director of Graduate Studies

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