

Resolution: for discussion and action by the Department of Politics.

NEW OPEN SYSTEM OPTION FOR THE M.A. AND PH.D.

(proposed by Alfred de Grazia)

Beginning in September, 1974, the Department of Politics of New York University offers to all graduate students a new simple option to qualify for the M.A. degree and Ph.D. Candidacy. It is an alternative to all existing rules save at present the requirements of a total of course credits for qualification, a measure that must be maintained to provide income for the University.

The student will fully qualify for his (her) M.A. degree when he deposits with the Head of the Department three separate letters, each signed by any fulltime graduate faculty member of the Department, attesting that, in the professor's judgement, the student has achieved the level of knowledge, skills and academic maturity of a Master of Arts in Political Science and explaining why. A student will qualify to enter upon the dissertation process for the doctorate by depositing with the Head five similar faculty testimonials declaring that he has achieved the knowledge, skills, and academic maturity required of a doctoral candidate, and explaining why.

The Coordinator of Graduate Studies will act as consultant (without decision powers) concerning the Open System, and will report periodically upon its progress and efficacy. But it is to be stressed that the Open System is self-structuring, personal and voluntary; it works through the agreement of a student and faculty counterpart. Whatever meetings, papers, projects, examinations, courses, travels and other means of acquiring and displaying competence are asked for and provided are a matter for the professor and student to decide between themselves.

Furthermore, at any time, the agreement may be unilaterally broken off by a professor or his student counterpart should one come to believe that the arrangement is unsatisfactory, whereupon the student may seek out and enter into a new agreement with another professor, should the second professor be willing.

It is expected that the Open System will result in closer communication between students and faculty, more flexible and instrumentally rational study programs, greater personal responsibility on the part of both students and faculty, and a greater preoccupation with the substantive goals of the academic process among all concerned.

During the experimental period of the Open System, when it will be working alongside the existing system, any student who has opted for the Open System may choose to transfer to the existing system, which may be accomplished by asking three or five faculty counterparts to adopt the existing system as their criteria for signing a letter of qualification on his behalf. Similarly, a student may move from the existing system into the Open System by turning his mind to the necessary arrangements for achieving the testimonial letters required by it.

List of The Advantages of the
Open System

1. A top student who is interested in political science can get a superior education in political science at New York University. The Open System will attract better students from everywhere.
2. An ordinary student can pass through on a completely conventional program, if he deems that to be his goal (fate).
3. Another student can discover herself and elevate her sights immediately.
4. A well-connected foreign student can acquire just what he needs to take up a role in his country's 'elite'.
5. Students will be attracted from around the world to study under this system. Imitations will follow at other places. The fame of the Department will be enhanced.
6. Any one to five professors can seek out student(s) anywhere, can put together the means for getting that student here, can assure the student of what she is getting into, and can help the student negotiate the right education with the necessary professors.
7. The difficulties of the system occur to an equal or greater extent in the present system. (This is true with regard to all questions and replies above that are asterisked*.)
8. The mythology, administrative confusion, drudgery, impersonalism, and complexity of the present system will be drastically reduced.
9. If a cutback in the number of faculty occurs, there will be a natural adjustment of professors and students, and no flurry of course reassignments to fit round pegs into square holes will be experienced, largely because there is no rigid "program" for everyone.
10. The present system allows flexibility through endless rules evasions, and obfuscations; the Open System needs none of these to provide even greater flexibility.
11. Greater personal communication on relevant subjects will characterize the Open System and, as a corollary, greater responsibility and accountability will follow with respect to the professors and the students.
12. Tests, examinations, quizzes - both oral and written - will become more relevant to the student being examined and to the examining professor.
13. Field work, difficult special reports, personal offbeat necessities, going wherever necessary to learn a special technique, the use of new media and new methods, the pursuit of original and imaginative ideas - all of these will be promoted by the Open System.
14. Each student will have her personal program of studies. It will be tailored to her wishes, provided only that she can discover three (or five) suitable tailors. Unusual students with special types of mind and special experience will be welcomed and provided for naturally.

