

“THE RESPONSIVE Ph.D: RETROSPECTIVE, PROSPECTIVE” CONFERENCE
June 7-8, 2005, Princeton, NJ

OPENING REMARKS

Fifty graduate deans and representatives from higher education organizations convened on June 7-8, 2005 to assess recent innovations in doctoral education and develop an action agenda for the future. The conference brought together participants in the Responsive Ph.D. Initiative, which was organized by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation.



Robert Weisbuch, president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation.

Robert Weisbuch, president of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation¹, opened the conference by describing four major findings that have emerged from the program’s three years of graduate school collaboration: Doctoral education needs freestanding graduate schools with strong graduate deans, an openness to world events and social challenges, students drawn from the full populace, and intellectually sophisticated assessment practices. *(A full report on the findings of the Responsive Ph.D. Initiative will be published in September 2005. For a free copy, please email communications@woodrow.org.)*

“I think this has been an enormously interesting, engaging, and because of you, successful project,” Dr. Weisbuch reflected. “We are on our way toward a national agenda for graduate education.” Dr. Weisbuch thanked Atlantic Philanthropies and The Pew Charitable Trusts for their initial grants to the program. The Henry Luce Foundation also has provided significant support of Woodrow Wilson’s related efforts to promote doctoral training that prepares humanities students to apply their knowledge to broader educational and social challenges.

The conference comprised eight presentations or panel discussions focused on the following critical topics.

NEW PARADIGMS: DISCIPLINES, INTERDISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE, AND NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

William Russel, dean of the graduate school at Princeton University, opened the first panel discussion of the conference with the question, “What makes for and prevents interdisciplinary scholarship?” One barrier to interdisciplinarity is often concern for preserving the disciplinary core of the Ph.D., but Dr. Russel pointed out that this usually turns out to be a relatively minor issue.



John Butler, Angela James, Elaine Berland, Tommy Darwin, and Richard English other conference participants hear presentations on graduate education programs.

James Duderstadt, president emeritus and university professor of science and engineering at the University of Michigan, spoke about the digital communities that today’s graduate students create and use for collaborative learning.

“Peer-to-peer interactive learning is wresting control of the learning environment from the university,” Dr. Duderstadt explained. “We must maintain some core values—academic freedom, spirit of inquiry—but at the same time, the university and graduate education must change [in response to the ongoing transformation of how students learn].”

Terrill Lautz, vice president of the Henry Luce Foundation, stressed the need for a deeper dialogue between scholars of “lived religion” and faculty in other areas, particularly those concerned with international affairs and public policy.

“Religion is inextricably connected with our world,” he stressed, and teaching it will require new paradigms connecting social science and the humanities.

Kathleen Woodward, director of the University of Washington’s Center for the Humanities, argued that higher education has a significant responsibility to serve the public sphere, and called for redoubled efforts in promoting public scholarship. Citing innovative examples of online journals and scholarship published on CD ROM, she encouraged conference attendees to help students connect to a broader audience by moving “from the staid page to the dynamic screen and its digital promise.”

NEW PRACTICES: PREPARING FUTURE FACULTY

Ted Hullar, director of the Higher Education Program at Atlantic Philanthropies, moderated a discussion on universities’ Preparing Future Faculty initiatives (PFF)—programs that train and prepare prospective faculty members for life and work in academe.

Howard University’s PFF initiative, presented by its coordinator, [Terrolyn Carter](#), utilizes mentors, training workshops, site visits to other institutions, and pre-faculty internships. Indiana University graduate dean John Slattery reported that its Future Faculty Teaching Fellows program places graduate students in teaching positions in small liberal arts colleges. The result, he said, not only gave them valuable, real-world experience but also recruited strong undergraduates to graduate study.

George Walker, formerly of Indiana and now a senior scholar with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, emphasized the importance of PFF in casting “teaching as a sacred human calling.”

“We don’t realize that everything we do as a research institution has to do with coaching, facilitating, learning—teaching. We don’t understand it.” Dr. Walker stressed the need to “get people to see that teaching is at the core of scholarly life, in all respects.”

NEW PEOPLE: DIVERSITY AND DOCTORAL EDUCATION

Referring to the Responsive Ph.D.’s recent publication, *Diversity and the Ph.D.*, Richard Hope, vice president for international programs at Woodrow Wilson, spoke about the pressing need for improved minority representation in academe. Increasing diversity in higher education has been an issue since the 1970s and 1980s, Dr. Hope recalled, describing early efforts that he led at other institutions. But due to a combination of factors, there is a lessening of support today for such efforts, despite the fact that the student body is becoming increasingly diverse.

Howard University’s graduate dean, [Orlando Taylor](#), gave reasons why diversity in doctoral education is becoming increasingly necessary, including the need to educate all students for life and work in a global, multicultural community.

“Diversity is in everybody’s interest, but we have to market that idea better,” Dr. Taylor said.

