Dear Incoming Graduate Student Colleague

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Abstract

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Composed in the form of a letter, this chapter is a fictional exploration of the thoughts that tend to animate graduate advisors in German graduate programs internationally. Addressed to a fictional "incoming graduate student colleague," the letter expresses a composite of hopes, experiences, caveats, and uncertainties that the author, a seven-year Director of Graduate Studies for a department with MA and PhD programs, has gathered, and which he often wishes he could share with his own incoming and continuing graduate students, alongside other preparatory materials, like the ubiquitous and complicated genre of the "Graduate Handbook." The letter does not reflect the author's own department or university setting, so much as a composite sketch of graduate education as a holistic intergenerational experience that blends his own settings of graduate training with those in which he currently works.

Keywords

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Early career researchers
Researcher identity

Welcome to the ancient and venerable fellowship of scholars—of which you are now a part!

You will have received by now a PDF copy of our Graduate Handbook; the preliminary schedule for your Fall orientation; your contract, insurance, and funding package; some not-quite-reassuring tips on local housing and transportation; and a number of other preparatory materials. This letter attempts to fill you in on a number of things you couldn't possibly know, even if you read those materials carefully.

You are, of course, joining a new community of scholars and scholar-teachers. Because you applied to this program, you are likely to have been a "researcher," in some hungry and meaningful way, long before getting here—probably since childhood. Perhaps you have some role-models already in matters of research and teaching, and you wonder whether you might ever have as much of a meaningful impact on anyone as they've had on you. If no one has yet called you a *scholar* or a *teacher*, let me ask you to entertain this strange, twin notion of identity here, in the privacy of this letter.

You may by now have purchased your airplane or bus ticket to this city you know very little about. You may know next to nothing, either, about this region, this land, the Indigenous territories your future university currently occupies, or about the players in the State's legislature directing university policy, budget, and institutional priorities—for all of us. For you are now *us* too. It happens fast. You may think it odd to be moving *here* to study what you're planning to study—which, you may think, is actually more at home culturally and linguistically somewhere else, *way over there*. There will be many such puzzles, the complexity of which only thickens from week to week. Complexity is a core experiential idiom of grad school. Unless you are an Indigenous person yourself, you'll soon be yet another settler in this place, participating in an ongoing, five-century occupation of these Indigenous lands. Acknowledging this fact from the outset may help direct your thinking and acting toward commitments that seek justice over prestige and responsibility over self-satisfaction.

Apropos complexity: Within two weeks of your arrival here, you're likely to be standing in front of a classroom of twenty students, teaching something commonly referred to, in institutional language, as "foreign languages and cultures," perhaps for the first time. For better or worse, your new students will often have much more experience than you do in the local interactions typical between undergraduate learners and graduate student teachers like you. For the first few weeks, your students will likely know the classroom technology, the online learning platforms, and even your own professors in the graduate program quite a bit better than you do.

To your surprise, you may however find that your students favor your endeavor to become an excellent teacher, as much as you do yourself. Many of them will be privately cheering you on, genuinely willing to help rather than deter you in your own development as a teacher and scholar. They likely know already whether this is your first formal go at university teaching, and they will know this in part by way of student Facebook groups you don't have access to. You will want to be an excellent teacher on your first day, and you will not be. For a while, but not too long I hope, you will tend to overprepare without quite knowing it, spending several hours of preparation time for every one hour of classroom time. You will perhaps vacillate between wanting to conceal this fact from your teaching peers and wanting to commiserate with them about it. Sometimes you will feel an inordinate pride at the teaching materials you prepare, like a novice ice-sculptor at their debut event. The first semester will be a marathon experience in blending vulnerability with professionalism; there will be many moments of delight and discovery along the way. Note them down so you don't forget them.

Your students will be Republicans, libertarians, Socialists, queer people, transgender people, undocumented people, Indigenous people of various local or non-local nations, veterans, Caribbean and Black and Latinx and White people, mothers, self-styled entrepreneurs, graphic artists, refugees, ranchers, activists, lesbians, bloggers, ministers, engineers, Deaf people, journalists, gamers, sexual assault survivors, devout and not so devout Muslims, poets, people of various physical and learning abilities, homeless people, wealthy people, people who are older than you, and people who are slightly or much younger than you. Most of them will be several of these things at once. The intersectionality of their experiences will baffle you when you think about it. There will be moments when your mind will want, or need, to triage this prism of intersectionality before you, lest you be stunned by the composite fact of all the human knowledge, futurity, and history alive in your students at any given moment in your work with them.

