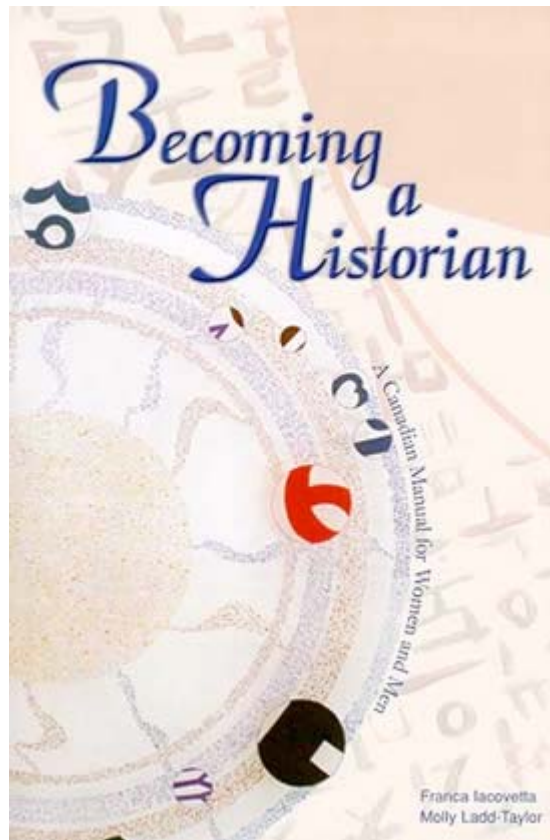


# *Becoming a Historian: A Canadian Manual*



Edited by Franca Iacovetta and Molly Ladd-Taylor

with

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Co-published by the Canadian Historical Association, the Canadian Committee on Women's History, the AHA Committee on Women Historians, and the American Historical Association.

## PREFACE

Welcome to the new and online edition of the Canadian version of *Becoming a Historian*! This ongoing project has been jointly sponsored by the Canadian Historical Association and American Historical Association.

This handbook is intended to provide guidance and practical advice to graduate history students in Canadian universities and junior history professors employed in Canadian institutions. In addition to updated information and an expanded bibliography of resource materials, this second edition includes new chapters on sessional jobs, postdoctoral fellowships, becoming a public historian, and pursuing a career outside the academy. Students in US programs contemplating a career in a Canadian university will find much practical information about the Canadian scene. We encourage candidates in Canadian programs who intend to seek jobs in the United States to consult both this manual and the many publications available through the website of the American Historical Association (AHA).

In 1999, Franca Iacovetta and Molly Ladd Taylor co-ordinated a collaborative project that produced the first Canadian version of the original AHA manual; they also edited the final product. As CHA Council member with the portfolio for women and graduate students, Franca Iacovetta had initiated the project, which was endorsed by the CHA's Canadian Committee on Women's History and the CHA's Graduate Students' Committee. We were grateful to Melanie Gustafson, editor of the original AHA manual, the AHA Committee on Women Historians, and the AHA for their permission to use, revise, and "Canadianize" their manual. Since then, the English-language paper edition of our manual sold out, and Melanie Gustafson incorporated some of our material in her revised AHA handbook. We thank her again for her generosity in sharing with us her original manual.

The initiative for this new Canadian edition came from CHA Council, which also provided funds for the French-language version of the manual, and the CHA's Graduate Students' Committee, which adopted the manual as a major project and provided on-going feedback and support. We are deeply indebted to the energetic, enthusiastic and hardworking members of the Canadian-wide taskforce of what became known as the "BaH" project. Catherine Carstairs, Dominique Clément, Robert Dennis, Lisa Helps, Rhonda Hinthner, and Heather Steel worked very closely with us at every stage. They solicited feedback and supporting materials from students and faculty at universities across the country, ran study sessions, carried out research, and together wrote most of the revised and new chapters. They also kept us in good humour as we edited the final volume during long workdays at each other's homes while juggling undergraduate and graduate teaching loads, conference commitments, committee duties, and other writing deadlines. We owe a special thanks to Sabine Hikel for accepting our invitation to write a chapter on pursuing a non-academic career. We particularly thank Dominique for his excellent co-ordination and computer skills, Lisa for building [www.becomingahistorian.ca](http://www.becomingahistorian.ca), and CHA webmaster Mark Humphries for getting the final version onto the CHA website.

We also thank the members of our Graduate Student Revision Committee for their critical reading of the original Canadian handbook and helpful suggestions for revision: Laurie Bertram, Caroline Durand, Jenny Ellison, Jarrett Henderson, Brian Shipley, Benjamin Potroff, and Danielle Terbenche. Numerous colleagues took time out from their busy schedules to field questions, fill specific requests, and provide feedback on earlier drafts. Many thanks to Denyse Baillargeon, Daniel Bender, Margaret Conrad, Krista Cooke, Lisa Chilton, Catherine Desbaret, Magda Fahrni, Allan Greer, Alan Gordon, Craig Heron, Suzanne Morton, Natalie Rothman, and Stuart McCook. As the text and links to this online manual show, many people generously shared with us their personal experiences, strategies, and/or their *curricula vitae*, job letters, or grant applications. We thank them for their generosity. We know that readers will benefit from their contributions. For several years, Jim Naylor has assigned *Becoming a Historian* to his upper level undergraduate students at Brandon University, and we thank him, and the students of his 2007 class, for sharing their responses to the manual. We kept their replies and insights in mind as we completed the new edition. We appreciate the continuing support of the CHA's Canadian Committee of Women's History. We owe a special debt to the many people who shared with us their personal anecdotes; in some cases, we explicitly incorporated their story or observation, in other cases, we used their personal experiences to inform our discussion particularly of the more sensitive issues raised in the manual. At the CHA office, Joanne Mineault and Marielle Campeau offered us helpful assistance. Finally, we thank Paul St-Jean of XL Translations for the French translation of the handbook. As editors, we accept responsibility for any errors. We also encourage readers who spot errors or out-of-date information to let us know about them: one of the benefits of an online version, of course, is that corrections can be more easily made.

We have updated the original CHA manual in response to the changes in graduate student funding, the job market, scholarly publishing, and other academic practises across North America since 1999. For example, funding for PhD studies in Canada has improved significantly since we wrote the first version of the manual, and the internet has transformed our teaching, research, and publications. Departmental websites have made it easier for job candidates to research the department that interviews them, but also raised the bar with respect to how much candidates are expected to know about a hiring department's faculty and the university as a whole. Employment equity policies and the growth of multidisciplinary fields such as sexuality studies and disability studies have led to progress in hiring and support for openly gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) faculty, faculty with disabilities, people of colour, Aboriginal faculty, and especially women. However, we do not want to exaggerate the changes; we still have a very long way to go towards addressing pressing equity issues. We have seen an enormous growth in Canadian Aboriginal history, for example, but the scholars remain overwhelmingly white. The manual acknowledges the failure of history departments across Canada to recruit or hire more than a handful of Aboriginal historians and historians of colour: the CHA (unlike the AHA) has shied away from adopting strategies to promote the diversification of the Canadian historical profession. This is frustrating because racial diversity is not just a big city issue, but a national and international one. The handbook also discusses the continuing problems of discrimination and sexual harassment on the job, and the challenges of juggling family and career. But the main aim has been to guide you through the various stages of

becoming a historian, from a promising graduate history student to a practising scholar. And a good deal of the basic advice remains the same as it was in 1999.

Of course, this new edition of *Becoming a Historian* also builds upon the work of those who helped with the original 1999 Canadian handbook. We remain indebted to the members of the original collective who co-wrote the first handbook and wish them continuing success in their professional careers: Adele Perry, Stephen Heathorn, Lykke de la Cour, Edmund Abaka, Lisa Dillon and Lorraine O'Donnell. Similarly, the valuable advice we had received from Ramsay Cook, Gerry Friesen, Sylvia Van Kirk, John-Paul Himka, Bill Waiser, Catherine Carstairs, James Bothwell, and Serge Cipko continues to inform this new edition. On CHA Council, Ruby Heap had shepherded us through the final production process. Finally, in discussing the joys of being a practising historian, we have once again relied upon the eloquent reflections provided by John Beattie, Margaret Conrad, Natalie Zemon Davis, Nadia Fahmy-Eid, Craig Heron, Michele Johnson, Greg Kealey, Jim Miller and Veronica Strong-Boag.

In writing this new and online edition of the *Becoming a Historian* manual, we have once again expended a lot of advice – and, once again, we have learned a lot. We hope that it will help graduate students – our own and others – and junior colleagues to become historians or otherwise build meaningful professional careers.

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## **INTRODUCTION HISTORY, HISTORIANS, AND YOU**

This manual introduces readers to the historical profession and helps you navigate the various phases of becoming a historian, from the decision to apply to graduate school to finding and keeping an academic job. We have emphasized practical strategies and situations we feel have not been adequately addressed in other publications. The manual considers the international context, especially the US job market, but focuses mainly on Canada. It discusses public history and post-academic careers, but deals mostly with university contexts. It tries to address issues relevant to groups who traditionally have been under-represented in the historical profession and still face unique challenges within it. We deal with both the joys and strains of becoming a historian.

Most graduate students are given conflicting advice. This manual will not readily solve that problem. The guidance offered here reflects personal experiences and established wisdom, and should be taken with the proverbial grain of salt. But our suggestions also reflect careful consideration and consultation with many people. Although we have tried to take into account a broad range of experiences and points of view, readers should not assume that we offer the definitive answer or the only road to scholarly success and personal satisfaction. But we invite you to mine the manual for helpful hints: to dip in and out of the sections that most directly relate to your (changing) situation, and to compare your experiences to those described here.

### **What is a Historian?**

Each historian defines his or her job, profession or calling differently. But all historians study and interpret the past. They also teach and write about it. Most historians work as professors in universities and colleges; others work in archives, museums, government agencies, trade unions, social justice groups, private corporations, and high schools. While some enjoy full-time employment, others piece together a meaningful career on a free-lance basis, straddling academic and non-academic worlds.

There are many difficulties associated with becoming and being a historian, some of which this manual addresses at great length. Yet being a historian has much to recommend it. It gives you the tools and credentials to contribute to important political and scholarly debates. As a professional historian you can spend much of your working life researching and writing about facets of the past that *you* find intellectually compelling. You can access the resources required to bring to light the rich histories of marginalized social groups. You can demonstrate to the wider public the value of a historical understanding of contemporary concerns. Being a securely employed historian also means the privilege, enjoyed by comparatively few other citizens in our society, of a working life characterized by relative flexibility and independence, and the right to call a life time of active learning your job.

We asked some colleagues to comment on the joys of being a practicing historian. Their



responses reveal varied interests, but also a shared curiosity about the past. Or, as Natalie Davis, Professor Emeritus at Princeton and Toronto, put it: "To rummage around in the archives or in rare printed pamphlets and discover surprising things about people in the past – especially people who seem difficult to track down. To begin to see a pattern, to see how parts of community fit together, to see the fault lines of conflict, the arrows of change. To write about the past, and in the writing, savour its strangeness and its familiarity, to delight in making the past live for others."

Our colleagues' comments reveal a common commitment to research and teaching, encouraging informed debate, and a continuing engagement with both the present and the past. Michele Johnson of York University observed that historians "slowly, sometimes painstakingly (and even painfully) stitch together the threads of evidence which together form a tapestry of questions, narratives, analyses, explanations and perhaps understandings." They explore the "'foreign country' that is the past," she added, and "mark the landscape with signposts of theories, theses and debates and tread upon varying paths that indicate the discipline's increasingly expansive definitions of a valued and valuable past. They struggle to unveil the complexities of the large and small processes, community developments and personal choices which together combine to create the many strata of past human experiences. They record...the 'large' and 'small' narratives of societies; and they make their thoughts available to those who would engage with them." In noting the joy such activity brings her, she concluded: "I simply cannot imagine doing anything else, being anywhere else."

Nadia Fahmy-Eid, formerly a professor of history at the Université du Québec à Montréal, explained her ongoing enthusiasm for historical inquiry as "un voyage dans le temps, qu'il s'agisse du temps présent ou du temps passé." "Ainsi," she added:

la notion de voyage le plaisir qui y est lié sont deux éléments indissociables dans mon esprit quand il s'agit de l'histoire. Aussi bien l'histoire qu'écrit les autres que celle que j'écris moi-même en tant qu'historienne. Écrire et lire l'historique c'est un voyage de découvertes constantes où ce que l'on connaît déjà d'un lieu familier permet de mieux comprendre les paysages nouveaux qu'on y découvre. L'historique pour moi est enfin le plaisir de l'intellect, celui lié à l'acte de comprendre. A la lumière de l'histoire mon présent de femme et de citoyenne acquiert certainement un sens plus profond, une signification plus intense que si ce présent avait été coupé de ses liens (historiques) avec le passé. Faire de l'histoire représente donc, selon moi, le besoin de savoir et le plaisir de comprendre réunis en une seule démarche.

Colleagues highlighted the dual roles of scholar and teacher, and the links between intellectual inquiry, informed debate, and active citizenship. Professor James Miller of the University of Saskatchewan noted that "as a researcher of history, the best features of my work are the constant engagement with complex and interesting analytical puzzles, and the freedom to change my specific topics of research in response to methodological innovations and shifts in contemporary concerns." As a teacher of history, he added, "the opportunity to spend one's time reading, thinking about, and discussing historical topics with bright students is something I appreciate and

cherish." As a historian of Canada, he enjoyed the fact that "my workaday life and my life as a citizen overlap and sometimes become inseparable."

British historian John Beattie similarly observed that "the pleasure – and the privilege – of being an academic historian comes from the connection between research and teaching." He added that "historical research carries the special bonus of allowing the researcher to handle documents and artifacts from the past, a pleasure in itself because of the immediacy of the contact such research provides with people in the past, and an immense aid to the imaginative effort that constitutes the essence of historical enquiry and especially historical writing." Whatever the documents, he concluded, "the act of historical research provides a constantly renewed contact, tactile and immediate, with the subjects of the work."

The importance of a research agenda that combines rigorous scholarship with a politics of social change was articulated by several colleagues, including labour historian and University of New Brunswick Vice-President (Research) Gregory Kealey. He reflected on "the pleasure that derives from understanding the past better, an understanding that clarifies the present in significant ways and allows one to envision a different and better future. The knowledge that things have been different, that there were choices made, allows one to see that we too make choices and that the world can be different." There is a "joy in the realization of the complexity of the past" and "that historical interpretation is never easy. Historical joy lies in the solving of mysteries; the historian is a detective and the major clue is human agency. The greatest joy is detecting the most plausible explanation of why things turned out the way they did."

Canadian women's historian Veronica Strong-Boag of the University of British Columbia shared her candid views on the personal and political contexts in which feminist historians write history and make community. "As for the joy," she wrote, "it's the continuing wonder of getting paid for doing something one loves, for thinking new and interesting thoughts and for having people who seem and may well be very interested in discussing ideas about the past." Given the "awfulness of much contemporary life (environment, wars, sexual terrorism)," she found it reassuring "to return to former days and see the human capacity to survive despite tremendous odds; personally it helps give me courage to go on." She concluded: "I also think a shared enthusiasm/passion for the past has brought me tremendous friendship without which I could not survive and a community that is not restricted to any single part of Canada. I continue to believe that understanding history, one's own and others, is the best way to approach the present and future, that historians are ideally the spurs to conscious, the guides to potentially more utopian/sane/kind visions of the world."

In answering our question, Atlantic Canada historian Margaret Conrad returned to the theme of an informed citizenry, noting that "a study of history and engagement in debates about the meaning of the past is a critical component of good citizenship. Because history can be invoked to support a wide range of causes, both for good and ill, it is essential for citizens to have a working knowledge of what happened in the past and to be able to identify arguments that rely on a distortion or trivialization of historical evidence." Like other fields in the humanities and social sciences, she added, "history has value as a way of understanding the place of human

beings in the world. Along with literature, history has long been central to identifying, interpreting, and sharing the values upon which civil society depends. It is an essential discipline for building community, for encouraging empowerment, for expanding our horizons, and for developing skills in discerning how knowledge and power intersect across time and place.”

At the time of writing this new edition of *Becoming a Historian*, Craig Heron was president of the Canadian Historical Association. So we shall let him have the last word on the many joys of being a professional historian practising his craft in Canada:

A historian is a privileged worker in Canadian society with both the independence to shape one’s work and a remarkable scope for creative activity in a challenging, diverse intellectual community. We quietly shout eureka when we finally track down a document in a box of dusty archival records. We glow with excitement when we sort out some complex connections in the behaviour of human actors in the past. We marvel at the insights of a scholar whose analysis provides our work with a brilliant theoretical framework. We delight in the engagement with other historians in our widely scattered but close-knit community. We thrive on the energy of young scholars who take up the fascinating projects that we always wished we had had time to pursue. We take much satisfaction from seeing sparks ignited among our undergraduate students as we share our distilled knowledge of the past. We relish the many opportunities to reach even wider audiences, to apply our historical expertise to public history and cultural programs, to current questions and controversies, and to collaborate with movements for social change. We take pride in our efforts to stimulate popular consciousness of the past and shape public memory.

While each of us has our own reasons for commitment to historical scholarship, historians work within a larger community of scholars. Historians teach one other, research together, critique each other's writing, and engage in controversies together. We vet each other's proposals, write each other references, and serve on hiring committees. We teach students and engage wider publics. Every historian draws on the work of others and should be prepared to take part in the collective endeavour of knowledge production.

A university-based historian does not merely join the historical profession, but also joins the academy, which brings together scholars with different disciplinary backgrounds, training, and commitments. Historians in Canada are represented by a number of organizations, including the Canadian Historical Association, which foster debate, encourage historical scholarship, promote history on school curricula, and work to further the interests of the profession by lobbying government and funding agencies. Many individuals cross disciplinary lines as they conduct research, engage in debates, and build their intellectual relationships and support networks. We urge readers to think broadly about community and networks.

Historians also work within the wider public sector. In Canada, where education is overwhelmingly state-funded, historians are publicly-employed educators. We share responsibility with other educational workers to defend publicly-funded education. Since

cutbacks to universities are often justified on the grounds that scholarship is irrelevant and a waste of taxpayers' money, it is also important that historians, like other scholars, demonstrate the greater value of our teaching and research. We can do more to popularize the study of history – to get our discoveries and interpretations out into the public domain – and to seek greater public funding for higher education, historical research, and historic preservations. Historians are not lone scholars happily ensconced in the ivory tower: we have responsibilities as professionals and citizens.

Historians do not merely eat, sleep, and think history. All historians have other interests, loyalties, and responsibilities. Still, the career of the historian is a demanding one, requiring strong commitment, intellectual curiosity, self-discipline, and perseverance. It can also offer priceless rewards: professional autonomy, intellectual achievement, social status, and meaningful work. This manual provides those interested in pursuing an apprenticeship in the historical trade with some guidelines and gauges of success.

## CHAPTER ONE GRADUATE SCHOOL: THE BASICS

Graduate study in history, like all creative work, is a labour of love. Historians are motivated by various intellectual and cultural interests, political passions, and scholarly commitments. Such motives, rather than a desire for financial reward or lasting fame and power, must ultimately sustain any person contemplating a career as a historian. As Canadian historian Kathryn McPherson of York University observed, being a history professor simply isn't a good enough job to be worth the long and protracted training and personal sacrifices required unless you love researching, writing, and teaching.

Graduate study in history is challenging and can sometimes be painful and stressful. In most MA programs, you are expected to do an enormous amount of reading, write a dozen papers that demonstrate your virtuosity, and write a major research paper or thesis. PhD students must do all that, plus master several loosely defined fields of history, pass a demanding exam or two, and write an original dissertation. When you are struggling to read a dozen articles and say something intelligent in seminar week after week, prepare for comprehensive exams, survive financially, and find the energy to finish a dissertation, it is easy to lose sight of why you ever chose this particular path. Surviving graduate study requires balancing the performance of certain regimented tasks with maintaining your enthusiasm for historical inquiry.

### **Stages of Graduate School**

It is important to understand what will be required of you in graduate school. Yet clear advice is sometimes scarce. At times, it may seem like graduate school operates according to a secret code of behaviour that is never clearly explained, but by which you are constantly judged. While programs at different universities vary significantly, all ask that students approach their work with a seriousness and commitment not required by undergraduate programs. Compared to most undergraduate history courses, there is less emphasis on learning "the facts" (though it is assumed that you will eventually master them) and more emphasis on interpretation, analysis, and historiography – the study of different approaches to the writing of history. Graduate students are also introduced to a variety of theories, research techniques, and methodological approaches, and to other intricacies of historical and scholarly practice.

Each program in history is different, but there are basic similarities. Some history departments in Canada, and almost all graduate programs in the United States, admit students to the PhD program directly from the BA. Stand-alone Master's programs usually demand a year of course work and either a major paper or a thesis. If you want to end your graduate education at the Master's level, a one year program without a thesis is likely sufficient. If you would like to pursue a PhD, a two-year program which requires a Master's thesis will prepare you well for the rigours of PhD work. Even in a one-year program, however, you can use the MA research paper to get you into the archives and produce an original – and potentially publishable – piece of

scholarship. Both routes will get you into a doctoral program and help you learn critical skills directly related to PhD work.

Doctoral programs usually involve a year or two of courses; six months to a year devoted to studying for a set of comprehensive examinations; and then full-time attention to researching and writing a dissertation. The last phase may take two to four or more years to complete. These days, many Canadian graduate schools talk about "a four-year PhD." Public funding for graduate education is increasingly tied to enrolment numbers and degree completion times, so graduate schools want students to finish faster, and administrators worry about students "lingering" in graduate school. In many schools, students are rushed through the PhD, and it is difficult to secure funding after four years. Clearly, it is better to finish sooner rather than later, but realistically few students finish a history PhD in four years. You will need to juggle various commitments, such as teaching and research work, and you may need to work outside of the university in order to survive. In addition, some dissertations simply take longer than others to complete. In an era when many candidates want to have a "publishable" thesis to help them crack the job market, there is serious pressure to write an "important," not merely competent, thesis. You will need to work efficiently and effectively.

## **Course Work**

All graduate programs involve course work. Taking courses is an important part of your graduate training in history and should not be viewed as a bothersome hurdle, an unnecessary barrier delaying your progress to "the comps" or your MA or PhD thesis. A course will introduce you to different types of histories and bodies of scholarship, and your seminar papers may become the basis of your MA thesis, your first conference paper, or your first publication. Perhaps they will help you formulate a dissertation topic. Graduate seminars are also where faculty and students first get to know each other as colleagues. They are often the main vehicle for building community among graduate students, and your classmates may form the nuclei of your social and intellectual network for years to come.

Graduate courses may be very small directed reading courses involving one, two, or three students working under the direction of a professor. Or they may be larger seminars of ten to twenty students. Some courses will be research-oriented, and involve the preparation of major essays based on some primary archival, newspaper, or periodical research. Others will be largely or wholly historiographical, oriented toward the critical analysis of scholarly works and/or preparing students for comprehensive examinations in topical or thematic fields. Faculty generally teach courses in their areas of expertise, and students can benefit enormously from taking a course in, say, Cultural History, Cold War America, or Crime and Punishment in Early Modern France from a leading scholar in the field – even if that course does not fit your research focus exactly. A few departments require students to take a historical methods course and/or another language. Most students will take all their courses within the history department, but some may enrol in a course or two outside of their "home" department, in a related field (or "cognate" discipline) such as Political Science, or in an interdisciplinary program, such as East

Asian or Religious Studies. Such courses expose historians to the ideas of other disciplines and allow students to develop contacts with faculty and students outside their departments. These connections can be important to your intellectual development and emotional survival in graduate school.

Courses are the main way that graduate students are introduced to scholarly culture. You will be exposed to a wide variety of views, both in your reading and from students and faculty. You will learn to think analytically, and to criticize, rather than to automatically accept or dismissively trash, the scholarship of other historians. You will also receive criticism of your own research, writing, and analysis. While overly harsh criticism is unproductive, we encourage you to be a bit tough-skinned about feedback. Use it to help you to improve your work.

Course work can also be an intimidating and confusing experience. Some professors may seem to favour certain students, or those who have a particular viewpoint, and to belittle students who don't seem to measure up to some unknown standard. Students sometimes compete with each other for the spotlight or faculty attention. Often, students with limited experience in the academy, such as those from working-class or immigrant backgrounds who are the first in their family to attend university, can feel overwhelmed and marginalized in weekly seminars. Some women are put off by male students who seem overly aggressive, and students of colour may be offended by insensitive remarks. Many factors can make a grad student feel like an outsider: being a "minority" in terms of your race, sexual orientation, or ethnic, linguistic, or religious background; holding "different" political or religious beliefs; having children; or even just studying a vastly "different" topic. It is not uncommon to feel inadequate, like an "imposter" whose intellectual failings are – or will soon be – apparent to all. But remember that all graduate students are unclear about what, exactly, they are supposed to do in courses, and all are there to learn.

The pedagogical and interpersonal difficulties many students experience in course work, combined with financial stress and demanding work loads, can be trying indeed. Furthermore, the most intense phase of course work occurs in the first years of graduate school, when many students are settling into a new city or country, coping with separation from family and friends, perhaps negotiating a long distance relationship, and generally adjusting to a new environment with new pressures and demands. As a result, students can often feel isolated and confused.

Try to use the intellectual and social opportunities presented by course work without getting bogged down by its problems and difficulties. Remember that your courses are not the sum total of your intellectual life, and learn what you can from the professor and the reading list and assignments. You do not need to "know" everything and should not lose sleep trying to anticipate what the professor will ask or want to hear. Most professors want some indication that you have engaged with the literature and have something interesting to say about it; they do not want you to sacrifice collegiality or your intellectual development in the struggle to get a good evaluation. You should treat other students with respect, and try to both give and receive helpful criticism without being harsh or overly sensitive. Courses should be places for collective learning and informed debate, and it is everyone's responsibility to be sensitive to the group dynamics.

If you have trouble speaking up in seminar, don't understand the material, or encounter other problems that affect your performance in class, discuss your situation with the professor and other students. Professors often have helpful advice, and like-minded students may find that creating a study group is a useful way to work through the course reading or resolve specific concerns. If you encounter serious problems with the course material, requirements, or classroom environment, discuss them with the professor, your graduate history students' association, your graduate director, or other appropriate authorities. But try to remember: courses are not forever, and they can be a terrific opportunity to learn about new topics, test new skills, and practice the demanding but interesting work of being a historian.

### **PhD Fields**

Early on in a PhD program, you will be asked to choose your fields, or areas of scholarly specialization. Fields are often defined by national histories or geo-political boundaries (such as Canadian, US, African, or Latin American history) or by time period (for example, Medieval Europe, Modern China, or Ancient History). Many departments also offer thematic fields. These may be very broad, as in the case of cultural history or comparative women, genders and sexualities, or they may be quite specific – for example, the history of medicine. Some thematic fields, such as North American labour history, are confined to two national historiographies.

Consult your department's guidelines, and ask your advisor, graduate director, and fellow students how to pick your fields. Try to select fields that match your interests and that complement each other. Draw on the strengths of your academic background and the resources available in your department. It is best to choose your fields early in your career to avoid scattering your efforts, but do remain receptive to new possibilities. Your interests may change during your first year or so, as you encounter new topics, professors and scholarly literatures. This is part of your intellectual development, and most graduate programs will accommodate requests for program changes. When choosing fields, give some consideration to topics that you and your professors think will translate into teaching jobs, but do not worry about coming up with the "perfect" combination of fields to get you a tenure-track job. You cannot possibly predict which particular constellation of specialties a future hiring committee will want.

It is important to specialize, but do not become overly narrow. Think seriously about demonstrating a breadth of knowledge and versatility both for teaching and research purposes. For instance, if your major field is African history, you might take a secondary field in Empire and Colonization and a third in the Atlantic World. If you are interested primarily in Medieval Europe but hope to write a thesis dealing with family and community, you might choose women's/gender history for your second field, and for added breadth, a third field in religious history, ancient history, or European antiquity.

### **Comprehensive Exams**



In most programs, doctoral students usually complete their comprehensive or qualifying exams at some point during their second or third year of study. Usually, students are examined on one, two, or three fields, each of which requires mastery of a list of books and articles set by the department or developed by the student with the examining faculty. Some programs require only written exams; others demand an oral performance. Still others require that students demonstrate their acquired knowledge both in written exams and in an oral defense before a faculty committee.

Unfortunately, comprehensive exams have become the object of a great deal of student anxiety, folklore, and grief. We want to put them in appropriate perspective. On one level, the comps do represent a rite of passage, marking the transition in a student's status from that of a promising beginner to a mature scholar-in-training, who has demonstrated a capacity for in-depth reading and analytical thought – both key skills of our trade – and who possesses a breadth of knowledge necessary for teaching. Most departments do tend to categorize PhD students as pre and post comps, and some faculty are more tough-minded than others about quality of performance they expect in an exam. Some students find that professors who appear relaxed and friendly suddenly become exacting and conservative taskmasters. But no one intends the comps as an instrument of humiliation, intellectual torture, or infantilization. Both students and faculty share some of the blame for the hysteria that seems to accompany the comps in many departments. Especially in large programs, some students seem to enjoy regaling each other with ghastly tales of horrifying examinations, and senior students tell their "war stories" to junior colleagues.

