

**Report of the Provost's Committee on the Impact of the Masters Program in Humanities
(MAPH) and the Masters Program in Social Science (MAPSS)**

November 2011

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I. Preamble

In Autumn 2010, the Provost constituted a university-wide committee charged with the examination of the “quality of academic life” at the University of Chicago. Traditionally, the University of Chicago has been characterized by a deep commitment on the part of the faculty to excellence in research and to the centrality of intense and fruitful intellectual exchange. The vitality of this academic culture is central to faculty satisfaction and needs to be fostered even as the University evolves in response to developments in its environment. Early in the course of the inquiry conducted by the Quality of Academic Life Committee, an issue emerged forcefully as a factor affecting faculty experience: the impact of the expanded Masters Programs in the Divisions of Humanities (MAPH) and Social Sciences (MAPSS). In view of the importance and complexity of this local (Division-specific) matter, the Provost decided to charge a special committee with its investigation. That committee (hereafter: “Committee”) was chaired by David Wellbery (Germanic Studies, Comparative Literature, Committee on Social Thought). Its members were: Leora Auslander (History), Daniel Brudney (Philosophy), Philip Reny (Economics), Mario Santana (Romance Languages and Literatures), Josh Scodel (English, Comparative Literature), Michael Silverstein (Anthropology, Linguistics, Psychology), Dan Slater (Political Science), and Rebecca Zorach (Art History).

It is important to stress at the outset that the Committee's charge was **not** to evaluate the Masters Programs themselves (issues such as coherence of intellectual program, quality of instruction, placement, student satisfaction). Our task, rather, was to register the impact of these programs on the texture of faculty working lives. This report is informed by discussions with current and past program directors of MAPH and MAPSS. A broad-based survey was conducted on a departmental basis, with department chairs gathering opinions from their faculty. In some cases, individual faculty contacted the Committee. The Committee chair also had lengthy discussions with the Deans of Social Sciences and of the Humanities. Finally, a range of statistical material was gathered in order to lend context to the various experiential reports received.

II. Summary Finding

The MAPH/MAPSS programs, which have benefitted from histories of dedicated leadership, enjoy broad respect among the faculty. It is perfectly clear that both programs bring talented students (some able to do work on a par with Ph.D. students) to the University of Chicago and that the vitality of these programs is of crucial importance to the maintenance of a rich post-baccalaureate culture here. The Committee finds, however, that, in terms of both size and student quality, the MAPH/MAPSS programs have become a source of considerable, indeed unacceptable, strain for a significant subpopulation of the faculty in the Humanities and Social Science Divisions. It is recognized, of course, that, under the current funding model, the two MA programs are an important source of income for the Divisions and that the financing of Ph.D. programs, in particular, depends on income generated through MAPH/MAPSS. However, the level of strain is such as to suggest the necessity for alternative funding solutions that would allow for reduction in the size of the M.A. Programs.

III. Salient Features of MAPH/MAPSS from the point of view of this Report

- 1) MAPH/MAPSS are the largest of a network of MA programs in the two Divisions (i.e., Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Visual Arts, International Relations, Latin American Studies). Of these, the one-year MA program in the Center for International Relations (CIR) is the largest with an average annual enrollment of 49 students. Although it is a divisional program, its draw is heaviest on Political Science faculty.
- 2) In terms of their intellectual content, both MAPH and MAPSS provide an educational program that transcends individual disciplines.
- 3) Both MAPH and MAPSS have histories of excellent and dedicated leadership. The two programs are structured differently and have emerged via different historical paths.
- 4) MAPH/MAPSS are income-generating programs and as such are significant sources of revenue for each of the respective Divisions.

IV. Committee Findings bearing on Impact of MAPH/MAPSS on Quality of Academic Life

A. Contributions of MAPH/MAPSS to Quality of Academic Life:

- 1) There is broad consensus in both Divisions that the MAPH/MAPSS Programs are a vital component of the academic culture at the University of Chicago. Leadership in both Programs has been characterized by a deep commitment to their flourishing. From the faculty perspective, working with MAPH/MAPSS students can be a source of intellectual and pedagogical satisfaction and in general faculty support the presence at the University of Chicago of vigorous Masters programs devoted to academic excellence.
- 2) The MAPH/MAPSS programs have a number of more specific benefits as well: a) In certain subject areas, MAPH/MAPSS students provide a critical mass in classes/seminars which otherwise would be undersubscribed by graduate students. For some faculty, graduate teaching would be impossible without MAPH/MAPSS students. b) MAPH/MAPSS are a source of students for University of Chicago doctoral programs. Their presence here during their Masters year provides an opportunity to identify talent, to fill in lacunae in students' preparation, and to engage them in the kind of work being done in departments. Such recruitment advantages accrue especially in areas where departments are closely involved in the selection of applicants (e.g., Anthropology). c) Since some proportion of MAPH/MAPSS graduates goes on to doctoral programs at other universities, these programs are also a vehicle through which the University of Chicago affects the various disciplines at large and develops useful intellectual-professional networks. d) In the past, MAPH/MAPSS have also served as an important pathway for minority students into the academic world. e) Preceptor and related positions in MAPH/MAPSS provide employment opportunities, training, and qualifications for our late-stage doctoral students. f) Placement of MA's in non-academic jobs is especially well documented with regard to MAPSS, which is a natural feeder for government agencies and kindred organizations.