Almost all of your own new students here will be worried about the/their future too—some vaguely, some anxiously. They may express this in oblique ways, often through fleeting stances and gestures amid the

practical matrix of whatever it is you are teaching on a given day. Some of your students will be high in class, some will be hung-over, some will have a migraine. Some will have an Indigenous claim to this land, and they will often be among the least adequately resourced learners on campus. Whatever their circumstances, many of your students will wish to see you as a role-model, in ways you are perhaps not intuitively comfortable with. Some may see your class as a rest or a refuge from worldly clamors; some will see it as their best possible shot at finding their place in the world, or of imagining other, better worlds. Others will be bothered and aggrieved about having to be in the class in the first place, for a handful of reasons you have no way to fathom or will not suspect—including linguaphobia and xenophobia, which are not the same thing. Whatever the case, for them your class will never be about learning a target "language and culture" alone. It will be about everything they've ever thought, felt, lost, wanted, and feared. Accept the challenge.

You've grown older and, somewhat suddenly, there is this whole generation of *adults* in front of you, or at least a micro-generation of them, who are on average younger than you are. And here they are, sitting there before you arrive, in a windowed or windowless classroom, anticipating you. Some of them will have practiced and mastered forms of neoliberal behavior you have not. Some of your students tend to look around the world as it is and feel vindicated by this moment in history as they construe it. Others are experiencing new forms of marginalization or alienation they're only now starting to put words to, or against which they've labored for decades, with or without the solidarity of the communities they've grown up in. Do not rush to over-identify with them; they are already a different kind of political subject than you are, or recently were. Listen closely though. Over the past years and months, your students will have been entertaining—via Youtube and conversations with their peers—all of the possible civic identities presented to them in our era, from the Marxist to the Wahhabist to the Freireian, from the white supremacist to the Afropessimist to the feminist, from the Fascist to the Confucian to the Melnibonian. Their passing references and implicit affiliations may be hard for you to comprehend; they may also be none of your business but listen nonetheless.

Many of your students' names will be difficult for you to remember and pronounce well; they will know this ahead of time from previous experiences and will feel various ways about your attempts. Do not, even in jest, talk about "butchering" or "not butchering" someone's name. Your students with names in tonal languages will sometimes help you practice saying their names correctly if you ask for their help. Some of your students will be binomial, using different names in your class than they do at home; this is more normal and unremarkable in the world than you may know (Diao 2014). They might wish to use even a third name in your class, as they explore the multilingual diversities that inhere within themselves. If you are White, your Whiteness will be a methodological problem for your teaching, in various ways you need to learn about (Rosa 2019; DiAngelo 2018). If you are a Teacher of Color, or if you are queer or trans* or non-binary or live with an ability difference or are of an immigrant or Indigenous background, these facts will mean the world to some of your students, and you may not ever know who they are or why. If you read socially as a "native speaker" of the "target" additional language, some students will intuitively favor this, for better or worse. If you learned the language later on in your early life, some of your students will feel vindicated and emboldened upon learning of your own experiences as an L2 learner, and of your own "privilege of the non-native speaker" (Kramsch 1997) as you model it for them. If you speak other additional languages, do not hide them from view, on the presumption these aren't "relevant" to the endeavor at hand. They are (Kramsch and Zhang 2017; The Eaton Group 2019).

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AQ2

There will be international students on variously labyrinthine kinds of visas that curtail their movements in

ways other domestic students cannot fathom; there will be refugees whose resilience amid violence and impunity over time would likely outstrip your grasp of the human condition. While some of your students will be worried about what to order for lunch, others will be worried about undercover Border Patrol agents on campus. Some students will have fought like hell to get into classrooms like yours, some are paying far more than they can afford to be there. Others are legacy students whose parents and grandparents are already on a first-name basis with some of your professors. A few of them can drop $200,000 on higher education without feeling a pinch. *This* is your classroom. And, more importantly, theirs. I can think of no good reason to be overwhelmed by a complex human community such as this. There are reasons, but not good ones.