Take all this lore and hype with several large grains of salt. You will find that preparing for the comps is demanding and at times quite stressful. But remember: it is a tremendous opportunity for reading and reflection. Preparing for comprehensive exams actually entitles you to spend a prolonged period of time reading widely and contemplating scholarship – something that we, as intellectuals, value. You will not have much time for this in the years that follow. Of course, you will be asked to discuss and evaluate secondary sources, but you do not have to have the "correct" answer. Faculty are looking for intelligent reflection, not quiz show answers. Of course, you will be asked to read and comment on historical developments or scholarly works that do not reflect your particular interests, but if you are going to claim expertise in an area of history you need to master the broad parameters of the field. And, if you get a teaching job, the chances are that you will be required to cover events and literatures outside the narrow confines of your specialties. The major objective of the comps is to give you breadth and prepare you for teaching. So, try to enjoy your reading, concentrate on what you do know, and avoid panicking about what you have yet to learn. And remember that almost everyone passes on the first attempt.

There is no secret key to success on comps, but being well prepared and informed about expectations and experiences can be crucial. Consult all members of your examining committee about their expectations. Does one member stress historiography, while another insists on a general narrative or knowledge of key events? Some examiners want you to master certain bodies of literature; others will demand a "textbook knowledge" of a field and thus drill you on

historical figures and events. Most faculty members see the comps largely as an exercise in self-directed reading, but individual professors differ in how they see their role in the process. Some meet with students on a weekly or monthly basis; others agree to a few meetings. Many departments now keep former exams on file, so check out this possibility. Consult with senior students about their exams or form a study group; many students find "mock exams" and other practice exercises beneficial. Throughout the preparation, keep in regular contact with your examiners; let them know about your progress and any problems you encounter.

Generally, faculty members do not want to see students do badly on exams; they want students to do as well as possible. But if something does go awry and you fail an exam, remember that it is not the end of the world. Most departments will let you try again. Find out why your committee was unsatisfied with your performance, and ask how you can improve. At the same time, if you feel you were treated unfairly, be sure about your rights, and develop a strategy for dealing with the problem. Consult with sympathetic faculty members and administrators; talk to the graduate program director and the school of graduate studies.

At worst, comprehensive examinations are something to struggle through. At best, they are a useful vehicle for mastering several bodies of historical literature capped by a satisfying moment of public recognition. If, after passing your comps, your friends or committee wants to take you out for lunch or dinner, enjoy the event. For most of us, these are the last set of exams we will ever have to write.

## **The MA Thesis and PhD Dissertation**

Courses and comprehensive examinations take up a large amount of time and energy, but the MA thesis or research paper, or PhD dissertation, is the most important part of graduate study in history. The completion of an interesting, well-executed MA thesis or PhD dissertation is a significant accomplishment and should be a source of great pride and satisfaction. It is your PhD dissertation, moreover, that will define your career and determine how others in the historical profession will see you. Your dissertation is where you make an individual mark as a scholar. No matter how impressive your seminar performance has been, no matter how disappointing you found your comprehensive exams, your PhD dissertation will most directly determine your success on the academic job market. This section focuses on researching and writing the PhD dissertation, but much of the general advice is also applicable to the MA research paper or thesis.

### *Choosing a Thesis Topic and Writing the Proposal*

When choosing a dissertation topic, try to select a subject that fits with current scholarly trends but also strikes out in some new directions. The best topics are those that break fresh ground through new empirical discoveries, new modes of conceiving questions, or interpretive innovations. However, it is sometimes difficult to find support for topics that are out of the ordinary. It is a good idea to select a topic with potential for publication as a book (or article, if you are working on your Master's), but choose something that interests you, as it will dominate

your thoughts for a long time. It is also important to make sure your topic is “do-able,” in the sense that you can find and access sufficient primary sources. Your thesis should also be of a manageable size for a project that must be completed within a specific time frame, generally between two and four years for a PhD. Your supervisor and other faculty members can help you identify resources and assist you in shaping an idea or an inspiration into a workable topic. Do not, however, allow faculty concerns to dominate your own. Make your own choice, rather than accepting a topic chosen by your advisor that does not interest or sustain you. Yet if your professors hesitate to approve your topic, listen carefully to their concerns. Contact historians in the field about sources, scout out the archives, and follow up leads in published periodicals to make sure your planned thesis is something you can actually do.

When you have chosen a topic, your graduate program will submit it to the Canadian Historical Association and American Historical Association for inclusion in their databases of history dissertations. (Head to <http://www.cha-shc.ca> for the CHA’s online register of history-related dissertations in progress and <http://www.historians.org> for the AHA directory). This will ensure that the larger historical community is aware of your topic of study. You can also use these databases to find out what topics are already being studied when you are in the process of choosing your own dissertation topic.

Most universities require you to submit a dissertation proposal, or *problématique*. This step prevents students from trying projects that would never win final approval because they are impossible, unethical, or otherwise unwise. Requirements for the dissertation proposal or *problématique* vary widely. In many departments in English Canada, the proposal is not very elaborate. In Quebec, the *problématique* is usually more detailed. In every province, new research protocols – such as ethics guidelines for oral history interviews – have enlarged and complicated the process. Check with your graduate program office for the specific requirements of your program.

Regardless of the specific requirements of your program, the process of preparing a *problématique* or dissertation proposal will help you clarify your thesis plan. Your proposal should provide a clear research outline covering the subject you intend to pursue and some general questions of inquiry. It should include a brief discussion of the relevant secondary literature as well as some of the archival and other primary sources you intend to explore. Do not worry if you are unsure about some of these details: the proposal is a forecast, a series of working questions and hypotheses, not a road-map. You should show that you have a concrete research agenda and perhaps that you can comment on the quality of some of your primary sources, not that you already know the answers to your questions. Your dissertation will take shape and probably change as you research and write. But until you produce chapters, this document may well be the only written work that your professors and department have for evaluating your performance. So, it can be an important source for any references they might write for you. It also can serve as the basis for preparing personal statements for fellowship or job applications, and some university funding opportunities require a formally accepted proposal before you can apply for awards. Take the exercise seriously, but it is important to get it finished and submitted in a timely fashion. You can shorten or expand it, update and revise it as the

occasion demands.

### *Researching and Writing the Thesis*

Whatever systems of support may be available, whoever is your advisor, ultimately it is you who must research and write your thesis. Some programs encourage students to work primarily with one advisor, while others facilitate a committee system. Adapt your approach to the prevailing system of your department, the preferences of your supervisor, and your own needs. Speak to your advisor or dissertation committee to clarify expectations of how you will proceed. Maintaining a good working relationship with your committee is essential, and, given the realities of power relationships, it is chiefly up to you to accommodate the relationship. Remember that your professors, whatever their shortcomings, know more than you do about writing history.

The process of research is what many historians identify as their favourite aspect of academic endeavour, the facet of intellectual life which is most compelling and exciting. At this stage, you are entitled to immerse yourself completely in your research. Do not put off going into the archives or beginning the daily grind of reading old newspapers in the microfilm room. Research for a thesis, especially when it involves travel or archival work, takes time; it usually involves many seemingly unproductive days sifting through materials that yield no results. Even the most brilliant PhD candidate cannot "blitz" the thesis. Indeed, at this stage, perseverance may prove more important than brilliance. It is often useful to begin with secondary sources and then move on to analyze your primary sources. It will also be difficult to predict how long your dissertation research will take – so the sooner you begin the better.

Pre-comps students may find it difficult to believe that many senior students actually find it difficult to stop researching, that even after a few years of research they are curious to know what is in the unseen archival boxes or want to visit yet another local archive. No matter how satisfying archival work can be, at some point you must begin to write. Many historians find it helpful to write as they research, so that they are not faced with a daunting and indigestible pile of research at the end of a year or two. Some students prepare chapters as they research, while others use conference papers as vehicles for getting preliminary thoughts on paper. Others prefer to gather all their data before turning to the task of analysis and presentation. Whatever the case, begin writing the section you are most confident about; this is rarely the "Introduction." Expect that some days you will seem to get nothing done, but your mind will be working, and the next day, or week, may prove extremely productive. In any event, keep track of the ideas and inspirations you have as you research, ruminate, and think: they can be an important base for larger arguments in your dissertation. You may want to consider getting a notebook or keeping a computer file entirely devoted to noting down your ideas (and problems) as you research.

Writing is a skill that takes time and practise, and writing a thesis involves plenty of outlines, drafts and re-writes – so do not be discouraged. Also, do not fool yourself into thinking you can write a dissertation in a few months. Even those who have the luxury of being able to devote full-time to thesis writing will take longer than that: at least a year or more. Start earlier rather

than later; some faculty advise that you spend as much time writing as you do researching your thesis. Once you begin writing, how you proceed and present work to your committee will vary according to departmental protocol, individual preference, and the demands of your committee. You may be called upon to hand in chapters at regular intervals, a method which allows students to revise gradually. Or you may prefer to write substantial amounts of your thesis before seeking committee feedback. While the latter method has the benefit of allowing you to develop ideas and arguments continuously, it also means that you run the risk of having a large amount of work rejected or seriously criticized, which can be a major setback. The amount and character of faculty feedback varies enormously: some professors offer detailed analytic and stylistic commentary, while others provide a few short remarks, usually with the encouragement "to keep going." Some students receive feedback from their entire committee throughout the writing process, while others consult only with their supervisor until their final revisions. Whatever your particular case, listen seriously to faculty feedback and remember that the writing process will inevitably involve major revisions. Being asked to revise is not a catastrophe, but part of the writing process. Be aware, moreover, that if your advisor or committee members set certain rules, you will have to comply.

Most students must make an effort to overcome the isolation of daily, dissertation work, and those with economic pressures or family responsibilities must work extra hard to carve out the time to write. Group support, whether formal or casual, can be the key to success and survival. Lunches at the archives have sustained many a historian-in-training. Informal student groups dedicated to the helpful discussion of work-in-progress often provide a crucial place for developing ideas in a supportive environment, as do more formal research seminars. Some people with "writer's block" find it useful to be given concrete deadlines (with rewards for meeting them). Others have made use of helpful services: your university probably has counselors to help with serious writing difficulties.

The dissertation is the last stage of your graduate education, and you should not let it become a stumbling block that keeps you from moving on to other stages. It is not your magnum opus. Think of the dissertation as an extended essay, or a series of inter-related essays, on a subject about which you have learned a great deal. Your thesis, after all, is just a thesis, not a book, and graduate school is a stage, not a life-sentence. It can be demoralizing to drag out the thesis process, and potential university employers may not consider a candidate who does not have a PhD, so try to get the dissertation done in a reasonable amount of time. Still, most departments acknowledge that caretakers of children, students with health problems or disabilities, and people who face serious financial pressures may find it difficult to finish within a set time-frame. Do not assume that delay is seen as a personal failure; rather, try to tap available resources to both allow you to meet existing requirements and alter them to realistically suit your situation.

After the entire committee has seen a full draft of your dissertation and agreed that it is acceptable, the final stage of the process is the defense. For about two hours, you will answer questions on your dissertation by an external examiner who is an expert in your field, one or two university representatives, and the members of your committee. The process varies between universities; find out how the defense operates in your department. If defenses are public, attend

one to find out how it operates in practice, and invite friends to see yours. Above all, enjoy the defense. You know more about your dissertation than anyone else in the room. Don't be afraid to take control of the conversation; like the comps, it is ok to admit when you don't know the answer.

Graduate study in history can be taxing at times, but it can also be a highly rewarding experience. Capitalising on the benefits and minimizing the difficulties of graduate school will help you navigate this stage of becoming a historian – and remind you of the passions, joys, and interests that led you to history in the first place.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **HOW TO APPLY TO GRADUATE SCHOOL**

Once you've decided to go on to graduate school, it's time to begin the application process. This chapter provides practical advice on applying to history programs in Canada. Some of our suggestions also pertain to graduate study abroad, but you should be aware that the application process is different for universities in the United States, Britain, France, and other countries. For example, in Canada applications to MA and PhD programs are usually made separately – though some universities offer direct entry into doctoral programs (where students without MAs are admitted directly into a PhD program). In the United States, by contrast, most students apply only once, to a joint MA/PhD program. Some American universities offer a terminal Master's Degree, but they rarely offer financial assistance toward this degree.

Allow plenty of time to decide where you want to study and to complete your applications. It is especially important to get an early start if you are applying to graduate programs outside Canada. For example, many American universities require applicants to take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), while Canadian universities do not. Ordinarily, you should begin the process in the autumn of the year before you wish to enrol. Although deadlines for applications vary, most fall between November and January. Financial aid deadlines may be different; take care not to miss them.

Most universities announce admissions decisions in March or April, although a growing number accept their top candidates earlier. Do not hesitate to contact the universities you have not heard from once you get an offer, and try to negotiate for the best possible funding package.

### **Gathering Information and Applications**

The first step in the application process is deciding where to apply. Don't base your decision solely on the university's prestige; the ranking of a specific graduate history program has as much to do with the reputation of the department and individual faculty members as with the university as a whole. If there is a scholar whose work you particularly admire, find out where that person teaches.

An excellent place to start your research is by looking at departmental websites. Here you will find information on courses, program faculty, and, increasingly, about graduate students currently enrolled in the program. Websites often discuss their faculty's current research; however, keep in mind, that some of this information may be outdated. When in doubt, contact the faculty member directly and inquire about their current projects. Departmental websites also list course offerings as well as admission, degree, tuition, and financial aid requirements. Graduate admissions committees appreciate applications that are familiar with the departmental offerings and faculty research interests.

Your undergraduate professors can be a great help in choosing a graduate school. Ask which

universities they think offer the best programs for your particular interests and abilities, and find out if they will put in a good word for you with acquaintances in those departments. Do not hesitate to ask professors for advice, even if you have not taken a class with them. Their advice may be especially useful if they studied at a school you are interested in attending. Some professors will speak frankly about the strengths and weaknesses of particular departments or faculty members. Others may drop hints. Listen carefully for hints about department politics or personality clashes: you don't want to wind up in a department where the two people you want to work with haven't spoken to each other in a decade! But don't just talk to your professors; find out as much information as you can about a university from a variety of sources.

To apply to a graduate program, you must have the necessary forms. Most applications for Canadian and American schools are submitted electronically, and so the forms will also be found online. However, for institutions overseas, you may have to write individual schools for paper copies – again this information will be found on departmental websites. Address your request to the director of graduate admissions or the department of history if you cannot find a specific name. You will receive in reply a packet of forms and information. Then your real work begins.

### **What to Look for in a Program, Department, and School**

You will be spending many years in graduate school, especially if you are working toward your PhD, so you should learn as much as you can about the history department and related programs, and about the university as a whole. Faculty members, curriculum, library holdings, computer facilities, financial aid packages, health and counseling services, accommodations for persons with disabilities, and location are important considerations in deciding where to apply. Find out as much as possible about the program requirements and how flexible they are. Must you limit your coursework to history, or can you take courses outside the department or at a neighbouring university? What are the language requirements?

It is important to find a program where your interests match the strengths of the department, and where you want to work with faculty members who want to work with you. If there is a historian whose work you particularly admire, find out where he or she teaches. Check out the books written by other department members, and find out the dissertation topics of current graduate students and recent PhDs. The dissertations written within a department reflect the interests of its faculty members as well as students, and the available research facilities. Recently completed dissertations are often listed on the department websites. They are also listed in the Canadian Historical Association's *Register of Dissertations* (<http://www.cha-shc.ca>) and in the Dissertation Directory of the American Historical Association (<http://www.historians.org>).

If you are attracted by a special program, such as environmental history or the history of medicine, do your best to find out whether the program is securely established and if any history student may take courses in it, or if you have to apply separately. If you expect to depend heavily on one or two faculty members, find out if they work regularly with graduate students,



and investigate their teaching status. Professors sometimes leave for sabbaticals, reduce their teaching load to do administrative work, move to another campus, or retire. If your interest in a particular program is based primarily on one faculty member, find out if there is a backup person to work with should that professor leave. This is particularly important as you begin to select among the schools that have accepted you. Identify the resources available to graduate students, for they indicate the level of commitment to graduate research and teaching within a department and school. Does the library have extensive holdings in your field? Are there relevant sources in the university archives? Is travel funding available to graduate students? Are there special interdisciplinary programs? What are the computer facilities or resources? Is there a common room where graduate students can socialize? Is there an active graduate students' association? What accommodations and support services are provided for students who have special needs?

You will also need to research tuition costs and financial aid, for they vary tremendously between schools and even between departments. Find out if financial aid is channeled through the department, or if you need to apply separately to a different office. Some important questions to ask include: is the financial aid package only for the first year or does it cover subsequent years of graduate study (and if so, how many)? Do you have to pay tuition out of your stipend or is it covered as part of your funding package? Must you pay tuition over the summer and when you are no longer taking courses? Does the financial aid package require you to work as a research or teaching assistant (or in another capacity), or is it an outright stipend? Is it contingent upon performance? Is there additional funding for travel to archives or conferences? While some universities have 'guaranteed funding systems' for doctoral candidates, aid is often contingent on students applying for funding from outside sources, such as Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Doctoral Fellowships, Canada Graduate Scholarships, Ontario Graduate Scholarships, the Fonds Québécois de la Recherche sur la Société et la Culture (FQRSC). Being competitive for major external awards will only bolster any application you make for graduate programs. For details on these matters, see chapter 3.

Canadian students are often shocked by the high fees at American universities, but do not be dissuaded from applying. Most universities offer very substantial aid packages to promising students, and some universities have fellowships flagged for students of colour and specific ethnic groups. Aid arrangements vary by university; you should discuss grant opportunities with the graduate director. When you receive an offer, weigh the financial aid package with the quality of the school. If possible, don't just go to the institution that offers you the most money. A school that offers less money may have a superior job placement record or be a better "fit" for you.

Although most financial aid packages require you to enrol as a full-time student, some people go to graduate school part time for economic or personal reasons. Being a part-time student does not mean that you are less committed to graduate study, and part-timers have the right to the same education as full-time students. Besides, "full-time" does not mean "all-the-time." Many full-time students have family responsibilities, have to work for wages at some point during their graduate education, or are engaged in activist pursuits outside the academy.

Graduate study does require a big commitment, however. It is not easy to do graduate course work and exam preparation on top of a long commute or another job, and it is even more difficult (though not impossible) to successfully complete a dissertation part-time. You will not be able to earn a PhD "on the side" if you already have a full life in another city or a demanding career. Moreover, you may miss the intellectual community of graduate school if you are not at the university during the day. Part-time students may have to make a special effort to break down isolation and meet other grad students.

The location of the university may also be a factor in where you choose to apply. Are you a big city person, or would you prefer to live and work in a smaller town? Are you more comfortable in surroundings that are ethnically and culturally diverse? Some students cannot relocate; others are limited to schools near their families or where there are job opportunities for their partners; still others don't care where they live, as long as the library is close by. If you cannot relocate, you may find yourself with several degrees from the same institution. Opinions vary on whether multiple degrees from a single university might pose a problem in your career. It is definitely to your advantage to work with several professors at more than one university, and staying at the same small university may make course selection a challenge. The courses you took during your Honour's year or as part of your department's MA program probably cannot be repeated as part of doctoral work. If you know you want to continue on at your undergraduate institution for your PhD, you should consider going somewhere else for the MA. On the other hand, don't worry if this is impossible. To a large extent, graduate study – and your career in history – is what you make it.

Never hesitate to write or call a department to get further information. If possible, set up an exploratory on-campus interview with the graduate director. Ask the secretary for the names of students in the program; they will probably give you a more candid assessment of the program's strengths and weaknesses than the history office! Many departments run graduate student conferences; the programs will give you a sense of student research interests, and, if you are able to attend the conference, you can meet your future colleagues in person.

An important strategy for finding the right PhD program and supervisor, as well as potentially increasingly your chance of admission, is to contact individual faculty members before submitting a formal application. Send your potential PhD supervisor an email providing a little bit of background on your education and research interests, as well as a sense of the topic you would like to explore during your doctoral research. Even if you don't have a clear idea of your project, finding out whether faculty are interested in your candidacy can save you much time and money; showing compatibility between your research interests and theirs is an important initial step. Keep in mind that their interest does not automatically grant you admission into the program – but it may help.

Unlike law schools, history departments do not receive thousands of applicants for admission. For this reason, try to pare down your choice of schools in advance of applying. Each application will cost you well over a hundred dollars, particularly when you factor in transcripts costs. Make multiple applications, but remember that well-qualified applicants will usually be

admitted to one of the schools that peak their interest. One rule of thumb is to choose two or three programs that interest you most – including one ‘safe school’ – particularly if you have contacted potential supervisors in advance.

## **The Application Process**

Application instructions vary with each institution, so read each set with care. There are so many different forms and deadlines that it is important to keep some kind of organized file or you will be easily overwhelmed. Keep all application materials in a file folder. On the inside cover, keep track of each school's requirements and your follow-up. Photocopy all materials you send out.

Submit applications well in advance, particularly if you are doing them electronically, and keep a record of your submission along with its reference number. Once your application arrives at the university, it becomes a file (comprised of your statement of purpose, writing sample, letters of recommendation, and transcript). That file, which may be read by all members of the department, by every professor in your field, or by a small committee comprised of faculty members (and sometimes graduate students) with several different specialties, is used to size up your scholarly potential in a few minutes. For that reason, you should make your application readable and concise. Graduate admissions committees look for students who show potential for solid scholarship and have a lively interest in history. They are not necessarily looking for leadership talent or an impressive resume. To increase your chances of acceptance, make scholarship the focal point of your application.

## **Tips on the Personal Statement and Letters of Recommendation**

Together with your academic transcript, the most important parts of an application are your statement of purpose, the supporting letters of recommendation, and your writing sample. In Canada, your transcript and letters of recommendations are most crucial; the statement of purpose is more important to American universities.

The most effective statement of purpose is specific, well-written, professional in tone, scrupulously accurate in spelling and grammar, and tailored to each institution. It avoids sweeping philosophical generalizations, avowals of political or other ideology, or ruminations about the nature of historical knowledge and its essential role in bettering the human condition. No matter how earnestly intended or passionately felt, such lofty rhetoric all too easily descends to the level of cliché, especially when offered in a necessarily compressed form, suggesting an immature and jejune outlook rather than the intended profundity.

It is appropriate to discuss briefly how you became interested in history and to include something about your long-range career goals. Explain how your undergraduate reading, research, and course work have shaped your particular interests and prepared you to pursue them further. Avoid mention of extracurricular activities and achievements, no matter how outstanding, unless

they have a direct bearing on the professional field to which you are seeking entry.

Your statement of purpose should sum up your scholarly interests and immediate academic objectives in a clear and straightforward fashion. Be as precise as possible about the time period, geographic region, research themes, and kind of history you want to study, and perhaps even the topic you wish ultimately to investigate. You must convince the readers of your application file that you are capable of developing a research project that is original, realistic, and appropriate to your level. At the same time, it is important that your focus not look too narrow. The first years of graduate education primarily involve general training rather than specific research. Therefore, your statement should convey your openness to acquiring a wide range of historical knowledge and research skills rather than a fixation on a single narrow topic.

It is entirely appropriate, indeed desirable, to tailor your statement of purpose to the institution to which you are applying. Feel free, for example, to mention particular courses, interdisciplinary programs, or library resources that make the institution attractive to you. Many departments are keen to attract students from diverse backgrounds, and you should not hesitate to identify yourself if you are a member of a group that has been under-represented in the academy. You may also refer to professors with whom you would like to work (after making sure they will be on campus if you are applying to a one-year program), but avoid a fawning, excessively deferential tone.

The statement of purpose is also the place for you to address briefly any anomalies or ambiguities in your record, such as poor grades, course content that may not be clear from the transcript, or a health problem or disability that affected your grades. Do not appear defensive or apologetic; offer a one-sentence explanation of your situation and move on. If your undergraduate background in history is weak, or you have been out of school for a long time, you need to demonstrate that your commitment to the academic discipline of history is now firm.

Remember that your application is one of many being read by busy faculty members who have numerous other time-consuming obligations. Keep your tendencies toward loquaciousness well in check, and observe word limits strictly.

Letters of recommendation are also highly important, particularly in Canada where the historical profession is smaller and many professors are acquainted. It is well worth the effort to get to know professors as an undergraduate; most are delighted when students express an interest in their courses and in graduate work in history.

Select with great care the professors you ask to write on your behalf. Academic letters of reference are confidential; you should not ask to see them. If you are applying to a US university, you must waive your right to see the letter or it will not be taken seriously. Obviously, you cannot quiz someone in detail about the content of a letter of recommendation, but it is acceptable to ask in advance whether the professor feels able to write a reasonably positive letter. If possible, select faculty members whose scholarly work might be known to those who will be reading the letters. (Admissions committees evaluate the writers of

recommendation letters as well as the subject of those letters!) The strongest letter comes from the person who knows you best, even if that person is a teaching assistant. Keep in mind, however, that a tenured faculty member will carry more weight than the opinions of graduate students or sessional instructors. Established scholars have likely taught and supervised more students, and thus have a broader frame of reference to evaluate your work. If necessary, try to supplement letters from beginning or relatively unknown instructors with others from more established scholars.

Generally speaking, try to secure letters of recommendation when you and your work are still fresh in the instructors' mind. If you wish to obtain a letter from a professor with whom you studied a year or so in the past, or who taught you in a large lecture course, remind him or her about your work in the course, your general undergraduate program, and your scholarly interests to fix yourself more precisely in the writer's mind. The more specific a letter of recommendation the greater weight it carries. Even if you know a professor well, it will not hurt to provide your statement of purpose, curriculum vitae (including grade point average and any scholastic honours achieved), and a personal assessment of your goals and ability to fulfill them. It is also a good idea to give the professor a copy of a paper you wrote in the course.

Do not hesitate to ask your professors for letters of recommendation; writing these letters is part of the job. At the same time, do be considerate and talk to the professor well in advance. Make sure your forms (electronic or paper) are filled out properly, and allow ample time, preferably four weeks, before the deadlines. As the deadline approaches, verify that the school received your letters. You may need to give a gentle reminder of the deadlines. When you are accepted, let your professors know and thank them for their help.

A writing sample forms another crucial part of the application to almost all universities. Ideally, you should submit a paper in your chosen field that demonstrates your ability to do research using primary sources. However, the quality of your essay is probably more important than its content or method. Your paper will be read for the evidence it offers about the quality, clarity and originality of your mind; your maturity and skill as a writer and researcher; and your capacity for attention to detail. A thoughtful, well-crafted, coherently organized essay can go a long way toward favourably disposing an admissions committee on your behalf. Conversely, a shallow, hastily-written paper, marred by poor organization, awkwardness of expression or (even worse) outright grammatical errors and typos can seriously undermine an otherwise strong application.

You should take great care in the presentation of every part of your graduate school application. There have been instances of applications where misspelled words or grammatical errors have been circled or underlined by previous readers, with an exclamation point in the margin. Such lapses of detail are not necessarily fatal in themselves, particularly if the admissions committee decides that the applicant is a "diamond in the rough." But such errors are sufficiently damaging, especially in borderline cases, that you should make every effort to avoid them.

Clearly, no single formula can guarantee admission to graduate school in history or any other

discipline. Each admissions decision reflects a variety of factors and subjective judgments by fallible human beings. Admissions committees must match student interests with faculty expertise and try to balance the number of students in any given field. They want to avoid a scenario where most of the incoming class wants to study with one professor! No matter how talented you are, you are unlikely to be accepted into a program that cannot accommodate your interests, either because the specialist in your area is on leave or the field is simply not covered.

### **Set Your Sights High**

Keep an open mind as you consider history-related programs and careers. If you decide that you don't want to invest six to eight years pursuing a PhD, then consider a related field. If you do wish to follow the academic route, determine which graduate programs you are most interested in and consider applying to universities of varying prestige. Don't sell yourself short by assuming that the better-known departments won't accept you or give you aid. They often take more students and have more scholarship money than smaller, lesser-known institutions. If you are not accepted the first time you apply, you can always try again next year. You will be competing in a different pool of applicants and may have a better chance. Good luck!

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **FINANCIAL SURVIVAL: FUNDING GRADUATE STUDY**

Many graduate students get university funding for all or part of their graduate education. The support, however, rarely comes from one source. You actively need to research and apply for a wide range of funding sources, from research, travel, and dissertation writing awards to various jobs on the university campus and beyond. In addition to providing key sources of financial support and other resources (such as computers), research and teaching assistantships, travel grants, and doctoral fellowships build morale and confidence, enhance your curriculum vitae (cv), and lend prestige to your scholarship. You can use these awards as building blocks towards securing additional grants or contracts that will provide you with the funding necessary to complete your program. Here, we orient you to the different sources of funding to help you get off to the best financial start possible.

In an ideal world, a candidate could secure funding for every year of the MA and PhD and for a few years of postdoctoral studies. However, you should be realistic about your chances for this level of financial security. In reality, there is a limited pool of funds and a great deal of competition for most jobs and awards. Tuition fees are lower in Quebec, but Anglo-Canadian universities tend to have more internal funds for graduate students than francophone universities in Quebec. Putting together a good funding package takes time and energy, but fortunately, many departments and universities hold regular funding workshops and some universities have official "grants crafters" to help you put together an attractive application.

You will need to consider not only fellowships and department-sponsored employment but also jobs outside the department and university. Your search should start early, before you enter a program, and it should be wide-ranging. Consult your university research and employment officer, graduate director, PhD supervisor, and other students who have won awards and secured jobs. If you are a student of colour or belong to a specific racial or ethnic group, there may be certain targeted funds available to you, though this is more common in the United States than in Canada. If you are a student with a disability, you may have access to specific resources, such as library technology. And if at some point you find yourself in dire financial straits, there is nothing wrong with going to your supervisor or graduate director and simply saying, "I'm broke ... is there any work I can do?"

