Meeting Minutes for Planning Theme 1: “Ensure Access and Inclusion”
Tuesday, November 15, 2016

The meeting was divided into two groups of ten people. The first group addressed access and inclusion during Recruitment, Application, and Admissions. The second group addressed access and inclusion during students’ time at Fordham, focusing on Retention, Mentoring, and Student Support.

To prepare for the meeting, both groups read extracts from Julie Posselt’s Inside Graduate Admissions: Merit, Diversity, and Faculty Gatekeeping (Harvard UP, 2015) and Leonard Cassuto’s The Graduate School Mess: What Caused It and How We Can Fix It (Harvard UP, 2015), as well as two recent reports on diversity and inclusion from Yale University and the University of Michigan. Each group aimed to produce five to six recommendations based on the readings and their discussion.

**Group I: Recruitment, Application, and Admissions**

**Introductory Remarks by Kirsten Swinth (KS) and Eva Badowska (EB)**
- Noted value of readings, tone they set for group’s deliberations: concrete and practical.
- Invited group members to think “visually” through the process of recruitment and admissions.
- Highlighted need to think about “range of actors” involved in the process, as well as need to think about how the process looks and feels from a variety of perspectives, especially those traditionally marginalized within academy.
- Noted that she took the group’s goal to be in part about thinking about how to attract a broad and diverse applicant pool.
- Eva Badowska (EB) noted that Fordham’s admissions processes are manifold: decentralized, dept-based. Departments conduct process by their own standards, which are crafted to align with state guidelines.

**General Discussion**

**Focus on the GRE General Test**
- Matthew Keil (MK) raised possibility of dispensing with GRE
- KS noted that multiple studies have shown GRE scores are not accurate predictors of success in graduate school. The question is: how does GRE impact admissions process?
  - EB noted that GRE is a deterrent, esp. at MA level
  - Malkah Bressler (MB) noted time commitment for GRE prep
  - KS underscored the relationship between GRE and privilege (test prep costs, etc)
  - EB noted that performance on standardized tests tied to socio-economic factors, also referenced her own experience taking the test abroad.
- Elizabeth Cornell (EC) reminded the group of Posselt’s charge to admissions committees: take a holistic vision of applicant.
• EB noted that discarding GRE would have consequences: GRE scores play a role in rankings, for example.

Looking at Admissions Process from Applicant’s POV
• KS noted that History department expects all potential Ph.D. students to have had an interaction with their prospective mentors.
• During discussion of this point, it was observed that this may hurt applicants unfamiliar with process, or hesitant to reach out.
• James Van Wyck (J VW) referenced Jamaica Dale’s observation that “US academia is structured around assumption that graduate students, adjuncts, and full-time professors have constant access to family wealth.”
• KS: we need to communicate the message to students that we are concerned with their well-being.
• It was observed that “proving financial need” was a complicated process.
• J VW noted that we should challenge this presumption, and design admissions processes with disadvantaged/underrepresented as the norm, and not the exception.
• Doug Steward (DS) highlighted the ADE report, and noted that graduate schools need to “fish further upstream.” Need to go out and find minority/underrepresented students; HCBUs often not targeted
• Nathan Ballantyne (NB) suggested connecting admissions data, admissions goals, and admissions committee members in departments
• NB noted that he would appreciate tools for creating a diverse pool of applicants. He observed that Silicon Valley has used apps that strip racial/social/institutional markers from application materials. Doing this has resulted in more diverse and talented hires.
• Blind Admissions Process?
• KS noted the tension of bringing a more diverse student body into poor job market (for traditional academic jobs) and noted that it was imperative to cultivate both a more diverse professoriate while allowing for open-ended career paths.
• KS: what kinds of career paths would be of interest to a more diverse graduate student population?
• KS: Need to work more intentionally with institutions in neighborhoods surrounding our campuses.