I learned these things myself, day by day, during my first semester teaching, in Fall 2002. My memories of teaching remain inexplicably vivid, while my so-called professionalization as a scholar are often hard for me to reassemble—dispersed, subtle, and ambivalent as they were. Much as I admired my own professors in graduate school and what they accomplished during my time in graduate school, it was always difficult to identify with their experience. The line of demarcation between us was as invisible as it was thick. I didn't feel then at all like an "academic," nor a "scholar," not a "Germanist," not an "applied linguist," not a "literary translator," not a "critic," or a "theorist," not even quite a "researcher" or "writer" yet, and definitely not a "future professor". Despite my mentors' encouragement, all of these positions-in-the-world seemed to require some barely thinkable image in the future-perfect tense, a provisional "you will have been," but not a useful and useable "you are." Until graduate school was nearly done, it was hard to articulate what my contribution was, despite knowing I was an ambitious adult with a passion for languages and aesthetics and critique, and with big ideas and some axes to grind. Negative capability, as it expressed itself in the multilingual experience, seemed to be the primary domain of talent I could offer, as much as calculus, business innovation, or song-writing was for others.

In graduate school, I looked at my CV frequently and felt helpless. Was it the font that was off? What did all these seminars add up to, really? Why was success—or even just coherence of personhood—taking so long? Maxine Greene saw this long ago as a general paradigm-problem for all kinds of curricula, including of course Master's and doctoral curricula:

Curriculum, from the learner's standpoint, ordinarily represents little more than an arrangement of subjects, a structure of socially prescribed knowledge, or a complex system of meanings which may or may not fall within his grasp. Rarely does it signify possibility for him as an existing person, mainly concerned with making sense of his own life-world. Rarely does it promise occasions for ordering the materials of that world, for imposing "configurations." (Greene 2008 [1971])

Why would graduate school be any different in this regard than other kinds of schooling? It was always clear to me that my professors in graduate school were trying—often and in many ways—to "signify possibility to [me] as an existing person," as Maxine Greene envisioned it, and to "order the materials of that world," but these efforts were often no match for the weighty default disposition, the defensive crouch of ambiguity I felt, which prevailed among many of us students. Despite the fact that the scholarly world we were preparing for was right there, undertaking its business on the same corridor where we were preparing for it, that world felt stunningly remote and occluded. Only long-term dedication to complex projects, with trustworthy collaborators and sometimes with no clear end in sight, seemed to yield growth. This is, I understand, a hardly reassuring message to convey to you as you begin this journey. Keeping a journal will help you keep track of the growth you are making, and much of that growth will be yours alone to notice and evaluate.

For scholarship is hardly reassuring, and the external constraints of time, contracts, reward, grades, and even

feedback will not yield enough insight for you to feel certain at any given moment about your path. Despite the rise of neoliberal discourses of assessment and outcomes, scholarship, or being-a-scholar, is a vocation ancient in its practices and responsibilities, precapitalist and anational in its legacies, radical in its possible discoveries, and venerable in its most courageous and precise expressive forms. It doesn't fit well into anyone's rubric, nor perhaps should it. It may be hard to keep the bracing experiential virtues of ambiguity and opacity in mind when you are sitting in a research seminar mid-semester, but do remember that there is nothing essentially sedentary or reclusive about scholarship, though some solitude is required. As Simone Weil foresees: "For every person there should be enough room, enough freedom to plan the use of one's time, the opportunity to reach ever higher levels of attention, some solitude, some silence. At the same time the person needs warmth, lest it be driven by distress to submerge itself in the collective" (Weil 1986, p. 71).

