

RETHINKING THE GRADUATE RESEARCH SEMINAR IN AMERICAN HISTORY:
THE SEARCH FOR A NEW MODEL

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This essay is an excursion into a too little explored area of contemporary pedagogy in history: what is wrong with the graduate research seminar and what might be done to correct it. The essay has two related purposes--to explore some problems with the traditional model for graduate research seminars, as I understand it, and to suggest an alternative conception for the seminar. The analysis is based on my experience, first as a graduate student, and then as a professor at a large, heterogeneous, and provincial public university that usually brings together at the graduate level students of a wide-range of abilities and goals. My comments have relevance largely for the teaching of American history, which is my own field. Moreover, the new, revisionary model I wish to suggest may be implemented best, though not necessarily exclusively, on the basis of research into the history of an American locality, such as, in this case, Buffalo.

The graduate research seminar has a troubled history in my department. Throughout the 1970s our graduate students increasingly opted to do research projects for their master's, or to take their research course requirements for the Ph.D., in independent studies with individual professors. The now more and more under-enrolled research seminars were seen as boring, and too often subject to the intellectual fancies or narrow interests of the professors teaching them, while the opportunity to work with an individual professor (in many cases, a potential Ph.D. mentor) on a topic of one's own design seemed much more appealing. Perhaps just as important, the research seminars had come to have a reputation as veritable sinkholes of human effort. Students expressed resentment that they worked long and hard, but failed to come up with viable topics until a point so late in the semester that they could not complete their papers. Or, confused by, or frankly uninterested in, the subject assigned to them, they put off working on it until it was too late to do anything substantial. Either way, many students ended up with "incompletes" that added to their burdens in future semesters and counted against them in the annual competition for assistantships.

Few faculty members wanted to respond by doing away with the research seminar format, which simultaneously, when it worked according to the theory that justified its existence, provided students not only with research training, but with a group experience of intensive discussion of research that approximated scholarly discourse. Moreover, it was also recognized that the seminar format could impose and maintain a standard definition of training and accomplishment, which it was impractical to expect each semester from as many as a dozen professors working in diverse fields, and working independently with individual graduate students. The counter-argument, that independent research training allowed for flexibility in dealing with the individual interests of students in different fields, was not given much credit, because recent experience seemed to indicate that "flexibility" was too often a euphemism for license or for indifferent, vagarious training. The result of departmental discussions on the future of the research seminars was a resolve to reinvigorate them by making completion of at least one a requirement for all graduate degree candidates. Little attention was given, however, to the problem of how to make these seminars more proficient at training, let alone more intellectually stimulating and feasible within one-semester boundaries.

When enrollment in these seminars again began to grow and some of us who had previously been uninvolved with them were asked to teach them, I found myself struggling to implement the vague, if well-meaning, mandate of my colleagues and make the format work. On the surface, of course, this teaching assignment seems to be a simple one and hardly a drain on one's energies. By its very nature the situation is one in which students, after being pointed in the right direction, are supposed to do the work. One struggles, furthermore, with the suspicion that under any circumstance research is an intuitive, imaginative skill that cannot be taught. I had my own illusions about the research seminar, but these were not among them. Eventually experience teaches every college or university teacher that seminars are actually more demanding on the pedagogical imagination, not to mention one's human relations skills, than lecture courses. Also, while it is self-evident that there are individuals with a flair for the detective work that is a considerable part of research, there are practical techniques of individual organization of research and bibliographic and library skills that can be taught. So, too, the processes of logical inference, by which that detective work proceeds, can be taught, though not certainly as if they were a matter of science. While they are engaged in research projects, students can be encouraged, in a common sense and empirical fashion, to develop the appropriate habits of mind.

While prepared to take this teaching assignment as a considerable challenge, I was still wondering how to organize the syllabus and get students engaged in research projects. I did have a model based on my own experience as a graduate student fifteen years before. The professor, a renowned scholar engaged in significant work in twentieth-century political history, largely improvised the course as he went along. There was no syllabus, printed or otherwise; nor was there a schedule of goals for our individual meetings. He suggested--forcefully enough that one may rightly say "assigned"--each of the six or seven of us a topic closely related to his work. Occasionally and randomly, without apparent method, we were to report "on what we were finding." Otherwise the seminar sessions were spent in listening as he read, here and there as it was evolving, from his own work-in-progress. We received little aid with the work of structuring our research or conceptualizing the particular problems on which we worked. There were no assigned readings to be discussed. Nor, a few informal hints aside, was there any bibliographic or library instruction.

