May 12, 2020

To our MA students,

First of all, we hope this finds you well. We look forward to the day when we can all gather in person again.

This has been a trying semester, presenting extraordinary challenges to our entire community. In recent weeks, through an anonymous student survey and two open meetings, we as a department have sought to learn how the crisis is affecting you, our MA students, and how we might respond. Following the open meeting for all MA students on April 30, the MA Faculty Committee met last week to discuss what we had learned. Though we regret that we cannot resolve every issue that was raised, many of which extend beyond the budgetary and administrative scope of the department, we want to assure you that the MA committee discussed each and every issue raised in this meeting. Below we include a sense of these conversations and the plans resulting from them, grouped by subject:

1. **What will the coming academic year look like?**

   Though this remains up in the air, we do know that we will be offering graduate classes in the fall. Whether these are in-person, online, or some combination of both, MA students will be able to continue making progress towards their degrees this fall.

   (Please also see my email of May 8 about the current planning of a robust, 12-week Summer 2021 semester, which could - for those of you so inclined - accelerate your progress.)

2. **Will there be partial refunds for Spring 2020, and tuition-free extensions for students whose progress has been delayed?**

   We regret that refunds are not possible. For students still in coursework, since the university will be mounting courses, there will also be no tuition-free extensions.

   **However, any students who had been completing theses in Spring 2020 should know that you have the option, at no cost, of taking the summer to complete your work and then filing for a September graduation.**

   Students not yet writing theses should know that, when the time comes to do so, you can extend your student status by paying not full tuition, but rather the far more modest “matriculation and maintenance” (MM) fees. Though GSAS is not in a position to waive these fees, if your progress has been delayed due to COVID-19, and down the road you are therefore paying MM longer than you would have, the department will consider applications to help defray these costs.
3. Will faculty be lenient on deadlines? Do they recognize that the quality of my [coursework/thesis] is not what would have been expected before the crisis? Will the library understand that I cannot return my books in person?

For graduating students, GSAS deadlines remain in place - meaning that you need to defend your thesis, and submit all associated paperwork, by May 19. However, as stated above, if this timeline is a problem, you do have the option of not submitting until the end of this summer, for a September graduation, at no cost - neither tuition nor MM.

For coursework, independent studies, and CA responsibilities, you should be in touch with the relevant faculty member directly to ask about flexibility or extensions regarding deadlines.

For both theses and coursework, it is often going to be the case that the work you have been able to complete will differ from what you’d planned, back when you could count on archives, libraries, and a generally less stressful and limited world. Faculty understand this and, if necessary, you are urged to be in touch with them to explain your situation. If for any reason you have trouble reaching them - since faculty, too, are facing extraordinary challenges - contact one of us and we can try to help put you in touch.

(Know that an announcement was made about these issues to all history professors at the departmental faculty meeting of May 7.)

Finally, with regard to library policies, we were fortunate that the librarian responsible for our department, Andrew Lee, attended the town hall. He assured us that the library understands that we are all scattered, making it difficult to return materials. He indicated that fines are being adjusted, even suspended, accordingly. But we would add that, since these systems are automated, you should monitor your accounts, getting in touch with Andrew directly if you require assistance. From Andrew Lee:

“I wanted to let ... you know about a service the library has implemented for students graduating in May.... A list of graduating students was cross checked against those with books checked out and an email with a UPS form for mailing back books (at our expense) was sent yesterday to those students who meet the two categories.... I wanted to clarify some questions arising from what we were told, especially that the deadline was the 17th in the middle of finals and did it apply to students abroad as well. I got the replies to my questions this morning.

• The deadline is specifically for mass generation of labels by UPS. After that date, students can contact lib-deliveryservices@nyu.edu for assistance. And it does include students overseas.

• Since due dates have been extended, no one should accrue overdue fines if the books take some time to be returned.”
4. What financial resources are available? Emergency funding; conference funding; income during unpaid internships; a semester of PhD-level support?

Though we do not have the resources to provide fellowship stipends, the following funds are available to our MA students:

**Emergency funds:** The department’s faculty has raised a considerable amount of money to help defray our graduate students’ most urgent needs. We on this committee are pleased that ¼ of the initial requests for these funds came from MA students, and that all or some of every single request from this initial funding cycle will be met. Keep an eye out for future calls for applications to draw upon these funds.

**Conference funding:** Due to frozen funds and travel restrictions, we are currently unable to access conference funding. However, we know that some conferences are moving online, and therefore finding a way to charge fees. In principle, for students who have not already claimed their funds, we want - and expect - to help defray these costs through the usual processes. In practice, though, we are laboring under the challenge of frozen funds as the university attempts to meet its financial obligations. If and when you are required to make payment for a conference, please be in touch with David Mendoza, who can find out the latest status of these funds.

