

## Graduate Center Master Plan Response December 2007

We are asked to contribute to CUNY's Master Plan from the standpoint of the Graduate Center's needs and strategic direction over the years from 2008-2012. To do so, we have taken stock of what has been accomplished during the last plan and present an outline of our goals for the next period. The Graduate Center is intrinsically integrated with CUNY as an institution due to our drawing doctoral faculty from all campuses, so in our comments we will simultaneously address issues as they affect both the Graduate Center and CUNY as a whole.

Many members of the Graduate Center community have contributed their thoughts on the CUNY Master Plan. Faculty members and students responded to a call for comments that appeared on the Graduate Center's web site. Student and faculty committees and governing bodies discussed the plan and reported on their deliberations; these included the Graduate Council (the legislative body of the Graduate Center), the President's Cabinet, the Doctoral Faculty Policy Committee, the Curriculum and Degree Committee, and Council of Executive Officers. The Doctoral Students Council discussed the Master Plan at a plenary meeting and compiled responses from students in many different doctoral programs. The Executive Committees of some programs also discussed the plan. While no one response can capture the many different views within the Graduate Center, many students and faculty members took advantage of the opportunity to comment by submitting statements detailing their own perspectives and priorities. All were carefully considered in the preparation of this response.

### **Our Starting Point**

No aspect of higher education is more labor intensive than doctoral education. It depends crucially on the skills and knowledge of faculty members and their interactions with advanced students pursuing individual and original lines of research. With this in mind, the Graduate Center's basic strategic plan over the last three years has been simple: hire the best possible faculty members, those with the most distinguished, accomplished and innovative records of scholarly production, and recruit the most talented students, and put them together in a supportive and intellectually charged environment. Of course, the devil is in the details. Here the Graduate Center has had to carefully assess its resources and ability to create the dynamic mix that leads to first-class doctoral education.

On the positive side, the Graduate Center has benefited from the upsurge in faculty hiring across CUNY, renewing our recruitment pool for membership in the doctoral faculty. We have also benefited from our own increased ability to hire on a more competitive basis. Our greatest step forward, however, has come from major

improvements in our ability to recruit and support doctoral students. We had lagged far behind comparable institutions in the financial aid we could offer those who wanted to attend the Graduate Center. With support from the Chancellery and from private donors, and spurred by CUNY's funding strides under the CUNY Compact, the Graduate Center has almost completed a transition to a financial aid system where we can now offer roughly half our doctoral students five-year recruitment packages. Doctoral students have also benefited from CUNY Central's commitment to provide in-state tuition to those who teach or provide other service to the campuses. These advances have occurred simultaneously with far-reaching programmatic and curricular changes as the Graduate Center, in concert with CUNY Central and the colleges, works to restructure the lab-based sciences and create joint doctoral degrees. The Graduate Center has also established new doctoral programs in health sciences, including Audiology, Nursing, Physical Therapy, and, more recently Public Health. And finally, it has created a new master's degree program in Middle Eastern Studies and is considering several other interdisciplinary initiatives.

These steps have been critical in strengthening the Graduate Center, but there remains much to be done. Even our proudest accomplishments raise the bar for us as we seek to secure and extend them. We now have student recruitment packages, but they are far from perfect. We now have increased resources for faculty recruitment, but observe risks on the horizon; the doctoral programs depend mainly on campus-based faculty members, but for this to continue to be a rich source of doctoral faculty recruitment, campus positions need to be improved by reducing faculty work loads. We also need to insure that our own internal functioning—our responsiveness to faculty and student needs, our ability to support efficient student progress toward degrees, our enhancement of diversity, and our contributions to the intellectual life of the city—expand in tandem with our increased resources for doctoral student funding and other initiatives. And finally, we must have sufficient investment in infrastructure to keep pace with programmatic growth so that new programs do not weaken the old, instead strengthening the whole.

Below we will outline what we consider to be our biggest challenges and how we think they could best be met. We will do this under four headings: Faculty recruitment; CUNY as an integrated university; student quality of life; and curricular innovation.

### **Faculty recruitment at the Graduate Center**

To put it bluntly, faculty members with appointments at the Graduate Center tend to the upper side of the age distribution. More than half (52 percent) are over 60 and nearly a third are 65 or over. It is impossible to predict retirement rates, which are a matter of individual decision, but it is reasonable to expect that there will be substantial faculty turnover at the Graduate Center over the next five to ten years.

This means the Graduate Center will have the challenge of reconstituting its faculty at a time when competition for the most renowned scholars is intense, the cost of living in New York is very high, and CUNY's salaries have fallen below national norms.

