

**Report of the  
Graduate Student Committee  
to the  
Council of the Medieval Academy of America**

**23 March 2007**

The Graduate Student Committee is delighted to have the opportunity to report to Council on our goals for the past year, the ways in which we have sought to accomplish those goals, and our proposals for the future. This report will also serve a second purpose: to take stock of the Graduate Student Committee's activities in the five years since its formation, and thus to conduct the self-study mandated by Council at the time it voted to create the GSC.

We hope that Council will share the conclusions of our review: that the committee has provided, and continues to provide, a valuable service to the medieval studies community, and that Council should consider designating the GSC as a permanent Standing Committee.

### **Goals and Organizational Structure**

Last year, the GSC adopted a new organizational style, with two co-chairs and without pre-defined portfolios of responsibility for individual members. Now in the second year of this arrangement, we have found that avoiding the permanent division of responsibilities among members has helped us to draw creatively and flexibly upon the talents of our members. This structure, fixing no individual to any particular role, has allowed us to represent our fellow graduate students more effectively.

When the GSC met in Kalamazoo in May 2006, it set two broad priorities for the coming year: first, to entrench and make permanent already existing initiatives which enable the committee both to serve as advocates for the needs of graduate students within the Medieval Academy and to help graduate students to interact as extensively as possible with one another; and second, to consider and make recommendations as to the role that the GSC should play in the Academy. The self-study section of this report contains some of the fruits of our discussions.

The committee is pleased to report substantial progress in both of these major areas. While a number of procedural and technical obstacles continue to prevent us from accomplishing all that we might wish, we believe that the various initiatives detailed below should continue with the full support of Council.

### **Communications**

One of the GSC's priorities remains to establish and maintain regular communications between the committee, the Academy, and graduate students at large. To this end, we have written

regularly both to the mailing list of graduate students derived from the membership records of the Medieval Academy and to the three electronic mailing lists administered by the GSC. Establishing an accurate list of the graduate student members of the Academy remains problematic, and we hope that our successors will work with Academy staff to resolve this.

#### Website and Listservs

The GSC is pleased to report that, thanks to the great generosity of MAA councillor Professor E. Ann Matter, the committee's two major listservs have permanently migrated to new homes at the University of Pennsylvania. This move allowed us to update and improve the service provided by the med-grad and med-grad-euro listservs, which in the past year processed slightly more than one hundred messages. Finding a more stable home for the lists provided us with the opportunity to offer thanks to former GSC member Ronald Ganze, who had kindly managed the old listservs even after completing his term of service on the committee.

The committee is currently looking to strengthen the arrangements for its website. Since winter 2005, the GSC's pages have been hosted by Eastern Illinois University, where Joshua Birk, a junior faculty member in the History Department, oversees their administration. Since moving the pages to EIU, the GSC has been able to revise the research guide written by student members, amend advertised conference panel configurations as needed, and update the lists of dissertations in progress and completed. While we are grateful to Professor Birk for taking on this role, the committee acknowledges that improving and expanding the website will require that we find a more appropriate arrangement. One proposal under consideration is that the GSC should appoint a graduate student member of the Academy to take on a two-year term as official GSC webmaster.

#### Mentorship Program

The committee is particularly pleased to report the successful launch of a graduate student mentorship program for MAA members. The program is designed to extend a welcome to less experienced graduate students by pairing them with their more experienced counterparts, thus making the professional and social realms of the medieval studies community more accessible. Janine Peterson has served as the coordinator of the program this year. The committee solicited applications from prospective mentors and mentees in October and November and matched up a total of thirty individuals. We have asked mentors, at a minimum, to correspond two to three times per year with their mentees and to meet their mentees for a brief conversation if both happen to attend the same conference. Following the successful launch of this program, we recommend that future GSCs continue to expand the network of mentors and mentees.

#### Liaisons with Graduate Student Organizations

On a somewhat broader level, the GSC has made progress toward creating a network of liaisons between the committee and other graduate student organizations. As a means of improving our ability to communicate with our constituents, the committee has sought to follow the example of the graduate student committees of other learned societies by designating liaisons between the GSC and individual medieval studies programs, regional associations, and graduate student publications and conferences. The committee has developed and instituted an action plan and is currently in the process of gathering information about the organizations with whom we hope to forge liaisons. We commend this program to our successors.