And yet, scholarship in the broadest sense is undertaken on the streets, under fire, in times of grave despair and suffering, at moments of transformation and incapacity and impunity, under threat of death, when truly lost in the woods, and in the shadow of menacing power. At its best, scholarship answers in the darkness to ancestors, strangers, children, and beings of unimaginable forms. Unlike business schools and other kinds of finishing academies, humanities graduate programs are not a place for people to come refine what Rachel Greenwald Smith (2018) calls "compromise aesthetics." Nor is it a citadel for "fort pedagogies," which Dwayne Donald explains as follows:

> Fort pedagogy works according to an insistence that everyone must be brought inside and become like the insiders, or they will be eliminated. The fort teaches us that outsiders must be either incorporated, or excluded, in order for development to occur in the desired ways. (2012, p. 44, see also Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández 2013)

AQ4

AQ3

A post-modern, twenty-first-century fort pedagogy is the kind of curriculum that sees itself as a beleaguered, misunderstood, undervalued bunker, besieged by opportunists and charlatans who cannot grasp the value of "what we do." This—professional misunderstoodness—is not a disposition you can afford to inherit here in the course of your graduate work. You are not here to reproduce our field, to represent our field's interests, or to master our field. You are here to transform it in its complex relation to the wider world, through research, vigilance, insight, conceptual translation, and what the feminist philosopher Sandra Harding in 1995 called "strong objectivity." If they're serious about constituting the next generation of researchers, graduate admissions committees are not looking for neutral critics who practice well-heeled rationalism, but people who bring "radically different and even conflicting, culturally local, explanatory models" to the world and its affairs. It is likely that we chose you to join our program because of some aspect(s) of the difference of experience and insight that you will bring to your work in this community, whether that be a difference in language, heritage, self-identification, vocational orientation, education, knowledge tradition, culture, or region. This kind of diverse collectivity of experiences, in dialogue on shared research questions, is what creates "strong objectivity." It absolutely must replace the narrow presumptive pedigree of expertise that occupied hegemonic positions throughout the colonial and early post-colonial period. Indeed, as Harding points out, "the kinds of explanations favored by modern science have not always been the most effective ones for all projects. […] The neutrality ideal functions more through what its normalizing procedures and concepts implicitly prioritize than through explicit directives" (p. 337).

AQ5

Harding's approach to feminist standpoint theory suggests a fundamental revision to the core–periphery

model that still disciplines most disciplines and graduate admissions committees. In the transformation Harding foresaw now a quarter-century ago, minoritized/peripheralized researchers are viewed as *strongly objective*, rather than just "included" as special cases pursuing special interests. Those whose positionality vis-à-vis a given scholarly question has traditionally evoked suspicion of a less than neutral relation to the field, so Harding claims, are actually quite often in a better position to answer research questions with an empirically reliable and theoretically sophisticated *objectivity*. African scholar-teachers studying medieval German theology, Latin American scholar-teachers critiquing European discourses of cosmopolitanism, Muslim scholar-teachers critiquing ekphrastic discourses in German art history, African American scholar-teachers rethinking Germanophone theories on ethnology and race, Turkish German scholar-teachers retheorizing Austrian state multicultural initiatives, Roma scholar-teachers critically reviewing the discourse of *Heimat*, Eastern European scholar-teachers studying Nazi manipulation of language. These constellations of attentive work aren't simply about diversifying the personnel of German Studies; they're about increasing the prospect of better, truer research results future generations will not have to regret, redress, and make reparations for. To borrow a prompt from artists Jesús Barraza and Orlando Arenas, it is just as crucial in research and teaching as in any other domain of living to ask the question *What kind of ancestor will you be?*

In this sense, the increasing proportion of scholars in graduate programs from Africa, Latin America, and Asia, from immigrant and diasporic and transnational backgrounds, and the increasing proportion of Black, queer, trans*, Latinx, Disabled, and Indigenous scholars too, are not just the result of institutional diversity initiatives. The reason our field is being transformed, away from a predominantly white enterprise toward one in which People of Color lead research, curricular, administrative, and teaching agendas is not *just* an ethical or political one in a narrow sense. Rather it is, from Harding's point of view, the best and most likely epistemic means we have to enhance and achieve, collectively, an objectively rigorous account of our objects and relations of study. This fact pertains, among other things, to knowledge-making about the very nature (or artifice, in some cases) of languages, foreignness, nativeness, nationhood, community, genocide, freedom, gender, aesthetics, learning, home, teaching, writing, justice, time, kinship, tradition, literariness, animality, humanity, beauty, and health. The purpose of graduate learning communities is not to display multicultural virtue; graduate learning communities are communities of becoming, places that house an intergenerational making, sharing, unlearning, and decolonizing of knowledge. It is the emerging and transforming epistemic work that you do here that will matter, not what you represent about your background upon arrival.