What I remember learning, largely osmotically I think, was less the technical matter of how to do research than this scholar's field, the personal and intellectual history of his engagement with his subject, and most specifically, through his discussions of historiography, how he came to want to ask the questions around which he centered his work. However indirectly these matters were taught, I now recognize that this experience was a not insignificant part of my larger education as an historian. At the time though, the experience of this seminar left me confused and thinking I had wasted a semester of valuable time. I held the same opinion for many years, until I was asked to teach a research seminar and thus to think about what its purposes were to be.

I do not believe that I am unusual in my experience as a graduate student, nor in my evaluation of it at the time and in later years. While I have not done a scientific survey of the models that have existed in the last two decades for the graduate research seminar, I have had many informal conversations with colleagues and students about these seminars, and more often than not their experiences were similar to mine. They have similar general evaluations of what I call "the old model" research seminar format:

It is messy in its organization, thoughtless in its goals, and lazy in its pedagogy. It has left a few of them, who possess a knowledge of the history of professional training in our discipline, musing about the degeneration of the American historical research seminar from its legendary beginnings under Herbert Baxter Adams at Johns Hopkins a century ago.

I came to my assignment determined not to repeat the obvious shortcomings I saw inherent in his model. From a pedagogical viewpoint, these are clear enough. In addition to the lack of practical and purposeful instruction, or even guidance, in research, let alone in the design of a complex research project and conceptualization of an historical problem, the seminar never really existed as anything more than a curricular convenience and a body of unconnected individuals. We were never encouraged to think of ourselves as a group engaged in a common scholarly enterprise, and by virtue of such thinking, and through discussion of common problems in doing research, actually to become a small community of scholars. The failure to encourage students to learn from one another, in settings like the seminar where the opportunity exists, is a serious pedagogical defect. The contribution of such mutual instruction to developing a general respect for the opinions of others, to learning to listen, and to gaining the ability to accept or to give supportive criticism is self-evident. In addition, such learning for graduate students is an introduction to participating in the less formal, unpublished scholarly discourse that is essential for the growth of knowledge.

Because it may clash with other equally admirable goals, it is not as easy as it may appear at first to know how to bring about this goal of mutual instruction. If one of your goals, for ethical or pedagogical reasons, is not to assign topics or even broad subject areas to students--or to put the matter positively, if your aim is to allow students to follow their own intellectual interests--then the problem of what seven or eight of them will have to say to one another for some 45 hours in a semester becomes pressing at the start of designing the syllabus. Furthermore, if you desire to avoid parochial immersion in a limited aspect of history, whether defined by time-period or subject area, you have another reason to avoid assigning closely related subjects. Moreover, if you feel, as I did when I began to offer the research seminar, that there is something self-serving, not to mention authoritarian, about imposing one's own research interests on students, these latter goals take on even greater urgency.

Following my own experience with the old model, all of these competing goals were the ones I brought to my first efforts to teach the seminar. I was fortunate that our American history research seminars had been defined broadly enough (colonial, nineteenth, and twentieth century) to allow for a general view of the seminar's scope. Balancing off competing goals, I created a syllabus that seemed to me both an enlightened combination of these priorities and a process by which students were deliberately to be marched along to the goal of finishing the course, thus avoiding the problem of "incompletes." Students were to choose their own topics, but they were to present orally, on three scheduled occasions, a precis, a progress report, and finally the completed essay before the entire seminar. (Written versions of the precis and, of course, the research paper were also to be handed in, at the close of the session at which they were presented orally.) The two weeks before these presentations, the seminar did not meet, but students were encouraged to meet with me and discuss their work, one week through formal appointments and the next only if they were experiencing difficulties.

Library and bibliographic instruction were to be offered by the history bibliographer, who has an excellent command of our finding guides and microfilm and printed collection of primary sources, and by a government documents specialist in meetings at our library in which I was both present and active. In the expectation that some students might find it convenient and interesting to explore local history, I scheduled a session at the library and archives of the local historical society, where I knew there to be a rich, underutilized archive of manuscripts and collections of recondite printed materials from the nineteenth century. Whether they worked on local history or not, I expected that all would wrestle extensively with some primary sources, which traditionally is the basic challenge in the graduate research seminar. For reasons largely of convenience, therefore, local history seemed promising for this. Finally in the interests of stimulating and concentrating student interests, I assigned three broadly syncretical or interpretive books to be read and discussed in the first half of the semester, between the various sessions of library instruction and presentation of the precis. The works were chosen because they were not only broad in the scope of the questions they asked, but because they advanced new approaches or controversial ideas that might encourage students to aim to do the same in their papers.