#### **Working for Pay as a Graduate Student**

This section discusses employment possibilities on campus and their ramifications for your career prospects. It is mainly aimed at domestic students. International students face very high fees; if you are a "visa" student, contact the International Students Office at your university for information about positions open to you. As an international student, you will encounter specific employment restrictions, but also special job opportunities too; certain campus jobs may be set aside for you, such as summer teaching assistantships.

Your department may offer you part-time academic employment. The job titles will differ from research assistant, to teaching assistant, to sessional instructor, but all fit the category of graduate student employment. The offer may come as an inducement to enter a graduate program, or when you accept admission into the program, or later, in your second or third year. All the work that you do as a graduate student for a professor or a faculty-headed research team or a department should be paid, have a stipulated number of hours per week, and a predetermined work schedule set out at the beginning of the semester. You will need to discuss your duties with the primary person for whom you are expected to work. When you know the particulars, you can decide whether you want the job. Get the job offer and its requirements in writing. If applicable, be sure that the duties and pay scale conform to those laid out by your union.

Keep in mind that even though you may have been promised a certain amount of funding in the form of a graduate assistantship, most departments require that you apply for particular positions. Keep careful track of deadlines for applications and renewals and apply early. Your supervisor should have up-to-date knowledge of your progress and may be able to point you in the direction of applicable employment opportunities. How graduate funding is awarded depends on the size of your department and its resources, and whether or not it must respect a union contract. Most graduate student employees in most universities in Canada are now covered by unions, usually the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

### *Research Assistantships*

Research assistantships help to build valuable skills and can allow for more flexible work schedules than teaching assistantships. As a research assistant, you may work for one professor or a faculty headed research team; if you are in a francophone Quebec university, the research team may also enjoy links with a team based in a Belgian or French university. You may undertake one or two of the following tasks: gathering statistical data, helping to edit a manuscript, arranging an archival collection, creating a website, drawing up the index to a book, photocopying published articles or primary documents, conducting or transcribing oral history interviews, or mounting a museum display. At some universities, research assistant jobs are given primarily to MA students, while teaching assistantships are reserved for PhD students. At other universities, you may have a choice between a teaching and research assistantship. If possible, pursue a research assistantship at least once in your years as a graduate student to develop your research skills. Students interested in a career in public history will particularly benefit from such jobs.

When you are hired as a research assistant you are most likely being paid out of funds awarded to a faculty member or group of faculty members. In other words, the faculty are investing their own research dollars in training you. Be professional and honour the agreed upon number of hours and work schedule. Do not assume that you can take care of the assigned tasks in far less time than the contract outlines, or do them at the last minute, as you will invariably fail to do so and thus disappoint your faculty/employer. If your situation changes throughout the term, and you are unable to fulfil the initial agreement, communicate this to the professor who hired you.



Remember that it is a professional arrangement and that you may later need to ask this faculty member for a reference letter. You do not want to develop a reputation as an unreliable research assistant.

Usually, professors with funds to hire research assistants do not openly advertise this fact. Some faculty members may wish to support their own students, or they may approach a student in their course who has impressed them. But many are also open to the idea of hiring students who need the money. All this means that you need to make your desire for such a position known to your supervisor and other faculty members. Ask around to discover who has grant money and might be hiring.

### *Teaching Assistantships*

As well as providing essential help to faculty, teaching assistantships are designed to provide you with teaching skills. Like an apprenticeship, a "TA-ship" affords you an opportunity to learn under professional guidance. You can gain experience in courses outside your particular field. It is a good idea to TA for several different courses. Obviously, it is less work to TA for the same course a number of times, and this may be the better strategy depending on where you are at in your own dissertation research or writing. If possible, make strategic choices.

There are at least two types of TA work: marking student assignments and leading small group discussions, or tutorials, within a larger class. A teaching assistantship will usually involve both sets of tasks. By contrast, a marker-grader has the more limited role of grading student assignments. TA-ships that combine tutorial-based teaching and marking are probably more numerous in English Canada, though both anglophone and francophone universities rely fairly heavily on marker-graders.

When you work as a TA in a course directed by a faculty member, that course instructor is in charge of your professional conduct in the course. Therefore, the instructor will likely stipulate the assignments for your students (for instance, weekly tutorial readings and essay topics) in whole or in part. The instructor will come to one of your tutorials to observe you and may also evaluate your abilities as a marker. You might be asked to explain to the instructor why you've assigned a particular grade for a paper and the instructor may ultimately revise the mark. Treat all of this as a learning opportunity. The course director may not only track your responsibilities, but also ask you for input on essay topics and exam questions, and consult with you about ways of improving the course. Ideally, this should be a collegial relationship despite the power imbalance involved. Additionally, teaching assistants are evaluated by both undergraduates and instructors; while this may seem intimidating at first, try to remember that you are an apprentice and their judgments can help you learn.

At most Canadian universities, TA-ships are covered by union contracts with established formulas that stipulate the amount of time required to prepare for a one hour tutorial, or to mark a paper of a particular length, a final exam, and so on. In most unionized settings, a mid-term

meeting is required between the TA and the instructor, where they review the TA's workload and determine whether both sides are satisfied with the contractual relationship. Sometimes disputes arise between TAs and course instructors, particularly with regard to job expectations and contract terms. If you find yourself in this situation, start by approaching the person for whom you are working directly. If you do not feel comfortable doing so, or if you have done so to no avail, find out who your union steward is (check your local CUPE website) and bring your concerns to that person. You can also approach the graduate director.

Whether or not these formal meetings actually take place, be sure that the course instructor is kept abreast of the hours you have worked and tasks you have completed. It is crucial that you and the faculty member agree in advance about your duties as a TA, and that your progress in carrying them out is monitored throughout the term.

Success as a TA can be extremely valuable when you are looking for a full-time teaching position. Hiring committees look for evidence of pedagogical skills in candidates. It is very much in your interest to do well and to have faculty observers witness your triumphs in the classroom. Whether in the form of letters of recommendation or departmental reports, faculty comments, supported by student evaluations, will carry weight in your applications for other jobs. So be sure to take the position of teaching assistant seriously!

However, you do not need to TA in every year of your graduate career. Keep your eyes on the prize and get your dissertation done! While TA-ing is rewarding work, it is also demanding and time-consuming. Of course, certain teaching weeks will be more demanding than others, and teaching a course for the second time is easier than teaching it for the first time, but do not make the mistake of spending most of your work week on a part-time job that pays on the basis of 10 or 15 hours per week. Consult the guidelines of your contract. If your union contract's formula for marking an 8-10 page paper is 20 minutes, then follow it. Remember, TA-ing is meant to help subsidize your graduate education, but it should not be a substitute for focussing on your own work.

### *Course Directorships: Teaching Your Own Course*

Some graduate students have the opportunity to teach their own courses, doing the planning, lecturing, and marking themselves. Some departments may invite senior PhD students to teach a course in their field. Senior PhD students at certain universities compete for the opportunity to teach a course they have proposed and designed. In other cases, a department will post the job openings, advertising to applicants both within and even outside the university. Certain departments make it a rule not to hire their own students to teach courses, so you will need to find out your department's policy on this issue. If part-time instructors at your university are unionized, they may enjoy seniority rights over advertised courses. In some departments, PhD students can prepare themselves for teaching by designing a course as part of their comprehensive exams. In addition, sessional teaching positions are available off-campus as well, at CEGEPs, community colleges, other universities, and so on. For many of us the joys of

teaching are a reminder of why we entered graduate school in the first place.

There are many advantages to teaching your own course. Designing and teaching a course allows you to develop important academic skills. It indicates a mastery of the subject matter being taught, and shows your capacity for planning and managing an important project. If you are planning to pursue an academic career, it is a good idea to teach one course during your graduate years in order to determine whether you even enjoy teaching. However, it is not necessary to teach many courses in order to demonstrate your ability as a university instructor and many PhDs are hired without such experience. Tenure-track hiring committees want some indication that you can teach undergraduates – that you will be able to design course outlines, write informative lectures, and generally perform well before students – but few look for a long list of course directorships as proof of this. Excellent TA evaluations, along with a first-rate job talk or lecture, will also be taken into serious consideration. Remember that course directorships can be very time consuming and delay progress on your thesis, so make an informed decision when considering such opportunities.

Of course, some students spend a lot of time teaching courses, sometimes for years, less out of a desire for the experience than for reasons of financial survival. A strong teaching record may help you on the sessional circuit: departments hiring on short-term (but, alas, also insecure) contracts often prefer seasoned teachers over candidates with a promising research profile but less classroom experience.

## **Fellowships and Grants**

Departments are not the only sources of fellowship funding for graduate studies, so you will have to look beyond your own program for sources of support. Your department and your university's school of graduate studies can provide information about different sources of external funding. In some cases, external fellowships or grants can be used to supplement departmental assistantships. For an excellent list of scholarships, fellowships, grants, and research travel awards for universities across Canada, head to <http://www.cha-shc.ca/gsc-ced/en/awards.htm>. Within your university, there may be open competition grants for which all graduate students can apply – for example, dissertation writing awards that cover tuition fees and other costs so the successful students can devote themselves full-time to completing their thesis. Some departments have funds flagged for specific fields of study, such as Canadian military or women's history or the history of certain immigrant groups or communities. Many departments award short-term travel grants to first-rate research proposals that finance a student's trip to a specific archives or locale, though, again, these are more common in English Canadian than in francophone universities in Quebec.

Canadian federal and provincial governments and publicly-funded academic organizations offer a variety of awards, including the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), and provincial ones such as Quebec's Fonds québécois de la recherche sur la société et la culture (FQRSC) and the Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS). Consult academic

organizations that offer student research and/or travel scholarships – for example, the Canadian Studies Association, and CRIAW (Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women). Various private sources, such as community groups, religious organizations, and unions, can also be tapped. These awards range from thousands of dollars for several years to minor one-time-only grants of a few hundred dollars. They may be awarded by individuals, families, social organizations, or volunteer groups – for example, the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE), Chinese Railway Workers' Organization, Canadian Federation of University Women, and professional and business groups. Again, head to <http://www.cha-shc.ca/gsc-ced/en/awards.htm> .

Many fellowships are set aside for graduate students. History students can also apply for more general or multidisciplinary grants aimed at humanities and social science candidates. For example, the Department of Canadian Heritage provides funds for the study of immigrant and ethnic subjects. In addition, many archives and libraries in the US and Europe offer travel grants or research funding for graduate students. The competition for these awards is stiff, but they are certainly within your reach.

An important goal of funding is to reduce financial risk to the granting agency. Conscious of how little money there is to distribute, they put great weight on the reliability of references and proof of productivity. It may seem unfair, but a student who has already received one major award is more likely to receive other ones, because he or she is perceived as "successful." Of course, there are always exceptions. A well-written application for a strong project can win a fellowship based on merit.

Many students remain mystified by the process of how awards are granted. In many cases, professors from various universities sit on selection committees. In some cases, the committee members represent a variety of disciplines and do not know or are uninterested in the debates, jargon, and styles familiar to historians. Rather, they are looking for important projects with wide appeal. In such competitions, the onus is on you to present your project with a non-specialist audience in mind, to make your proposal accessible to non-historians, and to argue for the wider value, significance, or relevance of your work.

In certain competitions, you may need to demonstrate the applicability of your work beyond the academy. This may be particularly so with government-funded grants, such as certain SSHRC awards and the Trudeau Scholarship, or with grants linked to publicly funded research centres. While it may be easier for, say, social scientists, to argue that their research has valuable social policy implications, historians cannot – and should not – shy away from the challenge. After all, don't most historians think their research, whether on ancient Greece, Medieval Europe, or Cold War Canada, matters in some way to how we understand current social and political issues? Think creatively about your project.

The unpredictability of funding awards might cause disappointed students to consider the awarding of grants something of a lottery. They may see students with lower grades or fewer publications than themselves receive awards, or they may receive an award one year but be

rejected for the same one the next year on the basis of the same academic dossier. Do not get discouraged by what may seem to be a random, even biased, process. Committees change; topics go in and out of fashion; the pool of applicants changes in size and quality; letters of recommendation vary from year to year. Be sure to keep applying for as many awards as possible. Ultimately, however, stay focused on finishing your dissertation, and don't let the award system affect your sense of self-worth.

### *The Application Process*

Given the enormous difference that a fellowship award can make to your studies, you should be prepared to devote considerable time to the preparation of your applications. Funding agencies adhere to strict deadlines for applications, so start early. Remember you need time to prepare a good project proposal. Similarly, faculty who are writing letters of reference on your behalf deserve the courtesy of having ample notification of the deadlines.

You also need to be organized. Create a different file folder – both virtual and real – for each funding application. Save all relevant email correspondence in the appropriate folder. It is a good idea to save the various drafts of your proposal as you never know what you might need to revisit or re-use at another date. But make sure your most recent draft is clearly flagged. Follow the instructions for specific awards carefully, providing all the necessary information. Complete the forms neatly and precisely, and stay within the recommended length. Remember that fellowship committees often have to read hundreds of applications.

Of course, graduate students compete against each other for grants, but writing funding applications can and should be a shared endeavour. Guarding your application from your peers will not serve you well in the end. If you have won an award, offer to share your successful proposal with other students. Many departments keep samples of successful applications to help others write strong applications. When drawing up your research proposal, ask people for feedback. Ask well-informed faculty to look over the whole application, which might include a budget and career statement as well as the description of the proposed research project. Professors and advanced students well versed in your field can make useful suggestions. So, too, can faculty outside your specialized field; indeed, they might be better at identifying mystifying jargon or confusing shorthand. If your university has an official grants crafter (check your university's office of research), make an appointment with this person well in advance of the deadline. Be open to feedback and incorporate it accordingly.

In applying for funding always remember to emphasize your strengths. This is best done by a clear statement of research and career plans. If your career shows unusual gaps, such as a period of withdrawal for family responsibilities or a paucity of research due to illness or heavy teaching responsibilities, explain the reason briefly, and in a straightforward manner. No apologies are needed!

Choose people to write letters of recommendation who will strengthen your application. It is

always wise to choose faculty who are well known in the field. If you are working on a topic that requires a variety of skills, try to get referees who can testify to all your attributes. If your career has been limited to a particular locale or to a teaching-oriented institution, you may try to include a recommendation from someone in a nationally recognized department, if that person is reasonably familiar with your scholarship. If you are a senior student nearing completion of the thesis, it is useful to get a few letters of recommendation from scholars outside your home institution; it is a sign that your work is already being well received. But weigh your options: a very positive and carefully crafted letter from a faculty member in your program, who knows you well, can carry more weight with a jury than a vague letter from a "star" from another university.

The application may request supporting materials, such as a writing sample or budget. In the first case, send a polished piece of work but avoid submitting a very long paper. If you have a choice, add an abstract indicating which sections indicate the heart of your work. If a budget is required, you will need to justify it, so be realistic when estimating your needs. Don't pad your budget. The rationale is as important as the total amount of money requested, so briefly explain your reasoning in constructing the budget. Since funding agencies differ on requirements for supporting materials, seek the advice of someone who is well informed about a particular agency. Above all, you want to show them that your topic is do-able and you can make their investment worthwhile.

### *The Project Statement*

Your statement of research should be tailored for each individual funding application. Most subjects have many dimensions, and it is entirely appropriate to emphasize the geographical or subject area in which each funding body is particularly interested. For example, if you want to write your PhD thesis on the history of poverty in twentieth century Canada and the United States, you should stress to the Fulbright Scholarship committee how your cross-border approach will enhance understanding of the similar and differing ways in which the poor have been treated and regulated in the United States and Canada. For a SSHRC application, you might emphasize how your project will contribute to the rich literature on poverty, welfare state provisions, and anti-poverty activism in Canada while at same time internationalizing this Canadian scholarship. In a Trudeau Foundation application, where social justice issues matter, you might stress how studying histories of poverty and social and economic marginalization can help scholars and policymakers to better understand and deal with current crises. You cannot, of course, claim to do all these things unless you really intend to. The main purpose of the project statement is to show how your research is original, how it adds to existing scholarship, explores new methods, or makes new information available. The process of applying for fellowships should lead you to discover the richness of your own subject and to think systematically about how to bring this richness out. Learning how to package your research in different ways is a skill, one that will serve you well when you come to applying for tenure-track jobs (for more details, see chapter 7).

Naturally, your project description will vary depending on what stage you are at in your graduate

career. For instance, whether you are finishing your masters and applying for PhD funding or in the fifth year of your doctoral program, will make a difference as to how detailed your proposal will be. In any case, combine general research questions (or working hypothesis or *problématique*) with a brief description of the relevant scholarly literature, and a concrete agenda for how you intend to proceed with your research. Note the archival collections, periodicals, newspapers, or novels you plan to examine. If you are doing an oral history project, let the selection committee know you have clear ideas about how to contact the informants you hope to interview, and that you are following the protocols of your university's ethics guidelines for research involving human subjects. You do not need to know all the answers to your questions, or what is in the records you describe. But you do need to present a viable research agenda.

### *Re-applying*

If you don't win a fellowship the first time you apply, don't get discouraged, and don't give up! Indeed, most departments will not let you give up since applying for external funding is often a condition of receiving financial support from the department. Many chance circumstances enter into funding decisions and you could succeed the next time. Upon request, some agencies will provide feedback on your application. If you think that your project or qualifications were not judged fairly by a particular agency, write and ask them about it. With some agencies, such as SSHRC, you can apply under the *Freedom of Information Act* to see your file if you are concerned about whether or not your application was treated fairly. You can also ask about grievance procedures, though your chances of success may be quite low.

### **Other Jobs**

In addition to external funding, university research and teaching assistantships, and course directorships, jobs are available for graduate students outside of teaching and research, and even outside the university. Your university may offer history-related jobs in the archives or library or, alternatively, in university offices, including graduate student associations or unions. Similar jobs might be had off-campus. You could check out teaching possibilities in continuing education programs or long-distance programs run by local community colleges. All such employment will provide you with experience and skills that may strengthen your eventual candidacy for a permanent faculty position. On the other hand, they may not have much bearing on your eligibility for academic positions, because hiring committees tend to focus on research and university teaching experience. However, one can make a strong case in a cover letter for a tenure-track job for how a seemingly unrelated workplace experience makes you a strong candidate for a particular job posting. Furthermore, if you are applying for a job as a professional public historian, employment experience outside the university setting as a graduate student could be of benefit.

Finally, there is the option of waged work completely unrelated to your career plans. Many students find themselves "between scholarships" at some point during their graduate years and

need to pursue just about any kind of job simply to make ends meet. If this is your situation, do not despair: you are in good company. It is not a sign of a lesser commitment. On the contrary, it shows that you are dedicated enough to your graduate studies to pursue what may be unsatisfying work in the short term in order to meet your long-term goal of a Master's or doctorate degree. Again, a case might later be made for how working outside the academy helped you develop skills that will serve you well in a university teaching position. But remember that even jobs that are not especially demanding intellectually may still tire you out so do not assume that you can write your thesis in the evenings after putting in day-long shifts at an office, restaurant, cinema, or store. Ultimately, finishing your degree is what matters.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **LIFE AS A GRADUATE STUDENT**

People outside the academic world are often astonished to think that someone can spend four, five, or even ten years in graduate school. New students, who may feel overwhelmed with the financial and emotional stresses of coursework, can barely imagine staying in school for so long. It may seem surprising, then, that many professors look back on their time in graduate school with fondness.

Being a full-time graduate student is a privilege and a unique opportunity for intellectual reflection, stimulation, and community. It is true that most MA and PhD students are “employees” as well as “students” of the university, and many if not most have significant economic and family responsibilities. Still, in graduate school, you have the opportunity to read and reflect, and to take classes or join study groups with students who have similar intellectual interests. Graduate school can be stressful, but remember that there are many stages of graduate study. Your day-to-day experience will change immensely as you move from coursework, to studying for comps, to researching and writing your MA thesis or PhD. Think of every stage as a great adventure, and enjoy your life as a graduate student.

#### **Student Relationships**

On entering graduate school, you will find that other graduate students form a new and important peer group for you. They will listen to your ideas, read your papers, hear rehearsals of your public performances, offer opinions on your efforts, argue with you, and in return will expect the same from you. The relationships you form with other graduate students can be very rewarding both professionally and personally. If you stay in the academic world, these people will be your colleagues forever; regardless of your later career, some will likely become life-long friends.

A great deal can be learned about the nature of the historical profession from other students. Veteran graduate students will likely be founts of information, both positive and negative, about your department, the university, and the wider profession. Moreover, they can be a vital source of emotional support. Many people find the first year of graduate school particularly wrenching: the experience of a new and rigorous program, often at a new school and city, can make the first year lonely and stressful. Experienced graduate students can provide advice and help on some of the more stressful aspects of graduate life: choosing courses and supervisors, negotiating financial aid and your institution’s bureaucracy, getting hooked into the academic community and grapevine, and so on. Of course, you must also take the advice you get from other graduate students with some grains of salt. A few of your more experienced peers may have personal axes to grind or may have soured on the whole graduate-school process entirely. Check out warnings that seem particularly bitter before accepting them as true.

It is a good idea to introduce yourself to, and associate with, as many of your graduate student

colleagues as you can. In most departments, there are a number of formal and informal activities for graduate students. These activities can be somewhat intimidating to new students, especially if you are shy, seem to come from a different background than most of your peers, or don't meet people easily. But remember, networking is not the prerogative of the gregarious, and it will get easier. Departmental activities provide excellent opportunities for social interaction and intellectual exchange with people of similar interests; at worst, think of them as learning experiences rather than simply awkward or "bad" occasions.

If the general social activities in your department are not to your personal tastes, consider joining or organizing a discussion group that better suits your own interests. For example, form a Latin American or sexuality studies group, or a discussion circle on environmental history. Consider joining your department or university graduate student council or association, or getting involved with an organization like the CHA Graduate Students' Committee or the Canadian Federation of Students. Other groups, like the Society for the History of Children and Youth, facilitate interaction among graduate students (and faculty) interested in specific sub-fields within Canada and indeed world wide. These organizations provide valuable networking opportunities, but be sure not to become so involved that it takes too much time away you're your coursework or PhD dissertation.

Everyone feels the stresses of graduate school, but mature students, students with disabilities, and those from backgrounds that have been traditionally under-represented in the academy may feel particularly isolated. Whether your program is large or small, interacting with other students inside or outside the classroom can be uncomfortable for those who are "different," and you may feel left out of the normal student networks or departmental culture. International students, in particular, often face enormous economic difficulties in addition to the stress of working in a second or third language and adjusting to a new society. The alienation felt by some may be exacerbated by a lack of social contact: many international students are barely visible in graduate programs, their presence largely unnoticed by the larger circle of students, and sometimes even faculty, beyond their supervisory committee. Mature students, students who are parents, and students with disabilities are often similarly invisible, and may be treated more like a curiosity than a peer.

Again, we advise that you need not be gregarious to "network." First, try to break through the isolation by attending structured activities on campus. Many departments and graduate history student associations organize brown bag lunch series and other seminars and parties. Such events combine intellectual and social exchange and can be an important avenue for developing friendships. Wider graduate school social events can also be important ice-breakers, and university-wide organizations, such as the African or Chinese Students' Associations, or programs for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered students, can provide both community and support. Departmental and university-wide student associations can help you become familiar with academic culture and to understand your rights as a student in Canada; but don't forget that you, in turn, have much to teach them.

For students with health conditions and disabilities, feelings of isolation and "difference" may be

compounded by the frustrations of having to fight for accommodations, the need to juggle appointments with medical specialists that always seem to come during class, or a reduced work load that gets you out of step with your student cohort. Mature students may feel outnumbered by younger colleagues fresh out of an undergraduate degree program. Some of your classmates may treat you more like a parent or teacher than an equal colleague, and some faculty may be uncomfortable teaching students who are their own age – or even older. (Fortunately, they are in the minority; most faculty find such teaching a pleasure!) If you have entered graduate school for personal development, not a career, try to keep the anxieties and ambitions of your fellow students in proper perspective. If you do intend to pursue an academic career, remember that you have the same rights as other students to tap all the resources of your program.

Many students are hesitant to seek redress for problems they encounter. They may come from societies or cultures where students are not encouraged to speak out, or worry about losing funding, visas, or their professors' respect. It is important to learn what services and resources are available to graduate students and to be assertive – but positive – in making sure your needs are met. Consult your department's graduate student association, your graduate program director, your union or the Canadian Federation of Students if you need help.

### **Collegiality and Professionalism**

While navigating new personal relationships with other graduate students, faculty members, undergraduates, and the support staff of your department, it is important to act professionally and treat others with respect. This is common sense. Keep in mind, for instance, that students come from many different backgrounds, both culturally and academically. Do not make unwarranted assumptions about other students' sexual practices, religious beliefs, or political views, and act civilly to all. Intellectual and political debates should be encouraged, but avoid *ad hominem* arguments and personally hurtful comments. Treat the office staff like professionals, not personal secretaries, and be sensitive to the demands on their time. Complaining about your students (or peers) in the graduate student lounge, or the room in which TAs hold office hours with undergraduates, is also not a good idea.

As a professional, you should also be aware of your online presence. Be careful what you post on social networking sites or blogs; you don't want embarrassing pictures or comments to be seen by prospective employers, or to come back to haunt you years later. If your program has a listserv for students to communicate with one another, and a heated debate breaks out, think twice before you send. This is not the place for angry comments or personal vendettas. Keep the personal out of it; you may offend a future colleague.

### **Relationships with Faculty**

As a graduate student, you will have more contact and interaction with faculty members than you did when you were an undergraduate. PhD students in particular are like junior colleagues,

serving an apprenticeship that will eventually lead you to become one of their peers. Still, different universities and graduate programs have quite different cultures when it comes to student-faculty relations. It may take a little time, for example, for new students to learn the accepted form of address between graduate students and faculty. Is it Professor or Dr.? Do you call faculty by their last names or first? Do not assume that because one student refers to faculty members by their first names that it is acceptable for you to do the same. There are no universal rules, and it is probably best to err on the side of formality until you find out the norm in your department. Other students may tell you departmental conventions; or you can always ask.

Your most important relationships with professors will be with your MA or PhD thesis supervisor and, if you are a PhD student, with the other members of your dissertation committee. The role of the faculty supervisor is multi-faceted. It may include (but is not limited to) helping you formulate your research project and consulting with you about your progress, reading drafts of your thesis, providing general advice about your academic work and career options, and writing letters of recommendation. Choosing an appropriate supervisor is not always easy, and your choice may be limited by a number of factors. At some institutions, a provisional advisor is assigned for you; at others it is up to you to find someone who will take you on as a student. When you do have the chance to choose your supervisor, you should consider not only reputation and area of expertise, but also style of supervision. Different supervisors, like graduate students, approach their tasks in different ways. Some are very "hands-on" and insist on regular meetings and formal updates; others offer less direction and wait until you are ready to report to them. Be aware, however, that having a close personal relationship with one's supervisor is not necessarily beneficial. Some teachers who develop intense relationships with students are seeking hero worship or other kinds of psychological nourishment, and have trouble maintaining pedagogical rigour. Some students find it difficult to accept scholarly criticism from professors they think of as friends. You might want to talk to other students to find a supervisor whose approach to supervision suits your own needs. But in many cases, you may not have much choice.

For PhD students, putting together a dissertation committee means matching your interests with two or three faculty beyond your supervisor. Try to avoid putting all your eggs in one basket: instead of relying on one superstar, a single individual expected to meet all your needs, consider approaching a variety of faculty members with different strengths. For instance, you might ask one professor to sit on your committee because she is well versed in your time period, another because he has a similar theoretical or methodological perspective, and a third because he is known as an excellent and helpful editor.

It is important to stress that the relationship between graduate students and faculty is an unequal one; it is a professional relationship informed by an imbalance of power. Most faculty members treat graduate students with friendliness, decorum, and respect, but no matter how friendly and accommodating professors are, they still hold considerable power over your potential career.

Faculty-student relationships are complex. A professor's sex, politics, age, or teaching style will not determine how that person relates to you and your work. Do not assume that younger or more casual faculty members will treat your work more sympathetically or less rigorously than anyone

else. Just because one professor allows you to use her first name when all the others expect more formal modes of address, for instance, does not mean that she will necessarily be more "laid back" or "easier" in her grading. The reverse may well be true. We also caution students to avoid the pitfall of assuming that faculty members who are "like you" will automatically be friends or allies. While feminists and openly queer professors will want to encourage feminist and GLBT students, and faculty of colour want to provide support for students of colour, your shared gender, sexuality, race, or political perspective does not mean that you have a right to a privileged relationship.

As a junior colleague, you should treat all the faculty members in your department in a professional manner – and expect to be treated the same way. If your supervisor is also your employer, some other issues about your relationship come into play. Performing teaching or research work for your supervisor or other faculty members can change your relationship profoundly. Think carefully about your relationships to your professors, for faculty members have a degree of power over your career. You should never "blow off" a teaching or research contract; take your work obligations seriously. This does not mean that you have to bend to a professor's every whim; quite the opposite, in fact. Keep in mind your own needs and goals, and assess the merits and drawbacks of professors' expectations when theirs and yours diverge. If, at any point, you are having serious doubts about the efficacy or appropriateness of your supervisory relationship, solicit advice from trusted colleagues and/or your graduate director about how to get your supervisor to hear your concerns, or about how to change your supervisor entirely.

