

On Graduate Study and Standards in Musicology

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THE STIMULATING RECENT REAPPRAISALS OF THE NATURE AND AIMS OF musicology in America (by Harrison, Hood, Palisca, Kerman, Lowinsky, Lippman, etc.) have been concerned only secondarily with problems of graduate study and standards. These problems deserve concentrated attention at this time for the urgent reason that graduate schools will soon be swamped by the multitude of maturing war babies. We can dispense with the statistics. The projections are indisputable. The word "swamped" is not idly used—many institutions are already at high tide. Because of its relative youth, musicology may very well be harder hit than other humanistic disciplines. The number of universities offering the Ph.D. in Musicology has risen from one to thirty-five in the past thirty-four years; the number should reach eighty by 1975. Although musicology in this country "may be said to be flourishing" (*Report of the Commission on the Humanities*, A.C.L.S. 1964, p. 166), it will be no simple matter to double its training capacities within a decade. To do so without sacrificing standards as they *now* exist will be doubly difficult.

In recognition of these problems and pressures the American Musicological Society has established an Advisory Committee on Graduate Standards. The members of the committee (Sylvia Kenney, Scott Goldthwaite, Albert Seay, Barry Brook, Chairman) will welcome discussion and comment on questions within its province both in private and in print. *Current Musicology* is the ideal forum for such discussion. Not only is it the journal of the graduate students themselves, but it regularly performs the valuable function of documenting and reviewing current graduate practice, curricula, and theses, both here and abroad. Furthermore, in her provocative editorial in the last issue of *CM*, Miss Croy has already flung a gauntlet in the face of the musicological establishment. More on this in a moment.

Graduate study in the humanities in this country has recently been the object of potent criticism. The most vehement attack was made by William Arrowsmith, Chairman of the Classics Department of the University of Texas. The humanists themselves, he holds, have betrayed the humanities by succumbing to "a long servile imitation of the sciences." Much of their teaching is "pathetically wanting—timid, unimaginative, debased, inefficient, futile." Humanists, he believes, ought to be making subjective and critical judgments about the arts, actions, and problems of men ("The Shame of the Graduate Schools: A Plea for a New American Scholar," *Harper's Magazine*, March 1966).

Quoting Arrowsmith, George Kubler, and others, Miss Croy brilliantly marshals their barbs and directs them at musicology today: its tendency to

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ward curricular uniformity and toward standardization of methods in reporting research; its stress on biography, style, and source research at the expense of "truth values of music"; its conservatism with respect to new techniques that might encourage "creative and critical approaches to music." These re-proofs warrant thorough exploration and debate and invite bold alternatives. Perhaps the very mushrooming of graduate education will, along with its dangers, provide the opportunity for imaginative new approaches in music.

The purpose of this paper is not to enter the lists on either side of the philosophical battle but rather to present for general consideration some practical issues on standards for graduate study. Admittedly, these "practical issues" can hardly be isolated from "basic viewpoints," but in light of the impending inundation of graduate facilities, musicologists may be forced to come to grips with the one while still debating the other.

It should first be pointed out that concern over graduate standards is widespread. Many disciplines are far ahead of ours in studying the question. The American Musicological Society, as an association of individual scholars, has until recently largely ignored the need to play a collective and well-thought-out role vis-a-vis music departments and university administrations in advising them on the establishment of graduate programs and on the professional training of young scholars. Obviously, no learned society in the humanities can impose standards (as can, say, medical and some other scientific associations). On the other hand, it is clear from what has been happening in disciplines such as anthropology and chemistry that the very establishment of standards by a responsible outside body can of itself help in raising them. Thus, a learned society, by merely *stating* its views, can provide guidance to institutions establishing new graduate programs; it can suggest ways to broaden and strengthen existing curricula; it can specify library requirements peculiar to an individual discipline and thus assist department chairmen in their efforts to pry funds from reluctant administrations. The effectiveness of an outside stimulus of this kind has been seen, for example, in a small eastern college where a single line in a Middle States evaluation report resulted in the rectifying of some major library deficiencies that years of faculty entreaty could not accomplish; and in a major university an entire doctoral program in the sciences was revamped to meet general specifications established by a professional society.

At its December 1964 meetings the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States devoted a plenary session to the subject of accrediting graduate programs. The definitions of graduate study and graduate faculty that emerged from the discussion are worth quoting in full:

Graduate study suitable for meeting the requirements of an advanced degree involves more than the mere accumulation of credits. It involves a degree of time of some duration during which a student's primary, if not exclusive, interest is his advanced study. It involves intensive application to his studies, fruitful contacts with his fellow-students of similar interests, personal relations with faculty members beyond those of classroom lectures, many hours in the library, not alone for required reading but also to follow his own interests into fields outside his immediate specialty, attendance in seminars, colloquia, lectures and symposia, both those directly related to his course work and research interests, and others more remote. It is of utmost importance that graduate education shall take place under

conditions that will thus stretch a student's imagination, broaden his outlook beyond the normal confines of his own specialty, provide rich opportunities for reading, discussions, investigation, and criticism, with ready access to libraries, laboratories, and instruments. Hence the residence requirement at the center where these opportunities exist.

These considerations for the graduate students are even more significant in their application to the graduate faculty. A professor who offers graduate instruction must not only keep in touch with the advance of knowledge in his field, but contribute toward it through his own research. Rewarding research requires time for reflection and reading, opportunities for the exchange of ideas with colleagues, blocks of time for scholarly work uninterrupted by routine chores even of academic significance. The richest resource of a university is the scholarship and learning of its faculty, and these must be protected from erosion by activities of lesser significance, however worthwhile in themselves. A faculty subjected to a heavy load would soon show the deleterious and debilitating effects of such unwise use of its limited time and energy—time and energy limited by preparation of *lectures* and *seminars*, by conferences with *graduate students*, by *constant reading* in fields of pertinent scholarship, and by visible work towards productive scholarship and research.

