Activity Report for 2018-19 from the

Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Humanities

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The Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Humanities (CSGSH) is charged with advocating for and representing graduate students in the humanities at all levels of the graduate experience. Our work is to consider issues affecting both Master’s and Doctoral students and workers by pursuing and developing projects that directly support and address students’ needs while they pursue their education, gain work experience, seek employment, and make a transition to a wide range of work places, not just academic spaces. To this end, CSGSH’s ongoing tasks include: organizing convention sessions, hosting the Grad Student Lounge at the annual MLA Convention, maintaining an online presence to inform and connect with membership via the CSGSH blog on HCommons and @MLAgrads on Twitter, engaging with membership to remain well-informed of current events and issues, and evaluating and responding, when necessary, to policies and current events that directly impact membership.

Committee Activity, 2018-2019

2019 MLA Convention

At the 2019 MLA convention in Chicago, the CSGSH convened three sessions:

“The Embodied Graduate Student in Relation” (chaired by Barbra Chin), “Reading the Fine Print:
Understanding Academic Freedom” (chaired by Meredith Farmer and Andres Rabinovich),
and “Storying Statements: Writing Research, Teaching, and Diversity Statements” (chaired by
Kristina Reardon). All three sessions were well attended and well received by graduate
students and non-graduate students alike. In particular, the “Storying Statements” panel,
scheduled for the final morning of the convention, was filled to capacity with a range of
attendees from graduate students to faculty members currently on or preparing for the
academic market. All sessions were also live tweeted from @MLAgrads, increasing visibility
and participation. The CSGSH received positive feedback from attendees of all three sessions
that expressed appreciation for and/or commented on the usefulness and timeliness of the
topics.

The CSGSH also coordinated and hosted a graduate student lounge at the convention.
As in previous years, the Committee sought to make the lounge a place of relaxation,
socialization, and decompression. Accordingly, the CSGSH worked with June Di Marzo to
stock the lounge with stress-relief balls in the shape of Zebras, light refreshments, coffee,
while supplies lasted, and comfortable seating. CSGSH also provided attendees an opportunity
to win door prizes, including gift cards for coffee or refreshments. CSGSH committee
members worked with graduate student volunteers to staff the lounge and ensure that it was a
welcoming and useful space, providing information and conversation as appropriate. Due to
the isolated lounge location and the accessibility of outlets throughout the convention hotels,
attendance at the lounge was lower than previous years. However, those who did attend would
return multiple times. CSGSH members were also able to make meaningful connections with
graduate students, particularly first-time attendees, in the lounge.

Online Presence
During the 2018-2019 year, the CSGSH maintained its online presence via *MLAGrads* on H Commons as well as via @MLAgrads on Twitter. Although the CSGSH is ever in conversation about how to best use the H Commons blog, in practice, *MLAGrads* was most productive around the MLA convention. Leading up to the 2019 convention, *MLAGrads* featured informational posts regarding all aspects of the convention, from navigating your first MLA to finding sessions of interest and locating cheap eats and attractions near the convention. The blog also highlighted CSGSH sponsored panels. Following the convention, *MLAGrads* featured posts that reflected on the convention, including a guest post by one of the MLA’s graduate student volunteers, and that provided follow up to our panel on job application materials.

On Twitter, CSGSH has maintained a more consistent online presence during the 2018-2019 year. With committee members Andres Rabinovich and Gerard Holmes at the helm, @MLAgrads was able to not only maintain a digital presence at the convention, but also to interact with graduate students and graduate student groups, to highlight graduate student voices and their work at the convention and beyond, to promote events and conversations of interest, and to participate in important conversations impacting graduate students. To date, @MLAgrads has 1,003 followers.

**Other Projects and Documents**

CSGSH reviewed and created several documents during the 2018-2019 year. These documents included internal documents such as “Tips for Twitter Use,” intended to help the committee utilize Twitter as a resource to its fullest extent, and “Best Practices for Issue Updates,” a revised document designed to streamline annual campus reports made during
the initial fall CSGSH meeting and to help focus them on issues facing graduate programs rather than insulated campus updates. The committee is also in the process of revising “Best Practices for Supporting Graduate Students/Junior Scholars in Academic Organizations.”

The CSGSH also prepared a letter addressed to the MLA Executive Council responding to a request for comment on the petition calling for Professor Judith Butler’s resignation as President-Elect of the MLA. Commenting on the situation, the CSGSH letter focused on issues and concerns of power dynamics in graduate school at large and urged the MLA Executive Committee to consider these concerns in their decision-making process.

Upcoming Projects and Plans, 2019-2020

Following the success of the job application session at the 2019 MLA convention, CSGSH member Kristina Reardon worked with MLA’s Anna Chang and Michelle Lanchart to provide two webinars: “Writing Cover Letters for the Academic Job Market” on 28 August 2019 and “Writing Your Diversity Statement” on 19 September 2019. Webinars featured Elizabeth Lenaghan from Northwestern University and Julia Istomina from Yale University, respectively. At least 50 participants had registered prior to the webinars.

For the 2020 MLA Convention in Seattle, the committee has again organized three sessions: “Empowering Graduate Student Writers: Theories and Strategies for Writers and Their Advisers” (chaired by Kristina Reardon), “Writing Projects in Graduate School: Writing with and Through Anxiety” (chaired by Kayla Forrest and Kristina Reardon), and “Graduate Student Mentoring” (chaired by Meredith Farmer and Andres Rabinovich). All three panels aim to address important topics for graduate students during their graduate school experiences. The CSGSH also plans to once again coordinate a graduate student lounge with prospective...
plans for additional programming during the convention. Details forthcoming. CSGSH also continues to discuss ways to increase visibility of graduate students and their contribution to MLA during the convention and beyond. Discussions for 2021 MLA convention in Toronto will begin during the first scheduled fall meeting on 27 September 2019. The CSGSH plans to hold one or two video conference meetings during both the fall and spring semesters, with an in-person meeting scheduled during the convention on 11 January 2020.

CSGSH continues to develop additional projects, including a digital Q&A for prospective graduate students, and to maintain focus on important ongoing topics affecting graduate students, including the continued discussions of graduate students and power dynamics, and concerns regarding the public humanities and diverse career track.