In some cases, professors exploit their students. Sometimes this occurs without the faculty member realizing it. For instance, a teaching assistant might be asked for help in putting together a course kit or syllabus, or a research assistant might be told to draft a book proposal or pick up a package. It can be difficult to say no to a faculty member who is on your supervisory committee, writes letters of recommendation for you, and/or teaches one of your graduate courses. The professor may think that asking you for help is an acknowledgment of his or her confidence in your abilities; that is, a compliment. However, if you are not being paid for this assistance, and/or if these requests start to impinge on the time you should be spending on your own work, you could find yourself in a difficult situation. It is always best to give the professor the benefit of the doubt, and assume that he or she is unaware of your personal situation or difficulties. If a polite "no" and a reasoned argument do not rectify the situation, then you may have to consider going above the individual to the graduate director, head of the department, or school. You have rights; the power of the professor is not absolute. Many teaching and research assistants are unionized, and most schools offer some avenues of appeal and the means to empower students when problems arise. Fortunately, such confrontational situations are rare. In general, there is a degree of collegiality between graduate students and faculty, and both parties can learn from interacting with each other.

Occasionally, graduate students become intimately involved with faculty members. When these relationships are entirely consensual, they are a grey area in terms of professional codes of conduct. We make no moral judgments, but want to stress that the power imbalance between

students and professors raises pressing ethical and pedagogical questions that should be carefully considered by both parties. A sexual relationship between student and supervisor is particularly problematic, and universities prohibit such relationships.

### **Discrimination and Sexual Harassment**

All students, faculty, and staff have the right to work and learn in a safe and welcoming environment. Sexual harassment, and harassment on the basis of sexual orientation, age, race, religion, and ability, creates a barrier to equality and is discriminatory under the *Canadian Human Rights Act*. University procedures differ, but every school has some kind of office for equity and human rights. If you have experienced harassment, seek redress immediately.

Harassment can take a variety of forms, including sexually suggestive remarks, persistent jokes or comments about your age or appearance, pestering phone calls, the display of sexist or racist pictures, inappropriate physical contact, and assault. While the most apparent harassment may seem to take place between male faculty and female students, male students can be harassed by female professors or teaching assistants, and female professors or teaching assistants can be harassed by male students. The harasser can be the same sex as the person being harassed, and students can harass professors as well as each other. Harassment can take place once or over an extended period of time. Because harassment creates a negative or hostile environment that can interfere with your job performance and academic success, all forms of it should be taken very seriously.

In practice, it is not always easy to know what constitutes harassment – or what to do about it. Students who object to ethnic jokes or sexually suggestive remarks may be told they should “lighten up.” Because many victims of discrimination, particularly those who have experienced sexual harassment, understandably prefer not to publicize their experiences, others may think they have encountered nothing unusual. Confusion, shame, or even ambivalence about your own feelings may make you believe you are misreading the signals. Yet if a relationship between a student and a professor (or another student) is characterized by sexual innuendoes or provocation; or if the expected level of intimacy is not consensual; or if you feel that you have been discriminated against in any way, seek out help. The bottom line is that if you are having a problem with someone, you do not have to deal with it all by yourself. Most universities have free psychological counseling services. Your graduate director or graduate student representatives can help direct you to the appropriate university officials. Your union is another place you can turn to for help. You are entitled to work and learn in a healthy and safe environment.

### **Balancing ‘Life’ and Graduate School**

Whether you are taking courses or writing your dissertation, graduate school will be a major, and perhaps even the most important, part of your life. Earlier, we stressed the importance of not

letting other activities impinge too much on your dissertation research and writing. But you should also try not to make your dissertation, or university related activities, your entire life. The pressures of course work, and the isolation of research and writing, can take an emotional toll. Stay healthy: eat well, get enough sleep, and try to stay active by playing sports, taking a yoga class, or going to the gym. Take time to relax with friends and family.

Finding a balance is particularly important when you are working on your dissertation. This may be a good time to find or revive a hobby, or to take an art, music, or language class unrelated to your studies. Do volunteer work and participate in political campaigns. Take holidays. Many students treat the dissertation like an office job, working from “9 to 5” and taking the evening off. Of course, everyone has different work habits and not every student will want to follow this model. But everyone can set aside work time and play time. As with anything in life, balance is the key. You will likely be happier, and write a better dissertation, if you devote some of your time to forgetting about your dissertation.

Many graduate students wonder about the “best time” to have children. Some begin graduate study with young children or other family responsibilities that take time away from writing and studying. Others who do not have children when they begin their program start a family before finishing the PhD. If you have children, you will undoubtedly need some form of child care and a lot of support from family and friends. Having a baby is absorbing and may be intellectually isolating; you probably can’t attend many lecture series or social events, and you must make an extra effort to maintain friendships and intellectual bonds with grad student colleagues. Children also provide a quick lesson in the importance of managing your time. If your baby is napping or with the babysitter, take advantage of your “free” time to write that paper or work on your dissertation; it won’t last long, and you want to enjoy your child when she’s home and awake! Some student-parents treat graduate school like a conventional job and put preschool children in full-time day care so they can concentrate on writing or researching; others use part-time babysitters or trade off “time to work” with their partners and friends. There is no single “best time” to have children; you have to find what works best for your personal situation.

### **When a Crisis Happens or Your Circumstances Change**

Sometimes “life happens” and your carefully-laid plans for taking MA courses or writing your dissertation go astray. You may find yourself unexpectedly pregnant, your partner might get a dream job and want you to move to another city, or you might face a financial downturn, family crisis, or major health problem of your own. If an unforeseen event gets in the way of studies that you want to continue, don’t simply give up your plans. Talk to your supervisor, graduate program director, and/or TA or student union representative to find out your options. They probably have lots of experience with students in similar situations, and most will be happy to advocate on your behalf.

As a student in Canada, you almost certainly have access to the many counseling and health services available in your university and city, and are entitled to non-discriminatory treatment. If

you are expecting a baby, find out the parental leave policies associated with your university, teaching contract, or SSHRC award. If you are suffering a mental health crisis, such as depression, or any other medical problem, get help immediately! Visit your school's counseling or health service, and tell your graduate director and supervisor about your situation. There is no need to feel embarrassed or ashamed; most faculty will be supportive, and some will have experienced similar crises themselves. You may have to battle your university's bureaucracy, but especially in cases of sickness and disability, students do have rights. For example, Dalhousie student Connie Wawruck-Hemmett had to fight to stay in her PhD program when she had brain surgery to remove two tumours, but eventually she found out that she qualified for five years medical leave. Professors can help you navigate graduate school rules regarding incompletes, withdrawals, accommodations, and medical leave – but only if they know you need help.

Occasionally, even the most carefully chosen path needs to be revised. Old interests wane, circumstances irrevocably alter, or you find your program unsuitable or unbearable. If this occurs, consult with relevant faculty, graduate students and academic advisors about the possible ramifications of changing fields, programs, or institutions. Will your progress be delayed, and if so, by how much and in what way? Through serious consideration, you can decide whether the extra burdens associated with a major shift are worth enduring. Do not, however, confuse discouragement for failure or incompatibility with the historical profession. If you have feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, or if you feel like an “imposter” just waiting to be “found out” and kicked out of school, know that you are not alone. Your feelings indicate the need for many more support systems for graduate students at every stage of their careers.

While doubt is common coin, students should not subject themselves to constant and fruitless unhappiness. If you do not see the benefits outweighing the difficulties of graduate study in history, consider leaving graduate school, temporarily or permanently. There is no law that you must complete every degree you start, and deciding that a particular path is not for you does not mean that you are unable to do it. In some circumstances, such as when personal problems become overwhelming, a leave of absence may help you return to your studies with renewed commitment. In others, you may just want to move on. Be realistic about your options and capabilities at the moment, and make decisions that meet your needs.



## **CHAPTER FIVE THE CONFERENCE CIRCUIT**

Historians do not spend all their time in the archives, library, or microfilm room. They also communicate their findings to other historians and scholars, to students, and the general public. Sharing your research with others can be a very rewarding experience, especially when the audience is engaged by your presentation and people ask you plenty of questions and initiate follow-up conversation. The form of presentation will vary depending upon the venue; the formal paper read at an academic conference, for instance, can be transformed into a more informal but equally valuable talk for a community group. Developing a strong scholarly profile includes getting your research findings out to a wider academic community. This chapter focuses on the academic conference circuit.

Ideally, academic conferences are vehicles for disseminating your research, facilitating intellectual exchange, and forging valuable professional and social networks with peers and established scholars. The relationship between writing thesis chapters and giving conference papers should be a symbiotic one. In the process of drafting a thesis chapter, you may decide the subject matter would work well for a conference paper, or you might first write the conference paper knowing that it will evolve into a thesis chapter. Supervisors who tell their students to complete their dissertation before ever presenting a conference paper or submitting an article for publication are simply out of date. Most candidates on the job market have a published article or two, and a few conference papers on their cv. This will not guarantee that you will get the job. In Canada, we still hear about the "ABD" (all but the dissertation) getting the nod over more senior and published candidates. But it happens infrequently, which is why it is the topic of so much gossip. Such hirings usually mean that the junior candidate really did best "fit" the particular combination of specialties the hiring department expressly prioritized, or are the result of what one history chair aptly described as "the mysterious process called internal departmental politics!" Nevertheless, these days, the successful job candidate usually is someone with a completed PhD, one or two publications, some teaching, and experience on the conference circuit.

### **Going to Conferences**

You should go to conferences but don't fall under the mistaken assumption that you need to attend many of them. Nor should you be giving hastily written papers to umpteen conferences without informing your supervisor – who is actually well-qualified to help you decide whether this is the right paper, right time, and right venue! Presenting at two to four conferences during the course of your PhD studies is certainly sufficient. For senior PhD students nearing completion of the thesis or new scholars, delivering papers at one or two conferences each year is plenty. (Increasingly, MA students deliver papers based on their master's research at graduate student conferences, which can be an important learning experience in giving a public presentation.) Conference papers should evolve into dissertation chapters (or vice versa), or

eventual publications, especially for newly minted PhDs and untenured junior professors. Avoid the trap of writing many conferences papers that then end up in a drawer or a pile on your study floor. Keep in mind that you do not have to write a new paper for each conference. Most historians present papers based on current research; they are "works-in-progress" that might eventually become a scholarly article. It is acceptable to present the same paper in a revised form to several conferences as it develops into a dissertation chapter or publication. But don't do this more than two or three times. Delivering papers that are already very familiar to the audience is usually frowned upon. So, too, is presenting a paper that has already been published. Nor should you deliver a paper that is too sketchy and lacks sufficient evidence to make your case.

Attend a few conferences before actually delivering a paper at one of them, and choose conferences carefully. Make sure that those you attend are relevant to your field of study and will allow you to network with colleagues and senior scholars in your field. The first few conferences may be intimidating. Most historians can tell tales about their early experiences: about finally getting introduced to that prominent historian in your field and then being too nervous to say anything; about convincing yourself you had destroyed your "career" by "putting your foot in your mouth" while talking to an influential scholar; or about simply feeling embarrassed about all those interrupted conversations with people who seemed more keen on talking to someone else. Franca Iacovetta can recall how at her first conference as a graduate student (the Blue Collar Workers' Conference, Hamilton, 1981), she met some of Canada's best known labour historians but couldn't say a word to them because she had laryngitis! She was convinced that they thought she was "an idiot – or worse, quiet and demure." Eventually, they became her friends and colleagues. As a novice, you're supposed to make yourself known to established scholars in your field, but no one knows quite how to do it. It can be as simple as approaching more senior scholars and indicating that you enjoy their work. Ask them about their current research interests. Draw parallels with your own scholarly interests, if this is relevant. Many senior scholars are interested in knowing about graduate students' work. But keep in mind that a conference is not a place for long leisurely conversations: that senior historian you want to meet is extremely busy, so keep it brief and don't be mortified if your conversation ends abruptly. Many established historians make a point of talking to graduate students and junior colleagues, but they may need to hurry off to business meetings and are also seeing friends and colleagues whose company they rarely get a chance to enjoy. Don't be scared off by the few unfriendly ones; they are in the distinct minority. And giving a paper means you may be in the same session as established scholars in your field, which can act as an effective ice-breaker.

There are many practical ways to reduce tension. Attend the first few conferences with a friend, colleague, or group of graduate students. That way you will know some people, can discuss papers and sessions you've heard, and perhaps be emboldened to approach senior colleagues. In Quebec, the Institut d'Histoire de l'Amérique Française (IHAF) welcomes students and its annual meeting provides a good place to mingle with faculty and senior colleagues. Also in Quebec, where many PhD students are linked to faculty-headed research groups that are affiliated with comparable groups in European universities, you may get the opportunity and funds to give a paper at a co-organized conference abroad. This will count as an international

conference. In the case of large organizations that hold annual or regular meetings, such as the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians (the Berks), the Canadian Historical Association, Social Science History Association (SSHA), and American Historical Association, check the conference program for organized meetings or social events by groups you would like to join. These might include a GLBT network, disability studies group, women's and/or gender committee, child and youth group, labour committee, or immigration network. Attending graduate student events at large conferences offers an excellent way of meeting your peers and future co-presenters. Taking time to do at least one or two activities unrelated to the conference – such as visiting a local museum, taking a walk, or even having dinner alone – can also help diffuse stress and make the overall conference experience more enjoyable. Some people thrive amidst the social interaction at conferences and others don't. Whatever your personality, keep it in mind that it will get easier as the conference rituals become familiar. And veterans might well bear this in mind when encountering novices at conferences.

### **Getting on the Program**

Formal sessions usually consist of two or three paper presenters, a chair, and a commentator who is expected to draw a few links between the papers and offer brief but constructive feedback to each presenter. Usually, paper presenters are asked to submit their written papers to their designated commentator a month or so in advance. At the conference, they are given anywhere from 10 to 30 minutes to present a summary of their paper. Conferences also sponsor panels or roundtables on a given subject or controversy. Usually, these include more participants, each of whom speaks briefly to the issue at hand rather than delivering a formal paper. Whatever the format, make sure you follow instructions and stick to time limits.

There are no secrets about how to get on a conference program, though many graduate students think so. One colleague recalled how she spent the first few years in her PhD program wondering when she would get that "invitation" to give a paper at a scholarly conference! Historians often talk about "being invited" to give a conference paper, especially when requesting funds. The letters we receive telling us that our paper proposal has been accepted often use the language and form of an invitation to the conference. In truth, very few people are actually invited to give a paper; this is an honour usually bestowed on senior scholars or historians whose work has made a significant contribution to the profession. For most historians, established or otherwise, getting on the program involves keeping informed about conferences (through journals, the internet, professional mailings, and word-of-mouth), responding to calls for papers, and setting up attractive sessions that program committees will want to accept.

When considering conferences, keep in mind that history conferences and the CHA are not the only game in town; look for thematic and multi-disciplinary conferences in your fields of study. Also, every conference has a different "feel." The big conference has its attractions, but the smaller formats of a regional conference or an occasional conference on a specific theme that bring together specialists from different disciplines can be a more rewarding professional and personal experience. Don't forget to consider non-Canadian conferences, such as the SSHA and

the European Social Science History Conference, as these will enable you to make international contacts. Many conferences offer funding for graduate students, in the form of reduced conference fees or travel grants. Your department or university may also offer travel money to assist with your registration, travel and accommodation costs. In both cases, such funds may be restricted to paper presenters. Don't hesitate to inquire early about the availability of these resources. To qualify, you may have to apply several months in advance of the conference.

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of graduate student conferences. These venues help graduate students get over first conference presentation jitters, give them experience at organizing an academic conference, and allow them to meet other students working in their field. The smaller format may also be more conducive for getting to know the invited keynote speaker, who is usually a senior historian. However, you must recognize that graduate student conferences do not have the same status as professional ones and thus have limited cv-building potential. So, strive for balance. Do not become so involved in organizing and attending graduate student conferences year after year that you neglect your thesis. It is important that you attend sooner rather than later the more prestigious professional conferences where you can meet, present with, and get feedback from more established scholars and share your work with a wider audience

Most advertisements announcing conferences come in the form of a Call for Papers (CFP) telling potential participants to submit proposals by a given deadline. These can be found in association newsletters or websites; most are also disseminated via listservs. The CHA, for example, posts its CFP on H-Canada, an H-Net listserv for Canadianists. For some conferences, your chances to present a paper are better if you submit a full session proposal. Other conferences, such as the annual meeting of the IHAF, regularly accept individual papers from graduate students. So, read the CFP carefully and follow instructions and guidelines.

The conference program committee generally seeks to develop a program that is balanced geographically, chronologically and topically, that includes both male and female participants at various stages in their career – although, of course, a conference with a very focused theme may have a less comprehensive line-up. To achieve balance, the committee welcomes proposals from a variety of potential participants. Some committees prefer to select commentators themselves; others gladly take suggestions. Most conferences, including the annual or regular meetings of large organizations, have a few highlighted themes that will also guide the committee's choices – although many papers that do not fit these themes will make the final cut.

In organizing a session, remember that the individual papers should clearly relate to each other and focus on a historically significant problem or topic. Avoid narrowly conceived sessions: only a small number of specialists will want to hear two papers on the same subject. Think broadly and comparatively. Use your session to bring together two or three papers that address the same theme but in different ways, or by considering different time periods, groups, and approaches. For some conferences, such as the Berks, you will be urged to think in international terms. Canadianists should know that an all-Canadian session on an international conference venue rarely attracts more than a few people. For examples of how colleagues have organized

international sessions, consult the past programs of conferences that interest you. They will also give you a good sense of current research interests and emerging fields of study.

## **Participants**

In choosing participants, including presenters, chair, and commentator, keep a few things in mind. Make every effort to balance the panel with regard to gender, rank, region (regarding both subject matter and the historian's residence), race, ethnicity, and type of institution. Put bluntly, no one wants to hear two papers on Toronto delivered by two female friends from the same Toronto university: not even their other Toronto-based colleagues! CHA Council encourages sessions that are not composed entirely of graduate students or otherwise lack a broad cross-section of the profession. If paper presenters are junior colleagues, then at least the commentator, but probably the chair as well, should be a person of established reputation. This will improve your panel's chances of acceptance by the conference organizers. Some programs may have additional rules. For example, the AHA limits the participation of individuals to every other year to encourage fuller participation by all its members. Candidates on the job market in US universities should bear this in mind. It is important to get on the AHA program while on the job market, but you may have to work at meeting the organization's various criteria for ensuring a "balanced" session proposal.

In putting together a session, you probably will need to contact colleagues or professors whom you may not know personally. This can be intimidating, especially for graduate students inviting senior historians outside their institution to join a session proposal. But try to remember that our professional community operates in this fashion, and that you do not need to be a natural networker or a gregarious personality to participate in it. No one will be surprised to be asked to join a session proposal, and most people, even the stars, are flattered by the request. Avoid asking people at the last minute; senior and active historians are busy people and so need advance warning. By the same token, they are busy precisely because they play an active role in the profession at its various levels. So, go ahead and ask. Send them an email with all the necessary information. If colleagues can't or won't do it, most likely they will suggest an alternate.

## **Submitting the Panel**

Make sure you submit a complete and well-conceived proposal. Inevitably, the Call For Papers will come at "a bad time," when you are busy meeting other commitments. Nevertheless, you must take some time to produce an attractive proposal. Typically, a session proposal consists of a short summary or "abstract" of each proposed paper (usually a paragraph), a one-page cv of each participant, including chair and commentator, and a brief explanation of the purpose and significance of the panel. It usually also includes a description of the panel as it would appear in the program, including titles for the session and papers, and the institutional affiliation and rank of each participant. One person involved with the panel usually acts as coordinator, amassing

the required material from each participant, and submitting it to the conference organizers well in advance of the deadline. Most CFPs request that submissions be made electronically (either via email or through an online form).

The conference program committee will keep track of submissions and send copies for appraisal to all or certain designated committee members. Appraisers have to make tough decisions about what to accept and reject. Sometimes they need to find a home for individual papers, and may re-organize your session proposal in order to accommodate a "floating" paper. Do not take rejection of your paper or session as personal or professional rejection. There are many reasons why proposals do not get on the final program. Perhaps your session was not on one of the highlighted themes. Or your topic may have been unusually popular at that meeting, and so you lost to a similarly designed proposal. Your session perhaps failed to offer a broad cross-section of papers and participants. If the proposal is turned down and you are convinced it is a sound plan, consider offering it again the following year, or submitting it for another conference. In any event, be prepared to wait several months after the committee's deadline for final notification of acceptance or rejection, although you may receive word of tentative approval earlier than that.

### **Performing the Conference Paper**

Once you have agreed to participate in a conference session, make every effort to fulfil the agreement. You do not want to develop a reputation for last minute cancellations. However, if certain circumstances prevent your being there, inform your co-panelists and the conference organizers in advance.

If you are to read a conference paper, allow ample time to write the best one you can and practise ahead of time. Normally, you will be told exactly how long your presentation should be, so plan accordingly. You can count on reading a page of approximately 250 words in about two minutes, so keep your paper short enough to stay within the time assigned. The person who chairs the session has the duty to cut off presentations after the allotted time has expired. You don't want to be asked to sit down just before you have reached that eloquent climax. Nor do you want to rush madly through a paper that you know is too long: you will lose your audience.

There may be a difference between your written paper and oral presentation. The former should be written in formal, scholarly style with footnotes and full citations. In some cases, the written version is longer than the oral presentation; in other instances, it is virtually the same. The length is largely determined by conventions within your field and by the requirements of the particular conference program committee. Some conferences ask for a short paper of ten or so pages. In that case, the written and oral versions are effectively the same paper, though the written paper will have all of the academic apparatus (endnotes, bibliography, etc.). If the written version is considerably longer, be sure when writing the summary oral presentation that you hit the highlights. Written papers submitted to the CHA tend to be approximately 25-35 pages, the length of most journal articles, in part because they are considered for possible inclusion in the organization's scholarly journal, *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*. Try to avoid

the mistake of sending a 35-page paper to a commentator expecting to read a 10-12 page one.

If your panel includes a chair and commentator, submit a copy of your written paper to them in advance. If you cannot meet the stipulated deadline, make suitable alternative arrangements. No one wants to hear an annoyed commentator complain about your late paper or ignore it altogether. Commentators do vary in style, flexibility, and degree of preparation. Some want the time to compose a polished critique, others are more casual or flexible about deadlines, though that doesn't mean that the commentary will be casually prepared or presented. You want constructive feedback and intellectual exchange, so do your best to get it. On the other hand, do not get upset if your commentator turns out to be overly harsh. Most commentators offer well-balanced critiques of papers, and those who are overly harsh or unfair actually hurt their own reputations. If that happens, don't get upset or act defensive, but by all means respond forcefully in defense of your research. The same applies to fielding questions from the audience. Accept criticism of your work while also emphasizing your positive contributions.

The oral presentation should be written with a listening audience in mind. Remember: you have little time in which to convince your audience that you are doing interesting and important work, so hit the highlights. Take the time to craft a polished paper that effectively summarizes some main arguments and offers interesting illustrations. Use simpler prose than you would for a written paper you intend to publish; your argument will be easier to follow if your sentences are relatively short and use few subordinate clauses. Avoid the temptation to say too much: do not include too many details, statistics, or disclaimers. This is especially important if you use PowerPoint because it takes more time. Don't let the technology dominate your talk. Too many pictures and too much slide text can be distracting, as can a malfunctioning computer or projector. Be sure to show up early to your session in case any technical problems need to be cleared up, and consider bringing overheads as backup if images are essential. It is perfectly acceptable to assert that the paper covers issues in more detail, or to whet the audience's appetite by focusing on the paper's most dramatic parts or provocative arguments. Of course, you will feel that you have reduced your work to less than a bare bones summary. All of us grow attached to our research (not to mention our phrases and narrative devices!), but you must be brief, clear, and succinct.

Although few people say it, the conference presentation (like the lecture) is also a performance. The quality of your work is the most important thing, but the audience will also evaluate your delivery. Stand, if you can, and if you have special needs (for example, for a microphone), make sure you ask for them in advance. Senior colleagues in departments who are hiring scout out prospective candidates at conferences. Can you write a well-organized talk, and deliver it in a confident and engaging way? Those who are impressed with your performance will want to meet you and possibly invite you to give a talk in their department. Do not underestimate word of mouth. People remember bad performances, whether delivered by a senior historian or a novice. The inequities are such that the senior colleague can afford to blow it occasionally; a graduate student does not have the same luxury. But do not make yourself sick over your first presentation; take precautions (described below) to help you get through the hurdles. And remember what University of Manitoba history professor Adele Perry was told following her

first conference performance: it's over, you will never again have to deliver your first conference paper, and you will be amazed by how much easier the second and third performances will be.

You should practise your conference presentation in advance – and, if possible, before a fairly large audience. This is especially critical for graduate students, but also applies to junior colleagues. You do not want to give a paper prematurely, before you have truly assimilated and distilled your research. Nor do you want to simply present one of your thesis chapters without providing wider context; a detailed discussion of a narrowly defined topic will not engage your audience. Don't put your supervisor in the awful position of trying to convince people that your thesis is far more interesting than your conference paper suggested. It will create enormous pressure on you to do brilliantly the next time.

When giving your paper, remember to perform! Learn to project so that your voice carries and speak in an animated and engaging manner. Look up from your paper, and make eye contact with your audience. Plan to wear an outfit that makes you look and feel both professional and confident. There is no “right” ensemble – some scholars wear suits (conservative or funky) to conference presentations, while others prefer more casual attire. Practise your presentation, but don't over practise. Make sure it fits the time limit the conference mandates. Recruit members of your department to a dry run of your paper (and consider delivering wearing your planned conference attire). Some programs run colloquia or seminar series precisely with this purpose in mind. If not, take advantage of whatever speakers' series your department or school does sponsor, and ask to get on the roster so you will have the opportunity to rehearse your paper before a demanding but sympathetic crowd. Check out similar venues in related programs, such as the History of Science, Medieval Studies, or International Relations. Graduate student conferences (both history-based and multidisciplinary) or small informal conferences offer the same opportunity. In these contexts, let colleagues help you improve the presentation; listen to their advice and be prepared to revise.

Of course, even these rehearsal situations can be stressful. Junior faculty may find this experience especially anxiety producing because it feels like a second job talk or a pre-tenure review. Try to remember that the best criticism often comes from colleagues whose fields and perspectives differ from your own. Also, rehearsals will make the actual performance far less stressful, and you want to perform well. Historians present conference papers for various reasons, including building up your cv, and accumulating credentials. But surely the more important goal is to share your ideas and receive responses to them from an audience of well-informed scholars. Go into your session prepared for this intellectual give-and-take. But also be prepared for no give-and-take. You may find that your session is not well-attended or that you get few (or even no) questions or comments. Don't take it personally. Even if you have a limited audience, deliver your presentation with gusto. Engage with your fellow panellists during the discussion period. You will still get the practise, and the experience will still end up on your cv. Moreover, smaller sessions can actually offer more of the intellectual exchange we desire and facilitate networking.

For a scholar, there is nothing quite so gratifying as to have your work spark animated discussion



and exchange. When it happens, enjoy it!

## CHAPTER SIX GETTING PUBLISHED

Scholarly publishing is one of the historian's greatest joys. It allows us to make meaningful contributions to people's understandings of the past and present and even to help transform the character of the discipline. Publishing is neither a luxury nor a burden for the professional historian, but a serious responsibility. It is one of the most important and demanding measures of our progress as research scholars. Getting published is not easy, so be prepared to write, listen, and re-write.

Some people do have more time, resources, and opportunity than others to get research and writing completed. But we all need to create time for our own scholarship. Fortunately, you really can be a responsible colleague, teacher, and friend, and preserve time for your work. But it takes an understanding of how to develop a scholarly research profile – and practise. Far from the “horror stories” spread about top-ranked US research universities that reject highly productive scholars for tenure, new scholars in Canadian (and most American) universities need only to publish a reasonable volume of peer-reviewed work.

Many graduate students and new PhDs understand the importance of scholarly publishing but are confused about when and where to publish, and how much. Too often, it appears that a few people have “figured it out” or are being closely guided by supervisors who “know how to get their students published,” while everyone else is “out of the loop” or somehow at a disadvantage. Many are not clear about the distinction between peer-reviewed and non-refereed articles; between journal articles and book chapters in edited volumes; between university and non-academic presses that publish books. Recently, this confusion has intensified as a result of the digital turn in scholarly publishing.

But you need not despair! Even amid the changes, some basic rules still apply. Remember that quality not quantity matters most. Especially for new scholars, “quality” (for hiring, tenure, and promotion purposes) is measured by publishing in “peer-reviewed” or “refereed” venues (they mean the same thing). This applies equally to publishing an article in a refereed journal or edited volume, or publishing a monograph (book). You also need to understand how journals are ranked. We provide some guidelines below, but also urge you to consult senior colleagues.