### Vagantes Graduate Student Conference

The GSC remains in contact with the travelling graduate student conference, Vagantes, which this year was held at Loyola University Chicago from 1–4 March. Members of the Vagantes Board of Directors, on which GSC member Lisa Chen currently sits, will meet the GSC in Kalamazoo this May to discuss ways in which Vagantes and our committee can most effectively collaborate in years ahead.

### SMART Project

As we announced in last year's report to Council, the GSC was invited by the editorial board of *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Teaching* to submit for publication the papers from its 2005 Medieval Academy round-table on graduate student teaching. The collection of papers, co-edited by Patrick Hornbeck and Jen Gonyer-Donohue, appeared in spring 2007. As the GSC continues to sponsor panels and other events on topics of equal interest to graduate students, we recommend that future committee members continue to think creatively about the possibility of publishing the proceedings in *SMART* or other similar journals.

## **Outstanding Proposals**

### Medieval Academy Travel Grants

At its last meeting, Council voted unanimously to approve in principle a proposal from the GSC that graduate student members of the Academy who are selected to present papers at the Academy's annual meetings should receive a subsidy for their travel expenses. We were particularly pleased to learn from the Executive Director that the Finance Committee and the Executive Committee, at their respective meetings in autumn 2006, decided to recommend that grants be given in the amount of \$300 per student. We urge the Academy to implement this decision of its committees for the 2008 meeting in Vancouver.

### Post-Doctoral Fellowship

The committee was sorry to learn that the present state of the Academy's finances would not permit the adoption of the committee's proposal to create a post-doctoral fellowship which would provide additional staff support for the Academy's headquarters in Cambridge. We nevertheless recommend that this proposal continue to figure in the Academy's plans for fundraising and development.

## **Conference Events**

### Kalamazoo 2006

For the second year, the GSC hosted a cash bar reception Thursday evening, 4 May, which was well attended by both graduate students and senior members. The reception allowed GSC members and the outgoing Executive Director to meet graduate students.

The GSC sponsored a roundtable panel organized by Patricia C. Kiernan, *Teaching for Dummies, or, What I wish My Department Had Told Me: A Panel on Pedagogy and Graduate Student Teaching*. This session was attended by some fifty students on Friday, 5 May. The panel

consisted of junior faculty and graduate students: Lisa West (Rutgers U.), Eric Limbach (Michigan State U.), Elly Truitt (Harvard U.), Abdullah Alger (U. of Manchester), and Julie Harper Elb (Lausanne Collegiate School). Gina Brandolino (Indiana U., Bloomington) was the moderator. The panel was well received.

#### Leeds 2006

The GSC-sponsored roundtable organized by Patrick Hornbeck and presided over by Daniel J. DiCenso, *Across the Pond: Transatlantic Perspectives on Graduate Study and the Job Market*, was attended by over forty graduate students on the evening of 12 July. The panel was composed of members from the medieval studies community whose careers have crossed the Atlantic in one or more ways: James Wade (U. of Cambridge), Aidan Keally Conti (U. of Bergen, Norway), Julian Hendrix (U. of Cambridge) and Albrecht Diem (Institut für Mittelalterforschung, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften). The panel was attended by about thirty graduate students and young professionals. The conversations continued well beyond the panel itself.

#### Medieval Academy of America 2007

The GSC-sponsored session organized by and to be presided over by Lisa Chen, *Preparing to Teach: Tips for Creating a Syllabus and Choosing Resource Materials*, will take place on 11 April, from 2:30 p.m. to 3:45 p.m. in the PIMS common room. This workshop-style presentation, aimed at providing students with tools and strategies that they can use in designing and delivering their own courses, will be given by Lori Woods (U. of Toronto). We invite all members of Council to attend this session.

A social gathering of graduate students, organized by the GSC, will take place on Thursday evening, 12 April, from 7:30 p.m. at the Foxes' Den Bar and Grill, 1075 Bay Street. In response to requests from our constituents, the GSC decided to have a social gathering at the beginning of the conference so that graduate students (especially those attending the conference without others from their home institution) might make connections early on.

An informal discussion and open meeting with the members of the GSC will take place from noon to 2 p.m. on Saturday, 14 April. We are grateful to the Centre for Medieval Studies for providing catering.