And yet, you may be surprised when you first confront the fact that the community you are entering is normative in some truly baffling, ritual ways. You've rightfully assumed that such a community of teachers and scholars ought to hunger for freedom from unjustifiable norms. Customs of interaction, writing, embodiment, sociability, and style are ubiquitous and vague, and these are only the beginning. The field tends to reproduce its boundaries by reflexively attributing core or periphery status to a question, thereby deciding the extent to which it's seen as relevant to the contemporary complex of agendas that constitutes *this* as opposed to an *other* field. It's very unlikely that you'll encounter a mentor or colleague who flat-out thinks your topic of specialization (thesis, seminar paper, or dissertation) is *not worth studying*. But they may very well opine that it's not quite appropriate to study it *here*, or *in this field*. They may have clear rationales for why this is the case; they may simply not have thought it through in the way you need them to. Practicing how to articulate your approach and your contribution is thus always essential, never just superficial. You're never ever "writing for the drawer"; you're always writing for an implied audience who, oftentimes, does not know your material as well as you do. Help them learn; learn from elders how to mentor up respectfully and effectively. Academic elders like the cultural anthropologist Dr. Karen Kelsky of "The Professor Is In" have dedicated their work lives to helping you learn these complex competencies.

Nonetheless, some themes enjoy central, i.e., "core" status without question; they function as the reassuring anchors the field uses—sometimes cynically, sometimes indifferently, and on rare occasions passionately—to determine and explain the essence of the field to itself and to others. Indeed, there are forms of white (male, heteronormative) supremacy at work in such centripetal, conservative canonicities, if we understand white supremacy with Frances Lee Ansley as a "political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, [where] conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and [where] relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings" (Ansley 1989, p. 1024). Literary figures like Kafka, Mann, and Goethe become "too big to fail," and even debating their relative virtues for contemporary life becomes controversial, as doing so destabilizes the reassurance that such canonical anchors bring to some but not others. The frequent litmus question "Do you think a major should graduate without having read *Death in Venice?*" is a coercive set-up, making it harder to reimagine the core of the field's consciousness and to move a historically peripheralized text or question of great urgency and/or importance toward that core.

One of the reasons such orders and norms exist in the way they do in our field is an underlying indeterminacy of *value* particular to academia. Elsewhere in modern global Northwest societies, Neo-Classical economics and its descendant traditions spent the twentieth century conflating value and price, and then assigning a value-price to everything circulating in our social midst (Mazzucato 2018). Contemporary scholarship is not entirely exempted from this regime, in that it is routinely parceled into "deliverables," "outputs," and "impact factors" in institutional reporting requirements. But the constituent features that make up those parcels of scholarly "output" do not submit so easily to Neo-Classical economic terms of price and value as do, for instance, protein bars or rideshares or trade books. So how is it, instead, that we come to value one approach or topic over another, one research question over another, one method of analysis over another—in academia? And how are we to feel about this process? Rather than by way of economic price-points and marginal utility, as in other market spheres, these valuations still play out in interactions, conversations, and various kinds of qualitative persuasion—a realm we could properly call the *political*. Moving a research question from periphery to core is thus not a mere matter of raising metaphorical price through demand, but rather one of learning how to claim, seize, and articulate value over time in the discursive idioms the field recognizes. When faculty try to help you learn how to "give a presentation" or "present an argument," this is often what they are trying to cultivate in you.

This is both good and bad news for us. Cultivating value in this way, day in day out, is exhausting, but it also means that we can individually and collectively cultivate the power to change how our research questions are valued. It also means, though, that those whose chosen research questions already enjoy supremacy and presumptive value have relatively little work to do to maintain that status. Those who wish to pursue a line of inquiry suspected to be somehow tangential to the field cannot simply raise the value of that inquiry through traditional market means. Their labor in this regard will need to be ongoing, enunciative, and strategically complex. It's exhausting work, which has been done in scores of generations before you. German Jewish Studies was able to garner a core position due in great part to the moral calamity of the Shoah, as well as to the mass exile of surviving European Jewish scholars to the Américas. Feminist German studies grew out of decades-long agitation among hundreds of thousands of radical, liberal, and centrist women (and some men) within and outwith academia, demonstrating, seizing the floor, and demanding equitable policy and representation. Turkish German studies was pushed into the rhetorical center of the field in the 1990s by collaborations between the first generation of Turkish writers and filmmakers in Germany and the first generation of academics and journalists who were in a position to be in dialogue with their work. Black

