

RTF Graduate Admissions Process Proposal

Objectives:

- Ensure a consistent means of assessing applicants that remains the same over time;
- Better match students with faculty areas and interests than might be occurring at present (which in turn might increase our yield).

Proposal for Process:

1. Revise the MA & PhD **committee composition** so that five people serve on each committee. Obviously, this would be more work for the committee members but it also would likely yield students who more accurately reflect the breadth of our program and interests.
 - Return to a format in which five people serve on both committees (including Graduate Director and Studies Area head) and shepherd all MA and PhD files.
 - Have the Graduate Director serve as “chair” who, in consultation with the Graduate Coordinator, oversees the process and makes sure it moves along according to the schedule outlined below.
 - In the interest of efficiency and streamlining the process, the Graduate Director runs both committees.
2. Adhere to a **regularized schedule** (with specific dates for each year noted in advance) for review of candidates at various phases. This schedule would conform roughly to the schedule noted below, to be implemented during the 2015-2016 school year.
 - **December 15th** – Spreadsheet of all applicants from Char sent to the Admissions committee (see notes below regarding assessment criteria).
 - Assessment scores (ranking from 1 to 5, with 1 as the low score and 5 the high score) can be tallied via email and a cutoff point of competitive candidates can be considered.
 - **January 22nd** – **First round** of PhD rankings by committee members due by noon; committee may meet in person on this date if necessary.
 - Committee then circulates the streamlined list of PhD applicants to Studies GSC members for review.
 - **January 29th** – **Second round** of PhD rankings: all Studies area recommendations **due to committee by noon.**
 - Studies faculty: please be aware there is only one week turnaround time for review and feedback (from 1/22 to 1/29).
 - Char and Graduate Director can then organize rankings as needed; Committee will then meet early the next week (week of 2/1) for final review/rankings.
 - Committee will Skype with all students with TOEFL scores as well as other potential candidates as needed.
 - Based interviews, ensuring distribution across areas and faculty, etc., committee will construct a rank order list (top tier, 2nd tier). This list will be completed no later than February 12th.

- At the same time, committee will rank person for the Harrington award or other possible fellowships & supplementary funding.
 - **February 5th** – **First round** of MA rankings by committee due by noon; again ranked from 1 to 3.
 - Committee then circulates the streamlined list of candidates immediately to Studies GSC for review.
 - **February 12th** – **Second round** of MA rankings due by noon; all Studies area recommendations due by date/time.
 - Once again, Studies faculty should be aware that they will have one week turnaround time for review and feedback (from 2/5 to 2/12)
 - **February 12th** – **Final review phase**. Committee meets the afternoon of the 12th to do final ranking of both MA and PhD candidates in preparation for making admissions offers.
 - **February 15th** – Send out MA and PhD admissions decisions; begin recruiting. For PhDs, divide up responsibilities regarding contacting accepted students based on who they have expressed interest in working with in their application. (Contact by faculty & grad students should be made no later than the first week of March.)
 - **March 3rd & 4th** – **Recruiting Days**
 - Consider a grad student “pecha kucha” session where several current students briefly present their work; this can provide a sense of the scope of interests and research in our program.
 - Also aim to get at least two years of the course rotation posted on the website prior to the recruitment period so students can see the types of courses available to them.
3. Develop **consistent assessment criteria** that are employed by each committee member to assist in ranking and evaluating candidates. These criteria might also be circulated to faculty to facilitate their review of files. It should account for:
- Quality of the applicant’s statement and writing sample;
 - Value of input on recommendation letters;
 - Undergraduate GPA (for MA applicants); MA-level GPA for (for doctoral applicants – though these should be 4.0 or close to it at MA level);
 - GRE scores/TOEFL scores (Char will provide information regarding desired minimums/recommended cutoffs for all categories);
 - Their interests being well suited and appropriately distributed to main research clusters; also that there are sufficient faculty wishing/able to work with them;
 - That there is not an uneven distribution in terms of potential advisors or areas of interest of admits;

4. Additional considerations/questions to address:

- Would it be beneficial to have committee members serve two year terms (perhaps staggered) to ensure a degree of continuity from year to year?
 - The staggering could occur in relation to the Graduate Director's two-year term so the committee has institutional memory to apply on years when there is a new Grad Director.
- Would it be helpful for those with grants to fund select MA students that look promising as future PhDs to ensure they get researchers who better match their interests?
- How much do we prioritize selecting from "areas" and/or faculty that students wish to work with?

At present, preliminary "clusters" students can identify with include (students can check off multiple areas of interest):

- Digital Media
- Global & International
- Identity & Representation
- Industry, History, and Criticism
- Media, Technology, and Social Change
- Other (write in category)

Please note: these clusters are not intended to be comprehensive and may not necessarily precisely capture what one or two people on faculty do. They are designed to broadly describe clusters of courses and research interest across groups of faculty. Any discussion of revising these categories should take place in the spring of 2016, after the graduate curriculum committee has begun their program review.