“Vertical integration” can be a key for success in diversity initiatives, [Susan Avery](#), dean of the graduate school at the University of Colorado at Boulder, pointed out. Programs instituted by Colorado combine undergraduate and graduate students, K-12, mentoring, and community



John Slattery, dean of graduate studies at Indiana, and Orlando Taylor, vice provost and dean of the graduate school at Howard.

building, and are sustainable because they keep students engaged from their undergraduate through their graduate years.

Kerry Larson, senior associate dean at the University of Michigan, echoed that retention is vital, citing a study of falling retention rates for African American and Hispanic students.

"It's becoming clear that we've been so intent on recruiting students that we've lost a sense of priority on keeping them," Dr. Larson surmised. He added that diversity is "in transition, in limbo." He stimulated a lively discussion by asking whether the moral imperative for supporting diversity was being lost under increasingly pragmatic arguments, particularly those tailored to meet political and legal tests.

NEW PARTNERSHIPS: APPLYING ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE TO SOCIAL CHALLENGES

Many of today's graduate students see an expanding gap between work that addresses the social challenges they have witnessed—AIDS, income gaps, 9/11—and the responsibilities of positions within the academy, stated Diana Rhoten of the Social Science Research Council. Keeping these talented members of the "Net generation" will require changes in how graduate schools train and employ their young scholars.

Julie Ellison, professor of English at the University of Michigan, agreed with Rhoten, observing that graduate students want their work to be applicable to social challenges and want to be able to move between the academy and other domains. Ellison, who is the director of *Imagining America: Artists & Scholars in Public Life*, described national programs that encourage graduate students to pursue public scholarship, citing examples of students who used Woodrow Wilson Practicum Grants to work with public interest institutions and develop youth leadership programs.



Julie Ellison, director of Imagining America: Artists & Scholars in Public Life and professor of American culture at the University of Michigan.

Arizona State University has already begun putting these ideas into practice, reported Maria Allison, Arizona's vice provost and dean of graduate studies. She pointed to the university's new interdisciplinary degree programs and institutes—centered on globalization, urbanization, education, health science, and new technologies—that are intended to apply learning to social problems.

Michael Clark, associate executive vice chancellor for academic planning and professor of English at the University of California at Irvine, suggested creating "a national organization that would be a model from the outside" for meeting social challenges through scholarship.

"I think if we build such an organization, the graduate students would come, and would bring the universities along with them," he said.

HOW WELL DOES THE Ph.D. PREPARE GRADUATES? VIEWS FROM BUSINESS, LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES, COMMUNITY COLLEGES, K-12, AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR

For graduate students to become marketable to employers outside academe, they need training in interdisciplinary connections and in "use-inspired" research, said Jody Nyquist, associate dean emeritus at the University of Washington.

Ernest Wilson, director of the Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the University of Maryland, added that employers want a deep understanding of issues via narratives, not just the facts, and that Ph.D.s excel at disciplined presentation of evidence. Dr. Wilson, who currently serves as senior advisor to the Global Infrastructure Information Commission and has previously served in the White House, said that students who want to

pursue careers in the public sector, rather than academe, find little support—if not tacit resistance—from their faculty and peers.

“In my limited experience of political science and public policy, we don’t take that very seriously,” Dr. Wilson said. “We’ve all had the experience of having a student come into the office and close the door, look left and right and say, ‘Professor, I think I may want to do something else with my Ph.D., please don’t tell my advisor.’ We need to help students who want to work outside academe feel comfortable.”

That same attitude discourages graduate students from entering K-12 teaching as well, said Rob Baird, vice president of school-university relations for Woodrow Wilson. In light of recent concerns about how well high schools prepare their students for college, and with new Early College High Schools in need of excellent teachers, K-12 needs Ph.D.s as much as Ph.D.s need careers outside academe.

Community colleges also need to overcome the academy’s bias against them, Kate Clark, president of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges and professor of English at Irvine Valley College, pointed out. An increasing number of Ph.D.s are taking up careers in community colleges, she said, and there needs to be better means to support and valorize that work.

Newly-minted Ph.D.s who seek work in business, on the other hand, encounter a Ph.D.-friendly field but lack professional skills like proposal writing and budgeting, explained Don Drakeman, CEO of the biotechnology company Medarex. Dr. Drakeman, who holds a Ph.D. in religion and a law degree and is a Trustee of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, suggested creating 3-week mini-MBA courses to help them develop those skills.



Susan Avery of the University of Colorado, Shirley Willihnganz of the University of Louisville, and Fred Pampel and Ron Atlas of the University of Louisville.

“Ph.D. training is for the most part a wonderful thing,” he reported. “My industry has benefitted greatly...but the strengths of the Ph.D. can be more effectively employed.”

Interdisciplinarity and a broad understanding of the connections between disciplines is quickly becoming a vital qualification for teaching at liberal arts colleges, said Thomas Tritton, president of Haverford College. The country needs free thinkers, he stressed, and to educate them liberal arts colleges need excellent faculty who believe in integrated learning.