Scholarly publishing is in a midst of a major transition from a reliance on print publishing (e.g., paper journals and books) towards online publishing (e.g., online journals, e-journals, e-books) and an increasing use of other digital forms of scholarship (e.g., scholarly websites and blogs), and a growing emphasis on collaborative projects. The process has been an uneven and even contested one and some uncertainty remains. But the situation is quite clear with respect to scholarly journals which, given their importance in the academy, have received most of the attention. Today, the majority of “online journals” are peer-reviewed publications that were originally print publications and migrated, either partly or fully, to an electronic format. In most cases, the publisher, editors, staff, editorial boards, peer review process, and even layout have

remained the same. The only difference is that the articles are available as electronic documents instead of paper documents bound in a specific volume or issue. There is no objective difference between these electronic and paper journals save for the medium in which they appear. Articles submitted to these refereed online journals will be peer-reviewed (that is, assessed by established experts or specialists in the field) and thus subjected to the same rigorous academic standards as articles submitted to peer-reviewed, or refereed, paper journals. In many established paper journals, your article will be published in both paper and electronic form. This is currently the case with *American Historical Review (AHR)*, *Canadian Historical Review (CHR)*, *Left History*, and many other journals. Alternatively, some journals are publishing certain issues in paper and others in electronic form. For up-to-date information on journals that interest you, check their websites or contact the journal editor(s).

Given the enormous weight attached to peer-reviewed work in the university, graduate students and new scholars developing a professional research profile should aim to publish at least some of their work in refereed journals. This applies equally to e-journals as paper ones. Generally, take *Left History* co-editor and York University PhD candidate Jason Ellis' advice to heart: "preparing an article for publication is an enormous undertaking. Use your judgment and ask yourself, with any journal, electronic or paper: is this a journal that is worthwhile contributing to, given the time and effort required?"

You should also learn about a journal's reputation. There is a world of difference in how your university will evaluate refereed and non-refereed work, but refereed journals also differ with respect to status and prestige. Journals tend to fall into two types: general and more specialized. Thus, for example, the *CHR* is a highly ranked general Canadian historical journal that publishes a wide range of work in Canadian history, and the *AHR* is a highly-ranked international journal of history. More specialized journals with high rankings include, for Canada, *BC Studies*, and, for an international example, *Journal of Women's History*. The ranking system operates both formally and informally. In some universities, departments provide a formal ranking of the journals in their field. More commonly, there is a generally understood ranking, though not everyone may agree on its precise nature.

The academy's emphasis on peer-reviewed scholarship and its pre-occupation with ranking journals can be frustrating, especially for scholars working in newer fields where the new specialized journals reflect important scholarly trends but have not yet had time to prove themselves. We are not saying that you should never publish in these recently-launched journals, but understand how your university and profession will assess your scholarly productivity and make an informed decision. Many left and feminist historians, for example, publish simultaneously in scholarly and activist publications. You might play a leading role in shaping the mandate of a new journal. Still, at the start of your career, publishing a few articles in well-established, highly-ranked journals is the most effective way of establishing a research profile. There are also valid alternatives, particularly publishing an article in a refereed edited volume. Below, we offer a break-down of the different publishing venues and forms of scholarly publishing.

## Graduate Students and Publishing

At some point, you will want to submit something from your thesis research for publication. Or your PhD supervisor or other faculty will encourage you to turn your excellent MA research paper or outstanding course paper into an article for submission to a journal or edited scholarly volume. Or you might come across a Call For Papers in connection with a special theme issue of a journal or an edited volume that reflects your research interests. Alternatively, for some MA and junior PhD students, the first opportunity to publish emerges out of their position as a research assistant for a professor who offers to co-publish an article with them. In this case, the student can learn a great deal while enjoying the support and guidance of an experienced publisher. The publication will certainly help your cv and reputation, though keep in mind that the greater reputation of your professor will mean that s/he will be seen as the senior author. (This also applies to a book co-authored by supervisor and graduate student.) Still, as McGill University PhD student Caroline Durand points out, the experience can be a very enlightening and rewarding one. She co-published her first article in this fashion when she was a Master's student at the University of Montreal. In Quebec and across Canada, you may be invited to co-publish with one or more members of the faculty-headed research team with which you are linked.

Above all, the decision to publish should not be made lightly. Consult your supervisor but also other faculty who know your work, are active in publishing, or have graduate students who have successfully published. Check out relevant workshops, seminar series in your own and related departments, and conferences. But be forewarned that you may get differing advice. Active publishers may push their students to submit articles early on, but you may feel you are not yet ready. Other supervisors tell their students not to get "distracted" by publishing until after the thesis is defended. We disagree with the latter advice. Publishing one or two articles while you are writing your thesis is a way of introducing yourself to the wider profession.

However, as a graduate student, you need not publish a lot. It is quality *not* quantity that counts. Remember: your number one priority as a PhD candidate *is* to get the thesis done. One or two peer-reviewed articles (perhaps evolved from conference papers based on thesis research), along with a fine dissertation that has the potential to be an excellent book, will allow you to demonstrate the *promise* of excellence as a research scholar, a key consideration for many, perhaps most, entry-level tenure-track jobs.

You want to publish your best work, announce yourself to the wider community, and convince them that you are making a serious intellectual contribution to your field of study. Do not publish prematurely; poor articles, if they get published, will not help your career. This is especially true of small fields, such as Latin American history, and of the Canadian historical profession, which is a comparatively compact professional community. Follow the same steps suggested for the conference paper: deliver an oral version of your paper to your department, submit drafts to faculty and classmates, try out an earlier version at a graduate student conference, each time listening carefully to the feedback offered. Be prepared to revise your

work.

We advise against simply submitting a piece on your own, without having received feedback (and even some editing help) from your supervisor or other well-placed faculty or colleagues. Even if your professor says your MA or course paper is excellent and “you should send it off,” do not simply go ahead without revising the paper. Even the best graduate paper will need to be revised before it is ready for a rigorous review process. Some professors might encourage early submission on the grounds that the student can take advantage of the reviewers’ assessments to help make the paper better. Certainly, you should always make use of valuable feedback. But doing it this way comes with the risk, especially for the junior scholar, of having the paper severely critiqued or even rejected, which could be demoralizing. It is a lot easier for a well-established academic with a strong publication record to “use” the review process in this way.

### **Publishing in Scholarly Journals and Anthologies**

You should aim to publish an article or two in a peer-reviewed scholarly journal. Know which journals in your field are considered the most scholarly and prestigious. Know the reputation of more specialized or regionally-based journals, and multidisciplinary journals in which historians publish. We advise that from the start you think seriously about submitting to highly reputable refereed journals with large subscriptions, as this is the fastest way of becoming known to a wide academic audience. But some people will prefer or be advised to begin with journals of more modest or specialized reputation: this is perfectly fine and you must still aim at producing your best work. But don't shy away from the "big" journals for too long.

Alternatively, you may be invited to contribute an article to a scholarly collection of essays in your field. Or you might respond to a Call for Papers on H-Net inviting interested scholars to submit a short cv and abstract outlining what they might contribute to a proposed collection. The editors of these edited scholarly volumes usually are of established reputation, so be flattered and seriously consider doing it. In this case, your article will be referred to as a “book chapter,” or a chapter in a book, but it is an independent article with roughly the same status as a journal article. The review and revision process involved is very similar to that for journal articles.

You should also learn how to present your work in different styles for different audiences. An article written for *The Beaver*, a Canadian historical magazine read by many educated but non-academic history enthusiasts, should differ from one submitted to the *Canadian Historical Review* or *American Historical Review*. In the latter case, you will want to communicate to colleagues in a more specialized language and within particular paradigms of interpretation and argument. A theoretical or review essay is not the same as one meant to demonstrate the value of a particular research method or showcase your empirical findings. When writing a scholarly article, you should generally aim at crafting a well-integrated essay that situates your work in relation to the existing scholarship and demonstrates a capacity for original research and perceptive interpretation. Be careful not to distort the work of other scholars, especially if you want to debate with them, and avoid creating false “straw people.” When drawing conclusions,

cast the findings of your case study as broadly as possible, but do not try to cover too much in a 25-35 page article. Articles written for a more general readership should also be based on careful research, written in excellent prose (not excessive jargon), and have a broad intellectual scope.

### *Review and Revision*

In most cases, and certainly with refereed journals, or refereed volumes of essays published by academic presses, your submitted essay will go through a confidential process of evaluation by recognized specialists in the field. Usually, the assessor is unknown to the author, but the author's name may or may not be known to the reviewer. Confidentiality is maintained in the spirit of encouraging honest but fair assessment, and maintaining rigorous standards. Each confidential assessor (the numbers vary) provides feedback and recommends publication or not. Then the journal editor(s) or equivalent will: a) reject your present paper, b) ask you to significantly revise and resubmit it for another round of review, or c) accept it for publication once certain revisions are completed. Most recommendations for publication require revisions (either minor or major) and a conscientious assessor (often also called reviewer or reader) will offer excellent suggestions. Use them to help you write a better paper even if you disagree with them. Sometimes, the assessors suggest contradictory advice. Sift through the suggestions carefully, taking the letter from the journal editor most seriously, but do not hesitate to defend your work. Again, learn to handle rejection. Do not take it personally, and do not let it become a measure of your self-worth. If your first effort is rejected outright, there is nothing to keep you from rewriting and resubmitting it again to the same or a different journal.

You must learn to be tough-skinned about accepting criticism. Professional historians spend much of their career commenting on colleagues' work or receiving commentary from them. Your first experience with the review process – that is, reading the assessments of experts who have scrutinized your paper and decided if it is worthy of publication in its present or a revised form – will be challenging, even emotionally draining. After all, you are a smart PhD student accustomed to doing well. But try not to be defensive: consider the criticism carefully, even if you disagree with it. Your supervisor can help you interpret the readers' reports and determine the nature and extent of the required revisions. You will also need to learn to handle rejection; few of us publish without having to revise our original submission. And if your first effort is rejected outright, there is nothing to keep you from substantially rewriting it and submitting to a different journal.

Getting published is an important accomplishment. You will probably work harder on those first few publications than anything else in your later career. So, when the article sees the light of day, take the time to feel very proud about it.

### **Publishing Book Reviews**

Writing book reviews or a review essay of several books is a part of scholarly life. Some

historians regularly write reviews, while others do so occasionally. For graduate students and junior PhDs, writing a few perceptive reviews will help your profile. But keep in mind that book reviews are not ranked as significant pieces of scholarship.

Once again, mystery surrounds this process. Many graduate students assume that they must wait to be asked to review a book or that only distinguished historians are invited to do so. This is not entirely true, though some journals do favour established historians. Your supervisor or other faculty may recommend you for the job. But you can also make yourself known to book review editors of journals. For the US, you can register with the *Journal of American History* and the *American Historical Review*. Canadian journals such as the *Canadian Historical Review* and the *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique Française*, also keep track of potential reviewers. Write to the journals, submit a cv, and ask to be considered for book review work. You can ask to review a particular book recently published in your field. Do not review books written by friends, your supervisor, or others who have trained you. Professional acquaintance, however, is no reason not to review a book unless you feel unable to provide a careful and fair-minded analysis of the book; no one cares to see you unduly promote or sabotage a work.

Most reviews combine a brief summary of the book's contents with some positive feedback and criticism or queries, but you can decide how to balance these components. A book review should not be a nasty attack on another scholar's work, even if you profoundly disagree with it. Avoid self-indulgent reviews. By all means, raise your criticisms, and intellectual and political differences, forcefully, but in a constructive manner. Junior historians who "trash" rather than "engage" scholarly work do not impress their senior colleagues. Some readers find vicious reviews by junior or senior historians mildly amusing, but most find them offensive, even if they agree with the overall perspective. Most of us have little respect for scholars whose publications contain gratuitous swipes at or distorted versions of other people's scholarship.

## **The Book**

Generally speaking, historians (including those who will hire and promote you) view the single-authored scholarly monograph as the most significant contribution to the profession. Not all disciplines share this view; in science and social science disciplines, for example, publishing many scholarly articles is the norm. If you are a historian hired in a social science or multi-disciplinary department, you should find out whose criteria of excellence you are expected to meet at tenure-time. The sociology or criminology department that hired you might tell you to prioritize peer-review journal articles over a book. But most historians and history departments place greatest value on the well-crafted monograph. This does not mean that a candidate applying for an entry-level position as an assistant history professor in a tenure-track job must have a book manuscript in hand, though you would do well to demonstrate to the search committee that your thesis provides the basis for a good book and to indicate your strategy for revision. This is a way of showing your potential for excellence in research and publication.

Junior faculty coming up for tenure, on the other hand, need to be aware that the book is still the

single most effective way of securing promotion and tenure, especially in research universities. Some departments may be content to see a manuscript that has not yet been submitted to a publisher. Others will accept the “copy-edited version” of a book that has passed the peer-review process and been accepted for publication. A historian without a book can get tenure, but it may be more difficult – and more nerve-wracking. It may involve efforts to prove you are an “outstanding” teacher who meets the highest levels of “excellence,” a difficult task in part because good teachers receive many “excellent” student evaluations. Some universities award excellence in teaching only to those who have published pedagogical materials. In the early days, creating computer-based interactive courses or websites might have been enough. It may no longer be so.

All of this means that you need to make progress on the book. But do not make yourself sick with worry. Many historians in Canadian universities do not go up for tenure until their fifth year, and they under-go a review process earlier, usually in their third year, which lets them know if they are on the right track for tenure. If the review is excellent, you may go up for tenure in the next (that is, fourth) year. Depending on the field, we suggest that a reasonable goal is to begin serious work on a book within a year or two of being hired, so that by three-year review time, you can demonstrate that you have made concrete progress towards the monograph. So, after submitting and publishing a few articles, prioritize the book above all other professional commitments. Do not avoid it by joining colleagues in collective projects that look like more intellectual fun. Do not let teaching and/or committee work take over your professional life so that there is never time to get to “the book.” It is perfectly acceptable to say “no” to additional requests for your time and energy on the basis that you must get the book done. So do so.

Do not forget that writing a book is hard work, but also that this is what you like to do. Many scholars, including published historians, find writing a book a demanding and exhausting task, but also a truly exhilarating one. Few people can “toss off” a book in a year. It is not true that most others find it “easy to write” while you alone are wracked by lack of self-confidence. It takes a lot of slogging and a lot of seemingly wasted days of work, but it is a cumulative process and, with persistence, the project will come together. There is no magic formula, though we all find tricks to help us get to work, to keep at it when we want to quit, and to reward ourselves for a hard day’s work. You probably have already built up your repertoire of tricks – after all, that’s half the battle in graduate school – but ask others for more tips. Some departments hold workshops on writing and related issues. Head to the AHA website ([www.historians.org](http://www.historians.org)) for additional assistance.

You should not publish a book that you do not consider a contribution to your field, but at the same time do not feel that your first book must be a “great book.” Make it as good as you can, send it into the world, and look forward to your next effort. We all would write our book differently, but few of us want to be writing the same book for twenty-five years! Think of your book as the culmination of a phase in your intellectual and academic career, and be ready to move on.

The guidelines provided below pertain most closely to publishing books in Canada but also are



more generally applicable. Those interested in publishing in the US can check out the AHA website ([www.historians.org](http://www.historians.org)) for helpful links.

These days, most historians plan to publish their dissertation – which also underscores the importance of choosing a dissertation that can *sustain* your interest over a long period. Even if you do get tenure without a book, remember that your stature within the professional historical community is affected by your ability to publish a book (whether it is based on your thesis or a new project). Many graduate students and junior faculty understand it is important to make that thesis “count” as the first monograph, but are unclear about the process.

You should know that even an excellent thesis will not be immediately acceptable to a press for publication. You will need to revise it. Most dissertations, even superb ones, suffer from arcane academic language, overly specialized or detailed historiographical discussion, excessive detail, and, yes, grammar problems. They need to be revised with several things in mind: trimming detail and repetition and a defensive tone in favour of confident statements, succinct prose, and carefully selected illustrations. Most authors need to rewrite rather than do further research. You will be asked to shift from the vantage point of the graduate student proving yourself worthy of attention, to an "expert" who can discuss the relevant historiography with broad strokes and reach bold generalizations without sacrificing the specificity and richness of your particular project. Some call it finding your authorial voice. But also keep in mind that more egalitarian or personalised forms of scholarship, in which scholars weave their personal history into their research and share their authority with their oral history subjects, and do not follow a linear chronology, have gained increasing acceptance in history. In any event, write the book with the readers in mind, and be as clear and engaging as possible. All of this will take some time and effort, and should be done before officially submitting a manuscript to a publisher. For more on transforming the thesis into a book, see *The Thesis and the Book* in the Resources section.

However, there is nothing to stop you from starting the publishing process before you have a book manuscript by informing publishers in the field about your dissertation work. (This also applies to any book manuscript you hope to write and publish.) To find a publisher for your work, check the press catalogues and stalls at conferences, click on publishers' websites, and talk to your supervisor, series editors, and other authors. For helpful information on US-based university presses, consult the AHA's *Guide to Book Publication for Historians* and other links at <http://www.historians.org>. Usually, you make the first contact. In some cases, an editor may contact you, usually because he or she has seen your papers on conference programs or heard about your work from an external examiner or other faculty whose judgement is respected, or seen your papers on conference program. Word-of-mouth operates effectively within the small Canadian history publishing circles. Know the difference between scholarly publishers, that is, university or academic presses, and trade (or commercial) publishers/presses. In Canada, most pre-tenure historians turn to university presses because their scholarly books are routinely subjected to the all important peer-review. There are trade presses that also publish scholarly books, but pre-tenure scholars should ensure that a trade publisher will conduct a full-scale peer-review process and that their university will respect it. Different publishers may have different timetables and different reputations for efficiency and treatment of authors but do not be easily

swayed by hearsay. Beware of any editor who promises to get your book out faster than anyone else. Check whether a theme series sponsored by a press provides a good "home" for your book. Examples include Sexuality Studies at UBC Press and Native and Northern Studies at McGill-Queen's University Press.

### **Working with a university press**

There are different kinds of editors. The press editor or acquisitions editor is employed by the press and handles many books and probably several series. The university professor(s) acting as editor(s) of a theme series will oversee that particular series. When you contact a publisher, you usually contact an acquisitions editor, but if you are considering a series you may want to communicate with both press and series editor(s). You may send a query and a proposal to more than one publisher, but once a press asks to read your manuscript, do not submit to anyone else for consideration until you know whether or not that publisher wants to publish your work.

Upon making initial contact, you will be asked to produce a proposal, or prospectus. It should be well written and contain at least some of the following:

1. A brief description of the scope of the book, the sources used, methodologies employed, and its significance to the literature in the field. Be bold about the larger importance or relevance of your case study or focused work.
2. Suggest a potential market, and do not simply state the obvious, e.g., that a history of homeless people can be used in urban poverty history courses. Explain how one could also use it in courses on politics or popular culture, or as a reading and writing assignment in the history of the body. Can it be used effectively in undergraduate courses? Marketing criteria alone do not decide the fate of most academic books published in Canada, especially by university presses who take advantage of federal subsidies (see below). But they are a consideration.
3. Provide a table of contents and indicate the length of the manuscript and its chapters. If the manuscript is a dissertation, clearly state your plans for revision. The publisher will assume that any dissertation will need work before it is ready for publication. Some editors and presses refuse to read the thesis but encourage you to submit the revised manuscript. This is *not* a rejection: get busy with the revisions and submit.
4. Include a writing sample. Choose one of the stronger chapters in the thesis or, alternatively, an excellent published article that draws on the dissertation. Do not send many chapters in the hopes that tremendously busy people will read everything that is thrown at them. It is okay to publish articles from your dissertation-based research, but a general rule is that at least two-thirds of the manuscript should be "original" work, that is, not previously published. This rule is not cast in stone.
5. Enclose a copy of your cv and any letters from senior historians, such as your external

examiner, who can speak in favour of the work. You may mention the names of other scholars competent to judge the manuscript, although the editor is not obliged to follow your suggestions.

Once a publisher has expressed a clear interest in your book – a process usually carried out by the press editor – it is *not appropriate* to continue or initiate negotiations with other publishers. If you have more than one positive response from publishers, send the manuscript to your first choice. If the publisher rejects it, go to your next choice. If the press suggests revisions that you are not prepared to make, you may cut off negotiations at that point and go elsewhere, though few first-time authors rarely do this. You will be flattered by the attention, hope for a contract, and be keen to get on with any additional revisions. You do not have to concede to revisions with which you do not agree.

Do not be overly secure about a book contract; first-time authors can rarely drive a hard bargain when it comes to royalties and other perks, and most publishers' contracts include clauses enabling them to bow out if the final manuscript is not favourably assessed. In carrying out revisions, conform to the press' style sheet, or rules of editing and style, and follow the guidelines about quotation marks, footnote or endnote formats, and so on. Don't use elaborate codes to indicate chapter titles, chart heads, and so on, since these will be reformatted to fit the publisher's design. The publisher will likely request a hard copy and electronic copy of your manuscript.

When your completed manuscript is officially submitted for to a university press, the editor(s) involved will read your manuscript and recruit outside "readers," that is, experts or specialists in the field, to assess the work. Press editors also prepare reports for their publications committee on the quality and commercial viability of the project. In Canada, where Canadian academic presses can apply for federal grants to subsidize their scholarly books (the ASPP or Aid-to-Scholarly-Publishing Program), the confidential peer review process is carried out by both publisher and the ASPP. In many but by no means all cases, the fate of the book depends upon the grant. A book manuscript designated as "revise and resubmit" can be re-submitted to the ASPP process only once before it is rendered ineligible for the grant. A press is not obliged to publish a book that receives an ASPP grant, but such rejections are rare. (For the ASPP Guide, go to <http://fedcan.ca/english/aspp/assessors/guide> or <http://fedcan.ca/french/aspp/assessors/guide>.) At any rate, authors who publish with Canadian academic presses (in *any* field) can therefore expect several readers' reports and the reports of the press' publications committee and the ASPP committee.

It will take longer than you think for the book to get published. While the publishing of electronic books – or e-books – may provide a faster form of publication in the future, the book production process today is inevitably slow. Most academic publishers still produce paper books in small "print runs" (number of copies), and some produce both a small run of print copies and an electronic version of the book. With printed books, it can take as long as three years, or more, from submission of your first manuscript to the finished product. With e-books, the process may eventually be faster. In either case, you will be excited, nervous, but also impatient the first time around. Do ask your publisher questions about the process but also remember that your press

editor is your professional colleague, not your servant, and be polite. Common questions include: how long will it take to find out if the manuscript is accepted for publication? How long will the production of book take once the final copy is received? How many copies will be printed? Will both hardcover and paperback editions be published?

Another big question concerns the publishers' plans for marketing. Be aware that most presses consult with authors as the book gets nearer completion. You will be asked to complete forms for the marketing department, and you should fill these out as carefully and thoroughly as possible. They will ask you to suggest faculty who might teach your book, journals that may review it, and potential course markets outside history. You will be asked to provide "catchy" summaries of your book that can be used by the publicity department. Once the book is out, keep your publisher informed of conferences you will be attending and other venues where copies could be put on sale or display.

What if a press offers to publish only an electronic version of your first scholarly book? We should acknowledge that print books are facing a serious challenge as university libraries, the major purchasers of often expensive scholarly books, shift their focus to scholarly portals and online resources. However, so far, there seems to be plenty of support for a mixed media approach to books and many history books continue to come out in paper. In the US, there have been some efforts to "publish" dissertations online on the grounds that new scholars can quickly move on to their second, and more important, book. If you do go this route, consider the reputation of the online press and who owns the copyright, and ask about peer review. Ask senior colleagues about how your tenure and promotion committee will assess such a book. Can you publish a paper version of the book at a later date? Ask yourself, will I be happy with an e-book?

Your book manuscript will undergo several stages towards publication, and you will be asked, usually on short notice, to perform certain tasks at each phase. Respond to these requests promptly, even if you are busy; otherwise it may delay the final production of your book. You will need to respond to your readers' reports, which usually involves agreeing to make some revisions. Then you will complete those revisions. Next, a copy-editor will pore over your final manuscript for grammar, organization, and style, and make many suggestions for editing revisions (e.g., to eliminate concluding paragraphs that are really introductions to the next chapter). You will need to review and approve these changes. You may be surprised at the amount of copy-editing done, but a copy editor usually helps your prose, so the advice to be tough-skinned applies here as well. Often the changes are not corrections to "bad" grammar but made to conform to the press' style sheet (for example, from World War II to the Second World War).

Read the changes carefully. It is okay to disagree with the copy-editor. For example, in breaking down a run-on sentence, the copy-editor may have changed the intended meaning of the original sentence. Once the copy-edited changes are inputted, you need to proofread the "page proofs," at which point you are to make only absolutely necessary changes.

First-time authors will be surprised by how much they are expected to do. In addition to reading the copy-edited version and “page proofs,” you will be asked to compile the index, provide the charts, tables, maps, or illustrations (which may be costly but for which you may be able to secure a grant from your department or university). Later, you will be asked to write a summary for the book jacket. Indexing software is available. If you can afford it, you might hire an experienced indexer, or perhaps a graduate student.

If a publishing house goes bankrupt or merges with another publisher, you may be faced with a suspended publishing program. A publisher may try to cancel or buy out your contract or publish but not market your book. Transitions at small or large commercial publishers can be difficult to weather. University presses may be more stable, but they too can be in difficult straits, and Canadian presses often face tough times. Also be aware that press editors move around. Your editor may move to another press and want to take you along, if you have not already signed a contract. Or, the new editor may be in a different field or have different interests and not recognize your contribution as quickly. In all these negotiations take seasoned press editor Laura Macleod's advice: recognize that you and your publisher are colleagues and should treat each other with mutual respect. Your editor may also have some graduate training as a scholar and a good editor will have plenty of experience at judging a "good" book no matter the subject. Try to develop a collegial relationship.

Once your book is out, take the time to enjoy it. Have a book launch – even a small and inexpensive one – to mark the happy occasion with friends, family, and colleagues. Agree to give talks to promote the book. You may well think you are "sick of it" after so many years, but it will be fresh to others. If your book is well received, you will also be invited as a guest speaker, so best to remember why the project had so engaged you in the first place. When talking about your book, keep your audience in mind; indeed, write at least two talks, one for a general audience, and one for an academic audience.

Finding the time to publish a monograph is a serious challenge for any beginning historian, whether employed or not. You may also find that it is years before you will be in a position to write your second book – so cherish this time, and feel proud of your accomplishment. It is no small feat. And it is an important intellectual event for you and your field and discipline.

## CHAPTER SEVEN POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS

The most nebulous status in academia is that of the ‘postdoc.’ For some, it is a wonderful opportunity to prepare for a career in academia or public history, get a strong foothold on a new research project and expand research networks. For others, it represents a painful transition at the end of the training period and is characterized by uncertainty, financial burdens, emotional distress, and dislocation. Since very few postdoctoral fellowships are available each year, postdocs have become the silent minority of the academic world. One thing is for certain the benefits of a postdoc rely almost entirely on how you use it. When you use the time wisely, the payoff will be enormous – you can kick-start your scholarly career.

### **What is a Postdoc?**

Postdoctoral fellowships are research grants designed to enhance the training of people with recently completed PhDs. Some fellowships, particularly outside Canada, are for teaching. Certain museums, such as the Canadian Museum of Civilization, also offer fellowships, although the latter are rare. SSHRC has identified five objectives for postdoctoral fellows (defined as individuals who have finished a PhD within the past three years): to undertake original research; publish research findings; develop and expand personal research networks; broaden teaching experience; and prepare to become competitive in national research grants competitions. The amount of funding provided for a postdoctoral fellowship varies depending on the source; in most cases it is a great deal more than graduate funding or a sessional salary, but less than a starting assistant professor or lecturer would earn. In applying for a postdoc, applicants are expected to establish a new research agenda that is distinct from their doctoral work. However, to make the case that the research agenda is viable, it helps to show how the new project grows out of the doctoral project.

One professor described postdoctoral fellowships as “the great sham of academia.” He meant that, despite impressive claims to beginning exciting new research projects, many postdocs do little more than turn their dissertation into a book. Of course, many history postdocs are new PhDs who are active on the job market, and they are understandably anxious to produce a book. In today’s competitive academic marketplace, publishing one or two articles and making concrete progress toward turning the thesis into a book are important steps to getting short-listed for a tenure-track position, and everyone understands that a postdoc will dedicate some of her/his time to publishing. Still, a postdoctoral fellowship is a rare opportunity to begin a new project before having to deal with the rigours of a full-time position.

Securing a postdoctoral fellowship should be considered a great accomplishment; you will be highly regarded by hiring committees. With few teaching or administrative responsibilities, postdocs enjoy enormous freedom. Many postdocs will teach during the tenure of their fellowship, although in most cases the granting agency restricts the amount of time a fellow can dedicate to teaching. If you have never taught before, you can use the period of the fellowship to gain some teaching experience. Some institutions will hire you to teach one course or provide

you with a contractually limited appointment to complement the fellowship. If you are concerned that you have never taught an introductory-level survey course, this may be a good time to start. In fact you might ask the department chair to observe your class and write a letter in support of your teaching abilities. Teaching a survey course will be a great deal more time-consuming than teaching a senior-level seminar in your field of expertise, but it may save you time and stress down the road.

## **Why do a Postdoc?**

There is a lot of mystery surrounding the postdoc experience. After many years at one school, some people are daunted by the prospect of relocating to another university in another city or across the country, and having to move again a year or two later. Friendships may be difficult to form when you are neither a graduate student nor a full-time professor. Not all fellowships provide generous remuneration, and many postdocs face financial constraints.