#### Kalamazoo 2007

Continuing our commitment to the professional development of young scholars, the committee will host a round-table discussion at the 2007 meeting of the International Medieval Congress in Kalamazoo entitled *The Yellow Brick Road to Success: A Panel Discussion on the Rights and Responsibilities of Academic Professionalism*. The panel, to be presided over by Jen Gonyer-Donohue, will include Susanna Fein (Kent State U.), Monica H. Green (Arizona State U.), Richard K. Emmerson (Florida State U.), and Bonnie Wheeler (Southern Methodist U.). The GSC will also continue its tradition of hosting a cash bar reception at the Kalamazoo meeting.

#### Leeds 2007

Following the GSC's roundtable discussion about transatlantic graduate study at last year's Congress, this year's session, entitled *Demystifying the Job Market: Applying and Interviewing*

*for Academic Positions and Post-Doctoral Research Posts*, aims to take up the difficult issue of entering the job market, whether for an academic position or for a post-doctoral research post. The session will lay out the peculiarities of applying to positions both in the UK and abroad. The panellists will consist of newly hired junior faculty members and post-doctoral researchers who can comment specifically on all aspects of the job application process in North America, Europe, and elsewhere. The session organizer will be Daniel DiCenso and the moderator will be James Palmer Wade (Magdalene College, U. of Cambridge). The GSC will also organize an informal social gathering at the Leeds conference.

## **The Future of the GSC**

The conclusion of the fifth year of the GSC's service to the Medieval Academy is an appropriate moment to reflect on the committee's achievements to date. With nearly a thousand constituents, the committee represents a dynamic and diverse segment of the Academy's membership: indeed, it represents the very future of the Academy. It is clear that, in ever increasing numbers, graduate students are becoming accustomed to looking to the GSC for leadership in a number of distinct yet interrelated areas: for the dissemination of information about the job market, publishing, and professional etiquette; for advocacy on behalf of graduate students and their concerns; and for initiatives, like the recently established mentorship program, which bring geographically dispersed individuals closer together.

Over the past five years, the GSC has:

- established, maintained, administered, and enhanced three electronic listservs to promote communication among graduate students;
- established and expanded a website with information about academic and professional opportunities and projects;
- advertised scholarship and fellowship opportunities;
- created a network of mentors and mentees which has brought together several dozen graduate students, many from small institutions;
- organized more than a dozen panel sessions, workshops, and social events at major medieval studies conferences;
- published the proceedings of one of its conference panels;
- developed partnerships with Vagantes, the travelling graduate student conference, and with other graduate student organizations;
- maintained a list of doctoral dissertations in progress;
- submitted to Council proposals for the establishment of a post-doctoral fellowship and travel grants; and
- advised the Executive Directors and officers of the Academy with regard to issues of concern to graduate students.

The wide-ranging profile of the GSC's activities testifies both to the enthusiasm and strong leadership of our predecessors as well as to the commitment of the current committee to the notion that graduate students have much to contribute to the life of the Academy.

A number of learned societies have, during the period of the GSC's formation, either established or substantially enhanced their own graduate student organizations. The American Academy of Religion, for instance, has created a standing Graduate Student Committee and allows the chair of its Graduate Student Committee to hold a voting seat on the Board of Directors.

We believe that it is time for Council to consider raising the profile of the GSC in similar fashion. While we remain grateful for the support of both current and former Executive Directors, Presidents, and officers of the Academy, the GSC is currently only an *ad hoc* committee, dependent upon Council for its continued existence. We believe that to designate the GSC as a full Standing Committee would not only send the right message about the importance of graduate students in the life of the Academy but would also make more official the links already in place between graduate student leaders and the officers of the Academy. Establishing the GSC as a full standing committee of the Academy would, in short, mean that the graduate students' voices and concerns would remain a permanent part of the Academy's conversations.

To this end, we propose a two-stage process for renewing the GSC's current mandate and for enhancing its role in the Academy. First, because the motion which initially created the GSC five years ago is about to expire, we recommend that Council, in its 2007 meeting, vote to renew the GSC as an *ad hoc* committee for a period of two years. Second, we recommend that our successors on the GSC work with the Executive Director and the incoming President, officers, and councillors of the Academy to agree the language of an amendment to the Academy's by-laws that would designate the GSC as a Standing Committee. (An initial proposal for such an amendment, and a draft set of by-laws for the enhanced GSC, are attached: they have already been seen by the Executive Director and the outgoing President.) Once the Academy and the GSC come to consensus, then the final text of the amendment and by-laws would be laid before Council in spring 2008 and before the Fellows of the Academy immediately thereafter.

