

# **I. Introduction: What is This Report About and Why is It Necessary?**

## **What is This?**

This is a report, narrowly speaking, on the abuse of graduate students at the UCLA Slavic Department and the subsequent attempts to cover up that abuse, and in a larger context, on the system in place that allowed such abuse to take place. Thus, the report has two different, albeit related, aims. The first is to highlight some of the abuses that have gone on in one specific academic department, in this instance the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at UCLA. For many years now, there have been rumors and whispers throughout the Slavic academic community concerning the state of graduate student welfare in the UCLA Slavic Department. The most recent Eight-Year Review of the Department, held in 2000, highlighted a great number of irregularities and abuses and caught the faculty in lie after lie as they tried to deny the all too obvious truth of what was really happening in their department to the students placed in their charge. Much of what is in this report deals with this issue, as it was the Eight-Year Review report that set in motion the entire series of events that led to the near meltdown of the Department itself.

The second, and probably more interesting thing that this report addresses is the larger context in which the abuse of UCLA Slavic Department graduate students transpired, how the system in place supposedly to root out wrongdoing on the part of faculty actually discourages dissent, and how far that system will go to make sure that the details of abuse at the hands of professors does not become common knowledge. For years, horror stories have abounded as to how bad graduate school can be, but rarely is there anything written on just exactly *why* such a system can exist. There is, of course, no shortage of articles and essays written that concentrate specifically on one or two aspects of the system, but in order to understand why it exists as it does, one must examine the phenomenon in a way that is both more detailed while at the same time being more comprehensive, i.e. both more accurately and from a wider perspective. Any such examination must provide detailed evidence in favor of its take on what the core reasons are that can (and often do) combine to make graduate school such a living hell. That so many students should suffer so grievously in graduate school should itself cause eyebrows to raise. After all, most of those who are in graduate school probably did well as undergraduates, so the usual assumption would be that most of them should also do well in graduate school, but as

anyone who has ever been through the graduate school grind knows all too well, this is not always the case. As it turns out, the example of the UCLA Slavic Department illustrates well just exactly why the system is so impervious to change, and indeed, how most people, including those whose tax dollars support higher education, often aren't even aware that there is anything wrong.

The problem with an exposé such as this, however, is that for it to do the job that it wants to do, it must be extremely detailed. There are a number of reasons for this, but the main reason is directly related to one of the misconceptions about academe that allows such abusive behavior towards graduate students to occur: when the public at large is asked to make a judgement on the academic systems that it supports with its tax dollars, more often than not it is the case that very few average citizens have any real idea of just what exactly it is that a college or university does. There is a vague and general understanding that higher education is about teaching, but the details are usually lost on most of those outside of academe. Because of that, whenever there is a conflict between students and professors in which the public is asked to believe one side or the other, the default assumption is often that the faculty is right, or at least more right than wrong. Faculty will usually trot out one or two facts, chosen selectively for the purpose of buttressing their argument, the students might or might not try to trump these arguments, and then the public, still grotesquely underinformed as to what is happening in academe anyway, is asked to come up with some sort of opinion. As long as the abusing faculty, or those in the academic administration who represent their interests, can throw out just enough counter-information to at least effect a draw in the mind of the public at large, then the system forces the public to ask the question "Who are you going to believe? Whiney graduate students who think the world should be served to them on a silver platter or respected academics who appreciate the need for these students to learn the value of hard work and inflexible standards of excellence?" Unless one is able to trump, at every turn and in every instance, the arguments of the faculty in favor of the existing system, one will have a difficult time convincing the public at large as to the inadequacies of the system. The down side, of course, is that because the devil is indeed in the details—and the details are many—this adds many extra pages to this report, thus making it that much less amenable to a quick perusal, but the thinking here was better an accurate document that will actually bring about some change than a smaller document designed to be read by a larger audience.