To meet this challenge, the Graduate Center will have to concentrate its resources on faculty hiring and will have to secure additional resources to attract the most productive and distinguished researchers. We can best improve our national standing by hiring strategically, based on analyses of where we can build on strength and achieve the critical mass required for academic excellence. This in turn will require some predictability of resources for faculty replacement.

This faculty renewal can offer improved opportunities for creating a more diverse professoriate at the Graduate Center. With most of our current faculty members hired decades ago, the Graduate Center's faculty represents the demographic mix of those earlier eras compared to the more diverse pool of more recent doctoral graduates. We want to take advantage of this broader pool to create a much more varied group of central line appointees; this goal also offers an incentive for hiring faculty members at earlier points in their careers than was formerly typical at the Graduate Center.

We see these tasks—strategically renewing the faculty and diversifying it—as central to the Graduate Center's goals and mission over the period of the next Master Plan and stretching beyond it.

### **CUNY as an integrated university**

The Graduate Center's central line appointees represent only one part of its work force and the smaller part at that. We benefit from the size and diversity of CUNY and take pride in its indispensable role in educating the work force of the region and providing social mobility for the city's residents. We draw faculty members from every campus and recruit students from many; we also send our own students to the campuses to teach. CUNY doctoral students teach more than three thousand undergraduate courses with a total enrollment of more than 100,000 students. An integrated university is a daily fact of our existence, giving us great personnel resources but also creating organizational complexities. Most importantly, we rely on many decisions made by others and they rely on the decisions we have made. The Graduate Center has little or no role in faculty hiring on the campuses but chooses most of its faculty from among those hired; the colleges do not choose the students we recruit with Chancellor's Fellowships but accept those we send to them as Graduate Teaching Fellows.

The system works surprisingly well but depends on trust and communication. For its part, the Graduate Center accepts the responsibility to prepare its Graduate Teaching Fellows to teach. It has experimented with a number of ways of providing instruction in pedagogy. We are now moving toward a model in which the GC will help doctoral programs to develop their own structured, semester-long courses in pedagogy; these courses will be open to all students but will be required of those who will become Graduate Teaching Fellows. The doctoral programs are closest to their own students, they know the distinctive teaching challenges in their own disciplines, and their professors have the most authority in conveying this information to their students. The provost's office, however, will continue to provide new Graduate Teaching Fellows with

information on work rules, responsibilities in regard to sexual harassment and disability policies, and guidance on how to deal with any problems that arise in their classrooms.

On the other side of the coin, the majority of the Graduate Center's courses are taught by campus-based members of the doctoral faculty, and these faculty members also provide much of the advising and mentoring of doctoral students. They fulfill these responsibilities despite the demands of teaching at two campuses. While the system has helped the Graduate Center achieve high levels of academic recognition, we have some concerns about the future. On the positive side, New York continues to be a magnet for academics, with increasing appeal to those wanting a rich intellectual environment and, often, jobs for two members of the family. On the downside, though, the relative advantages once enjoyed by CUNY's newly-unionized faculty have largely evaporated over time, as the cost of living in New York has skyrocketed but salaries have fallen far below those at peer institutions. Equally importantly, prospective faculty members with strong research orientations must weigh CUNY's heavy teaching load at the campuses against the lighter loads often found elsewhere. If not addressed, these factors will weaken the CUNY colleges' ability to recruit (and retain) the most accomplished faculty members. This weakened recruitment ability is likely to reverberate in the Graduate Center's recruitment of campus-based professors to the doctoral faculty.

The workload problem will not be easily solved. It will require extensive resources to lower the teaching loads on the campuses. We believe this goal must be put on the agenda, however, to enable CUNY to continue to move toward academic excellence and, from our own perspective, to insure the long-run health of the Graduate Center.

We would also like to see the teaching loads of Graduate Teaching Fellows reduced. Chancellor's Fellowships have made a great difference to our ability to recruit the most talented students and to enable them to focus on their academic work. The fellowships, though, require an arduous work load in Years Two, Three, and Four, when the students serve as Graduate Teaching Fellows, a work load far heavier than that experienced by doctoral fellowship holders at other universities. It is heavier in several ways. Our students must teach four undergraduate classes a year, mainly running their own classes, rather than serving as TA's, a pattern that is more common elsewhere. In addition, they must often travel long distances to get to their campus assignments, while at other universities graduate students teach and learn in one location. We recognize the cost of reducing the GTF work load, but as with campus faculty members, we think a work load reduction is a crucial next step in improving CUNY's academic standing and functioning.

