Do you remember what it was like to be a graduate student?

Among other things, you probably remember being chronically short of time and worried about getting everything completed by ever-loom ing deadlines.

But many of you have told us that you also remember the excitement and stimulation of learning, traveling to collect your research data or visiting another university to learn a new scientific technique, and attending national and international meetings to present your research. Current graduate students have the same worries about time and the same excitement about learning.

One of the most interesting descriptions that I’ve read lately of graduate education is that it is a process of “learning to be.” In their book, The Social Life of Information,1 John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid describe Jerome Bruner’s (New York University) distinction drawn between “learning about” and “learning to be.”

They go on to describe undergraduate education as mostly “learning about” through association with a number of “learning communities,”2 with a transition to the “learning to be” process associated with graduate education. In “learning to be,” graduate students are associated primarily with one learning community, or across related communities in interdisciplinary areas.

This focus, as well as closer relationships with faculty, and especially for doctoral students, the opportunity to conduct original research/scholarship, depend on being immersed in the discipline or interdisciplinary areas in order to understand the vocabulary and values and become one of the accepted practitioners.

As you think about your own graduate experience and your subsequent career(s), does this sound familiar?

Part of “learning to be” is the opportunity to pursue research/scholarship in locations around the world, to learn new techniques, and to participate in disciplinary/professional society meetings to share results, theories, ideas, technology, and pedagogy with colleagues in one’s field. Our usual feature on Graduate School Travel Grants to support these broad experiences for graduate students is augmented by two special articles on graduate fellowships. These fellowships, as well as others that MSU graduate students are awarded, provide additional opportunities for broadening a learning community and encouraging the process of “learning to be.”

An example of these fellowship winners, Brandon Hespenheide, a dual major doctoral student in biochemistry and physics, is featured on page 12. Other notable fellowship winners at MSU were part of the Social Science Research Council competition for International Predissertation Fellowships, covered on page 10, and the list of MSU National Science Foundation awardees is found on page 13.
The ability to offer these fellowships to graduate students is one of the most important services of the Graduate School. We are limited only by the amount of funding we have to share and cannot meet our current demand from active, enthusiastic graduate students who wish to share their research and scholarship with others around the country and the world.

Another example of creating learning communities is the set of new master’s degree programs in the College of Natural Science featured on page 14. These programs, whose development was funded by the Sloan Foundation and organized by Associate Dean Estelle McGroarty, bring to the natural sciences a process of training and educating that includes an internship, common in other professions, and an introduction to business and communications skills through a certificate program.

These experiences, skills and knowledge are also among those discussed at the “Re-envisioning the Ph.D.” conference earlier this year. This conference was convened by the University of Washington in April, 2000. The year-long look at doctoral education culminating in this conference was funded by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts to Jody Nyquist, Associate Dean of the Graduate School and Principal Investigator for the “Re-envisioning the Ph.D.” project. Wendy Wilkins, Dean of the College of Arts and Letters, Ann Austin, Department of Educational Administration, and I provide conference highlights on page 8.

One of the recommendations of the conference suggested that universities reconnect with graduates of their Ph.D. programs to discover what parts of their education and training were most valuable for their professional development, first careers and subsequent careers and what components should be added or subtracted. They also suggested that alumni provide an overall assessment of the department as a graduate education unit.

The University of California, Berkeley, instituted a large survey that covered alumni from 38 institutions between 1982-1993. MSU began a parallel process for eleven of our departments soon after (see article on page 4). Because the results show a surprising similarity across these disciplines in terms of suggestions for improvement, I believe the “lessons” may be useful across the university.

In fact, one of the alums from the College of Natural Science, Dr. Arnold Ott, provided a succinct and timely list of his own suggestions (page 6). If you weren’t in one of the departments surveyed, you may still contribute some ideas of what would have been helpful to you in graduate school. Simply email me kklompar@msu.edu!

Finally, we at the MSU Graduate School, are pleased to provide The Graduate Post to you. We hope that you will find it informative, not only in terms of the activities of current graduate students, but also as a way for us to communicate the many opportunities for alumni to support various graduate educational programs and fellowships.

Conversations with recent alumni typically include their appreciation to the Graduate School for offering “survive and thrive” programs, in addition to professional development opportunities that help improve the overall educational experience and enhance early careers.

Fellowship winner Brandon Hespenheide is engaged in a cutting-edge research project which bridges the physical, computational and biological sciences. Story on page 12.

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When former graduate students discover what today’s MSU Graduate School offers, they often express appreciation and recognition that these activities enhance the quality of the graduate program and the graduate school experience, and are eager to ensure their continuity and growth for the next generation of graduate students.

For those committed to enhancing the Graduate School’s ability to provide travel funds for graduate students or to providing special professional development seminars, I encourage you to please enclose a contribution in the envelope included in this edition of The Graduate Post.

For those interested in finding out more about the Graduate School’s development program, please call or email me or Cara Boeff (boeff@msu.edu), Development Director, at 517-353-3220.

Karen L. Klomparens
Dean