German studies, as many Black German scholars point out, is often still invisibilized in mainstream German Studies, and the effort to undo this exclusion is an ongoing labor that can lead to burn-out, isolation, and precarity. You can keep abreast of these ongoing transformative efforts and discussions for instance on the pages of the DDGC (Diversity and Decolonization in German Curricula) Blog.

Transforming the field for the better—and we do wish to do it *for the better*—is messy, borderline anarchic, and political in major and minute ways. This is one of the reasons why power, order, rationalization, and notions of corehood/peripherality play such a prominent role in our interactions and discussions. You might not know that, though we generally get along and often like each other, your professors often disagree with one another on fundamental questions. Some of these questions are so fundamental that we often cannot bear to discuss them. When it comes to shaping policy, curriculum, advising, and our local versions of the field imaginary, we are not unlike Supreme Court justices. Picture Justice Sonia Sotomayor trying to convince Justice Neil Gorsuch of something; picture her thinking about his entire approach to jurisprudence, to the law that she so loves, as he does. There are deep conflicts of value and philosophy, and yet the two justices work together every day, always facing the imminent prospect of coalition or dissent on any number of questions. They get coffee at the same places on their way to work. Such isn't an entirely ill-suited analogy for how professors in a given department countenance one another. This disunity is a pronounced and constitutive strength of academia, and we should not hide it. Teamwork is simply not our intuitive idiom, in the way that neoliberal corporate management schemes so zealously adopted it in the private sector in the 1980s. Your exam and thesis committees are sites where these constellations of conviction and disunity are often on bold and subtle display; if you are curious, come to faculty meetings and listen very closely to what is said and not said. Indeed, it is a miracle that we are able, nonetheless, to build a curriculum and a set of procedures we can all assent to, on the principled premise that it will serve our students well.

And yet, at the same time we are all expected to be sturdy *generalists*, able to enter into detailed conversation and advising on general-knowledge questions within the field. There are many ways to become a good generalist, and doing so will enrich your flexibility and credibility in job interviews, no matter what your research focus is. It is important to find ways to make peace with the fact that, even if you are a scholar of Turkish German poetry from the 1970s to the 1990s, you'll often be expected to have something more than superficial to say about Gustav Freytag's six-volume novel *Soll und Haben* from 1855. Likewise, literary scholars need to be conversant in an advanced way about contemporary themes in applied linguistics and Second Language Studies, rather than just caricaturing them opportunistically. Modernists need to be equipped with sensible, historically accurate lines of thought to discuss with their medievalist colleagues, making sure not to speak as if everything clever and critical was discovered after Kant. Germany-Germanists need to have a working knowledge about Austria, Switzerland, and European cultural politics. Everyone needs to know as much about literature written by women as they do about literature by men. Too, we'd all do well to view "pedagogy" as a complex scholarly field of knowledge, rather than as a grab-bag of solutions for tomorrow's class.

Beyond your obligations as a generalist, your chosen area of specialization (for a seminar paper, thesis, internship, summer project, or dissertation) needs to be a nourishing refuge for you. It simply cannot be something from which you feel alienated—at least not most of the time. If you have chosen a particular cluster of authors or texts or cultural artifacts to work on, you should probably love them on their own terms, or at least feel intense and detailed curiosity about them. Thinking that they are important or timely is not enough. You'll need to talk about your specialization *a lot* and in various spoken and written genres, so you ought not to put yourself in a position to be talking about something you don't quite like. Most topics, most texts offer the potential for extraordinary insight, joy, applicability, and critical intervention. It's hard to go

wrong, but it's also hard to go right. Don't snatch up a particular researcher identity precipitously as if it were a shield; some other fields do compel you to choose a specialization very early; ours allow you time to explore for a year or two, before focusing on something you truly find meaningful, fruitful, and important to share about. That's what you have to use your mentors for. Be careful where you seek advice, lest unwanted cynicism dispirit your sense of scholarly purpose and responsibility, which are ancient and ancestral indeed. Beware of naysayers who seem to enjoy naysaying to insulate themselves from settings that require risk, vulnerability, action, courage, trust, or transformation.