B. Sources of Strain Emergent from Expanded MAPH/MAPSS Programs

- 1) Whatever the particular advantages of MAPH/MAPSS, it is clear that growth in these programs has reached a point where strain -- in certain subject areas: acute strain -- is felt by many faculty members. The stress is not simply due to quantitative factors: the number of MA students taught in classes, advised on theses, met with during office hours, supported by letters of recommendation, and so forth. Qualitative issues are of equal concern.
- 2) While some faculty highlight the positive contribution of MAPH/MAPSS students in classes (both undergraduate-graduate and MA-doctoral classes), a consistent *leit motif* is the difficulty felt by faculty in reconciling the conflicting pressures of, on the one hand, the needs (background, explanation of concepts, etc.) of a subset of MA students and, on the other

- hand, the normal expectations as to level of discussion in a University of Chicago graduate class. In certain subject areas, this tension is aggravated by quantitative imbalance (e.g., courses with two Ph.D. students and fourteen MAPH/MAPSS students). Especially high MAPH/MAPSS enrollment can also lead to complicated selection procedures that are onerous and frustrating for all concerned. The experience is replicated in thesis advising, where faculty sometimes find themselves working in a line-by-line, paragraph-by-paragraph fashion, in which frustration outweighs pedagogical satisfaction.
- 3) A further source of faculty dissatisfaction with regard to MAPH/MAPSS is the disproportionate distribution of labor among departments and, within departments, subject areas. In addition, there are individual faculty members who often carry an inordinately large burden. MAPH/MAPSS students are apt to cluster in subject areas that require little linguistic or other special preparation and that are topically “familiar” and “modern.” The problem of inequitable distribution is widely acknowledged and deplored in both Divisions.
 - 4) The Committee found evidence of widespread dissatisfaction with aspects of the admission system in MAPH/MAPSS. In particular, the setting of required numbers of recommendations by Humanities departments and the MAPSS policy of screening virtually all applications rejected by departments in their admissions procedures is widely viewed as an academically questionable practice.
 - 5) Directors (past and present) of MAPH judge the current enrollments to have crossed the threshold of smooth manageability. There is faculty concern that, beyond a certain point (variously set between 75 and 100 by present and former MAPH directors and at 150-180 by the MAPSS director), it becomes difficult, even with expanded staffing and adequate budgeting, to create a sense of community within the cohort, to provide adequate advising, to handle emergent difficulties, and to provide the sort of individual guidance into the divisional world at large that these students require. Recall that these are nine-month programs; that they must be run while the next year’s cohort is being selected and recruited; that students often have only indefinite goals and must develop their individual academic/intellectual itineraries almost from scratch.
 - 6) Taken together, the factors enumerated here (B. 1-5) have begun to obscure the positive academic rationale of the programs. Although clear intellectual missions for MAPH/MAPSS were articulated by past and present directors, the Humanities and Social Science faculties have lost sight of these or have come to view the two programs’ rationale as primarily driven by financial considerations. Lack of transparency as to the concrete “payoff” and purpose of these programs – not merely for the divisions as a whole, but also, and perhaps more importantly, for the departments – contributes to growing disaffection. Because MAPH/MAPSS are built on the principle of full faculty participation (as opposed, say, to a separate instructional staff), their success requires commitment on the part of the professoriate. The Committee holds that this commitment has, for the reasons recorded above, suffered serious erosion

V. Recommendations

- A. **In view of the major finding that the MAPH/MAPSS programs have crossed the limit of acceptable strain on the faculty, the Committee unanimously recommends reduction of the size of these programs.** Such reduction should be made with a view toward maximizing the number of students qualified to do graduate-level work consonant with the academic culture of the University of Chicago. The Committee recognizes that decreasing the size of MAPH/MAPSS will, under current funding practices, leave a budget gap that may pose a serious threat to the financing of our Ph.D. programs. It is the unanimous view of the Committee that reduction in the size of Ph.D. programs is **not** an acceptable response to such a shortfall.

The charge of the Committee was to gauge the impact of the MAPH/MAPSS programs on the quality of academic life, not to solve funding issues that would follow from a contraction of MAPH/MAPSS tuition income. Nonetheless, a realistic recommendation of size reduction must accept the consequence that hard decisions will have to be made. To repeat: no one on the Committee and, we believe, no significant subset of faculty within the Division of Humanities and the Division of Social Sciences, believes that a corresponding reduction of Ph.D. students is an acceptable option. A majority of the Committee therefore recommends serious consideration of a small increase in the College population as an alternative funding source. We are cognizant of the fact that this recommendation entails a host of problems. The expansion phase of the College has itself generated strain on a faculty that has not seen corresponding growth in its numbers. It is therefore important to stress that the majority view is based on the premise that the purpose of any College expansion would be to secure the financial stability of the Humanities and Social Science Ph.D. programs. Before making the cuts in MAPH/MAPSS admissions necessary to achieve the goal of a reasonably sized, academically fully qualified student cohort, the Divisions would need to be assured that funding of their doctoral programs – their core graduate mission – is guaranteed.

- B. In addition to recommending reduction in the size of the MAPH/MAPSS programs, the Committee also recommends the following measures to address problems regarding impact on faculty life that have come into view in the course of our deliberations. In particular, we urge that the Divisions:
- a) find devices to alleviate inequities in the distribution of the work burden generated by MAPH/MAPSS;
 - b) eliminate fixed quotas of departmental recommendations in the MAPH admissions process and, in general, work more closely with departments on admissions;
 - c) begin consultations to explore ways of increasing the pool of qualified applicants;
 - d) create incentives for departments and/or individual faculty for contributions to MAPH/MAPSS;
 - e) permit and support measures (e.g., prerequisites or numerical thresholds) to secure the integrity of advanced (Ph.D.-level) seminars;
 - f) encourage MAPH/MAPSS to develop additional or alternative programmatic foci (e.g., “literary and cultural theory”) that will 1) attract qualified student sub-cohorts and 2) distribute students more equitably across departments;
 - g) effectively communicate to faculty the benefits that flow from the MAPH/MAPSS programs (including making annual reports available to chairs).

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