The most difficult aspect of being a postdoc is determining where you belong. You are no longer a graduate student, but neither are you a full member of the faculty. Some institutions will hire you to teach a course, but without a full-time appointment you may feel isolated within the department. Some universities simply do not know what to do with a postdoc. The sense of dislocation some postdocs feel is exacerbated by the fact that they may not have access to internal research funding or professional development funds, may not be members of the union or faculty association, may have limited access to health, dental or pension benefits (or other benefits, such as campus athletic facilities), and sometimes have limited office space with poor equipment. You may attend departmental meetings regularly, but be asked to leave when colleagues turn to an issue (such as hiring) on which discussion is limited to permanent faculty. Some postdocs avoid departmental meetings in order to avoid being singled out in this manner. Many postdocs also feel the frustration of their ambiguous status in the wider professional community. Postdocs have to be proactive in seeking out opportunities and developing collegial relationships in a larger research community.

Postdoctoral fellowships also come with many benefits. Obviously, the greatest benefit of a postdoc is that it can facilitate your research agenda. You can use the time to produce articles, make concrete progress on a book manuscript, or begin a new project and set the stage for your future work. A starting professor faces numerous challenges, and the demands on their time for administrative work and teaching are enormous. If, like the majority of postdocs, you have not yet secured a permanent position, you will also use the period of your fellowship to apply for jobs. In most cases you will have a host who follows your progress and acts as a mentor, and may also be willing to write a letter of reference. You might ask the department to host a research talk. This is not only a good opportunity to share your work with your new colleagues, but offers valuable experience for a job talk. The period of your postdoctoral fellowship is also a good time to become involved in a professional association. The Canadian Historical Association, l'Institut d'histoire de l'Amérique française, and many other organizations welcome volunteers to help co-ordinate meetings, organize advocacy campaigns or run for election to their

governing councils.

As a postdoc, you should not shy away from applying for research grants. Although most universities do not permit postdocs to apply for internal funding, SSHRC encourages postdocs to apply for Standard Research Grants and, in fact, sets aside funding for new scholars. SSHRC also allows postdocs to apply for workshop or conference grants. Organizing workshops/conferences can be very time-consuming, and your tenure as a postdoc may be a good opportunity to hone these skills early in your career. None of this is inconsistent with the mandate of a postdoctoral fellowship. In addition to research, postdocs are encouraged to become more competitive in applying for future grants.

### **Funding Opportunities**

The largest source of postdoctoral fellowships for Canadian citizens in the social sciences and humanities is SSHRC. Each year SSHRC awards dozens of postdoctoral fellowships. The Killam Foundation has also provided funding for postdocs at five institutions across Canada: Dalhousie University, McGill University, University of Alberta, University of British Columbia, and University of Calgary. Killam fellowships offer more remuneration and are extremely competitive. Dozens of other universities also provide postdoctoral fellowships to attract new scholars. Other institutions provide non-stipendiary fellowships. In this case, the university provides a postdoc with an office and other resources if they have external funding. Postdoctoral fellowships are also available outside Canada. The Australian Research Council, for instance, has an open competition each year for fellowships (albeit with a preference for Australian citizens). The Canada-US Fulbright Program provides grants to Canadian postdocs for up to one year at an American institution. Hundreds of universities, foundations, non-governmental organizations and governments across the world provide postdoctoral fellowships. The criteria for evaluating an application depends on the agency, but generally includes: academic accomplishments (awards, fellowships, scholarships, distinctions); previous research experience and publications; duration of your doctoral studies; originality and significance of your proposed program of work; assessments from referees; and appropriateness of place of tenure (usually based on the university or department nomination form).

Most universities have a research office with people who can answer questions about crafting the best possible grant application. In this regard, the advice of Rosemary Ommer (VP Research Office, University of Victoria), is especially useful: “The grants officer [SSHRC] is your friend. It's surprising how few people know that. Grants officers at SSHRC do not judge applications ... their job is to make sure that there are no technical errors that could disqualify you. They will be happy to answer any query, and to send a query on ‘up the line’ if they can't deal with the matter themselves. That's their job.”

If you are interested in beginning a postdoc soon after completing your PhD, it is essential that you plan in advance. The deadline for SSHRC, Fulbright, and Killam fellowships, for example, are in October and November. Awards begin the following May. You need a great deal of time



to construct a competitive application and solicit an institution to host your tenure. Be prepared to spend weeks, if not months, preparing an application and soliciting feedback from colleagues with experience applying for grants.

### **Choosing a Host Institution**

Choosing the appropriate institution and/or a good host is critical to the postdoc experience. SSHRC, Killam, and most other fellowships do not permit award holders to remain at the institutions where they completed their PhD. Fellowships associated with a specific university also generally refuse to allow their own graduates to apply for the award.

Many postdocs look abroad. This is a good opportunity to expand your horizons and look at your research from a new perspective. Applicants with international experience are also attractive candidates to potential employers. This is even true for Canadianists; no matter what your field of study, international experience can be a source of inspiration and help you establish a larger network of colleagues early in your career.

A host institution should provide postdocs with all the resources (library access, email account, mailbox, etc.) available to faculty members. External agencies such as SSHRC and Fulbright insist that the host institution provide the candidate with proper resources for conducting research before they will provide funding. Office space is especially important if you want to fully integrate into a department, but be aware that some institutions simply do not have additional office space to offer. Most funding agencies also require an individual at the institution to host your research. Hosts are not a supervisor; they will not evaluate your work or micro-manage your research. But a good host can help you get oriented on campus, dispense useful advice about the publication process and job applications, and possibly provide a reference letter.

A postdoctoral fellowship facilitates the beginning of a new research program, publishing original research and entering the job market. Consider your long-term objectives and the academic trajectory of a postdoctoral fellowship. In choosing a host institution, consider the whole of its intellectual resources and communities – research institutes or centres, guest speakers or visiting scholars, teaching and learning centres, interdisciplinary programs, research clusters, and international linkages all enhance the research capacity of a university. Enjoy your time!

## CHAPTER 8 SESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT

Teaching is one of the most rewarding parts of the job of a professional historian, and working as a sessional gives you plenty of teaching experience! Many people in tenure-track jobs started off as contract faculty. Others spend their entire careers as a sessional instructor. “Sessional positions are not McJobs,” writes Sharon Wall, a former sessional who now has a tenure-track job. “They can be a great way to learn about teaching, about oneself and about what one really values in an academic job. But they are also ways that universities are coping with reduced government funding of post-secondary education. The students and the sessionals are the poorer for it.”

Sessional labour has become an increasingly important part of the Canadian and American university scene, for a workforce made up of sessional instructors is much cheaper than one comprised of tenure-track faculty with benefits and sabbatical leaves. Unions are working hard to improve conditions for sessional instructors and have made some gains in terms of job security and preference in hiring for tenure-track jobs. But it is a tough battle. Contract faculty are some of the most exploited academic workers on campus; indeed, one person may be teaching at several schools. Many sessionals are not unionized. They are often poorly paid, have limited benefits and job security, and receive little or no support for their own research. These conditions persist because so many people have so few options and are desperate for a university job.

That said, the working conditions of sessionals vary widely. If you have a limited term contract as a visiting assistant professor, you may have approximately the same teaching load and salary as your tenure-track colleagues. You may have your own office and even be eligible for internal grant monies. At most institutions, you will be expected to take part in the life of the department by attending department meetings and social events, although you will probably not be asked to serve on committees or participate in job searches. A limited term contract can last from eight months to three years or even longer; in some cases it can lead to a tenure-track job.

Most sessional instructors are hired on a course by course basis. At most institutions, teaching by the course pays only slightly more than TAing, yet it is far more work. In order to earn a living wage, many people must cobble together courses from a variety of institutions. Of course, this is possible only in larger cities or regions where there are a number of colleges and universities. You will probably share an office with other sessional instructors, and you may feel quite alienated from the department. Sessional instructors often teach at night, or once a week, and it can be very difficult to build relationships with tenure-track faculty and even with other sessionals. Tenure-track faculty see a large number of sessionals come and go, and may make no effort to see how you are doing. They might not even know you exist. Because medical benefits are likely to be minimal, you might find yourself in an extremely difficult situation if you get sick or pregnant but you do have some basic rights. Caring for children, elderly parents, and sick or disabled family members can be tremendously challenging when you're working

long hours and traveling a great deal. Also, unless your union has arranged some sort of job protection or seniority, you are very much at the whim of the department as to whether or not you will be hired to teach again next year. You might have taught the same course at the same institution for years, but if a tenure-track faculty is hired to teach this course, you will lose out.

Since departmental expectations for – and the working conditions of – contract faculty are so variable, it is important to learn the rules of the institution. Make sure you are aware of the exact requirements – and opportunities – of your job. Some departments offer a handbook for sessionals, while in others you will have to ask the chair for advice. Do not hesitate to bring up your concerns – for example, safety considerations if you work at night. If you are unionized, contact your union if you are unsure of your rights.

### **Applying for a Sessional Job**

Sessional jobs are often advertised in the same places as tenure-track jobs: H-Net, *University Affairs*, and the CAUT Bulletin. Be aware, however, that some sessional jobs are advertised only on university websites – or not advertised at all. If you are interested in finding sessional employment, begin your job search early and look widely. Tell your supervisor and graduate director, and send your cv to departments where you would like to teach. Colleges often have sessional positions as well, so include them as part of your job search. Tell friends and colleagues in tenure-track positions that you would be interested in teaching at their institution. Courses often come up at the last minute, due to illness, parental leave, and other factors. You want to be prepared.

If the job is a full-time but limited term contract, the job interview may be fairly extensive. You might be expected to do a job talk, either in person, by video-conference, or over the phone. If you are being hired to teach a course or two, you will likely have a short interview with the chair or associate chair, perhaps on the phone. Many sessionals are hired to teach the course of a faculty member who is sick or on leave. Sometimes, the department will have a fairly firm idea of what they want you to cover in the course. In other cases, you may have a lot of freedom in designing your own course. Make sure that you understand what the department wants.

### **Being Evaluated**

As a sessional instructor, you will receive teaching evaluations from the students, much like any other faculty member. At some institutions, your teaching will also be reviewed by a faculty member who comes to one of your classes and submits a report to the department. This can be an intimidating experience, but it can also be useful. Most of us could benefit from having our teaching observed by others. Ask for feedback and take the advice seriously, but also be aware that teaching styles differ and you do not have to do everything they suggest. At the same time, if you receive a positive evaluation, ask the department chair or supervising professor to put a note in your file and write a reference letter you can use when you apply for a tenure-track job.

You can also ask for copies of your students' teaching evaluations; they will be useful for future job applications.

### **Moving Out of Sessional Teaching**

Some departments give preference to sessional instructors when it comes to tenure-track hiring, but you should never count on this. Most searches will be openly advertised and there are advantages and disadvantages to being an internal candidate. On the one hand, your colleagues will have a fairly good idea of whether they want you to stay on as a permanent colleague (so no matter how frustrated or marginalized you feel, your job performance matters!). On the other hand, faculty members are often excited by the possibility of hiring someone they don't yet know; they want an emerging "star" or someone they think can cover more gaps in the curriculum. To land that tenure-track job, you must compete in an open search. Here your publication record will matter. Being an effective teacher is probably not enough to get you hired; indeed, teaching too much to pay the bills can delay your research and actually reduce your chances of being hired. While it is extremely disappointing to be turned down by an institution where you have devoted your time and energy and developed relationships with colleagues, try not to take it personally. A variety of considerations go into hiring decisions, and unfortunately rejection is very common.

If you are teaching a full-course load, it can be very difficult to find the time to publish and apply for jobs. However, if you want to land a tenure-track job, you must build up your cv, and show that you have made concrete progress toward turning your dissertation into a book. If you can afford it, it is wise to teach a little less and work on your publications. Search committees want to see some teaching experience and good teaching reviews, but years of sessional teaching will do you little good on the academic job market. Alternatively, if you decide that what you really love is teaching and you are not as interested in research, you might seek out employment in a CEGEP in Quebec, or colleges in other provinces, like British Columbia which has an extensive college system.

If you wind up as a long-term sessional instructor, either because of the lack of professional alternatives or your own personal circumstances, remember that as an educator, you can make a huge difference in your students' lives by nourishing their intellects and encouraging them to engage with the past – and present. Take pleasure in the joys of teaching history.

**CHAPTER NINE**  
**LEAVING ACADEMIA: THE POST-ACADEMIC JOB SEARCH**  
**By Sabine Hikel, Ph.D.**

Most PhD students likely assume they are training for a career as a university professor, but there are many alternative career choices for historians. Whatever your field of specialization, employers in a wide range of sectors want someone with your special set of skills. However, many graduate students and scholars don't know how to make the transition to a "post-academic" career. All too often, they are paralyzed by difficult questions. Will the academy be forever closed to me if I take up a post-academic position? What will my peers and advisors think? Does leaving the ivory tower mean I am a failure? Were all those years in school wasted?

Answering these questions is all part of the process of making a career change. This chapter provides some step-by-step strategies for exploring career possibilities beyond the professoriate. Whether you have an MA, ABD (All But Dissertation), or PhD, you were smart enough to get into academia and you're smart enough to find a way out.

**Fear #1: "But what else can I do with my life?"**

You may have never really seen yourself being anything other than a history professor. Envisioning alternative careers can thus feel daunting and disheartening. But once you get started, it can be fun to explore the career alternatives that do exist for students and scholars with a history background. Former scholars who've come from the social sciences and humanities have gone on to successful and satisfying careers in areas as diverse as broadcasting, union organizing, school-teaching, non-profit research, fashion, life coaching, and consulting.

Post-academics differ from other career changers in a few significant ways, but they can begin formulating their career-change plans using the same basic strategies. Attack the crafting of your post-academic career as you would a research project. Start by consulting up-to-date career planning resources for the best advice on making a career change and how to conduct a job search. You can find many of those resources right on campus at the career counseling centre. You'll learn that networking, for example, is a strategy that never goes out of style and applies to all job seekers. Even as you're trying to figure out what other lines of work might interest you, let everyone around know that you'll soon to be on the job market. You may face some raised eyebrows and difficult questions, but remember, there is no need to apologize. You can prepare some replies; tell people in a polite but firm manner that "academia isn't the right fit for me." Or "I'm excited about pursuing my long-time interest in journalism." Or "the academic job market has dried up and I'm assessing my other options."

In some cases, you may be an unemployed contract instructor or a cash-starved graduate student looking for a short-term post-academic job, not a career. Your first post-academic job might not be your dream job, or even in your field of choice. It might be a transition job that helps you to

pay the bills while you research other careers. One of the best places to look for the stop-gap job is in the university sector, even at your alma mater. An administrative job in the dean's office, graduate studies office or alumni office can pay well and allow you to work in a familiar environment. Other jobs that support the university sector can be found in the offices of major funding agencies (including SSHRC), academic recruitment firms, university presses, and so forth. This work can give you the time, money, and breathing space you need before devoting yourself to serious career planning- or you might decide this is where you would like to stay and advance. Historians have found rewarding careers as writers and producers for the CBC, as public and private school teachers, as fundraisers and policy analysts in NGOs and social justice organizations, and so on.

Aside from networking, you can pursue other traditional job-search or career-planning techniques, including conducting information interviews, perusing job postings on the web, consulting a life coach, securing an internship, finding a head-hunter, and joining a job-search club. Another tip that applies to all career-planners is to focus on your passions. Many graduate students sacrifice their hobbies and interests in the name of dissertation research and writing, but returning to the things you loved may help you formulate your career plan.

### **Fear #2: “All I know is nineteenth-century Norwegian textile production,” Or “I’m not qualified for any other job!”**

Telling yourself that you're under-qualified is perhaps the greatest mistake that potential academic-leavers tell themselves. Many academics think the only thing they're good at is working on their narrow topic of specialization. But nothing could be further from the truth. You are armed with a wealth of skills – many that you had before you even set foot in graduate school – that qualify you for a range of jobs.

In some cases, your academic area of interest will parlay itself into your post-academic career, but this is actually seldom the case. Miuccia Prada, head of the Prada fashion house, has a PhD in political science. Working in fashion might require her to use her research skills, but she probably does not consult her methodology chapter when designing the new spring line. Canadian novelist Camilla Gibb's PhD in social anthropology likely helps her bring fictional characters to life, but it's doubtful she frequently consults her dissertation's bibliography. Debbie Stoller's PhD in the psychology of women probably fuelled her desire to start *Bust* magazine and to write her line of Bitch N' Stitch books, but she probably did not heavily consult her thesis for either enterprise.

In other words, your qualifications for a new career may not have anything to do with the actual topic of your doctoral research. What is usually more important is that you can transfer skills cultivated in graduate school to the new job. On the post-academic job market, you will be judged not by academic standards – how much do you know about this topic? – but on how well you can do the job. Does this mean graduate school is a big waste of time? Absolutely not! At the very least, graduate school allows you to hone a wide range of skills, sometimes even without

noticing it!

### **Fear #3: “Skills? I don’t have any skills!”**

The fear that you have no skills for life outside the academy poses another huge barrier for potential academic-leavers. Thinking about your PhD in terms of transferable skills can be very difficult because graduate students are accustomed to thinking of their skills in terms of intellectual attributes or scholarly achievement. But you can shift your thinking by breaking down the steps you took as a student and scholar, and recognizing the skills that were required to meet challenges and to progress through the stages.

As a graduate student, you are engaged, essentially, as a professional researcher. You handle huge chunks of information – uncovering it, analyzing it, synthesizing it, finding holes in it, speaking and writing about it, and so on. In the information economy, people who do exactly what you’ve spent years doing are in high demand. Not only do you have a wealth of experience in this regard, but it is second nature to you to the extent that you may not even regard your abilities as a set of skills!

Doing what the career-planning books call a “skills inventory” may seem an either daunting or dull exercise, but it is by far the most important thing you can do for yourself as an academic career changer. To secure a post-academic job, it’s imperative that you reframe your work experience in a way that employers can understand. By articulating all the skills you used in academia and beyond, you will help your potential employer to grasp just what it is you can do. You’re also affirming for yourself just how talented and able you are. And as you consider what your transferable skills are, more and more career possibilities will bubble to the surface.

Take the example of teaching. Ask yourself, what exactly is involved in my weekly engagement with my students? It may feel like second nature to you but you are using countless skills when you teach. If your resume states, “Teaching Assistant, 3 Years, Introduction to History; Course Director, 1 Year, Eighteenth-Century European History,” you’re not telling your future employer very much. But if you think about the actual tasks performed, you might find skills like the following:

- facilitated large and small group discussions
- provided oral and written feedback on a weekly basis
- planned and delivered weekly presentations
- conveyed complex information in a clear, accessible way
- used a variety of audio-visual technologies to present information
- developed and implemented grading and evaluation criteria
- responded to student and course director feedback in a timely fashion
- exercised resourcefulness without supervision
- wrote documents tailored for specific audiences (e.g., student handouts)
- set and met weekly, monthly, and yearly goals

This is only a partial and general list to help you start your own teaching skills inventory. Consider the other skills involved in teaching – those you use when attending a course director’s lecture, working with a TA team, reading the textbook, drawing up a lesson plan, grading papers and exams, meeting with students, and teaching students how to write an essay. You will end up with quite an extensive list of skills that are in high demand on today’s job market.

You also developed other practical and marketable skills in your academic life. For example, you didn’t only write a Master’s thesis, course papers, or a doctoral dissertation. You also managed large volumes of information, established a data-storage system (both electronic and hard copy), and edited manuscript copy. You were a creative thinker, you adapted and navigated your way around unanticipated barriers (of the intellectual variety), and saw projects through to completion. You worked independently but consulted others for their expertise. And don’t forget all those "soft skills" that a PhD helps you cultivate:

- you are a master/mistress of time management and meeting deadlines
- you have superior organizational skills
- you learn things quickly and grasp complex ideas easily
- you are disciplined, motivated, and a self-starter
- you enjoy a challenge

Once you learn how to articulate your transferable skills, you will be able to explain in a job interview how well your background – graduate school and all – prepared you for the line of work described in the job ad. Thus, you might not have specific experience working in the not-for-profit sector, but your teaching skills demonstrate the creativity you used to communicate complex ideas, something that not-for-profit organizations need when consulting stakeholders and the media. You might not have the background called for when applying for a job with that multi-national software producer, but your experience shows you’re a quick learner.

#### **Fear #4: “But how can I turn my ten-page cv into a one-page resume?”**

It can be an emotional, even demoralizing, process to “gut” one’s scholarly cv and convert it into a resume. But writing a skills-based resume (rather than a chronological one) that highlights those transferable skills you’ve worked hard to identify will demonstrate just how “hirable” you really are in a range of employment sectors. To find out more about crafting a solid, up-to-date resume, consult one of the many job resume books, websites, or writing services available.

Thorny issues will come up, so best to be prepared. For example, some ABDs wonder if they should mention the years spent in graduate school, or explain why they left without earning the PhD. If you’ve converted the time spent in graduate school into transferable skills, then by all means mention it. But you do not owe a potential employer an explanation for why you left without a doctorate.



The matter of references can be difficult, even for the most successful graduate student. Non-academic employers will typically ask for names of people to whom you directly reported, which may – or may not – make your doctoral supervisor the best person to provide a reference. If you left academia largely or partly because of a difficult or destructive relationship with your supervisor, you will not want this reference. But do not despair; there are others you can ask. Remember, you need referees who will speak to your ability to show up on time, grasp concepts quickly, stay focused on tasks and meet deadlines, rather than to the strength of your scholarship. If you don't have recent non-academic experience, you can use faculty for whom you conducted research and with whom you established a good rapport. You can ask a course director for whom you TA'ed. You could even go back to professors from your BA days if you're still in touch with them.

However, you should inform your references in advance that the job for which you are applying is not an academic one so that they can shift the standards of praise and evaluation – for example, from “she was in the top 10 percent of my class,” to “she always came to meetings on time and spoke in an informed and intelligent manner.” As with academic letters, it is always a good idea to ask potential referees if they will be able to provide a strong reference for you. If you sense any hesitation, move on to someone else. If necessary, you might call upon a colleague with whom you edited a collection or worked on a journal. This is not a senior person to whom you reported but he or she can testify to your work ethic and organizational skills.

Here are some additional tips:

- Whether you are consulting someone in an information interview or being interviewed yourself for a position, be gracious and say thank you. It will help get you remembered.
- Be bold. You'll distinguish yourself from the rest of the pack, prove how courageous you really are (especially to yourself) and affirm that you can take charge.
- Be persistent. When you've applied for a job you're really interested in and you don't hear back right away, don't be afraid to call. If you get turned down for your dream job, reject rejection; with persistence, you will land in the sector you want.
- Consider self-employment. If you have a flair for writing, why not try freelancing? If your line of study is marketable, consider consulting.
- While you might not need it, consider training in a totally different field. You might decide history is not for you and that your true passion is to become a social worker or an actor or a chef. Consider taking the plunge.

Making the transition from an academic to a post-academic career can be frightening. The process of transferring to a new and satisfying career can take one or two or even several years. You need to deal with the emotional and psychological issues as well as focus on the concrete work of re-tooling your career. The good news is that very few former academics regret leaving academia after re-establishing themselves in a line of work that rewards them for doing what they enjoy or love. Post-academics in new careers relish the guilt-free leisure time and the freedom from having to constantly turn to funding agencies and apply for research grants. Others

earn salaries that are higher than that of an assistant professor. Still others cherish the opportunity to pursue a life-long passion. If you decide that you want or need to pursue a career outside that of university professor, a certain amount of planning, networking, self-reflection, and, yes, luck, will help you to establish a new and rewarding career.

## **CHAPTER TEN**

### **THE ACADEMIC JOB SEARCH**

A PhD does not guarantee an academic position, and unfortunately the market for tenure-track jobs is very competitive. The very existence of a job in your field depends on a number of factors outside your control. The vagaries of the economy and specific institutional concerns, such as scheduled retirements, government funding priorities, and the wishes of donors may mean that there are quite a few jobs in some areas (such as world history or nineteenth-century Canada), but hardly any in others. No matter how successful a graduate student you have been, then, forces beyond your control may adversely affect your chances of getting an academic job. For those pursuing an academic career, we offer some advice on how to optimize your chances of academic employment, identify some pitfalls to avoid, and indicate some of the difficult decisions that you will have to make.

#### **Prepare Early in your Graduate Career**

The best way to prepare yourself for the uncertainties of the job market is to begin planning early in your graduate career. Get experience as a teaching assistant in the first couple of years you are in the program. Later, try to get experience by teaching a course of your own. While waiting for your supervisor or committee members to review your dissertation chapters, sit down and prepare your dossier. Design your dream course, write up your teaching philosophy, refine your cv, draft a job letter, and practice summarizing your thesis and its scholarly significance in a paragraph or two. When a job ad actually appears, you will be ready to respond. Don't wait until the last minute to apply.

You can also prepare by being aware of your online presence. As academics, our workplace is as much virtual as it is physical. The proliferation of social networking sites, blogs and personal websites raises a new set of issues for job-seekers. It is a safe bet that anything you post on the internet will be seen by a future employer.

#### **When and Where to Apply**

First, you will need to decide when to first enter the job market. This is not a simple decision, and it is one which generates a great deal of contradictory opinions. You should consider a variety of issues before deciding when to first seek an academic position. On the one hand, you may be encouraged to try your luck if you have gotten positive feedback on a publication or conference paper, or your economic circumstances might necessitate a temporary or part-time job search. On the other hand, the job market in your area might be quite dismal at the moment, or your supervisor might discourage you from applying on the grounds that such a move is premature and will hamper your progress toward thesis writing. While teaching experience will certainly help you get a

job, do not be fooled into thinking that sessional or part-time teaching will inevitably lead to a tenure-track position. And keep in mind that teaching positions are labour and time intensive, and teaching will slow down the progress of your own work, perhaps considerably delaying the completion of your dissertation. Of course, you may have little choice: financial pressures may push you into looking for part- or even full-time academic work prior to finishing your thesis. Still, think about your situation and ponder your options carefully.

There are a number of pitfalls to expending time and energy in looking for academic employment as an ABD (All But Dissertation). First and foremost, the chances of getting full-time academic employment, even on a sessional basis, are slim. At the very least, you will probably need to have a couple of chapters finished to show search committees and to ensure positive letters of recommendation. Preparing a curriculum vitae and covering letter is time consuming, and if your job search is unsuccessful the experience can be discouraging. Given the expectation of employers for a finished dissertation and even publications, and assuming for the moment that extreme financial pressures are not pertinent to your situation, you should ask yourself if a time-consuming teaching position could delay the completion of your thesis or book to the point that you might lose your appeal as a candidate for a permanent position. At the same time, as an ABD you may find that undertaking a modest job search when you are within a year or so of completing your dissertation can give you the experience and build up the confidence you will need when you enter the job market in earnest. Ultimately, the final decision is yours.

Once you are actively on the academic job market, you will have to decide where to apply. Job ads for historians in Canada can be found in *University Affairs*, the magazine of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada ([www.universityaffairs.ca](http://www.universityaffairs.ca)) and the Canadian Association of University Teachers' monthly *Bulletin* (<http://www.cautbulletin.ca>). In addition, the Job Guide of H-Net, a networking site for scholars and teachers in the social sciences and humanities ([www.h-net.org/jobs](http://www.h-net.org/jobs)), provides a comprehensive (although not exhaustive) notice-board and email postings for job openings in Canada, the United States, and abroad. Job ads are also listed in the American Historical Association's *Perspectives* (<http://www.historians.org>) and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (<http://chronicle.com/jobs>). Job notices are often posted on the human resources page of the website of the university that is hiring or sent to graduate departments for distribution or posting on bulletin boards. Your university probably has a career counseling centre, with services specially geared toward graduate students and information about academic employment in Canada and elsewhere. The career centre might offer an academic dossier service, whereby a copy of your cv, transcripts, and letters of recommendation are kept in a special confidential file ready to be sent out to prospective employers, perhaps for a small fee. The dossier service may be very useful once you enter the actual application stage of your job search. Deciding whether to set up a file with the dossier service depends on the number of jobs you are applying for and whether your referees are amenable to writing a new letter for each job you apply for. Having individually prepared letters for each position is ideal, but it can pose an unrealistic demand on your supervisors and other referees.

Many academics find that it takes a few years to land a permanent position, and successful candidates often move through one or more temporary positions – or postdocs – between the time they finish their thesis and take up a permanent job. However, there is no set pattern for job placements. Some people find permanent jobs very quickly, others only after many years. Often, economic factors, public policy, or institutional needs dictate the type of candidates hired. With these considerations in mind, you should try to be as flexible as you can when deciding what positions to apply for, and consider applying for a large number of quite different jobs. For instance, specialists in modern Britain may find themselves applying for jobs that want someone to teach Western Civilization or European history; historians of gender or sexuality might apply for positions advertised as social or cultural; and Latin Americanists or Africanists may have to teach World History. In these situations, you have to convince the hiring committee that your specialty is related to the desired field, that you are qualified to teach the relevant survey courses, and that your presence will strengthen the department. Historians have also found homes outside history departments; for example, in Humanities, Education, Sociology, and Criminology departments, or in law, medical, or business schools. Interdisciplinary programs, such as Aboriginal Studies, Law and Society, and Gender Studies, also include historians. Keep your eyes open for advertisements calling for applicants with a PhD in a particular field *or a related discipline*. If you are unsure if you qualify, send a brief email to the contact person listed in the ad and ask if an application from history would be welcome.

