

History Department

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In light of the research delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the History Department at Johns Hopkins University has voted unanimously to ask the university to pursue the following measures:

- An extension of full funding (including stipend, tuition, and insurance) of at least one semester for Ph.D. students who were still under the provisions of such funding in the spring 2020 semester.
- Elimination of at least one semester of future non-resident tuition and student health insurance fees for current Ph.D. students in good standing who were on track to complete the program in their sixth or seventh year before the pandemic struck.

We make these requests because many of our students have faced serious personal and research challenges during the pandemic that have made their prior dissertation timelines infeasible. The great majority of our students pursue dissertations that require extensive on-site archival research; many of them lost access to their archives in March 2020, and months later still face no immediate timeline for return. Archives are historians' laboratories, and in many cases students cannot make significant progress on their research without timely access to them. The ongoing library closure has also greatly affected all of our students, who rely on access to primary and secondary sources (via the Sheridan Libraries, BorrowDirect, and Interlibrary Loan) that cannot be accessed online. And a number of our students have been required to attend to personal and family circumstances that severely curtail their time available for research.

We are emphatic that the university should not respond to these circumstances by trying to distinguish between the disruptions experienced by individual students. Such an approach inspires a competitive scramble for resources that incentivizes students to dwell publicly on personal and professional challenges — an anxious and destabilizing process that often leads them to relay information that they should not feel compelled to share with advisors or university or departmental authorities. Given our inability to obtain complete information about individual circumstances, and students' differing tolerances for sharing personal challenges with faculty and administrators, any resulting policy will necessarily be uneven and unfair. Instead, we urge the university to pursue a policy that is global in scope.

The only policy that can provide redress for the delays our students have confronted is a universal extension of at least one semester (for all students who are currently funded), and a suspension of tuition and insurance charges of at least one semester (for those who are not). Such support could be granted outright or channeled through the expansion of Dean's Teaching Fellowships, Dean's Prize Fellowships, and Teaching Assistantships. Given our teaching needs during the current crisis and the proven success of small classes (both in-person and remote), expanding the role of graduate student instructors would be a productive use of resources.

The History Department is currently exploring how to use its internal endowments to help our graduate students account for these delays, and we have already offered to cover fall 2020 non-resident tuition and insurance charges for a select group of students who were planning on defending their dissertations over the summer (during their last semester of funding) but who were unable to do so due to the disruptions of the pandemic. However, we cannot provide a universal extension in funding without placing a severe strain on funds that we already use to support our graduate students in other critical ways. We have worked hard over the years to raise money for our graduate program, but we now find ourselves in the midst of a massive public health crisis and seek additional institutional support.

We are aware that the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences has limited resources. We therefore call on the Central Administration, in concert with KSAS, to support the needs of History graduate students, as well as graduate students in other Departments, at this difficult time. We recognize in good faith the many challenges created by the university's current fiscal circumstances, but we ask KSAS and the Central Administration to acknowledge that our graduate students need and deserve this additional support, and to explore how best we can provide it.

Sincerely,

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Peter Jelavich
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Angus Burgin
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