“So how do you cultivate this breadth?” Dr. Tritton asked. Success will depend on the attitudes of presidents, provosts, and deans who must “rely on the idealism of students who believe in notions like integrated knowledge. Ask students to consider a common framework of connections among the fields they’ve studied and describe work in ways that will communicate beyond their field, but without diminishing rigor. Ask our students to tell us we must do this.”

THE GLOBALIZATION OF DOCTORAL EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Allan Goodman, president and CEO of the Institute for International Education (IIE), opened the session with an overview of the flow of international students to U.S. doctoral programs. He enumerated several obstacles that U.S. universities face in recruiting international students, including problems in accurately evaluating credentials from foreign universities and dealing with post 9/11 politicization of relations between the U.S. and other countries.

“It’s one thing for us to sit here and say graduate students are welcome,” he pointed out, “it’s another thing to get them here.” Dr. Goodman emphasized that overcoming these obstacles will require commitment from universities and organizations, not just from the U.S. government. Dr. Goodman also noted that IIE’s Project Atlas, a data-collection initiative that tracks global student

mobility, provides statistics on international students for administrators and faculty and can be accessed online at <http://www.atlas.iienetwork.org/>.

Jon Butler, dean of the graduate school of arts and sciences at Yale University, noted that U.S. faculty on admissions committees sometimes hesitate to offer admission to international students, since they believe that many are likely return to their own countries after graduate school. There is a subtle preference among some faculty, he said, for U.S. students who are more likely to pursue tenured positions at prestigious American universities.

At the same time, U.S. students need more exposure to other countries, said Jeannine Blackwell, dean of the University of Kentucky graduate school, who called for close collaboration between U.S. and foreign graduate programs.

An upcoming international graduate student conference, slated for Oct. 28-29 in Beijing, will provide one opportunity for this kind of interaction, reported [Robert Thach](#), dean of the graduate school of arts and sciences at Washington University in St. Louis. Co-sponsored by Washington and the China Scholarship Council, the conference will feature a Scholarship Information Exchange day. Between 3,000 and 4,000 students are expected to attend.

CONNECTING RESOURCES TO OUTCOMES

As described by [Lewis Siegel](#), dean of the graduate school at Duke University, there is at present a “massive debate” among graduate schools concerning what constitutes quality in Ph.D. programs. Factors that can be used for assessment include faculty reputation rankings, external reviews, program selectivity, GRE scores, publications/citations, and degree completion rates. Dr. Siegel described Duke’s experience in using specific measures to allocate resources to academic departments—including allowing funds paid by and for graduate students to be recycled for support of graduate programs, and basing allocation on criteria that provide incentives for improving the quality of programs.

Tommy Darwin, director of professional development at the University of Texas at Austin, posed the question, “How do we know we’re having an impact?” and suggested increased use of networking and peer-to-peer support to “demystify” both doctoral education and ways that graduate students can apply their work to broader social issues.

[Marisi Nerad](#), director of the Center for Research and Innovations in Graduate Education at the University of Washington, reflected on studies of doctoral students that showed many common assumptions about the professoriate to be false—such as long-held beliefs that only the “best” students become professors, that Ph.D.s have linear career paths, that children distract women from academic work, and that academics have the highest job satisfaction. Dr. Nerad suggested informing applicants and new doctoral students about career prospects in academe and elsewhere; organizing annual career development symposia for Ph.D. students; engaging faculty, deans, and staff in a discussion about students’ career realities; and offering enhanced professional development skills to students.

[Robert Thach](#) suggested that one way to increase support for humanities doctoral students lies in reduction of admissions—when Washington reduced enrollments in humanities Ph.D. programs from 260 to 200, it was able to guarantee students six years of support, which “meant a great deal” to them.



Marisi Nerad, director of the Center for Research and Innovations in Graduate Education at the University of Washington.

THE FUTURE OF THE RESPONSIVE Ph.D.

In a concluding discussion moderated by Dr. Weisbuch, participants reaffirmed their support for continuing and even institutionalizing the Responsive Ph.D. as a convening body to analyze and promote solutions to doctoral education issues. Participants identified four primary issues for a national agenda:

- increase diversity in graduate education and the professoriate (through means such as opening the K-12 “pipeline” and removing blockages on the tenure ladder, as well as supporting collaborative programs between a broad range of educational institutions, particularly community colleges);
- apply academic knowledge to social challenges and promote public scholarship;
- address the globalization of doctoral education (clarifying the role of U.S. doctoral institutions in the emerging international market, developing common standards, and collaborating with foreign counterparts);
- improve professional development of doctoral students for a full range of careers (preparing and tracking their success as scholars, teachers, and practitioners in a variety of sectors).

¹ Dr. Weisbuch left the Woodrow Wilson Foundation as of July 1, 2005 to assume the presidency of Drew University in Madison, NJ.