The report itself is divided into eight different sections. Whether or not you as a prospective reader would want to plough through all eight sections depends very much on where your interests lie. If you are interested merely in the abuses that were happening in the UCLA Slavic Department and how the Eight-Year Review of that department brought some of those abuses to the fore, then you could skip directly to either the Eight-Year Review report itself (reproduced in its entirety as [Section IV-A](#) except for one page that was not released to students), or you could go to [Section IV-B](#), an annotated version of that same report that was offered to the

Graduate Council of the UCLA Academic Senate in response to a request by the Graduate Council that UCLA Slavic Department graduate students comment on the report. If you are interested in the larger question of how a department with such an alarming degree of graduate student abuse can exist within a university system, then it might be advisable to at least start with [Section II](#), which provides background both for academe in general and for the nature of the relationship between the university administration and the tenured professoriate, and also provides a detailed account of what happened during the Eight-Year Review of the UCLA Slavic Department.

An in-depth reading of all the sections is not necessary to get an idea of what is going on at UCLA and probably at other UC campuses and other similar institutions as well. And indeed, some of the sections are placed here only for reference. For example, [Section IV-H](#) is simply the Graduate Student Handbook, thirty plus pages prepared by the faculty of the UCLA Slavic Department in an attempt to show the Academic Senate and the Dean of Humanities that this department is indeed capable of managing its own affairs and need not be placed into receivership. The whole point of this particular section being included in the report was to show how vapid and meaningless this handbook really was, so there is no real need to read through it in detail unless one wanted to be absolutely sure of the assertion made in this report that it contained nothing that would support the UCLA Slavic Department's claim that this handbook was an integral part of their strategy to reform themselves. Similarly, if you are interested more in how the system itself broke down—or, as the report suggests, worked very well while only appearing to break down—then you might want to concentrate your attention on [Section VI](#)

If, however, you as a reader of this document are looking for more than simply an idea of what was happening in the UCLA Slavic Department and why what did happen was allowed to happen, then you might want to go through the chapters in order. The report itself was written to be seen as an organic whole and works best that way. Some issues, once explicated, are often referred to once again later in the report along with a shorter explanation because of the interrelated nature of the various academic processes that came into play in the Eight-Year Review of the UCLA Slavic Department. Thus, the report does have what is hoped to be a comfortable (as opposed to numbing) degree of redundancy to it. Still, if you are thinking of coming to UCLA (or any of the UC campuses, for that matter) for graduate school, if you are in a position where you offer advice regarding graduate school choices, or if you are considering making a financial donation to UCLA and have concerns regarding the extent to which you can trust the academic institution that would be the recipient of your donation, then you might want to consider reading through the entire report.

## **Contents of the Report**

The eight sections of this report begin with what you are reading now, the Introduction, which also contains an explanation as to why it was necessary to go public in this manner. The rest of the report breaks down as follows:

- **[Section II](#)** begins by providing some initial context and insight into the academic world in terms of the relationship between tenured faculty and the academic administration that purportedly oversees their work, as well as into concepts such as professional courtesy between tenured academics and the nature of their relationships with each other, especially when it comes to matters of investigation and discipline. It then goes on to examine, step by step, the case of the 2000 Eight-Year Review of the UCLA Slavic Department, from the beginning of the process (actually, even before the beginning, as it also provides some background on the history of this department) up to the present. This section of the report is very detailed and devotes a considerable amount of attention to the mechanics of the review process, and thus might not be seen as "gripping" reading. This fact notwithstanding, such attention to detail was seen as necessary in order to establish the facts of the Eight-Year Review and how this review played out in the case of the UCLA Slavic Department.
- **[Section III](#)** and Section IV have to do with some of the documentation associated with the 2000 Eight-Year Review of the UCLA Slavic Department and the events connected to it. Section III is merely an explanation of the documents and communications listed in Section IV. Section IV breaks down as follows:
  - **[Section IV-A](#)** is a copy of the Eight-Year Review report as issued to the students of the UCLA Slavic Department. Also included is an email sent to these same students by the Chair of the Department, Michael Heim, in which he attempts to counter some of the charges contained in the report, as well as a "revisionist" letter from two members of the external review team (i.e. those members of the review team who are not UCLA faculty members but rather faculty members from other universities brought in specifically to provide "objectivity" to the process, or so the thinking went.). In this letter the two external reviewers, at the request of the Chair of the UCLA Slavic Department, attempt to counter some of the more serious charges made by the internal review team (i.e. those members of the review team who are UCLA faculty members).
  - **[Section IV-B](#)** is more or less an annotated copy of the Eight-Year Review report that was produced by some linguistic students of the UCLA Slavic Department in response to requests by the Graduate Council of the Academic Senate for input from Slavic Department graduate students. Graduate student commentary is interspersed throughout the report itself, much in the same way that one would reply to different parts of an email by inserting individual responses directly after the relevant original text. The