If your qualifications and research interests fit most of the requirements of a job, by all means apply. Do not try to second guess the motives of employers. Job ads are often deliberately vague because the hiring department has not yet decided (or cannot agree) on the sort of candidate they want, or because faculty are shopping around for an individual who can plug all the gaps in their curriculum or are harbouring fantasies about the “perfect” candidate. Departments occasionally hire candidates who barely fit the job description. Some job ads seem very narrowly focused, while others combine several fields, historical periods, and specialties. As long as you fit one or more of the requirements, apply. Chances are good that you will be on a relatively equal footing with most of the other applicants. If in doubt, it does not hurt to apply. You may be completely surprised and fall into a good position unexpectedly.

Once you decide to apply, ensure that you will be seriously considered for a job by producing an application that is thoughtfully and carefully prepared. The old adage that you only have one chance to make a good first impression applies doubly here. Faced with dozens, even hundreds of applicants, search committees routinely throw out applications simply because they fail to impress on the first read-through. Take the time to write up a high-quality cv and covering letter. The curriculum vitae, carefully proofread and on good quality paper, should include your teaching experience, education, publications, and awards. Usually, it begins with basic information about where you can be reached, and then moves on to post-secondary education, including details about your graduate degrees. List your dissertation title and supervisor, fields of study, and any honours or awards. Include teaching appointments (most recent first), any other work experience relevant to an academic position, and publications or conference papers. Last,

mention other items of relevance to a prospective employer: languages, administrative experience, and other professional work. Do not pad your cv or pretend to be something that you are not, as you will eventually have to prove yourself and may be quite embarrassed.

The same general guidelines apply to the covering letter. *Never* send out a form letter in response to an academic job ad. You should expect to re-craft your letter for each job. The covering letter should be succinct (1 to 2 pages) and link your research, teaching and administrative experience to the requirements of the particular job. Obviously, you need to fit a large amount of information into a small amount of space. You must explain how your qualifications fit the job by describing your dissertation and the courses you are capable of teaching. (Enclosing a course syllabus, published article, or short – 30-page – chapter with your letter or dossier would back this up nicely.) You must give a brief description of your current research, and/or explain how you are revising your dissertation. Opinions differ on whether to account for gaps in the timing of your employment or education. Some prefer to leave these gaps unexplained and let prospective employers ask about them. If your academic career was interrupted to raise a family (or for some other reason), you might mention it in your letter, but do not be defensive. It takes many drafts and a lot of time to produce a well-written, smoothly-flowing covering letter. Avoid selling yourself short. Put care and effort into your letter. And, once again, ask your supervisor or other senior colleagues to read your letter and provide feedback. Some larger departments have sample cover letters and cvs on file; others run job placement workshops and mock interviews. Take advantage of all these resources.

You will be asked to provide the names of references or to get professors to send letters of recommendation. Try to get recommendations that address both your scholarship *and* teaching abilities. Never hesitate to ask a faculty member to write you a letter of reference; they are standard fare in our profession. But do provide your referees with the time and information they need (ideally, including the job ad) to write the letters you want. Keep your references current. If you use a dossier service, make sure that the letters in it are up to date and that they reflect your current qualifications and situation. Leaving an outdated letter of recommendation in your dossier is a mistake; a letter which talks about the promise of a thesis proposal will not help you if you have actually finished your thesis! Make sure that when you finish your dissertation your letters are updated. Strong letters of recommendation are vital to your success or failure in the job search, so you must choose your referees carefully. The external appraiser of your thesis might write a good letter, particularly if he or she liked your work. But do not seek out referees who have an exceptional academic reputation but are relatively unfamiliar with your research. Try to strike a balance between reputation and enthusiasm. It is almost always better to have a glowing (and precise) letter from a lesser-known scholar than a mediocre or uninformed letter from a "big name." Find faculty who are enthusiastic about writing you a reference, and be cautious with those who seem reluctant or hesitant to do so. If possible, try to ascertain in advance if your intended referee is willing to write an enthusiastic letter or will "damn you with faint praise" out of apathy, unfamiliarity, or even hostility to your work. Remember, a bad letter in your dossier is likely to scuttle

your chances of getting to the next stage in the process: the interview. But also keep in mind that hiring committees will recognize and likely dismiss an unduly harsh or vindictive letter.

### **Affirmative Action**

Employment discrimination is illegal, and many universities in the United States and Canada also have affirmative action or employment equity programs intended to further “level the playing field” and remedy the effects of past discrimination. Most employment equity programs focus on the four groups that Canadian law recognizes as having been historically disadvantaged: racial minorities, Aboriginal persons, persons with disabilities, and women. In a very few departments of some universities, affirmative action may also apply to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered individuals. Employment equity policies and procedures vary greatly from university to university. Some schools simply state that candidates from under-represented groups must be treated fairly and informed of their rights, others may give “preferential treatment” (for example, in short-listing) to members of designated groups, and still others use affirmative action as a “tie-breaker” – meaning that, if two candidates are equally qualified, the “equity-seeking” candidate must be offered the job. Excellence is the principal criterion for academic employment, however. You should assume that you will be treated fairly whether or not you are a member of a designated group.

Some job ads announce the university’s commitment to employment equity and ask job candidates to “self-identify.” If you belong to one or more of the groups designated for special consideration, we strongly advise you to self-identify at the outset of the search, either in your job letter or curriculum vitae. It is important to self-identify early because most candidates are eliminated from consideration at the short-listing stage, and this is when subtle forms of bias have the biggest impact. A hiring committee may be looking for someone who can replace a beloved colleague and “fit in” with the (homogeneous) departmental culture; they may question whether a candidate whose dissertation is on Aboriginal health care can teach Canadian political history; or they may be influenced by less-than-positive teaching evaluations that refer to a candidate’s accent, appearance, or cultural style. While some people are reluctant to self-identify because they want to get the job “on their own merits,” and others worry about calling attention to invisible disabilities, many schools’ affirmative action procedures do not apply to candidates who have not self-identified. If you feel you have been treated unfairly, the university’s equity office or faculty union may not be able to help if you have not self-identified.

### **The Interview**

The job interview is an opportunity for candidates and their prospective employers/colleagues to determine if they are compatible. Good interviewing requires significant work on both sides. Unfortunately, some interviewees find that anxiety and the desire not to offend makes them suppress their natural personalities and appear less

interesting than they actually are. And some interviewers seem more concerned with demonstrating their own erudition and impressing other members of their department than with learning about the candidate! Some interviews are models of propriety and efficiency, while others turn into hellish experiences for the candidate (and occasionally for the interviewers). But the horror stories should be put into the context of the dozens of other interview experiences where the candidates (even if not selected) felt that they were treated with respect and genuine interest. As strange as it may seem, interviews can be a genuinely enriching experience for everyone.

There are many things you can do to make the interview more positive. Thorough planning and preparation is essential. Do not hesitate to send ahead a reasonable amount of written material, even beyond what is requested, to make your scholarship more familiar to those who will be evaluating you. Ask what to expect in your interview, and learn as much as possible about your interviewers' teaching and research interests by checking out the hiring department's website. Do faculty members represent more than one age group? Are women and people of colour well represented? Practise presenting your work, for you can often re-focus a wandering interview by being able to talk about your work in a condensed but easily comprehensible form. A useful way to get a sense of what to expect in the academic interview is to get involved with your graduate department's own hiring process. Volunteer for hiring committees, attend job talks given by prospective candidates, and discuss them with faculty and other students.

Academic job interviews fall into three general categories: convention interviews, distance interviews conducted by phone or video-conferencing, and on-campus interviews. Most Canadian universities short-list candidates after assessing the written applications, but US universities generally conduct brief convention interviews before deciding who to invite for an on-campus interview.

### *Convention Interviews*

Many US departments hold preliminary interviews at large conventions like the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, held in early January. These interviews are grueling situations for all involved because many people are seen very briefly, perhaps for as little as fifteen minutes. Candidates must therefore be prepared to sum up their work in five minutes or less and to convey its importance without seeming arrogant or boastful – or apologetic. Try to avoid being too narrow or cautious in describing your scholarship, and be prepared to think and talk beyond the limits of the dissertation. Interviewers sometimes ask candidates to talk about general trends in the historiography of their fields or to discuss their long-term research agenda. You will probably be asked about teaching, so be prepared to talk briefly about how you would organize key courses. You can bolster your preparation and courage in advance by having trusted faculty and friends ask you difficult questions in a simulated interview before you go to the real one. Confidence is always an asset, especially at a convention interview where you have so little time to make a favourable impression. This does not mean bragging or listing honours. Real confidence is reflected in a willingness to offer genuine opinions and to



respond to thought-provoking questions. Do not expect too much from a convention interview. It is practically impossible to know what the interviewers thought. In fact, sometimes those interviews in which you thought you did poorly turn out to lead to the next step.

### *Phone and Video-Conference Interviews*

Phone interviews are generally similar in length to those held at conventions, and usually serve the same purpose: to reduce a large pool of candidates to a number small enough to be brought to an on-campus interview. They are used if a candidate is abroad or cannot get to the convention, or if the university has limited funds to bring candidates to campus. In Quebec in particular, they offer a way to evaluate French language skills. Occasionally, small schools or departments with limited funds will rely on them in the final hiring process, instead of an on-campus interview (although this is more common for sessional than tenure-track positions). Prepare for a telephone or video-conference interview as you would any other. Arrange to have the interview at a location that has a minimum of distractions; explain to your family and friends that they should not try to phone or disturb you at this time. If you have a choice, use a phone with a clear connection; turn off or ignore features like call-waiting.

### *On-Campus Interviews*

Once you have been short-listed for a job (either after a convention or phone interview, or from the pool of written applications) you will be brought to campus and put through a series of meetings and interviews. Once you know you have been short-listed, you should find out all you can about the hiring department, the demands and requirements of the position, and the nature of the interview. If someone on the faculty offers you his or her telephone number prior to the interview, make use of it to ask specific questions, but do not be swayed either by overly positive (or negative) characterizations of the department. Try to get a detailed interview schedule in advance, as well as some information about who will be evaluating you. Interviewers inevitably interpret your knowledge about the department as evidence of your interest and engagement, and will see its absence as apathy or disinterest in the position.

If you are short-listed, you may be told on very short notice (often only a week, sometimes two) so it helps to be prepared for the possibility. Some job advertisements are extremely specific about the research and teaching expertise they are seeking, possibly because they want a candidate to teach the survey or a particular course in the department. In this case, you should construct a basic the course to distribute during the interview – and be prepared to discuss it. Do not simply borrow or download someone else's outline; if you are unable to talk intelligently about "your" course, it will be the kiss of death! In addition to showing that your research fits the hiring department's needs, it is a good idea to try to link your work to other research centres and clusters in the university.

Always inform the hiring committee if you have special needs. If you have a mobility disability, hearing impairment, or any other condition that might affect your interview, the university is obliged to accommodate you. Also inform them of your dietary requirements or child care concerns. Ultimately, it is impossible to predict how any one individual will respond to requests for special accommodation, but most hiring committees will be happy to adapt to your circumstances.

Once on campus, you will be busy: the interview process can take one, two, or even three days. The structure of the interview varies greatly. You will almost certainly have a formal interview by the search committee or possibly the entire department. You will be asked about your teaching, your current and future research, and what you can bring to the department. (See sample interview questions.) Ask for rest breaks if they have not already been put into the schedule. Try to avoid expressing any ambivalence you may have about the job or its location. You may start out not wanting the job, but by the end of the process you may well desire it. Moreover, try to avoid becoming exasperated when, over the period of a day or two, you get asked the same questions and have to sum up your thesis many times over.

It is essential to be absolutely clear about what the hiring committee expects in terms of a research talk or teaching presentation. Often, interviewees are expected to demonstrate their teaching abilities by providing a guest lecture before an undergraduate class or a mock lecture before the faculty. The latter can be awkward, but remember that no one expects you to become an expert on the topic in such a short period. The key is to demonstrate that you have the basic skills necessary to teach at the post-secondary level and can discuss a topic that is not in your area of expertise. (The lecture topic is often, but not always, chosen by the host department). If a research presentation, or “job talk,” is expected, bring a prepared paper and deviate from it only if and when you feel comfortable doing so. Make sure you understand what the committee wants – a broad overview of your research or a more formal conference paper. If a formal paper is required, present your strongest paper, even if recently published. Remember that in most departments you will be talking to non-specialists in your field, so make sure your talk is general enough and is fully contextualized. It is also important to be sure that your talk is the right length, the right volume, and is delivered with minimal repetitive mannerisms. If possible practice in front of friends or supportive faculty members. It is best to deliver a talk like a lecture, and speak directly to the audience, rather than reading. Be enthusiastic but also succinct, and do not drone on about your work. If there is a question period, make sure you answer questions graciously, even if you think they are stupid, and be honest if you do not know an answer. Faculty members often talk about a candidate who gave a mediocre talk “coming alive” in the question period; this could be the moment you win the job.

It is a good idea to compile a mental list of questions to ask while you are on campus. When you meet with the department chair or dean, ask about teaching responsibilities and tenure criteria. Ask members of the department about enrolments and student profiles, resources and opportunities for faculty development, evaluation and promotion,

departmental structure, anticipated hiring, and library facilities. Also ask about how and when the department will make its decision. It is not appropriate to ask about the other candidates (other than "how many?") and a properly conducted search will keep that information from you until the final decision has been made.

Take the "informality" of any specific meeting or social event with a grain of salt. Even when you are out for dinner, you are being evaluated. You are better off sticking to generally observed formalities unless instructed otherwise, and you may wish to abstain from alcohol. Wear clothes you are comfortable in, but that show you want to be taken seriously. It is not necessary to dress like a Bay Street banker. Wear what you consider to be formally "dressed-up." In certain contexts, specific cultural dress may be accepted or expected. If you are unsure about dress, try to find out departmental norms in advance.

In the social situations of the on-campus visit, questions may surface about your personal situation. It is illegal to ask about your personal life, but this does not necessarily prevent questions from cropping up, sometimes inadvertently. Keep in mind that departments are evaluating you not only as a scholar but also as a potential colleague. They want to know if they will be able to work with you over a period of years. For example, while being given a tour of the town or city in which your prospective department is situated, you may be asked if you'd like to see the neighbourhood schools. While heterosexual couples with children may engage in such discussions easily, others may find questions about their personal circumstances, especially regarding marital status and children, difficult. But do not assume that the department will be hostile: Americanist Molly Ladd-Taylor was six months pregnant at the time of her (successful) interview at York University.

It is entirely up to you as to how to deal with probing or off-hand questions or remarks about your personal life. Feel free to discuss your situation if you like, but plan responses in advance if you wish to retain your privacy. You can always state simply that you have no personal commitments that would prevent you from taking the position. You will have to assess each situation as it arises and respond in a manner that you are personally comfortable with. On the other hand, don't feel that you must converse only about professional topics; it is useful and important to let people know about your other interests. Indeed, letting your interviewers know about what sort of things you like doing in your spare time (such as music, volunteer work, watching and playing sports, gardening, or collecting antiques) is an important means for them to get to know you as a potential colleague.

Handling innocent questions about your personal situation can usually be done with a certain degree of tact. But there are no simple or easy answers for dealing with overt prejudice or discrimination during the interview process. Comments about your appearance can be particularly unnerving. If someone compliments your looks or what you are wearing, you may wish to acknowledge it with a smile or a nod and promptly change the subject. If that fails, you can say that you would feel more comfortable concentrating on your academic credentials. If there is an implied insult, you may need

to challenge it directly, although if you still want the job you may wish to help the interviewer save face. You might try to defuse the tension with humour, or simply ignore it and try to move on. Remember that interviews can be stressful for both parties; it may be that no offense was intended.

In considering your response to offensive comments you will have to weigh various factors: is the entire department pervaded by a sexist/racist/homophobic culture (in which case you will have to ask yourself whether you want to become a part of such a department at all), or is it limited to a few individuals? Are you confident enough to challenge such comments directly at the interview, or would you rather let them slip by and address the problem later, after a final hiring decision has been made?

Even when everything goes really well in the interview, you still might not get the job. This is hard to take, but it is a fact of life in the current job market where universities have their pick of many extremely well-qualified candidates for each position. It is natural to be disappointed, but don't see it as a reflection of your self-worth. So many factors shape the hiring process that any one of a number of things could tip the balance. You might consider asking an approachable member of the search committee about your performance, but be aware that this is not common practice. On the other hand, if you and some members of the hiring department believe that you were treated in a discriminatory manner, talk with the faculty association or union there, and ask your supervisor to help you weigh the pros and cons of launching an appeal.

No amount of good advice can obviate the fact that interviews, and indeed the academic hiring process itself, can seem full of arbitrary interactions and unexpected decisions. A good candidate is enthusiastic, brings new ideas to the university, and shows the promise of future ability. Even if you don't get the job, you will have had a chance to practice your job talk and make valuable contacts. If you do get the job, enjoy your celebrations!

## CHAPTER ELEVEN BECOMING A PUBLIC HISTORIAN

Public history is a burgeoning field that employs many historians. Historians can find employment at historic sites, in small and large museums, and archives in both the private and public sectors. Novels, plays, and documentary and fiction television shows and movies, also considered forms of public history, often rely on the work of historians in a variety of capacities – as researchers, writers, and talking heads. Many public historians are self-employed, contracting out their expertise on a diverse array of projects.

There are many routes to public history. Some people go into a Master's or PhD program with the intention of becoming public historians. Others move towards public history because an interesting job becomes available, and they successfully apply. This was the case for Rhonda L. Hinthier. She had been pursuing a tenure-track history job when the Canadian Museum of Civilization advertised for "Curator, Western Canadian History." A friend saw the posting and encouraged her to apply. She did so, was flown to Ottawa for an interview, and was offered the job because of the array of skills she had developed researching and writing her PhD dissertation and teaching Canadian history.

Public history is a varied field that offers many opportunities for exciting and rewarding intellectual engagement. Many public history jobs are academic jobs. On the job, public historians are often able to pursue their personal scholarly interests while also developing exhibitions and programming for their institution. Some public historians are encouraged, and even expected, to publish as actively as university academics. Many teach at universities or community colleges. History departments, especially those with public history programs, often actively seek practising public historians to sit on thesis committees, affiliate as research associates or adjunct professors, act as external readers, or teach courses related to their particular expertise. Some public history jobs are less academic. For those working in smaller institutions or ones that are less research oriented (which is probably the case at most Canadian institutions), historians will be expected to contribute not only to developing exhibitions, but also to other museum products. They might be asked to give group tours, design educational programming related to collections, produce web products, organize fundraisers, build exhibition cases, and handle acquisitions. Often, the smaller the institution, the more diversified the work of a historian or curator will be. Such positions can offer a public historian the chance to develop a wide range of skills and experience.

Many public historians eschew permanent institutional affiliation, choosing instead to contract their services and work on a variety of projects in different institutions. They might work as curators on one project, exhibition designers on another, or as researchers or text writers-for-hire helping to develop one or more components for an exhibition. While at times contracting can be an insecure means of earning a living, it is not without its advantages. In addition to developing broadly-defined skills and experience,

contracting offers many public historians the opportunity to negotiate a more flexible schedule and, in some cases, to exercise greater choice over the types of projects on which they will spend their time.

### **Finding a Job in Public History**

If you are interested in going into public history but don't have a public history background or degree, fear not! While it is helpful for some types of positions, a public history degree can be quite limiting in other circumstances. Sometimes, public history programs of study are too broadly defined to offer the type of specific historical expertise that many museums or historic sites are seeking. Moreover, the research and writing skills you develop in a history PhD program are readily applicable to many public history jobs. Even without a public history degree, a skilled historian can do public history. History students hoping to practice public history should recognize the importance of studying images and artifacts as historical documents, consider developing skills in oral history and material culture, and learn about the cultural community (e.g., museums, galleries, historic sites) outside of academia.

Many public historians get their start working on part-time research contracts. These jobs can help to position you for permanent public history work. They can also be a great way to supplement your income as a student or after you have graduated; often you can structure the work to fit around your own writing or TA duties. Sometimes these opportunities are advertised, but more often, especially for smaller contracts (under \$5000), they are not. Employers of public historians often need to hire quickly to fulfill short or long-term project needs. Generally, they draw on people they already know have the interests, skills, and experience they are looking for. Networking, then, can be critical to getting your foot in the door.

Networking for public history jobs is a lot like networking for other academic jobs – at conferences, via email, at museums, and on campus. Consider joining public history professional associations that reflect your interests, like the Canadian Association for Women's Public History (CAWPH) or the National Council on Public History (NCPH). Sign up for public history listservs like H-Public or H-Museum. Finally, don't be afraid to approach individual curators or public historians for advice. They are busy, but most would be willing to meet for a coffee or take time over the phone to discuss their work, your interests, and to offer career advice. If you are interested in working for their institution, let them know and forward your cv, along with a short cover letter or email reminding them of your field of study, teaching experience, and areas in which you would be qualified to work or carry out research. Many will also willingly forward your information to colleagues who might be seeking research assistance. Volunteering can often be a good foot in the door as well. It can help you understand the internal structure of a particular organization and its procedures, databases, lingo, contacts, and projects that might be helpful in your search for a contract. Depending on your program of study, you may be able to volunteer or carry out an internship for degree credit – check with your department. SSHRC-funded postdocs can also sometimes be carried out at

museums or historic sites.

Positions in public history, permanent jobs as well as postdoctoral opportunities, internships, and research fellowships, are usually posted publicly. Institutions often advertise for curators or historians in many of the same places as tenure-track jobs, such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education* or H-Net. H-Public and H-Museum are especially valuable resources for international public history opportunities. The websites of individual museums, historic sites, or government departments like Parks Canada, the Smithsonian, and the Canadian Museum of Civilization, sometimes advertise positions. Jobs are also posted at the websites of the American Association of Museums (<http://www.aam-us.org/aviso>), the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN) [www.chin.gc.ca](http://www.chin.gc.ca), and the American Historical Association ([www.historians.org](http://www.historians.org)). Students looking for summer work can sometimes find public history opportunities through the Canadian Government's Federal Student Work Experience Program. <http://jobs-emplois.gc.ca>.

In Canada, the largest employer of historians is the Canadian federal government. Many (but not all) public history jobs with the federal government require bilingual candidates, so consider brushing up on your bilingualism. Examples of the tests you will need to pass can be found at [http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/ppc/sle\\_main\\_e.htm](http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/ppc/sle_main_e.htm). For some government jobs, you need only demonstrate an aptitude for learning a second language; your employer will send you and pay for language training.

The process of applying for posted public history jobs is generally similar to that of a tenure-track job. Usually you will be asked to submit your cv and a cover letter outlining your qualifications. As noted above, the skills you develop in graduate school are readily applicable to most public history jobs. When you apply, be sure to spell out clearly in your cover letter how your particular skill set, experience, and field of study fit the position. Refer to the institution to which you are applying, and its characteristics, and indicate why you would be a good fit. The hiring committee may be made up of individuals who do not hold graduate degrees or who hold graduate degrees in fields other than history – they may not know what a history PhD candidate or recent graduate learned while pursuing their doctorate. You will need to tailor your cv and covering letter to the specific type of institution. Too strong an academic focus may actually be a deterrent for employers looking for applicants with “practical” training; you might be better off emphasizing successful projects rather than publications. Take care to follow all instructions in the job posting to the letter. Some may ask you to email or submit your application online, others may request a paper application. If a Government of Canada job posting lists the “core competencies” required for a particular position, make sure that you list them by name and indicate how you possess each one (no matter how mechanical this may make your cover letter). Failure to do so may disqualify you as an applicant. In fact, since more and more cvs are pre-screened by computer, yours might be quickly rejected if certain keywords are missing.

## **The Job Interview**

Generally speaking, job interviews for public history positions are relatively simple compared to those for tenure-track jobs. Usually, they take about an hour or two and do not require a job talk or lecture. For certain government jobs, standardized testing may be involved (though it may be scheduled for a later date). Don't be afraid to inquire about the nature of the interview process – the individual who schedules your meeting should be able to give you a general idea of what to anticipate. To prepare, think about how to convey your area of expertise practically and to a popular audience. Consult job interview manuals for general advice about a professional interview. Be sure to investigate the institution so you can go into the interview informed about the type of public history it does. Plan to dress up – a suit is usually an appropriate choice. Bring extra copies of your cv, publications, conference presentations, teaching dossier, public history projects, and any other material that you might draw on in the interview to highlight how well-suited you are for the job.

On the day of the meeting, you may be interviewed by one person or by a team. Some interviewers may be academics; others might be representatives of the human resources department or other departments with an interest in your candidacy. Always keep in mind who the interviewers are when addressing their questions, and do not be condescending. A mixed audience or a solo non-academic interviewer will not be impressed by professional jargon, no matter how erudite you think you sound. Be straightforward and clear in your responses. Always prepare some questions for the interviewers: ask them about their institution, its direction, and how the job opening fits with its mandate. It is also reasonable to ask when you can expect to be contacted with the results of the competition.

If you are hired, congratulations! Competition for public history positions can be fierce. Before you start, negotiate your salary, starting date, and other benefits. Again, general job search handbooks, as well as the tenure-track section of this book, may be helpful resources. If you have to relocate, be sure to inquire whether the costs of your move will be covered. On the job, you may encounter a variety of workspaces and resources. You may have your own office with a view, you might have a cubicle, or you might share a single large workspace with your co-workers. There may be ample administrative support or none at all. Be prepared for the possibility that you may have to be flexible in your work style. You might be expected to work primarily in a team, respect seemingly arbitrary deadlines, and put in overtime for special events. You may also have little control over your working hours and where you carry out your work. Be sure to ask about your research budget (if you have one), how much it is, and what it may cover in terms of expenses. Ask if you will sometimes be allowed to work from home. Familiarize yourself with your union and its benefits, if you have one.

Most of all, take time to be proud of your success. Working as a public historian can be a rewarding and engaging experience. Like any job, the workload and dynamics can be challenging at times, but the payoff can be greater. Your work may be viewed by hundreds, thousands, and possibly millions of people. You may have the opportunity to shape public opinion and bring to light historical experiences about which few would



otherwise know. Your research may take you to interesting places where you have the opportunity to meet a variety of people. Public history can be an exciting career path for anyone interested in becoming a professional historian.

## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

### **ON THE JOB: LIFE AS A JUNIOR PROFESSOR**

When you are hired into a university department, you may be surprised to find that permanent faculty jobs vary enormously. In addition to the three major distinctions between professors – assistant, associate, and full professor – colleagues often carry very different workloads. Life in a mainly undergraduate teaching institution differs markedly from life in a graduate research institute, and if you have a joint appointment with two departments or campuses, you will face special challenges. Just as junior faculty on full-time but contractually limited appointments face heavier teaching workloads and enjoy fewer institutional supports than tenure-track colleagues, tenure-track and even tenured faculty in the same university can have very unequal workloads. In some departments, “new hires” are given reduced teaching and committee workloads in order to build up a tenure file. Graduate research faculty in large universities may do little or no undergraduate teaching, and a few senior colleagues manage to negotiate a permanently reduced teaching load as compensation for having made a particularly significant contribution to their department or university. The proliferation of research chairs has intensified inequities by rewarding certain faculty with research funds and lower teaching loads – although keep in mind that many “chairs” devote a great deal of time and energy to the administrative demands of their research programs and centres. All universities want their faculty to apply for external funds, but the pressure to do so may be greatest at universities with modest graduate student funding. In poorly-funded francophone universities in Quebec, for example, you almost certainly will be expected to help subsidize graduate education by winning research grants and hiring research assistants. As a new faculty member, you should be aware of where you fit in this schema. Whatever your situation, try to avoid complaining about unequal workloads and status; you don’t want to develop a reputation as a colleague with a chip on your shoulder.

It is important to know your rights and precisely what is expected of you as a full-time, pre-tenured assistant professor. In universities and colleges where faculty members are unionized, the requirements for promotion and tenure, research leaves, and other workload issues are most clearly spelled out in the union contract. If you are unionized, read your collective agreement! Most schools also publish a faculty handbook that outlines what is required academically and professionally at different stages. Do not hesitate to ask your chair, dean, personnel officer or union representative to clarify the rules regarding tenure, leaves, benefits, and so on. Colleagues can be helpful but they may not be up-to-date on procedures and (changing) levels of expectation for tenure.

#### **Negotiating the Job Contract**

Given the competitiveness of the academic job market, most people are extremely grateful to be offered an academic job. Do not let this gratitude get in the way of negotiating your job contract. Many universities will pay your moving expenses, and

even cover the cost of a trip to find a place to live before you start the job. Some universities provide interest-free loans, or outright grants, to help people purchase a home.

Before you negotiate your salary, find out what you can expect. Speak to colleagues and ask your faculty association or union for advice. If the university has a grid system, you should receive a copy of the grid or look for it online. Statistics Canada publishes a yearly report of academic salaries in Canada by university; this will give you a general idea of what other people in your prospective institution are being paid. It is very important to negotiate your starting salary, because even though salaries in the early stages of an academic career can rise quickly, they usually do so by predetermined increments. Your starting salary will play a large role in what you will be paid well into the future.

You may be able to negotiate a reduced teaching load and other benefits. Many universities give course releases in the first year or two of teaching, and some people are able to negotiate permanently reduced teaching loads. (If you do this, be aware of the impact it might have on collegial relations within your department.) Some universities also offer early sabbaticals or research leaves to junior faculty members. Most will provide you with a start-up grant for research expenses and perhaps an office computer. You can also negotiate funds to increase library holdings related to your teaching and research needs, especially if you work in a field that your university has not traditionally taught. Check into other grants that might be available for book-publishing, research trips, and research assistance – often, these funds are flagged for new projects. Some new professors negotiate a faster-than-normal time to tenure, but be aware that this is not always advantageous. It may take longer than you think to get your book published, and you might want extra time to build up your teaching or research profile.

