

10-20-2014

Don Bialostosky, moderator

John Stevenson, UC Boulder, Graduate Dean

Dennis Looney, French & Italian, now dir of programs for MLA

Looney:

MLA transforming from a “benefits-based” to a “value-based” organization

Report in works for 2 years, released Feb 2014

- doctoral ed good for society, students (both intellectual & professional growth), research community
- crisis: crash of job market post-2008, student debt crisis, “casualization” of acad work force, and time to degree (9 years in languages), public questioning of what we do
- opportunities: new forms of collaboration and communication, digital scholarship, concern with learning outcomes & accountability

Framing principles:

- excellence
- accessibility (not just for elite)
- broadened career paths
- focus on grad students needs (flipping the class & focusing on what students need)

Changes:

- form & pacing of course work
- non-course based activities
- modes of evaluation
- comps & prospectus

Engage more deeply with IT

- more jobs for languages include reqt for digital humanities training

Reimagine the diss

- depts. should advocate validity of alternatives to proto-print book diss for hiring and promotion

Time to degree

- make 5 years the norm!

Strengthen teacher preparation

- teaching opps should be accompanied by course work, practical experience, mentoring

Expand prof opportunities

- need a digital lab for work in collaborative groups!
- depts. should build partnerships with other units

Use the whole university community

- programs should look beyond dept boundaries and seek out other professionals in this university and others (CMU, Duquesne, etc) for role models and mentoring

DGS needs to advocate for all this

Depts should validate diverse career outcomes and administration should validate the depts.

Why this can/should happen:

- job market still off compared to pre-2008 and reforms are underway

Stevenson (on responses to report):

- one reaction: finally!
- but also considerable dismay, esp from contingent work force – doesn't address present employment crisis (and offered no immediate help)
- specific mandate of commission – what should doctoral programs of the future look like – got lost in debate
- report as belated and premature
- a bad story has ensnared us; used to be a narrative of quest, aligned with American dream; now we are in a Kafka narrative, of decline & fall; we are misguided like ancien regime in need of sweeping away
- for some the report read as a defeatist manifesto, of adjustment to corporatism, making readers simply longing for the old territory
- there are voices against reducing TTD, reducing access, upholding traditional literary-historical content areas
- the recommendation not to reduce size of PhD programs has been a head-scratcher for most (probably due to some political backstory)

Belated:

- shrinking of job market and interest in alternative careers was already there in late 1970s, but business went on as usual – so the report is very tardy

Premature:

- because it predicts a stream of alternative careers outside academy;
- we haven't studied all the people who got non-academic jobs during that time, all the "dropouts" – did they get anything out of their aborted education? What can our graduates and dropouts tell us and our students – who are they and how did their professional lives turn out?

He believes we should:

- we may not need to tear down our house & do wholesale change of curriculum, but yes, reduce TTD and celebrate diverse career paths
- open the back door and let in our grads and dropouts to come educate us

Discussion

MLA subconference has manifesto that is polemical and practical

- published?

<http://mlasubconference.org>

Stevenson: Scientists also face pressures to make their research immediately applicable and marketable; so the impact on research is across disciplines

Looney: Huge drop in enrollment in higher ed, across undergrad and grad levels, across the country, which is a new phenomenon, with concomitant drop in majors

Batholome: How do we provide real rewards for teaching, esp now that the research bubble is bursting – we have no credibility if we lament the consequences of actions that have been to our benefit, i.e. the reduction of teaching loads for core faculty to make research possible, which then necessitated a huge expansion of grad student and adjunct teaching

Steve Carr: Have there been useful articulations of what the added value of a humanities PhD, that make it worth the investment? How do we articulate the non-disciplinary value of these programs? Have you heard specific recs for restructuring grad programs?

Stevenson: Instrumentalists already dismiss us, so even if we put our arguments into their terms they will dismiss them –

Shearer: How do we reduce TTD and not reduce disciplinary content?

Looney: MLA report in 1990s recommended reducing “coverage” in undergrad curriculum and it has had a major impact, and the best programs have done that; something like that needs to be done at the grad level

Stevenson: 50% completion rate in PhD programs may be about right; initial admission can’t predict who is going to be good at original research

Bickford: TTD issue: long TTD and postdoc are incentivized in the job market, because these are the people who have hung around the longest and made our publications; he doesn’t see how a 5-year PhD can compete in this environment

Looney: Summer funding is crucial in reducing TTD

John: Mellon fellowship money made no difference in outcome; many students took the money and just used the money to live off of with no intention of finishing; control group without the funding had better finishing rates.

[Book citation: ??]

Jean Carr: Access issue: taking better prepared students who will finish faster reduces access. Faculty don't have knowledge of these alternative careers and institutions, so how can they train for them?