responses here are given in blue font to make it easier to distinguish between them and the original text. This section also includes an introductory note to the Academic Senate and a concluding list of suggestions.

- [Section IV-C](#) is a copy of a letter from the head of the internal review team to the graduate students of the UCLA Slavic Department in which he urges them to cooperate with the Chair of the UCLA Slavic Department in discussing the results of the Eight-Year Review. This letter was sent in spite of repeated requests from Slavic Department graduate students themselves and from their representatives not to be put in a position where they would have to either agree to speak with UCLA Slavic Department faculty members about the report or else openly refuse to do so, thereby putting them under a cloud of suspicion as having "cooperated" with the reviewers who brought about such a damning picture of the UCLA Slavic Department.
- [Section IV-D](#) is a communication to the head of the internal review committee from the sole member of internal committee who was not a UCLA faculty member but a UCLA graduate student (a doctoral student in English Literature). Following the communication itself, he passes on his initial report on the conditions he found within the UCLA Slavic Department to the head of the internal review committee.
- [Section IV-E](#) is a series of emails from this same graduate student representative on the internal review committee to various officials within UCLA frantically asking them to back off their call to UCLA Slavic Department graduate students to speak with the UCLA Slavic Department faculty about the results of the Eight-Year Review. Especially noteworthy is the increasingly frantic and frustrated tone of each successive email, so much so that by the last one, this graduate student representative is questioning his own judgment in having encouraged UCLA Slavic Department graduate students to cooperate in the review.
- [Section IV-F](#) is a communication from this same graduate student representative on the internal review committee to an administrative official in the Academic Senate office asking that copies of the Eight-Year Review report be made available to graduate students in the UCLA Slavic Department.
- [Section IV-G](#) is a response produced by the UCLA Slavic Department in October of 2000 after it had a summer to get over the shock that the Department had been exposed so thoroughly in the Eight-Year Review report.
- [Section IV-H](#) is a handbook produced by the UCLA Slavic Department for incoming

students, a handbook produced in response to the results of the Eight-Year Review and which, according to the UCLA Slavic Department, would go a long way toward solving the problems that had been plaguing the Department and its graduate students.

- [Section IV-I](#) is an Internal Report produced by the UCLA Slavic Department in 2001 designed to show further reform and progress on its part in righting the ship that was rocked so badly by the Eight-Year Review report.
- [Section IV-J](#) is a copy of the resolution passed by the UCLA Graduate Student Council as a result of what happened during the Eight-Year Review of the UCLA Slavic Department.

- [Section V](#) describes the fallout from the decision by the Chair of the UCLA Slavic Department, Michael Heim, to fight the order from the Dean of the Humanities that prohibited Slavic Department faculty from speaking with graduate students of the UCLA Slavic Department concerning the review itself. Michael did indeed win this battle against the UCLA Academic Administration, this in spite of repeated promises of protection given to these same students by the UCLA Academic Administration, promises that were also explicitly written into the Eight-Year Review report itself. This was the single most important moment in the review process, for once these promises of protection turned out to be a house of cards, the tide started to turn against graduate students. Because of its importance, it is given its own section in this report.

- [Section VI](#) addresses the question of why a review system that was, in theory anyway, designed to protect graduate students and highlight abuses within departments wound up failing these graduate students so badly, time and time again, at every level. It explains the role played by some of the main characters and entities involved in this review process and it provides a listing of how various processes in the system "broke down" and failed these students. It concludes by offering a new perspective as to what these processes were in fact really designed to do.

