



The Graduate School Mess: What Caused It and How We Can Fix It

By Leonard Cassuto

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It is no secret that American graduate education is in disarray. Graduate students take too long to complete their studies and face a dismal academic job market if they succeed. *The Graduate School Mess* gets to the root of these problems and offers concrete solutions for revitalizing graduate education in the humanities. Leonard Cassuto, professor and graduate education columnist for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, argues that universities' heavy emphasis on research comes at the expense of teaching. But teaching is where reforming graduate school must begin.

Cassuto says that graduate education must recover its mission of public service. Professors should revamp the graduate curriculum and broaden its narrow definition of success to allow students to create more fulfilling lives for themselves both inside and outside the academy. Cassuto frames the current situation foremost as a teaching problem: professors rarely prepare graduate students for the demands of the working worlds they will actually join. He gives practical advice about how faculty can teach and advise graduate students by committing to a student-centered approach.

In chapters that follow the career of the graduate student from admissions to the dissertation and placement, Cassuto considers how each stage of graduate education is shaped by unexamined assumptions and ancient prejudices that need to be critically confronted. Written with verve and infused with history, *The Graduate School Mess* returns our national conversation about graduate study in the humanities to first principles.

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Editorial Review

Review

There are many books offering graduate students a guide to academe, but there has never been a book for graduate faculty, advisors, and program directors?until now. **Cassuto**'s thorough account of the mess, from admissions to comprehensive exams and dissertations, will be required reading for everyone who wants to understand how we got into this mess, and how we can get out of it. (Michael Bérubé, Pennsylvania State University)

Graduate education in the humanities needs to change at every level; **Cassuto**'s lucid, frank, and informative book explains why. He traces the history of institutions that seem eternal, shows how and when they came into being, and makes clear that they no longer serve the needs of our students. Everyone concerned with graduate teaching should ponder his concrete and sensible proposals for reform. (Anthony Grafton, Princeton University)

This is an important book that will engage anyone with a stake in higher education. **Cassuto**'s diagnosis will spark a lively debate, but the questions he is asking cannot be ignored. (James Grossman, Executive Director, American Historical Association)

Cassuto presents astute summaries of the history of graduate education in America as a foundation for specific approaches to reconceiving it...A thoughtful, clearly written analysis aimed at university professors but speaking to a broader public. (Elizabeth Hayford *Library Journal* 2015-09-01)

With rising costs, longer time frames to get PhDs, and uncertain job prospects at the end of it all, more and more students are questioning the wisdom of getting the advanced degree...**Cassuto** offers a thoughtful and well-researched look at the broader ills of academia through the lens of graduate education programs. (Vanessa Bush *Booklist* 2015-09-15)

Cassuto clearly presents the challenges facing graduate institutions, including antiquated admissions policies; incoherent course offerings; esoteric, gatekeeping qualifying exams; long times to degrees; and failure to prepare students for diverse career outcomes...The novelty of his treatment is in identifying broader and more encompassing forms of teaching as a solution. (Johanna Gutlerner *Science* 2015-10-02)

Cassuto does more than just map the problems facing graduate students and graduate departments today. He examines the assumptions that perpetuate these problems, and he makes recommendations for extensive reforms to graduate education. (Sara Rodrigues *PopMatters* 2015-11-09)

The volume is richly referenced and moves in soup-to-nuts fashion from graduate admissions to qualifying exams, the dissertation, the degree, and the job market. Prospective humanities graduate students, program directors, and faculty will probably find spending a few hours with **Cassuto**'s book worth the investment. (A. R. Sanderson *Choice* 2016-01-01)

About the Author

Leonard Cassuto is Professor of English at Fordham University.

Users Review

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