Our position both drawing and sending instructors from many different campuses also leads us to support the idea of creating a new identity, that of "Citizens of CUNY." It is understandable, and valuable, for students and faculty members to identify with their own campuses, but many also have identities that transcend one college. This will be even more the case with the reorganization of the Sciences (biology, chemistry, biochemistry, and physics) and the development of joint degrees. Students in the sciences

will take their first-year courses at the Graduate Center but then will move to campus locations for their lab work. Similarly, students in the health-based doctoral programs, in Business, Criminal Justice, and in Social Welfare take most of their courses on other campuses but also embrace an identity as Graduate Center doctoral students. These students, and the many others who take courses at the Graduate Center but teach on the campuses, would be well served by the development of a CUNY-wide ID system. This could enable them to readily draw upon the library and extra-curricular resources of the multiple campuses with which they are affiliated.

While we favor the “Citizens of CUNY” concept, we also believe that integration should be thoughtfully implemented to also allow decentralized decision-making and also to make sure that the needs of different members of the community are met. One area where one size does not fit all is library borrowing policy. Our doctoral students have made it clear that this issue matters a great deal to them. They often need to hold onto library materials for some time, delving deeply into them and reflecting on their contents. This is recognized at university libraries across the country, which usually offer doctoral students borrowing periods of several months or even a semester (unless materials are recalled). At CUNY, however, doctoral students must conform to the three-week borrowing policy that applies to all students. This is simply too short for those undertaking complex research projects.

We also do not favor integrating our Institutional Review Board with IRB’s at other campuses. We believe centralization of this function, which is so vital to our ability to do our research, would be highly detrimental to the smooth and efficient functioning of our research review system. We favor, in short, integration where it saves resources and contributes to the whole being greater than the parts, but do not favor it where decentralization allows for decision-making that better serves the local community.

### **Quality of student life**

The pleasure and intensity of college life stems from the blending of the social and academic worlds of students as they explore new activities and forms of learning. This potent combination has given college its flavor and its ability to draw upon alumni nostalgia even when graduates are far removed from their college years. At an urban university like CUNY, our students often have had a truncated version of the full paradigmatic college experience. We do not generally offer them dorms to socialize within, or sports contests to engage them. We will never have some of these things—and some might say that we are better off without the distractions of college sports—but we can develop other aspects of college life that can deepen student engagement, increase its range, and help make the student experience more enjoyable. Obtaining a Ph.D. can be so demanding that we have to pay special attention to mitigating its stress and allowing for a full flowering of students’ abilities.

We aim to do two things to improve the quality of doctoral student life. First, we want to deploy our resources to minimize the bureaucratic frustrations and anxieties

students experience as they navigate their doctoral programs. Some of these frustrations have been mitigated by technology. The days when student registration was a prolonged and frustrating process, requiring standing in multiple lines, are over with the advent of on-line registration. We are now implementing on-line applications as well, which will reduce labor and stress for both applicants and faculty-student admissions committees. The Graduate Center is also intensively reviewing the ways its administrative bureaucracy interacts with its students to insure that students are not subject to unnecessary delays or difficulties in transacting business. We are now reviewing, for example, how entering international students can best receive financial aid checks in a timely manner; this has proven to be a thorny problem, as there are often delays in their receipts of Social Security or Tax Identification Numbers, but we have also identified ways in which the overall process can be handled more efficiently.

On a deeper level, however, we have not yet been able to relieve student anxiety caused by lack of health insurance. To be without health insurance in the U.S. is to be highly vulnerable. Our students are mainly young and healthy, but they should not have to count upon good luck to forestall catastrophic financial problems arising from accidents or illnesses. They also should not have to forgo regular medical care to save money, risking turning small problems into big ones. This issue came up over and over again in the responses of members of the Graduate Center community to the request for comments on the CUNY Master Plan. It will be complex, expensive, and difficult to find ways to provide students with affordable health insurance, but some creative ideas have been floated and need to be fully explored. CUNY's commitment to providing health insurance for Science Fellows may also spur planning that could help other students down the road. There is no greater contribution that could be made to the quality of doctoral student life than allaying students' fears about the costs—medical, emotional, and financial—of injuries or illnesses.

The Graduate Center could also significantly improve students' lives by offering housing. Not all students would need housing, as many already have homes in New York City or its environs. We draw from a national and international recruitment pool, however, and those coming from afar need a place to land while they scope out the New York City housing market. A safe, clean, attractive and affordable place for their first year would give them the base they need to establish themselves in the city. This is an expensive undertaking, but it could be a breakthrough for the Graduate Center. It would greatly ease the transition of students who have crossed the greatest barriers to enter CUNY's doctoral programs.