**Professional development:** Beginning this year, the department made conference funding available to all MA students - as a right, not a competition. However, we know that for many students conferences are not as relevant as are other forms of professional development. Moving forward, we are therefore redefining conference funding as “Professional Development Funding,” making it available to students for a wider array of opportunities.

★ For more on conference and professional development fund details: https://wp.nyu.edu/nyuhistoryma/history-department-funding/

**Income during unpaid internships:** This is a longer-term issue, and one that we are thinking about. It is already the case that the Wasserman Center makes grants available to students in unpaid internships. In the meantime, this is a good example of the way that the more capacious category of “Professional Development Funds” can help defray some expenses during internships that a strictly “conference” budget could not.

**Emergency summer positions, in light of lost internships:** Ellen Noonan has been working hard on this. Some funds are available. Students who had been enrolled in the internship course, and are facing vanished paid positions, should check in with Ellen for updates and details.

**Research positions:** At the faculty meeting of May 7, the MA DGS urged all faculty to consider extending research positions to MA students in economic distress. We know of at
least one position that has since been advertised as a result. At the moment, though, due to frozen funds, no students - BA, MA, PhD - are being hired. If and when those funds become available, MA students will be eligible to apply to work as faculty research assistants. Interested students are encouraged to let Chelsea know of their availability and interest.

5. In light of lost internships, the collapsed job market, and a certain rise in applications to doctoral programs, what can the department do to support MA students’ careers?

These are, we know, terrifying times. Everyone will be impacted by this new economy, and we truly regret the challenges that our students will soon face. We want to do everything we can to best position you as you leave NYU to pursue your careers. Though surely no match for the scale of the challenges ahead, here are some ideas the MA committee are now working on - but please let us know if you have additional ideas or desires.

1. Ph.D. Placement Program. Not all of our MA students want to pursue doctoral degrees, but those who plan to do so will benefit, beginning this fall, from a new series of workshops designed to help you produce the best possible graduate applications. Modeled on the department’s (Academic) Job Placement Program for advanced doctoral students, these sessions will include advice and workshopping on every aspect of the application process - from the identification of targeted programs, to the selection of letter writers, to the writing and revising of the personal statement.

2. Professional Development Workshop. Pending student interest, the MA committee is working a roundtable this summer advising students how they can best prepare themselves, even while in lockdown, in order to eventually secure internships and employment. Further information TBA.

3. Research Skills Workshop. Pending student interest, the MA committee is working on a roundtable to help students with the practical aspect of primary-source based research. This workshop will likely emphasize faculty experiences identifying and using the sorts of electronic sources that we are all now increasingly dependent upon.

4. Online Conference Workshop. On May 21, Ellen Noonan will run a workshop on online poster sessions, since online conferences seem the most likely venue for sharing and learning about new work until the current crisis is behind us. (And even then, surely, will persist to become a new part of our professional lives.)

5. Professional networking event. The History Department has alumni working in every conceivable profession, many of whom remain in New York City. Following the model of the Institute for French Studies, the MA committee plans to run an event this fall that will showcase some of these careers, while also providing a forum through which students can meet these well-placed alumni.
6. Wasserman Career Center seminars. Have you visited NYU’s career center? They run an enormous number of programs designed to help NYU students navigate the transition to the world beyond the university. Though in the past we have circulated announcements of these sessions, we are now thinking of ways that we can better put interested MA students into contact with Wasserman.

7. Internship class. Under Ellen Noonan’s direction, the APH program runs a robust internship class every spring. The MA committee is discussing the managed expansion of this course to include, on a case-by-case basis, qualified participants from the MA in History.

6. Will the faculty endorse the graduate students’ demand to extend universal grades of A this spring semester?

The department will not formally endorse this demand. Faculty are reluctant to interfere with our colleagues’ courses and assessments, whether on the undergraduate or graduate levels. But however stressful these times are, the MA committee genuinely does not believe that MA students should feel stressed about their grades. Faculty roundly report that they have been impressed by the work that so many of you have been doing under these adverse circumstances. And, in light of the public health crisis, faculty have been asked by both the DGS and the university to bear in mind the extraordinary nature of these times when making all assessments. We understand the constraints you are working under - we face them, too.

See also the answer to Question #3 above.

7. Future meetings?

We learned a lot about your concerns and needs from these forums, and want to hear from you again. We will plan another open forum in the first half of this summer so that we can identify your concerns - whether lingering or new - that we might be able to help address.

Our goal has always been to provide you with the best possible MA program, and that goal remains in place even amidst this crisis. We will follow up on these items, with an eye towards updating you on our progress at our upcoming (early) summer meeting. In the meantime, rather than waiting for that meeting, don’t ever hesitate to be in touch with one of us.

With best wishes,

Guy Ortolano, Ellen Noonan & Chelsea Rhodes, on behalf of the 2019-2020 MA Faculty Committee: Daniel Juette, Tatiana Linkhoeva, Jeffrey Sammons, & Becky Goetz