Recommendations based on the discussion:

1. Offer guidelines about best practices for admissions to departments. Share data and studies regarding the GRE with departments. Send admissions data to admissions committee members.
2. Build pathway for Ph.D.s to teach Service Learning Courses.
3. Offer guidelines and suggestions for applicants on website (outlining, for example, information about GREs).
4. Reach out to HCBUs via faculty contacts.
5. Advanced Funding for Accepted Students to help with transitional moments.
6. GRE forgiveness fund and/or Accept Unofficial GRE scores
7. Assess Fees/Funding from P.O.V. of Underrepresented Students
8. Rethink how we represent career trajectories to prospective students (Recruitment/website to be conducted with needs of underrepresented students in mind).

9. Since diversity means different things in different contexts, departments need to think about (value of) diversity in their particular contexts.


Group II: Retention, Mentoring, and Student Support

About mentoring a diverse body of students:

- Lack of diversity among mentors: Davidson and Foster-Johnson mention in “Mentoring in the Preparation of Graduate Researchers of Color” that mentors working with students of color are predominantly white males.
- Can also attempt to mentor all students in the same way, something that Davidson and Foster-Johnson emphasize is ineffective.
- Dewis Shallcross (DS): mentoring all students in the same way fails all students, as everyone has different issues.
- Mentors can also fall prey to homophily, moulding students into versions of themselves.
- Mentors need training to work with under-represented groups; for instance, they can be “color-blind,” seeing racism as a non-issue.
- Steven D’Agustino (SD): but we need to be careful about focusing on racial differences over other forms of diversity.
- Erin McKenna (EM): there are other forms of diversity that come with hidden identifiers; need to make students feel welcome and willing to admit their diversity.

Formal vs. informal mentorships:

- Jeannine Pinto (JP): could set up a checklist of requirements to fulfill in a mentorship, but basing a mentor relationship on a checklist can result in a mentor treating all his mentees in the same way. If you want the student to develop, you have to cater the mentorship to the particular student.
- EM: Formal mentorships can impede creating a relationship with the mentor, creating a focus on short-term rather than long-term goals.

Acquiring a mentor: how different from an advisor?

- John Drummond (JD): mentoring is not a question of individual mentoring early on in graduate study, as students haven’t yet learned enough to select a mentor. Not sure who they want to work with or what they want to study.
- JD: instead of individual mentorship early on, the Philosophy Department holds a Proseminar, where students learn about issues in the profession.
- Mentorships as developing along the way in graduate school, not an instant relationship.
- DS: what’s the difference between an advisor and a mentor? Do they have the same role?
- Melissa Labonte (ML): Yes, students come in (especially to the Ph.D.) knowing who they want to work with, but often change their minds. Students don’t know the difference between advisors and mentors.
- EM: what about an optional mentoring program that students and professors could sign up for early on?
- JP: when guiding a student, how much of your help is linked to the fact that he or she is working on a topic that you work on?
Mentorship of under-represented groups:
- EM: Students of color often feel unable to build these relationships on their own.
- DS: there’s a burden on faculty members of color, as minority students can feel uncomfortable approaching other members of faculty.
- JD: need to hire more faculty member of color.
- SD: we’ve talked about the formal term of “mentor,” but it’s a cultural idea. Many students are not part of that culture.
- DS: mentorship as being about including students who don’t traditionally fit into the community.
- EM: focus on training faculty to serve students from under-served populations. Idea that white students tend to be more confident about reaching out to faculty for help.
- SD: need to think carefully about what we do in academia, how we view our structures as universal, when actually they’ve been filtered through systems of oppression and force.
- Consider different types of diversity – what we learn, how we’re brought up isn’t always revealed by appearance. Eg. socio-economic status, having a family, educational background…
- Reliance on appearance to determine elements about people. Encourage mentors to talk to their students to discover who they are instead.
- EM: can’t just say that you don’t exclude groups, but also that you welcome all groups.