When it comes to my own *ancient and venerable fellows* in scholarship, the image this phrase conjures is not a professor in times of peace who publishes book after book over four decades without being deterred in the least by the requirements of public life and moral leadership. I think, rather, of people like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Quentin Crisp, of Hannah Arendt and Octavia Butler and Primo Levi, of the Highlander Folk School and the Combahee River Collective, of Rachel Carson and Gayle Rubin and Pina Bausch and Rosa Luxemburg and Aras Ören and Amalia Mesa-Bains. I think of Glickl of Hameln and Johann Joachim Winkelmann and Bayard Rustin and the Stoics. Of May Ayim, whose death in 1996 had as much to do with her burdens as a scholar and teacher as it did with her overall human health burdens. Some of these ancestors went to grad school, some of them completed it; some of them ran out half-way through or never entered in the first place, and nonetheless became giants of knowledge and research.

When I think about the essence of desire that propels research, I think of insatiable overextensions of the human repertoire of imagination, the kind that makes the head ache and the heart break. I think of questions that can't adequately be housed in a journalistic thought-piece or blog essay, of cosmological, epistemological, semiodiverse, and political incommensurabilities that resist conceptualization, let alone resolution or expression. I think of my living mentors, my big sisters and grandmothers in teaching, writing, and thinking, who have greeted and guided me gently, and kept me within view since my first days in graduate school. And I think of everyone (in and out of a school context) who has ever held on to an inappropriate, riddling question about the world, which they haven't been able to shake, answer, or even sometimes yet countenance fully.

One thing, though, that graduate training does not offer is a clear path to emotional, mental, or spiritual stability. If it were a TV drama, grad school would be more *Fame* than *Portlandia*, more *Pose* than *Parks and Rec*. So-called "life–work balance" is not one of its strong suits, and there is no obvious solution to this. Given the dismal paycheck, the long feedback time required in peer-review processes and advising, and the solitary time often essential for writing and thinking, one of the primary everyday idioms of graduate training tends to be doubt and uncertainty. There are ways to mitigate this at an institutional level, but they are not necessarily good ways. In fact, doubt and uncertainty are often crucial resources for a scholarly and pedagogical practice that pursues truth rather than expediency in its daily affairs (Richardson 2017), and it becomes quickly important to distinguish mental well-being from a hunger for unequivocal certainty in one's various choices. Think of all the various other, better-paid places where you could just as well be soaking up the spoils of what Nietzsche calls "strength of character":

When anyone acts from few but always from the same motives, his actions acquire great energy; if these actions accord with the principles of the fettered spirits they are recognized, and they produce, moreover, in those who perform them the sensation of a good conscience. Few motives, energetic action, and a good conscience compose what is called strength of character. The man of strong character lacks a knowledge of the many possibilities and directions of action; his intellect is fettered and restricted, because in a given case it shows him, perhaps, only two possibilities; between these two he must now of necessity choose, in

accordance with his whole nature, and he does this easily and quickly because he has not to choose between fifty possibilities. (Nietzsche 1910, p. 210)

Surpassing the easy comforts of "strong character," as Nietzsche describes them, makes for a successful scholar and teacher over time. "Or to give another picture:" continues Nietzsche, the graduate adviser, "someone who has completely *lost his way* in a wood, but who with unusual energy strives to reach the open in one direction or another, will sometimes discover a new path which nobody knew previously,—thus arise geniuses, who are credited with originality" (p. 215). Obviously, we don't need to achieve that kind of genius and originality to be successful and to make a meaningful contribution, but we should probably want to do so nonetheless. The longer I spend in the profession, the more I find that hunger for growth is more important than any supposedly achieved form of expertise and authority.