## **Conclusion**

It has been an honor and a pleasure for us to work on behalf of the Academy and its graduate student members. Over the past five years, the GSC has achieved much, and we hope that Council will enable our successors to achieve even more on behalf of the Medieval Academy and its graduate student members.

Respectfully submitted,

Jen Gonyer-Donohue, University of Washington  
J. Patrick Hornbeck II, Christ Church, Oxford  
(Co-Chairs)

Daniel J. DiCenso, Magdalene College, Cambridge  
Janine Peterson, University of Indiana  
Lisa Chen, University of Toronto

## Appendix: Proposed By-Laws

### Amendments to the By-Laws of the Medieval Academy of America

#### Amendment 1

In *section 9*, after “of the Standing Committee on Centers and Regional Associations”, insert “, of the Graduate Student Committee”.

#### Amendment 2

After *section 25*, insert the following text:

#### GRADUATE STUDENT COMMITTEE

26. The Graduate Student Committee shall be a standing committee of the Academy and shall consist of graduate student members of the Academy appointed by Council in accordance with such procedures as Council shall set forth. The committee shall determine its own operating procedures.

Renumber *sections 26-31* accordingly.

## **By-Laws of the Graduate Student Committee of the Medieval Academy of America**

1. *Name.* The name by which the Committee shall be known is the Graduate Student Committee of the Medieval Academy of America.

2. *Standing Committee.* Pursuant to Article 26 of the By-Laws of the Medieval Academy of America, the Committee shall be a permanent Standing Committee of the Academy.

3. *Purposes.* The purposes for which the Committee is formed shall be (a) to represent the views, concerns, and suggestions of graduate student members of the Academy to the Council and other organs of the Academy; (b) to facilitate the professional development of graduate student members of the Academy; (c) to facilitate communications among graduate student members of the Academy; and (d) to encourage graduate students working in any area of medieval studies to become members of the Academy.

4. *Membership.* The committee shall consist of five members, of whom either one shall be designated as Chair or two shall be designated as Co-Chairs. Of the members not designated Chair or Co-Chairs, the committee shall elect one as Secretary. At the time of their appointment, members of the Committee shall be members of the Medieval Academy and shall be enrolled in studies leading to a graduate degree in some area of medieval studies.

5. *Appointment Procedures.* Members shall be appointed, and the Chair or Co-Chairs shall be designated, by the Council of the Medieval Academy in accordance with such procedures as Council shall set forth.

6. *Term of Office.* Members shall serve for terms of two years, or until their successors are chosen, and shall not be eligible for reappointment.

7. *Vacancies.* In the case of the death or resignation of any of the members of the Committee, the vacancy or vacancies may be filled by the Council of the Medieval Academy in accordance with such procedures as Council shall set forth. Should a member of the Committee cease to be enrolled in graduate studies during the course of his or her term, he or she shall be entitled to serve until the next annual meeting of the Medieval Academy, at which time, if his or her term will not already have concluded, the Council of the Medieval Academy shall declare his or her seat vacant and shall appoint a replacement in accordance with such procedures as Council shall set forth. In no case shall a person appointed to complete the term of another member of the Committee be entitled to serve longer than the term of the original member.

8. *Chair and Co-Chairs.* In the case of a vacancy in the Chair or among the Co-Chairs, the Council of the Medieval Academy shall designate as Chair or Co-Chairs a current member or members of the Committee.

9. *Meetings.* The Committee shall meet at least annually, at a time and place designated by the Chair or Co-Chairs.

10. *Voting.* In meetings and votes of the Committee, all members of the Committee shall have the right to vote. A quorum shall consist of four members.

11. *Minutes.* The Secretary of the Committee shall be responsible for recording the minutes of each meeting.

12. *Communications.* The Committee shall maintain an electronic list-serv, on which members shall be included from the time of their appointment until the conclusion of the International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan, following the end of their term of appointment.

13. *Amendment.* These By-Laws may be amended by a vote of four members of the Committee, with the assent of the Council of the Medieval Academy.