The reader is probably now in a position to anticipate that the balance of this essay concerns how and why these well-intentioned efforts went wrong and what I did to correct my errors.

I began to sense that I was neither fulfilling my aims nor meeting the students' needs after two semesters (one devoted to nineteenth and the other to twentieth-century history) in which a pattern of frustrating, misfired efforts, mine and the students' alike, emerged. I became conscious of this in three related ways. First, library and documents instruction and our common readings did not seem to help students much in dealing with the most pressing problem, practical and intellectual, they faced--finding viable topics that could be researched and completed in a little less than four months, and that were also on subjects of real interest to them. Probably most of them had nothing more than a vague idea of what they wished to investigate, and the openness of the seminar hardly assisted them in focusing their interests. One student, for example, was interested in the American annexation of part of the Samoan Islands in 1899. This seemed a promising subject, though one hardly convenient to research from Buffalo--if, that is, one intended to ask meaningful questions of key primary sources. But the problem was more general than that, as anyone who has ever tried to bring student and topic into alignment with one another knows. Just what is it that a student wants to know about the process of taking colonial possessions in the southern Pacific? Too often students do not know themselves how to frame a topic that embodies some original questions or challenges some conventional wisdom. Too often by the time they had begun to sense their deficiency and could take the first tentative steps beyond it--say, after presenting a precis revealing their confusion and eliciting productive, if painful criticism--a month had gone by, and they had lost precious time that was difficult to make up.

Having a viable and even intellectually significant subject, however, was not necessarily the key to finishing work in one semester. Sometimes for reasons that defied either logic or the wisdom and exertions of interlibrary loan specialists, the materials (usually microfilm newspapers) were agonizingly slow to arrive, or could only be obtained in small allotments, the reception of each dependent on the return of the one before it.

As a consequence of misconceived subjects and problems in getting materials, three or four of the eight students in each of the two semesters I used this format took "incompletes." Signs that this would be the case were, of course, present before me for many weeks. Not the least of these signs was the fact that we often had little to discuss when students presented their precis and progress reports. Far too many projects were either in a constant state of confusion or simply too stalled for anything substantial to be said of them. I learned, too, that this lack of progress was frequently made worse by unfamiliarity with the basic organization, or housekeeping chores, of research--efficient notetaking from sources and keeping and organizing files of notes. It had never occurred to me to set time aside to teach these skills. Somehow they seemed common sense matters best left to casual conversation--where, of course, they never came up.

Perhaps most disturbing, however, was another problem I came to identify: Few of the students who finished their papers, let alone those who had not, felt positively about their work in the seminar. It was a rare student whose topic was not something conceived to fall back on, rather than genuinely aspired to. (One student consciously underscored this by putting a question mark at the end of his title, explaining to me that on reflection he was not really sure what he had been writing about.) Most students revealed they had lacked the time, moreover, not merely to develop a significant topic, but to research it as thoroughly as required and then to write the essay reasonably well.

How does one evaluate such claims? To be sure, they may be seen as evidence of a real learning process to the extent that failure, frustration, and false starts all have something to teach us. Indeed their lessons are particularly powerful in direct proportion to the pain and inconvenience they cause us. But this hardly means that we should seek them out, or forfeit the search for a positive learning experience based instead on processes of growth and achievement. Of course, there was in the student complaints always an element of that curious, defensively and preemptively negative self-appraisal one sees so frequently in graduate students. It is as if somehow being perceptive enough about the weakness of one's work to volunteer that it is unworthy to an admired or feared professor who is about to read it redeems one's intelligence and self-respect at the very moment the critical axe is about to fall.

There was, however, much truth to the students' complaints, whatever the peculiar psychology that helped inform them. Most of the papers read like the first drafts they inevitably were. Once they had been successful in choosing a topic, students lacked time to perfect the organization and polish the writing of the papers. Moreover, the papers were always poorer in thematic coherence and general interpretation than one might have hoped. It was, therefore, testimony to the students' comparatively high expectations for themselves and to their abilities, however latent in most cases, just as much as testimony to their insecurity, that they judged their work harshly. The excellent books we read and discussed probably deepened their own feelings of inadequacy. It occurred to me that it was a dubious pedagogical exercise that made students continually feel so poorly about themselves. This realization was reinforced by the fact that none of the students in either semester I used this format came forward to say that they had learned anything, about research or anything else.