To the extent that I was part of your admissions committee, I may be able to say some things about why you were admitted to this program. Certainly, we need you to be able to speak German vividly, flexibly, and correctly enough to teach others how to. We don't need you to sound like, or mimic, a native speaker (Chow 2014), though being an expressive, eloquent languager helps. We need you to read this language well enough to catch subtle meanings, make your way through large amounts of written German at a go, to be able to make justifiable analytical observations about what you read, and to reveal meanings that may go unnoticed by so-called "native speakers" (Kramsch 1997). We also need for you to be able to build complex, sustained ideas in the research language or languages you will likely be working in when you leave our program, wherever you think that is. Some call this "writing," but to my mind it is more broadly the capacity for critique and unflagging curiosity, the ability to fend off boredom or the seductions of superficial, merely associative, and reductive thinking.

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We need this more than we need people who are "passionate about German language and culture" as such. Yes, you may at times need or want to be ambassadors or promoters of these faraway countries and societies, which your students dream about and may never have experienced themselves, but that is only a secondary obligation in your teaching and research. If we wanted you primarily to be promoters of German or Germanophone master narratives, it would be best for the Austrian or German or Swiss government to foot the bill. Your lot in the broader sense is to promote among your students an ever-opening sensibility about the multilingual world and its knowledges, a sensibility whose primary idiom is humility rather than domination. So long as this remains a serious university, graduate education must be about cultivating courageous thought-leaders, critical trusts, and ambitious communities of discovery and healing, who reveal complex, inconvenient things that often scandalize beloved orders. We admitted you to this program, in part, because we believe you will be that leader, that trust—with our help, the help of your fellows, and the resources of the academic communities you seek.

I hope the impressions shared here fall somewhere in the range between inspiring and ultimately accurate. One graduate student implored of me the following, when I offered my help with planning his graduate school career a few years ago: "Just… try not to give us the wrong information." I'm still trying to live up to this complex request, as are most of my colleagues.

You've decided, for one reason or another, that it's time to move and change. You are now perhaps wondering what of your treasured books to pack, what clothes to jettison, what friends you'll need to say goodbye to, and how you'll manage on the salary you've been offered. You may be worrying about finding a living space

(sight unseen!) that will give you solace when you need it, sociality when you want it, and stability, shelter, sunlight, and warmth through all seasons. You may have to cross borders to get here, displaying various hard-won documents that attest to your credibility. A border patrol agent may ask you what the purpose of your entry into the country is, and you may find yourself choosing to respond as curtly as possible: *grad school*. The border patrol officer may offer you words of welcome, or may just shrug you on toward the double-doors, under the flag, to the Baggage Claim Area.

As that day approaches, you may feel anxious about how, once here, you'll go about finding a good dentist, an obstetrician you trust, a physical therapist, a mosque, a dance teacher, an immigration lawyer, an NA sponsor, or maybe just a good hiking path, or falafel place. Perhaps you are bringing a sibling with you, a spouse, a companion animal, children, or an elder, and they have these concerns too. It's just as likely, though, that you are coming on your own and, if so, you may or may not worry about being lonely or stuck in a strange place. You'll have been thinking off and on about the habits you may wish to break before, or by virtue of, going to grad school.

The world after grad school, its "futurity," may be the last thing on your mind, though its temporariness is an important resource. I'd recommend you set a countdown to graduation day on your phone, lest you feel suddenly stuck in one or another season. In the rare case, there might be a great job already promised you upon your completion, but it's more likely that you'll need to design this future as you go. Grad school is a tricky life: it's temporary, but it often feels permanent. It's easier to feel stuck than to feel the "sparkles," as one of my recent doctoral graduates described their own moments of research insight. (I think they meant *sparks*, but *sparkles* is even better.) Grad school is financially stressful, psychically immoderate, and full of ambiguities, good and bad. If, for some reason, you continue in academia after grad school, these features won't change much, though the paychecks and benefits do tend to improve.

Privately, you may have had questions about how much you want your own identity and self-understanding to change in the course of the coming years. You may wonder whether there are things you will speak or care more about, and less about, in your new life in this place, and whether the language you will use to speak about them will change. You'll have heard some stories, vague or vivid, about people dropping out, staying too long, struggling to maintain a sense of purpose, having dispiriting experiences with peers, advisers, or bureaucracies, or falling out of love with their thesis topic. But you feel compelled nonetheless to try it out, wagering that your hunger for knowledge, critique, literature, languages, culture, and dialogue about ideas means you're in the right place. You are.

Again, welcome to the ancient and venerable fellowship of scholars!

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