15. The all-important letters of recommendation that a student needs after taking a degree will be written by professors who must feel responsible for him and who know him.
16. Repetition of a student's undergraduate studies will be more frequently avoided, because of the absence of requirements, Hereas, at present a student can obtain anonymously an MA degree by an easy route and sometimes even a Ph.D.
17. A student will be able, even before coming to NYU, to know that she can avoid professors whom she considers poorly qualified to teach her.
18. Recurrent, interminable, and futile (save in a power-seeking sense) discussions of "a balanced program", "the core of political science," "Is the history of philosophy necessary for everyone?", "a rule needed to evade the last rule we made," will become rare, unless people wish to engage in voluntary colloquia.
19. A professor will finally be in a position to give a total, personal, considered evaluation of his student, deciding, without useless and obstructive compromises with the rules and without bowing to the general laxness and confusion of contemporary departments, whether in his estimation the student is what a Master or Doctor should be.

Questions and Answers

- Q1 Will there be confusion between the existing system and the Open System?
R1 It would be better to adopt only the Open System if only to avoid people saying that having two systems is confusing. Still, no abnormal interface problems are foreseen.
- *Q2 Will a student try to deal with the five "easiest" professorial sponsors, and, if a number do so, will this force the others to lower their standards?
*R2 The Department, in these stringent times, has had and will have unusual chances to assure itself of the integrity of its faculty. Assuming, then, that professors are equally responsible, "easiness" is in the eye of the beholder. If a student seems to be pursuing such a policy, he will encounter resistance from one or more of his sponsors, and furthermore, the "hard" sponsors will have immediate means of redressing the balance.
- *Q3 Will professors raise their standard to avoid having an average or "too many" (subjectively defined) students?
*R3 Yes, with positive results.
- Q4 Will a professor be trapped with a student?
R4 No. The agreement is mutual and can be dissolved.
- Q5 Will a student be trapped with a professor?
R5 No. He can withdraw from his sponsorship.
- Q6 Will the "core" courses be required?
R6 Only if professors and students need their services. The departmental teaching load in courses will tend to even out.
- Q7 Will the "best" students opt for the Open System?
R7 Probably, on the average.
- Q8 Will the Open System increase graduate enrollments?
R8 Probably yes, because of the sense of personal control over program that a student will have.
- *Q9 Won't a student discover that satisfying the demands of three or five sponsorial professors as well as other teachers will be too difficult? Each will ask too much of her and in an uncoordinated way.
*R9 For the same reasons that professors are unlikely to become easy, they are unlikely to become too strict. Putting aside the assumption that they are normal, reasonable people, one can still believe that a student's right to go to another professor (less strict) will enter the scales and that a student can inform the professor (or he can inform himself) of the requirements others are making upon her.
- *Q10 How soon after enrollment must a student find her sponsors?
*R10 That is her concern.
- *Q11 Isn't there a need to notify a student formally when his professor wishes to drop him; ugly surprises may be foreseen, perhaps days before a student intended to finish up?
*R11 The professor who unjustly renegs or balks at "signing off" his student will be met by colleague and student antagonism. The student may appeal to any other professor to take up sponsorship upon proof of achievement.

- *Q12 Will a student who brings in credits from other schools tend to "lose time" or "gain time"?
- *R12 Neither, but programming will be easier and more conscientious.
- *Q13 Will the graduate education process become a "game of musical chairs"?
- R13 A student with academic or personal difficulties (superiorities) may change on the average more of his sponsors than the typical student.
- Q14 Will attendance in classes increase or decrease?
- R14 No change is expected.
- Q15 What will be the function of grades?
- R15 They will be more closely appraised and evaluated by the sponsors and remedies applied before it is too late. Conversely, in themselves, they will mean less.
- Q16 Suppose a student wishes to choose a professor(s) of another department or a past professor(s) as member(s) of his three or five group, what happens?
- R16 He or she does so. A student who goes to the extreme of offering three outside sponsors for an MA in political science will have to find unconscionably arrogant non-departmental professors.
- Q17 Does the Open System have a time limit?
- R17 A student who pays tuition and wishes to study indefinitely may do so. If his sponsors feel he is becoming overeducated they may drop him.
- Q18 Does the Open System foresee the developing of "incompetent" students?
- R18 The student without sponsors will probably drop out of the Department. But nothing forestalls "living in hope" that three or five sponsors will recognize his abilities and promise.
- *Q19 Will students find that a professor with whom they seek to work is overloaded and/or unwilling to sponsor them?
- *R19 Perhaps. They would then have to find a substitute or leave the Department.
- Q20 Would the Department committees continue to function as they did before, assuming only the Open System were adopted?
- R20 Some of their work would atrophy, and if the Open System alone exists, the committee system should be reorganized.
- *Q21 What happens when one or more of a student's committee is on leave?
- *R21 The student keeps in touch or may transfer to another professor.
- *Q22 What happens when one of a student's committee resigns from the university?
- R22 The professor may still "sign off" in the future or the student may seek out another sponsor.
- *Q23 Suppose a student craves "structure" in her studies. Will her need be satisfied?
- *R23 Exquisitely, by approaching professors who are structure-minded or by asking a professor for a structured program.
- *Q24 Suppose three or five professors decide to try to turn out well-trained communists? Can they try to do so?
- *R24 Yes.