Sorting out these three sets of perceptions over the last several years as I have worked to design alternative models for the seminar, I have been led time and again to realize that the basis for the goals and processes I

create has to be an assessment of the levels of ability and areas of strength and weakness of the various types of graduate students in our program, rather than merely a set of fixed principles, however high-minded.

Let me begin by speaking of the master's degree candidates. Larger than the Ph.D. program, our master's program takes in a broad range of students: many secondary, social science teachers wishing to enhance their credentials and in so doing, in New York state, their incomes; immediate post-B.A. students killing time before making career decisions; and middle-aged adults, usually women with recently "empty-nests," looking to resume educations put aside two or three decades before. Though a few make the transition each year, these students, however conscientious and thoughtful, generally do not have the ability, time, or inclination to enter the Ph.D. program. Even fewer I learned have useful research experience or an understanding of professional discourse, i.e., of the development of historiography as a way of organizing knowledge of human experience. When they enter the program, they think of history instead as more or less interesting and significant things that happened in the past. But we made the decision some years ago not to isolate these students from the Ph.D. candidates, with whom, it was argued, they would profit from sharing formal and informal relations. Also informing this opposition to intellectual segregation was the feeling that the master's students should be exposed to intellectually challenging graduate work, such as research seminars, that are intended to be introductions to the professional study of history. These understandings and decisions predate the decline in Ph.D. enrollments that began in the mid-1970s, but obviously they have been pragmatically reinforced by the need to gather together enough graduate students to provide a critical mass for our seminars.

I also had to evaluate the abilities, needs, and goals of our Ph.D. students, with whom I had been losing touch because of several leaves of absence, a personal shift in fields, and the completion of dissertations by several of my students, who had been working in my previous area of specialization. Most of our Ph.D. candidates, I discovered, come to us recently after graduation, with B.A.s from departments very much like our own at similar public universities and public and private four-year colleges of the second-rank. As history majors, they were usually B+/A- students, who distinguished themselves by being conscientious, writing well, and often doing well on some senior project (a historiographical essay or research paper, utilizing mostly published sources). A significant minority in the program, often on a part-time basis, are somewhat older working people, often public school teachers, who share the same educational background. Highly motivated, likeable, and possessing a good deal of raw ability, these Ph.D. candidates come into the program with little knowledge of intellectual or professional culture, and little breadth or depth in historical studies. Few in my experience have strong inclinations when they arrive about either their fields of concentration or a general direction for their dissertations. They want and need direction as much as space in which to define their interests and become aware of their abilities. Left alone to create their own programs, many become confused and fall behind. Those who work have their own anxieties about being aimless compounded by the fear that they are wasting what they have so little to spare--time. Directed in a purposeful manner, these students grow tremendously in the first two years of the program, prior to their qualifying examinations.

Direction in a purposeful pedagogical and intellectual manner is what I eventually came to feel was lacking in the efforts I had been making. I came to this realization after evaluating students' mixed backgrounds and

goals, and gathering my impressions about the time constraints posed by the semester framework and by the job responsibilities of working students, the burdens that "incompletes" create, and perhaps more than anything else, the impossibility of teaching anything about research when each student was going off in a different direction at a different rate of speed. There have been several principles underlying the reorganization I have undertaken, and these have imposed a number of choices at odds with the old model and my first efforts to struggle with it. I wanted to provide actual instruction in research, not merely individual guidance in choosing a topic, and struggling to execute it, or bibliographic and documentary instruction. I wanted to create a feeling of common endeavor and mutual instruction that would make for spirited discussions and intellectual cooperation in order to replace sessions that misfired because at any given time half the members of the seminar were not sure what exactly they were working on, and the other half were working on such fundamentally different topics. I wanted students to finish their work in a semester; I see no virtue in a flexibility that allows work to be carried forward to compete with new obligations in another semester. In the process of coming to terms with these goals, I chose to do away with the traditional research paper, to impose on students a variety of projects of my own creation, and to inform students exactly what sources to use to gain access to the subject and where these sources were to be found.