### **First-year Teaching**

The most obvious thing about your first year of full-time teaching is the staggering amount of time and effort required. You will get up early and stay up late preparing courses day after day. You will deliver lectures and lead seminars on subjects about which you know little and feel barely able to keep ahead of your students. Prepare yourself psychologically for this transition; you have gone from the top of the graduate hierarchy to the bottom of the faculty ladder. At times you will feel like a fraud; other times you will simply feel panicked. Try to remember that becoming a teacher is a learning experience, that it is okay to make mistakes, and that it will get easier. Also, try to step back from your graduate school mentality and think about your undergraduate students' needs. What will excite them about history? How can you convey difficult concepts in accessible prose and through illuminating examples? An undergraduate lecture is a performance that should convey the drama of the past as well as some chronology and a *few* analytical or interpretive points. Do not bombard students with umpteen facts and figures or, worse yet, with historiographical details and revisionist arguments that they cannot possibly understand. If you do, you will lose them.

It is not necessary to develop your courses in isolation – seek help! Many first-year teachers borrow outlines from more experienced colleagues, who are usually happy to share their materials. Syllabi are also posted on H-Net and other listservs and on institutional websites, such as that of the National Library of Medicine in the US. In addition, many universities have teaching centres that assist faculty in developing syllabi and improving their teaching. Most also offer courses on teaching with technology and provide assistance with other digital resources and the design of course websites. Get advice from colleagues about the most useful resources and technologies at your university, but recognize that opinions will differ.

### **Committee Work**

Departmental expectations involving service for new faculty vary, but you will be expected to do some committee work, at least after the first few years. Department-level committees generally deal with student curriculum, job searches, tenure and promotion, and perhaps also graduate studies. You will probably also be asked to serve on university-wide committees or sit as the external member of another department's committee. Having a joint or cross-listed appointment with other programs can mean double and triple duty when it comes to committee work.

You are expected to do your share of this sort of professional service for your university community, but do not let committee work drive you into the ground. Many departments try to lessen the committee load for new arrivals; some may protect you from all committee work. If this is the case, do not be surprised if your committee load increases dramatically in years three or four. Find out the acceptable standard, and talk to your chair if you find your committee load is too heavy; he or she may not be aware of everything you are doing. Women, Aboriginal faculty, and faculty of colour are often asked to do more than their share of committee work in order to meet university equity criteria or diversify the line-up. You do not want to be a casualty of this structural inequity. But if you are not doing any committee work, you should talk to your chair. Service will be an important part of your tenure file, and you do not want to be delayed or rejected for tenure because you have not done this type of work.

### **Daily Life Inside and Outside the Department**

When you arrive in your new department, you will need to learn about the departmental culture. You may encounter a formal or informal division of acquisition money for the library; use your share to suggest materials. Departmental policies about long-distance phone calls vary, but whatever the rules, don't run up big department phone bills for private calls.

The office staff of your department may help you with photocopying for large courses, ordering course texts and other small matters, but in general, you will be expected to do

your own secretarial work. Many universities are short-staffed; learn how to make your requests as easy as possible on the staff. Under no circumstances should any faculty member expect support staff to handle private business. Remember that the office staff are professionals. They are your colleagues, not your servants.

New faculty are often assigned a mentor, who will take you out for lunch, answer questions, and generally serve as a source of advice. This can be extremely helpful, but feel free to approach other colleagues as well. Everyone knows how difficult it can be to start a new position, and most colleagues are happy to give you any help they can. But be aware that faculty may differ widely in their views about the department or how to advance your career. Some are relentlessly upbeat, while others are bitter. Whatever their thinking, you will not necessarily have the same experience. The department might have changed considerably since they were hired. Take your time getting to know new colleagues, and then you can better weigh their advice.

As a new faculty member you may face a busy social life, or you may be ignored. There are ritual events, such as a president's reception and departmental cocktail parties, and possibly dinner invitations. Find out how to dress for these events, they may be more formal – or informal – than you expect! As for dinner invitations from colleagues, you should try to reciprocate once you feel settled in, but, again, take your time. You will soon find out whether you have joined a department where dinner parties are regular occasions or rare events.

It may be hard to maintain your privacy during your first year. As a newcomer, you may arouse curiosity, especially if you seem “different” from the departmental norm. Colleagues will ask both professional and personal questions, so be prepared, and try to handle questions you find intrusive with as much professional aplomb as possible. Your novelty as a newcomer will wear off, and first-year stresses will abate, so just try to weather the storm. You can decide for yourself whether, when, and how to reveal details about your private life, and take time to let collegial friendships unfold. After all, you may be in the department for the next thirty years.

Of course, everyone faces different challenges. A person who grew up in the province where they now work might adjust more easily than someone who had to move across the country, a married couple might “fit in” to a relatively conservative community more easily than a GLBT faculty member, or a single mother. Some new faculty members have disabilities or the additional challenge of a chronic illness; others have to care for – or support – sick or aging family members. If you have young children or are in a long-distance relationship, you will have to perform a difficult juggling act and might find it extremely difficult to make department meetings. Being the only person of colour in a mostly white department, university, and town will bring it own challenges, especially if you come from a different country and culture. The community might be so small that everyone knows who you are, you might have to deal with insensitive or racist comments, or your white colleagues might be shy about talking with you for fear of saying something inappropriate – with the result that you are neglected and marginalized. Individual professors differ in their sensitivity and consciousness of these issues, and

departments differ in how (and how much) they will accommodate your needs. Take time to find a trustworthy friend in whom you can confide. Do your work, stand your ground, make any necessary requests, and, if you feel comfortable doing so, educate your colleagues about your situation.

Some junior colleagues may be surprised to learn that, despite the large number of women historians and institutional supports for women's studies, gender inequities persist. Academic sexism takes many forms, from the subtle to the serious. Many women find it annoying, for example, when students say their male professors are brilliant and address them as "Dr.," but describe women faculty as "nice" (or maybe "biased") and call them "Miss" or use their first names. But when such attitudes show up on teaching evaluations and other job performance measures, their impact can be severe. Gender bias can also emerge in service assignments, as when female colleagues are "encouraged" to do extra committee work because they are seen as particularly sympathetic to student needs, or because a committee needs more female representation. It can also appear in assessments of your scholarship. Research on beauty culture or mothering, for example, may be treated as less "significant" than political economy and thus may be undervalued by readers of grant applications and tenure files. Any woman who has found herself belittled or embarrassed in public by an arrogant male colleague – or who is assumed to be lacking commitment to university service or her scholarship because she is juggling childrearing and career – would chafe at the notion that sexism is a thing of the past. There are few formal procedures for dealing with these issues, but talking about them can help. Get moral support and suggestions for coping strategies from trusted colleagues and old friends from graduate school. Above all, do your best to keep a frustrating situation from damaging your morale or sense of self-worth. If you are subjected to overt discrimination, sexual harassment, or assault, contact your chair, dean, faculty association, and/or university equity officer. Familiarize yourself with the appropriate procedures, and know your rights.

You may not be at the university or in the city of your dreams. You may be far from home and separated from loved ones. You may be worried that you are not suited to life in a big city – or small town. You may be a GLBT faculty member living in a city or town that offers no alternative social and cultural life. Fortunately, academic life does not require a twelve month residence; you can socialize at conferences and spend summers and holidays in another town. But if your situation is untenable, remember that you do have options. You can look for another job, and even give up a tenure-track position in order to return to a more conducive environment. You can work as a sessional while you look for another job, or you can leave academia entirely. Some academics have made this decision and are happier for it. But we also suggest that you not make any decision hastily.

Try to approach your new locale with an open mind. Do not make derogatory comments about the place to your new colleagues, who may love where they live and work. Take advantage of what the local community has to offer. You may be surprised. Consider joining a campus group for women, LGBT, or international faculty – or starting one if one doesn't exist. Make an effort to meet people from outside of the university. Sign

up for a sports league or exercise class, invite new friends to accompany you to films and concerts, join a book club, find a place of worship. Is there a food bank you can volunteer at? Enjoy the outdoors – go cycling or take long walks. Make the best of your new environment, and you will be more content.

## **Advancement**

As a teacher and colleague, you will find yourself constantly providing services, advice, and support to students and other members of the academic community. This is an important part of academic life, and many professors give generously of their time. But you must also learn what counts towards advancement in your position. Learn what colleagues did to get tenure, but don't obsess over trying to figure out what precisely is appropriate behaviour. Speak when you have something to say, figure out when it's important to fight and when it is wiser to let something go, and build your credibility as a responsible professional. Be yourself. You do not have to hide your politics or religion, or pretend to be what you think your colleagues want you to be. But you do have to do your homework by getting to know your colleagues, participating actively in searches, attending departmental meetings, and completing committee work and other tasks. All of these activities will not only help you with tenure and promotion, but also help your chances of winning when it's time to fight for a principle or job candidate that really matters to you. Take time in making friends and allies in the department. There is no rush.

In all likelihood, your university requires faculty members to achieve success in the usual trio: teaching, research, and service. It sounds obvious, but learn what is specifically meant by that policy. If teaching and research matter more than service when it comes to tenure, then how much professional service is enough? For the research category, do you need a published book or a book in the review process, or will articles in respected journals and scholarly volumes be enough? Will you also need to show evidence of a new project beyond the thesis? Publications take time, so you need to know the answers to these questions and pace yourself accordingly.

Increasingly, universities expect you to bring in research grants. Find out whether or not this is expected at your institution. Do your research when you apply for one of these. Attend seminars on how to apply for SSHRC Standard Research Grants and other funding, and ask colleagues for advice. Also consider what is best for you. If you are working on turning your dissertation into a book, and applying for research monies would be a distraction, you might want to delay a year or two. On the other hand, few funding applications are successful on their first attempt, so it is wise to start applying early.

At some schools, publishing a textbook (or other teaching materials) counts in the teaching category; in others, it counts as research. Some institutions emphasize student enrolments while others look for consistently favourable evaluations by students and faculty. Others want to see that you have supervised graduate students. Learn what aspect of teaching is important for tenure.

Service is a vague category. In addition to committee work, it may also apply to activities external to the university, such as volunteer work with historical or heritage organizations, consulting contracts, attendance at professional meetings, speeches at Rotary clubs or seniors' groups, and so on. Some schools define service as work done for the wider professional community, while others are concerned with the portion of your time devoted to administration within your own department and university. Think carefully about what tasks you are required to do, and what you want to take on. As a faculty member you will be asked to peer review manuscripts, write book reviews, organize conferences, edit special collections, write textbooks, give public talks, do media interviews, and get involved with national and international organizations. Although it is flattering to be asked to do these things, and many of them are interesting and fun, the requests can pile up and become overwhelming. Organizing conferences and writing textbooks, in particular, can be an enormous amount of work. Think carefully about which tasks you have time for; and choose the ones that are most enjoyable for you. Practice saying, "No!" You will not be able to accomplish anything effectively if you are completely exhausted.

Get into the habit of keeping records, and build up a tenure file. Keep class grade lists, course outlines, notes from students and colleagues, and teaching evaluations, if available. Keep copies of anything you write for publication, public presentation, or institutional business, as well as reviews of your work. Inform your chair of all your accomplishments. Many departments have faculty activity sheets or yearly reports. Be sure to record *all* your accomplishments: publications, student supervision, guest speaking engagements, media appearances, work-in-progress, research grants, and prizes or other academic honours. In short, never allow yourself to suffer an incomplete departmental evaluation because you are not well-organized. Requirements for tenure and promotion, and the interpretation of those requirements, can change, so find out the current expectations.

## **Tenure**

Tenure is meant to protect academic freedom and integrity in the university, but it also provides professors with a degree of job security that few other citizens in our society enjoy. Tenure is not a fundamental right that follows from landing a tenure-track job. You must earn it, and to do so you will have to satisfy the particular requirements of your institution. Tenure requirements vary little from university to university across North America, although Canadians hear fewer "horror stories" than US colleagues about well-published faculty turned down for tenure. Generally, Canadian universities review you for tenure after a probationary period that ranges from four to six years. There may be an interim progress report a few years before you come up for tenure; this will give you constructive feedback on your progress and let you know what you need to do.

Tenure review is a lengthy process, and you will be painfully aware of being evaluated. Try not to let it get you down. The best way to get through the tenure process is to be



prepared. You will be required to provide comprehensive files on all your work and accomplishments for several committees and the dean. Be very clear about expectations and keep complete records. Expect it to take weeks, even months, to compile your files: you may have to track down your published articles and reviews of your work, rummage through your office for student letters that praised your course, assemble students' course evaluations, and so on. You will need to discuss your work in progress. You may need to compose a statement on your approach to teaching and perhaps one on your research profile. Many Canadian and most American universities solicit letters evaluating your scholarship from external reviewers as well as departmental colleagues. You may or may not be able to influence who is asked, and in the end you may only be given a verbal or written summary of what was written. At other universities, the tenure-review process is entirely internal.

Our advice about knowing what is expected of you, and knowing your rights, applies especially to tenure. Most tenure requirements include a combination of teaching, research, and service, but in most locales, a strong publication record is the most effective way of securing tenure. Prepare yourself, and ask for plenty of advice. Your chair should be helpful and informed about university guidelines. An appeals committee, if you need it, usually can do little more than determine whether the proper procedures were followed. If you believe that you were denied tenure because of discrimination, you will have to prove it. We still hear of cases where poor teaching evaluations caused by student prejudice, or a scholarly assessor's bias against a certain field of study, appeared to affect a tenure decision. A more common problem, however, is that tenure expectations were not made clear, and so the candidate failed to meet them. You will have to present a convincing case to support your claim that you have indeed met the established tenure standards. Most colleges and universities have quasi-judicial procedures for adjudicating tenure and hearing grievances, and "T&P" policies and procedures are usually written down. New faculty should receive a copy of the rules – read them! Make sure that you know what you are supposed to do, and if you feel you are being treated unfairly, get help. Do not let anger, embarrassment, or profound disappointment prevent you from filing a grievance if you think that you have been wronged. It is your right.

## **Promotion**

Most institutions rank tenure-track faculty members as assistant, associate, or full professor. At many North American universities, tenure and promotion to associate professor status go hand in hand, but some institutions treat these as distinct phases. Promotion to full professor usually occurs more slowly and will require you to have an impressive publishing profile, including two monographs. Large research-oriented universities may also demand that your work has received some international attention, but do not worry about this stipulation. It does not mean that you must be known around the world, but, rather, that you have published in international journals, presented at international conferences, and that scholars in appropriate fields have come to know and respect your work. Promotion may or may not bring a higher salary, but it does bring

more prestige inside and outside your institution, and often new responsibilities.

Once again, find out the criteria for promotion at your university, and know your options should you be denied promotion to any rank. This is especially important for pre-tenured faculty, who may be too busy writing lectures and preparing classes to take the time out to read university guidelines, talk with colleagues, and attend workshops. The key is to learn the ropes sooner rather than later, and in as painless a fashion as possible.

### **Being a Historian**

When you become a tenured history professor, you have secured a highly desirable job that comes with considerable status and autonomy, and a remarkable degree of security. You have entered into a privileged life as a successful academic with the opportunity and resources to participate in conferences around the world, to engage in intellectual debate with scholars you respect, and with the right to devote yourself to intellectual endeavours that have always excited you. Comparatively few people have the luxury of living as a full-time intellectual. As you find yourself stressed and overcommitted, juggling too many projects and committees, supervising too many students, and marking big batches of essays or exams, it is easy to forget your good fortune. You have privilege and prestige inside and outside the university. Enjoy your lot in life, even while you fight for better pay and working conditions, juggle your personal and professional lives, and remain sensitive to those who do not have such secure careers. Enjoy the rewards of being a practising historian.

## RESOURCES

### THE PEER-REVIEW PROCESS: HOW DOES IT WORK?

The peer-review process means that when you submit your work – whether it is an article or book manuscript you are hoping to publish or a grant application and in some disciplines even conference papers – it will be carefully and rigorously scrutinized by established experts or specialists in your field, who confidentially evaluate the quality and value of your scholarship. Since many graduate students remain mystified by the actual process involved, here we cover in more detail the steps for publishing articles in journals and scholarly (edited) volumes, and for publishing books.

*Journal Articles:* The scholarly article that enjoys the highest prestige is a peer-reviewed article that appears in a prestigious or highly reputable journal. Once you submit a piece to a peer-reviewed journal, the journal editor(s) will solicit experts or specialists to assess your work. Each “reader” or “assessor” who agrees to evaluate your article will produce a reader’s report. This usually consists of a mix of numerical and qualitative answers to a set of questions (or guidelines) posed by the journal and pertaining to the quality and value of your piece. The number of reviewers varies from two to four (and even five) readers. You are not obliged to carry out all of the suggested revisions but you must take all of them seriously. When you finish your revisions and send in your revised essay, you may need to explain your revisions to the journal editor(s). Keep a list of substantive changes made, and be clear and precise about what you did and did not do.

The degree of revision required will depend upon the reader’s reports. The journal editor(s) considers all of the readers’ reports and determine whether your piece falls into one of several possible categories: publish as is; accept with revisions; revise and resubmit; and reject. If all the reports are in agreement, this is an easy decision. More commonly, the readers offer different rankings, which means that the editor(s) will need to decide on the most appropriate response. Different editors may carry out the process slightly differently but all are bound by the reader’s reports. They will usually send you the readers’ reports with information about how they have ranked your paper and perhaps some additional comments about which criticisms or suggestions seem the most pertinent. But they will ask you to attend to all of the comments raised.

Very few papers receive a “publish as is” ranking, so do not expect this to happen, especially if you are a new author. You will most likely be asked to undertake some revisions, from minor to major, and these can relate to writing, presentation or argument, or requests for more supporting evidence. Do *not* interpret “revise and resubmit” as a rejection. Certainly, it is a disappointment, but it is not a rejection. You are being told that the amount of work required to bring your paper up to rigorous academic standards is of a sufficiently high order that the paper must substantially change from its original state, and thus require another confidential review. The list of criticisms and suggestions for revision might be long. Most readers write helpful reports, but even if you come up against readers who uses the veil of confidentiality to produce a vicious or vindictive report, or to push their own agenda, you are obliged to respond to their reports in a

meaningful way intellectually. Also trust that editors can recognize a self-serving or excessively polemical review. Usually, the revised and resubmitted paper will be assessed by at least one of the original reviewers and a new reviewer – but the pattern varies. The journal editors' final decision will again be shaped by the reports. Journal editors are bound by the peer review process and so are you.

How long will this take? It will take much longer than you wish or expect. Several factors are involved. It may take longer for an article in the top journals, which often receive many submissions and have a backlog of accepted articles, perhaps as long as three years. But the prestige of the publication may be worth it. Another factor concerns the readers, who are usually given a specific deadline (for example, within three months of receiving the piece) but may not always meet it. Most people do this work as volunteer professional service, not for financial or professional reward, and their more immediate deadlines or hectic schedules may make for late reports. This is frustrating but a fact of scholarly life. You may slow down the process if you do not get your revisions in on time.

What of the non-refereed journal? Even in the case of journals that are not peer-reviewed, you will probably need to undertake some revisions, usually at the editor's suggestion. But the review process will not be as extensive, which is why such articles carry less academic weight. So, when you submit to a non-refereed journal, be clear that you are doing this for compelling reasons, for example, a political commitment to the journal's mandate or the chance to get your feet wet in the publishing world.

*Book Chapters or Articles in Edited Volumes:* The other major venue in which scholarly articles appear is the edited scholarly volume, or collection of articles on a major subject or theme. In contrast to journals, these are not routinely generated publications but instead initiated by a scholar or group of scholars who act as editors to the project. It is generally a good idea to participate in such a project especially if the editors are historians or scholars with established reputations.

But do keep a few factors in mind. You should know whether the volume will be peer-reviewed. If the editors already have a book contract or letter of interest from a university or academic press, the book will very likely be peer-reviewed, but ask to be sure. In this case, the review and revision process involved is similar to that for refereed journals, save for a few differences. Consider the editor's status and track record for getting projects done. This is important partly because in contrast to submitting an article to a journal, which has an established infrastructure, there is no guarantee that a book project will come to final fruition. It depends on all or most of the contributors coming through. If the editor is a prominent and experienced figure in the field, and a good taskmaster, the chances are excellent that people will respect their obligations. Frankly, junior scholars will find it harder to pressure colleagues to produce their work on time. A late contributor may hold up production and, on occasion, a few delinquent contributors may even sabotage the whole project. It can be difficult for friends to pressure friends to meet deadlines – but it is certainly not impossible. Indeed, a book put together by a cohort of “up-and-coming” scholars associated with a new and exciting field may attract plenty of attention and even help make their careers. Some editors facilitate the production process

by holding small conferences to “workshop” the book. There are SSHRC funds for occasional conferences that can be used for such workshops, which bring together contributors to discuss everyone’s submissions, agree on revisions, and move on to the next stage.

These articles are often called chapters in books, or book chapters, on the grounds that they appear as separate instalments in a singular volume that is edited by one or a few editors. But, remember, they are *independent* articles and, if the book is peer-reviewed, they enjoy a scholarly status similar to the peer-reviewed journal article. In addition to the volume’s editor(s), a press editor will shepherd the volume through its various processes and provide support. If the volume is being submitted to a particular series at a press – for example, Law and Society at University of British Columbia Press, or Studies in Gender and History at University of Toronto Press – the academic editor(s) of the series will work with the press editor and offer advice and support to the volume’s editors and contributors.

What are the relative merits of the peer-reviewed journal article and peer-reviewed book chapter? Generally speaking, the stand-alone peer-reviewed journal article carries more weight because it has been subjected to a greater degree of scrutiny, that is, several specialists have carefully reviewed it. By contrast, your book chapter article is submitted along with all the others. Usually, two readers assess the entire manuscript, which means they may not have scrutinized every article to the same degree or with the same authority. They might be more expert on some than on other articles. Also, the very strong articles, or those penned by senior authors, may help “carry” the weaker articles or articles by less-known authors.

The readers’ reports resemble the journal readers’ reports, and contain a mix of general comments about the whole volume and specific comments about each article. On occasion, a reader may recommend the rejection of one or two articles. Or recommend that the editor(s) recruit one or two additional articles to address serious or obvious “gaps.” If the initial reports are critical, a third reader may be recruited, sometimes even a fourth. On the basis of the readers’ reports, a determination will be made about the status of the volume and the degree of revision required. Once again, you must respect the readers’ reports. The revised book will then be submitted for final consideration. Or, if the initial verdict was “revise and submit,” another review process will need to take place.

As with the monograph, a Canadian university press hoping to publish an edited volume will apply for federal government subsidies, especially the Aid to Scholarly Publishing Program (ASPP). This means that the press committee and the ASPP committee – both of which are scholarly committees – will assess the readers’ reports and determine the status of the volume. Those interested in editing a volume of essays should know that the ASPP frowns on general anthologies and conference proceedings; it requires that there be a strong thematic or methodological coherence to the volume.

If all of this sounds daunting, consider the plus side of being part of an edited scholarly

volume. It can play a major role in announcing and establishing legitimacy for a new field and thus attract plenty of attention both at the undergraduate and graduate level. This can increase the profile of the junior colleagues enormously and make them highly attractive on the job market. Indeed, there are plenty of examples of how the arrival of the first edited volumes on a new “hot” topic captured the limelight for a while and made the reputations of young scholars. It is perfectly appropriate, then, for a junior historian’s first publications to include a peer-reviewed journal article and book chapter. By contrast, a greater ambiguity surrounds the scholarly rewards for the editor(s), whose considerable efforts in producing the volume are weighted differently by tenure and promotion committees in different departments and universities.

We have been describing the edited volume that is composed of original (that is, not previously published) work. There are also edited volumes designed as course readers that contain previously published articles brought together for use on courses with a specific theme or period. In this case, the authors get additional exposure and the reward of having work considered important enough for re-publication, but it does not garner the same academic rewards as the original publication. But it does mean more exposure for your work – a very good thing!

## SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR AN ACADEMIC JOB

Hiring committees ask a wide range of questions, and it is impossible to know what exactly you will be asked. However, some questions are common. Think about how you would respond to the following:

- How would you characterize your research interests in relation to our department?
- Are there other research clusters or programs in this university with which you would to interact?
- What courses would you like to teach at the undergraduate and graduate levels?
- How would you teach a survey course?
- What is your teaching philosophy? What are your teaching methods?
- What kind of assignments do you find most effective?
- How do you think you would relate to students at our (rural/big city/francophone, etc.) university?
- What administrative experience can you bring to the department? Are you willing to serve on committees?
- Would you like to work with graduate students? What kinds of research projects and methodologies might you encourage them to pursue?

### *Questions you might ask the department"*

- What are the students like? Do they come from across Canada? Do they commute or live in residence? What issues concern them?
- Are there faculty or graduate-student-run lecture series, research seminars, or regular conferences?
- Are there any start-up grants or internal research grants for new faculty? Is there travel funding for faculty?
- How are faculty members assessed/evaluated for tenure and promotion?
- Where do most professors live?

## FURTHER READING

This brief reading list focuses on the professional concerns of graduate history students in Canada, including publishing, fellowship and job postings, professional associations, and career paths beyond the university. It is not a comprehensive list, and it is not meant as a recommendation of any particular publication or organization.

### *Research, Writing and Publishing*

Ask the Dissertation Diva [Liena Vayzman]: <http://dissertationdiva.typepad.com/>

Bolker, Joan. *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day: A Guide to Starting, Revising, and Finishing Your Doctoral Thesis*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998.

Booth, Wayne C., Joseph M. Williams, and Gregory G. Colomb. *The Craft of Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Germano, William. *From Dissertation to Book*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Harman, Eleanor, Ian Montagnes, Siobhan McMenemy, and Chris Bucci, *The Thesis and the Book: A Guide for First-Time Academic Authors*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003.

Luey, Beth, ed., *Revising Your Dissertations: Advice from Leading Editors*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2007.

Turabian, Kate. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007.

University of Chicago Press Staff, *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>

*Newsletters (News, job postings, teaching advice, etc.)*

*American Historical Association (AHA) Perspectives Online*  
<http://www.historians.org/perspectives/>

*Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) Bulletin*  
<http://www.cautbulletin.ca/> and <http://www.academicwork.ca/>

*Canadian Historical Association (CHA) Bulletin*  
<http://www.cha-shc.ca/english/publ/bulletin/>



*The Chronicle of Higher Education*  
<http://chronicle.com/>

*University Affairs: Canada's Magazine on Higher Education*  
<http://www.universityaffairs.ca/>

*General Information and Advice (history graduate programs, dissertation registries, funding and employment opportunities, and other professional concerns)*

*AHA Online Directory of History Departments and Organizations in the United States and Canada:* <http://www.historians.org/pubs/directory/index.cfm>

*AHA Directory of History Dissertations:*  
<http://www.historians.org/pubs/dissertations/index.cfm>

AHA Quicklinks for Students  
<http://www.historians.org/quicklinks/students.cfm>

Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences [mandate includes the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences and Aid to Scholarly Publications Program]: <http://www.fedcan.ca/>

CHA Graduate Students' Committee [scholarship listings, listserv]  
<http://www.cha-shc.ca/gsc-ced/>

*CHA On-line Register of Post-Graduate Dissertations in Progress in History and Related Subjects:* [http://www.cha-shc.ca/english/publ/rod\\_rdt/](http://www.cha-shc.ca/english/publ/rod_rdt/)

FastWeb [Internet Scholarship Service]  
[www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com) .

Hannah, Elena, Linda Paul and Swani Vethamany-Globus, eds. *Women in the Canadian Academic Tundra: Challenging the Chill*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002.

H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online  
<http://www.h-net.org>

H-Net Job Guide  
<http://www.h-net.org/jobs/>

Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada  
[www.sshrc.ca](http://www.sshrc.ca)

Tenured Radical [Claire B. Potter]: <http://tenured-radical.blogspot.com/>

Toth, Emily. *Ms. Mentor's Impeccable Advice for Women in Academia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997.

### *Professional Associations and Networks*

American Historical Association (AHA): [www.historians.org](http://www.historians.org).

Committee on Lesbian and Gay History: <http://www.clghistory.org/>

Association of Canadian Archivists: [www.archivists.ca](http://www.archivists.ca)

Canadian Historical Association (CHA): <http://www.cha-shc.ca/>

Canadian Committee on Women's History (CHA): <http://www.cha-shc.ca/ccwh-cchf/>

Institut d=histoire de l=Amérique française: <http://www.cam.org/~ihaf/>

### *Beyond the University*

Basalla, Susan, and Maggie Debelius, “*So What Are You Going to Do With That?*”: *A Guide to Career-Changing for M.A.s and Ph.Ds*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2001.

Beyond Academe: a website designed to educate historians about opportunities outside of the academy. [www.beyondacademe.com](http://www.beyondacademe.com)

Hachey, Jean-Marc. *The BIG Guide to Working and Living Overseas*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Ottawa: Intercultural Systems, 2004. Available online at: <http://www.workingoverseas.com/>

Howe, Barbara J. and Emory L. Kemp, eds. *Public History: An Introduction*. Malabar, Florida: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Co., 1986.

Leaving Academia [Sabine Hikel, hosted by *University Affairs*]: [www.leavingacademia.blogspot.com](http://www.leavingacademia.blogspot.com).