### **Curricular and pedagogic innovation**

The Graduate Center has probably changed its programs and curricular offerings more in the past five years than it did in the twenty years before that. Most importantly, it has branched into new fields, or at least, fields new to it, including, particularly, those in the clinical or health-related fields. It is also engaged, with the colleges and CUNY central, in a thorough-going restructuring of students' pedagogic and academic

experiences within four lab sciences. Every part of the students' experiences is being rethought, from their recruitment to their placement in labs and the assignment of mentors to them. These changes, in turn, form part of a larger restructuring through the creation of a new joint degree system. We anticipate that these changes will be the harbingers of broader changes within CUNY as selected campuses receive the right to grant doctoral degrees. While we see advantages in these changes—including a rightful recognition of the colleges—we also want to maintain a cautious watchfulness to insure that the restructuring of programs and the development of new ones does not undermine our traditional strengths, including well-regarded programs in the humanities and social sciences. There is much reason for the humanities, in particular, to be strong suits for the Graduate Center, including the enormous draw of the cultural institutions offered in the city. There is also the realistic recognition that CUNY's less than stellar salaries go further in the humanities than in some other fields, such as economics, where opportunities outside academia are more abundant. The social sciences also have major roles to play, with New York City serving as an urban laboratory par excellence. In addition to the scholarly contributions of the Graduate Center's humanities and social sciences programs, they offer many avenues for connecting CUNY with the intellectual life of the city, as with the Graduate Center's planned multi-year Great Issues Forum, which has been developed with support from private donors and CUNY Central.

In a spirit of careful innovation, the Graduate Center is moving to establish a number of freestanding interdisciplinary MA programs. One has already been approved, the MA Program in Middle Eastern Studies, which will admit its first class in the Fall semester of 2008. Others are being proposed and will be considered by the relevant review bodies. The Graduate Center does not want to start new master's programs in fields where they would compete with the campuses. It sees its natural niche as being in interdisciplinary programs that do not have counterparts in the CUNY colleges. These programs can, it is hoped, draw new students to the Graduate Center and fill important academic needs; we also anticipate that these programs, being more flexible and nimbler than the doctoral programs, and not as geared to preparing students for entry into existing academic frameworks, will serve as incubators of new pedagogic methods. The major constraint we face in establishing such programs is a shortage of space in which to house them.

The doctoral programs themselves can undertake pedagogical reforms by undertaking thoughtful review of course offerings and exam requirements to insure that students can efficiently progress toward their degrees. We do not want curricula and requirements that are maintained through inertia; we want well-considered programs that foster learning while allowing efficient movement toward the degree. The Graduate Center began this review process last year by asking each doctoral program to prepare a timeline so they could assess the typical path through the program and remove any bottlenecks that were identified. We are also beginning an analysis of a sample of "long-stayers" (students moving slowly toward their degrees) in selected programs to identify reasons for their delayed progress and consider ways to alleviate the problems that are found. These are critical steps in helping students move quickly to the establishment of

their careers. They are also representative of those that need to be taken to insure accountability and efficiency in the provision of doctoral education.

## **Conclusions**

The Graduate Center has benefited from the progress that CUNY has achieved over its past two Master Plans. We believe that we have made substantial gains in faculty and student recruitment and in the academic quality of our programs. In academia no one ever stands still, however, and we must move forward in order to hold onto our gains and to improve our academic quality. Most importantly, we foresee the need to reconstitute our faculty in response to a potential wave of retirements over the next five to ten years. This will require a substantial infusion of resources so that we can offer competitive salaries and recruit a first-rate and diverse group of faculty members.

We have also emphasized some vital steps that we hope CUNY can undertake sooner rather than later in striving to attain parity with other major public universities. These include, most importantly, the reduction of the workloads of college faculty members and of Graduate Teaching Fellows. These changes are critical in allowing the Graduate Center to recruit the most talented and productive faculty and students and to foster their research once here. We also see affordable student health insurance as being in the category of a fundamental need. It is a measure of CUNY's recent successes that we can contemplate—much less realistically hope to see implemented—such ambitious and costly steps, but we think CUNY should consider them top priorities.

In terms of pedagogy and curriculum, the challenge in academia is to maintain the strength of the old while embracing the new. We are striving for this balance, bolstering our doctoral programs in the humanities and social sciences while also restructuring four sciences and establishing new doctoral programs in health-related fields and new interdisciplinary MA programs.

We aim to further develop our core strategy over the past three years, a strategy built on the idea that we must attract the best possible faculty members and recruit the most talented students, and put them into a stimulating environment that fosters the highest-level research and innovation. This strategy depends in turn on CUNY's continued development as an organizationally complex but also extraordinarily dynamic and increasingly integrated institution.