In my own research on Buffalo I had been discovering, as one does particularly in newspaper research into local history, episodic and ephemeral, but nonetheless interpretively meaningful, conflicts, controversies, and daily events that seemed in themselves to illuminate the major directions of society, politics, and culture. These included such varied aspects of historical experience as a bitter exchange of letters in the daily press between the Catholic vicar-general and a nativist Presbyterian minister over public funding for Catholic hospitals; a violent strike of Irish outdoor unskilled laborers in which the mayor called the local militia to restore order; and a municipal election campaign in which reformers sought to create a new local party and overturn corrupt, expensive, and boss-ridden government. Having researched these incidents myself, I could attest to their pedagogical potential for explaining significant developments in history, and I had knowledge of the sources that could provide information on them. At the same time, however, having had too little time to pursue them, since they were really only a small part of the larger puzzle I had set out to put together, I had many lingering questions about each one, and some fairly educated guesses about where, if any place at all, additional sources of information could be turned up. Moreover, I had a manuscript that could place each episode in context, and provide a background for the general rise and development of the city in the relevant period of time. Thus, such passing episodes, several grouped together in one semester to provide variety, became the new basis for the research seminar. This brought with it the not completely coincidental pedagogical benefit that local history could be employed to reveal a specific instance, or microcosm, with localistic variations of "the big picture"--an important lesson in the social and spatial interconnectedness of historical processes, and one that combats the tendency toward parochialism in local history.

I hesitate to add that the use of local history as the basis for graduate research does not depend on the instructor's personal scholarly engagement with that history. Were I not personally writing a book on Buffalo, enough published local history would still exist at the present time to pinpoint the type of incidents in the city's past that I have mentioned. Moreover, several weeks spent in microfilmed collections of

local newspapers may go a long way toward amplifying one's knowledge, and the same may be said, too, of brief excursions into the collections of unpublished manuscripts and locally published historical pamphlets, books, and broadsides at the historical society or public library. While I chose to read from my manuscript in setting the context, I did so also to get criticism of my work. Assigned interpretive readings and discussions of them may accomplish the same goal, and proved in the seminar an important supplement to my own work. There was undeniably a benefit to the seminar from having simultaneously both published work and my work-in-progress presented to it, for the former provided both a comparative basis for evaluating my interpretations and instruction in the evolution of my own ideas. This afforded students some insight into the thought processes of a working scholar.

In the final section of this essay, I will outline the syllabus I created, and describe the goal of the seminar in regard to research, the individual sessions, and the various bibliographies that accompanied the syllabus.

At the center of the seminar is the completion of three "reports on research" on three different episodes in local history of the type just mentioned. The first report is a practice-run, to be presented orally, while the latter two are to be read to the seminar and are also written in essay form and presented for grading. Unlike the conventional research paper, the report does not attempt either an analytical explication of a subject or proof of some hypothesis. Instead, students are told that their task has three related elements: to narrate what they know about, say, a strike; to explain how they know what they know from the sources they have used and what the strengths and limits of those sources are; and finally, to speculate on additional questions that need to be addressed and on what sort of sources may be helpful in going beyond what they now know, were they in a position to do further research.

Students are given in the syllabus specific references (titles of local, microfilmed newspapers and dates of relevant articles) to easily available primary sources to illuminate each episode. Further suggestions, often in the form of coyly offered hints, are made informally in discussions about generic types of primary sources that may be helpful for further investigation. But nothing specific is presented, because, as they are told, the hunt henceforth is theirs to pursue. On the other hand, an extensive, printed bibliography of secondary sources is presented in the syllabus. There is a bibliography of local history with four different categories of sources: microfilmed newspapers, general histories of Buffalo, books and articles (including my own) about Buffalo, and student papers based on work produced in seminars and undergraduate classes at various area institutions over the years. I provide students with the call numbers for books and the location of all of these items among the several relevant libraries and repositories in the area (university and local college libraries, the university archives, the public library, and the historical society). Three of the latter possess extensive microfilm runs of local newspapers. Whenever relevant I make purposeful efforts to discuss the student papers, which have a good deal of useful information and provide students with a realistic standard for their own work. For each of the three subjects, students are also given in the syllabus five to ten references to the outstanding published, scholarly literature in non-local history that will set down for them the historiographical context for the subject they are investigating as well as provide models for conceptualization and interpretation.