Returning to the "practical issues" referred to above, here are a fistful, briefly outlined, that may profit from public airing:

General. Can the dimensions of the Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees in musicology be defined? What should these degrees prepare the student to do? How much time should it take to earn them? How valuable is it for those going on to the Ph.D. to first earn an M.A.? Should there not be an objective evaluation of faculty competence before graduate degree programs are instituted?

Curriculum. What kind of balance between formal course work and independent investigation is reasonable? How comprehensive should professional preparation be? For example, are "two solid semesters of study in notation" an indispensable part of every musicologist's equipment? Should such courses as advanced orchestration and counterpoint be credited to musicological degrees? If so, how many? How about courses normally credited to the Master of Science degree in Music Education? How about advanced study in other departments? inter-disciplinary degrees?

Dissertation. Should a full-fledged master's thesis be a requirement for the master's degree? Are the substitutes available in some schools defensible (e.g., the "extra course," or the "thesis outline, bibliography, and single chapter")? Can standards be established for doctoral dissertations? How many years should be allotted for their completion?

Language requirements. Present practice varies from one to four languages and from the most stringent controls to the almost non-existent. Some universities require rigorous nationally-standardized qualifying examinations; others are satisfied with evidence of ability to translate a relatively simple paragraph with dictionary at hand. Can or should recommended norms in this field be established at all? In a thoughtful memorandum prepared for faculty consideration at New York University, Isidore Chein, Professor of Psychology, forcefully challenged the validity of blanket language requirements. He regards them as "arbitrary, unjust, and unduly restrictive and often self-defeating with respect to their proper function." In their place he

would propose:

a wide variety of alternatives to be specified by the various schools and departments from the entire gamut of subject matters (including various languages, of course) represented in the domain of graduate education. . . . Granted that the mastery of one or more languages may be a very great asset, there may be other subjects beyond the scope of a given area of study, that are even less dispensable. . . . If social psychologists, to take one example, must devote time to the study of foreign languages, few if any of them will be able to devote time to the study of physiology, anthropology, philosophy, mathematics, etc. Yet, the field as a whole would be richer, if there were some social psychologists skilled in foreign languages, others skilled in physiology, others in anthropology, others in philosophy, others in mathematics, and others in various combinations of these.

These arguments do not, at first blush, seem to apply to a discipline so rooted in foreign language literature as musicology, but they should not be lightly dismissed in view of rapidly changing research interests and the vast new literature in English.

Library facilities. A definition, if it were possible to make one, of the kind and size of library needed for new M.A. and Ph.D. programs in musicology may be invaluable in inhibiting premature births. For established institutions, an indication of the funds necessary to keep a library up-to-date might work wonders when budgets are debated.

Miscellaneous. Should there be an intermediate degree in musicology, say, Doctor of Musicology, for undergraduate teachers not planning to pursue a career in research? (See Everett Walters, "The Immutable Ph.D.," *Saturday Review*, January 15, 1966.)

What can be done about the increasing numbers of ABD's ("All But the Dissertation") and the avoidance of stretch-out cases in the future? (See Frederick Ness, "The Case of the Lingering Degree," *idem.*) The institution by one university of steep yearly fees, levied after course work has been completed, is a "distorted remedy" at best.

What of the work loads of the IGA's ("Indentured Graduate Assistants")? In some instances, students are expected to perform so many routine chores and other duties that insufficient time is left for study and none for, say, music making. In one large institution, students have been advised to leave their instruments at home!

The problem of non-preparation of future college teachers is a most serious one and needs immediate attention. Possession of a doctoral degree in musicology counts for nothing with a class of 70 freshmen "appreciators." Although college teaching is the young musicologist's principal method of eating in this country, he is rarely given any guidance to prepare him for his *de facto* vocation. This sink-or-swim method of initiating the newly-minted scholar into his teaching career is wasteful at best and frequently disastrous. The frustration of his research ambitions—even if temporary while he learns his trade—makes matters worse. A sensible—preferably informal—training plan involving observation of old hands, followed by apprentice teaching, should be part of every graduate program.

It would be appropriate to conclude with a quotation from the recent report made by the Advisory Committee on Graduate Standards to the Executive Board of the A.M.S.:

We propose, after due study, exploration and consultation, to prepare a document that would formulate standards and ideals of excellence for graduate study in musicology; the document should be framed in terms specific enough to guide young departments with library, curriculum, language requirements, etc. and general enough to be applicable to the great variety of means and aspirations that exist on campuses across the country. Curricula, for example, are not built out of standards; they are compromises between the interests of whatever faculty happens to be present and the realities of budget and schedule. What is needed is a formulation of ideals to give direction and meaning to these expedient compromises as they are hammered out in individual departments. Such a document should incorporate a statement of the standards of musical scholarship—scholarship that draws its strength and its standards from a long tradition of university scholarship in many disciplines. Such standards can always use redefining; especially they need clear, forceful application to the many different kinds of things done in graduate programs today. This document should include a survey of existing graduate facilities, libraries, faculties, curricula, language, degree and dissertation requirements, etc. It should carry forward the work of Strunk (*State and Resources of Musicology in the United States*), Bukofzer (*The Place of Musicology in American Institutions of Higher Learning*) and Palisca (*American Scholarship in Western Music*) to include a systematic self-appraisal of our graduate teaching, its content and its goals.

There is urgent need at this time for full-scale debate of the issues, philosophical and practical, by faculty and students alike. Such debate is imperative, both for the preparation of a meaningful document on graduate standards, as well as for the realization of its essential objective: growth toward the highest excellence in professional preparation.