Good vs. Bad Mentorship – how to create good mentors:
- Lisa Holsberg (LH): problem of a “bad” advisor – unclear about distinction between an advisor and a mentor. Focus on vocabulary: have to address what a student can expect from an advisor and a mentor. Different faculty members have different rules, many implicit.
- JD: can set up expectations in the faculty handbook for each department.
- JP: students feel apprehensive approaching their mentors, telling them their issues. She notes that this apprehension was common among her friends who didn’t finish their graduate degrees.
- JD: can encourage students to gravitate toward two or three members of faculty.
- SD: But you can’t make every faculty member into a good mentor; so students have to evaluate faculty members before they approach them.
- SD: maybe separate successful mentorship dimensions – not just about completing the degree, but also about creating a relationship with the student.
- DS: why does the responsibility of building a mentorship rest solely on the student?
- ML: can come up with general principles of mentorship that can then be tailored to specific disciplines.
- SD: are mentorships discipline-specific?
- JD: the dissertation is discipline-specific, as students are writing for that discipline.
- LH: likes the idea of a Proseminar for first-year graduate students. First year as very disorienting, learning the norms of the new environment.
- Importance of having empathy for students, taken from Lenny Cassuto’s *The Graduate School Mess*.

ML: need to think about capacities (goals of a mentor relationship). Work with the needs of students from different groups.
- Have to consider training and discipline specific knowledge and expertise
- Also consider students’ capacities – the goals they have for the mentorship.
- Also have to consider training for students who don’t know what to expect from a mentor relationship and from graduate school.
- LH: mentoring students one-on-one, but also bringing them into the community of the department. Goal of teaching students what coursework is like, setting up the payoff at the end.
- Getting rid of the “hazing” that many graduate students face.
• Mentorship as opening a window into departmental culture, practices, and the life of the mind.
• SD: could divide mentorship into different parts – academic progress, cultural ideas in the department, disciplinary issues, social issues.

Different modes of mentoring (LH):
• One-to-one (one faculty member, one student)
• One to many (one faculty member, many students, as in teaching)
• Many to one (department to individual students)
• Horizontal mentoring (student to student)

Different types:
• Transactional: clinical, advisory.
• Retention: try to build capacities, address students.
• Discipline-specific.

Taking Action:
• Matthew McGowan (MM): Have to consider how much has already been done for mentorship in the humanities as Fordham.
• To tackle diversity issues, we need diversity in our departments. To do that, we need money – a combination of institutional support and grants.
• ML: have to not only write that all groups are welcome, but show it through action. Applicants for faculty positions have read the language welcoming minorities and not believed it.
• Diversity Task Force has recommended mentorship training for all employees.
• EM: host a “Diversity Summit” and town hall where students can voice their concerns.
• Two groups already exist supporting under-represented groups: the LGBTQ group and the group for students of color. Need to give these groups more visibility, make them more interconnected to academic and social life.
• MM: we have a great resource in the city of NTC, can help us to attract students. Perhaps create a graduate-level HEOP program to attract local students in the Bronx.
• JP: need to look at undergraduate teaching as well. Students can get discouraged with higher education as undergraduates, leading them not to apply to graduate school.
• EM: what about surveys where students can raise concerns and give feedback, identify as under-represented groups.
• JP: such surveys already exist, but the response rate is so low that it can’t be reported.
• ML: what about focus groups to yield current trends?
• JP: a combination of surveys and focus groups shows students that the university cares.
• DS: Create a best practices sheet for students and mentors with recommended questions and how to ask them. At a departmental level, can start conversation with faculty.

Recommendations based on the discussion:

1. Create a handbook to demystify mentoring
2. Create resources that allow us to say that we prioritize access and inclusion
3. Change how we support our students when they get to Fordham
4. Advocacy – retool resources for undergraduates so they cater to graduate students as well.
5. Develop a pipeline of faculty mentors from under-represented communities
6. Positively incentivize faculty members who are good mentors, recognize them publicly
7. Think more fully about what diversity means for different departments