- [Section VII](#) takes the facts and documents presented in the previous six sections and uses them to draw some conclusions about the system of higher education as it exists at UCLA and in academe in general. Specifically, it speaks to the opacity of the system and its desire to keep its inner workings from being known by the public who support it. It also speaks to the question of how to quantify success in academe and to the impact of the Eight-Year Review of the UCLA Slavic Department on former and present graduate students in that department. How the University views concepts such as honor and integrity, as well as the two-track system in place in academe in this regard (one for tenured academics and one for everyone else) are also addressed here. How this system, as flawed as it appears, is nonetheless able to perpetuate itself, is also discussed, with specific attention given to the decentralized nature of the typical university, the

practice of buying the silence of those who have been aggrieved, the reality of an individual trying to stand up to an institution, the question of how one quantifies prestige, and to what is termed here the [Moosa-ization](#) of the university, i.e. the inability/unwillingness of a typical University administration to try to enforce discipline on its own tenured faculty.

- [Section VIII](#) attempts to do two things. The first is to predict some of the possible reactions to this report might elicit from various people and entities associated with the UCLA Slavic Department and with the events connected to the Eight-Year Review report listed here. The second is a list of recommendations as to how things can and should be changed in order to preclude this sort of abusive behavior and institutional cover-up in the future, with specific recommendations for various entities, e.g. the University of California Regents, the California State Legislature, law enforcement, unions, taxpayers, and so on. It concludes with an appeal to graduate students, past and present, to use their considerable power and knowledge to bring pressure to bear on the system in order to initiate change.

### **Why Was It Necessary To Go Public In This Way?**

The immediate question that comes to mind when a report such as this is made public is why such public exposure is necessary. Why, if students had grievances against either their department or the University itself, could they not have availed themselves of the channels of communication and avenues of redress already in place? This is, after all, one of the stated purposes of any administrative superstructure, be it inside academia or in government or in business. This question takes on even greater significance when the issue involves graduate students training for jobs in academia itself. As is clear to anyone who has ever worked in academia, in most fields (and without question in the field of Slavic) jobs are hard to come by. In such a competitive environment, where literally hundreds of students apply for a single position, the slightest taint to a given applicant's profile can lead to his/her application being consigned to the reject pile. Equally clear to anyone who has ever been associated with academia is the fact that academia loathes open conflict and does not look at all kindly upon those seen as prone to stir up trouble and controversy. The label of "rabble-rouser", be it justified or not, is one that sticks to applicants and negatively impacts their employment potential for years to come.

These facts are very well known to all graduate students who have gone through or been associated with the UCLA Slavic Department. They understand how the system works in this respect, and because of this, they understand very well the dangers involved in going public. Why do this, then? Why put oneself at risk in an attempt to force change in the system through public exposure when there already exist avenues to express grievances within the academic institution itself? The answer to this question, an answer that one will see as one reads through this report, is that graduate students have already availed themselves of those options. Time and

again graduate students tried to exercise these options, and explored other, less public options as well. On countless occasions graduate students attempted to work within the existing system in an effort to be protected and have past wrongs righted. But as this report shows all too clearly, those attempts were all for naught. In other words, every option provided by the system itself for seeking redress was tried, and every time it was tried, it was, at one level or another, thwarted. Sure, some cosmetic reform was allowed, but no real change was instituted, no one who abused students or covered up that abuse was ever terminated, no student who ever suffered at the hands of this faculty was ever compensated. In effect, students were simply given no choice: they could either accept the results of the cover up of the abuse or they could go public.

Hence the necessity to compile this report and post it publicly.

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Section 1 | [Section 2](#) | [Section 3](#) | [Section 4a](#) | [Section 4b](#) | [Section 4c](#) | [Section 4d](#) | [Section 4e](#) | [Section 4f](#) | [Section 4g](#) | [Section 4h](#) | [Section 4i](#) | [Section 4j](#) | [Section 5](#) | [Section 6](#) | [Section 7](#) | [Section 8](#)  
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