- Q25 Suppose a professor wishes to "cop out", to hide, or to lower his burden, if you will; how can he do so?
- R25 He can resist attempts to engage him in any programming short of the "spin-off" letter. He can require simply coursework.
- *Q26 How do students and professors know what is going on under the Open System?
- *R26 The Head may publish and keep current a list of "sign-offs". However, a student need not take up a sponsor(s) until fully decided and a sponsorship need not be divulged until the ultimate and only document, the sign-off letter (with such substantiation as the professor wishes to add) is produced. In most cases, a student would be foolish to shop for a sponsor (and spin-off letter) at the last minute.
- *Q27 What is to keep Professor B and then C, D, et al. from simply following the cue of Professor A, relying on A to have done all the necessary supervision and evaluation of a student?
- *R27 The good sense, integrity, and respect for others' opinions of Professor B, C, et al.
- Q28 Will collectively administered examinations end?
- R28 Not in the courses. A sponsoring professor(s) may determine that an examination has or lacks significance.
- *Q29 Are we to believe that every kind of political science interest will find a well-equipped and comfortable home in the NYU Department of Politics?
- *R29 No. However, perhaps the chief task of the Head will become that of overseeing the changing balance of interests and of strengthening points of overburden and significance.
- *Q30 Since the Head, the Director of Graduate Studies, and the other gatekeepers (dictators) on the committees and so forth will find their functions (powers, drudgery) diminished (eased), and since the countervailing powers of a majority of those present and voting against (for) them at meetings will no longer be exercised so actively, will not the consensus of the Department disappear, and small cliques run their own affairs contra bono publico?
- *R30 The costly and futile struggle to force an unnecessary concensus will probably diminish. The machinations of cliques will become pulling and tend to the public good, if by cliques are meant the groups of 3, 4, 5, or 80 persons with common interests of a monetary or greater type.
- *Q31 How long should the Open System be given to prove itself?
- *R31 The Open System, operating alone, should require four years to prove itself. Operating alongside the existing system, its efficacy will be more difficult to judge; since the Department will not be burning its bridges behind it, it may be half-hearted and easily frightened back across. Perhaps the Open System should be granted a four year trial, with the right of review and cancellation always available if bad results (or panic) occur; if so, a formal annual review should be held of the existing system to determine whether it should be promptly scrapped.
- Q32 Can any great harm be caused by the experiment with the Open System?
- R32 None has been alleged to be possible.

Q33 If a student, during the trial period, decides to transfer from the Open to the existing System will she encounter difficulties?

R33 She may take "core" courses her sponsors thought unnecessary, after taking other post-core courses and she profits from their easiness.

*Q34 What will happen to language and similar requirements under the Open System?

*R34 They will be required naturally by the student's faculty sponsors if they are needed, but if a student discovers, to take an extreme instance, that none of the five professors who are sponsoring his concentration upon his Ph.D. work in Chinese Government demands that he know Chinese, then he need not know Chinese.

Q35 Suppose a student wishes to do his Ph.D. in the theory of representative government but wishes to avoid a professor who has special qualifications in that area, may he do so?

R35 Yes, if all of his sponsors permit it.

Q36 Will the student's dissertation be done under the same group of five professors, that is his faculty sponsors up to that point?

R36 No. It is suggested that the student propose, after receiving her sign-off of her five sponsors, a 3-person supplementary sign-off from at least three of her five sponsors approving the dissertation and that she proceed forthwith.

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