The first four weeks of the semester are spent in introduction, while the last twelve may be divided up into three sets of sessions with exactly similar sequences and purposes, because of the symmetry allowed by the use of three topics. (In semesters where there are only fifteen meetings because a session falls on a holiday, I drop one session from the first unit because the oral report requires less preparation.) The seminar begins with the usual introduction-and-organization session in which the syllabus is presented, and in which students are fully briefed on what will be expected of them and particularly on the difference between a research paper and a research report, a distinction few of them have previously encountered. I also set aside approximately fifteen or twenty minutes to talk about those housekeeping chores in the organization of research that had bedeviled some students in previous seminars. Sessions #2 and #4 were spent in discussions of the rise and development of the city to provide a context. I used the sessions to present my own work and to talk about the sources I used among primary sources, local histories, and thematically and conceptually related scholarly work. In so doing I attempted to place the subjects the seminar was investigating in historical and historiographical context. Reading assignments could accomplish the same purposes.

In between these sessions was an orientation meeting at the library and archives of the local historical society, where students could do their preliminary newspaper research and where they were expected to do most of their digging for additional primary sources. (I was surprised to find that, freed of the time spent in coming up with their own topics and arranging such logistical matters as interlibrary loans, a number of students in the last several semesters have taken the initiative in going to private institutions, such as churches and hospitals, in search of additional materials.) In place of the session for library instruction, which was rendered less necessary by the bibliography provided to students, I now encourage students to take one of the orientation tours at the university library and to go to reference librarians and ask focused questions. It is a good idea, in fairness to the librarian who will be the target of these questions, to provide him or her with a copy of the syllabus in advance. We now also have an introductory seminar in historical studies that provides library and bibliographic instruction.

After this month of introduction, the seminar begins the first of three projects. The first session on a project is spent reviewing the significance of the subject in its historical context, current interpretations, the narrative structure of the event as revealed in newspaper sources, biases and situational limitations (e.g. weather, lack of foreign language ability) governing newspaper reportage, gaps in our knowledge, and, finally, research strategies for filling those gaps. During the next two sessions, the seminar does not meet, so that students have no formal assignments or responsibilities other than their research. However, during the first of these "open" sessions, each student is scheduled for an approximately 45-minute appointment with me to monitor progress and activities. Often the ground that we covered the week before in seminar is charted again in light of subsequent reflections, and questions are asked of me that students were reluctant to ask in the group, largely because they were not yet able to formulate them confidently the week before. The next session is a free one, but I hold office hours during the three hours of the scheduled seminar meeting should students have questions or be experiencing some sort of difficulty.

The next week students present their reports and, in the latter two sets of sessions, hand in their essays. One would think there would be a

great deal of repetition, since all of the students are working on the same subject. This is hardly the case. The reports, as we have noted, consist of three parts--an analytical, narrative review, a discussion of the sources by which we know what we know, and a discussion of gaps in our knowledge and how to fill them. Significant disagreements arise in all three areas. Even in regard to what actually happened, there are differing views and understandings. Not all of the differing student opinions are unique, of course, and they usually fall into two or three broad areas of internal consensus and conflict. Adroit and attentive questioning and summarization by the instructor will not only avoid repetition of information, but place in sharp focus these emerging areas of conflict and agreement as they arise.

After a short time, however, students have mastered the technique just as well, and they are closely questioning one another about inferences drawn from sources, about sources that needed to be consulted but were not, and about mistaken assumptions and personal biases. There are, of course, frequent interruptions, and often, because of the free-for-all discussions that have taken place, students do not have the opportunity to finish their reports. In my judgment these lively discussions give evidence of the students' intellectual growth, and serve to enhance their self-confidence and to draw them together as a group with common interests in scholarly discourse. The students seem to sense this positive process, for their morale has been high, as evidenced by the extent of their preparation, their performance in the discussions, and their completion of the work in one semester. (In the four semesters I have employed this format, I have had only one "incomplete"--and that one for personal reasons--among seventeen students.) Students have frequently reported (both in my conferences with them and at the end of the semester) that they find the seminar rewarding. Admittedly it is too soon to judge whether the seminar has been successful in providing Ph.D. students with enough practical training to facilitate markedly their dissertation work. But, under any circumstance, it would be difficult to judge the relationship between the former and the latter.

I do believe that this new model is an improvement over both the old model and my earlier revision of it. The new model goes further toward suggesting to students the processes by which historians actually create the written past, and then allowing students to do it, while affording them the practical assistance they need to deal with their lack of both the experience and the habits of mind that come with active engagement with historical scholarship. The new model has the additional virtue of creating a process for building up student confidence, ability, and knowledge during the semester. It may shake our traditional ideas of what skills students should be expected to have by the time they are in graduate school, and it may disappoint our expectations about how well they should be able to do history. But those conceptions hardly seem to have ever been based on either reality or science, to begin with, while in my experience this new model seems to work on several important levels.