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Women in Ancient History Graduate Programs in the U.S.A.

This paper is a product of my involvement in the creation and ongoing development of an interdepartmental graduate program in ancient history at the University of Michigan. The Interdepartmental Program in Greek and Roman History (IPGRH) was founded in 2001 with the goal of educating students both in the traditional methods of ancient history and the broader debates of historical studies at large. Ancient historians have, of course, long been trained at the University of Michigan, but in the late 1990s – partly in response to the emergence of successful interdepartmental programs at other universities such as Princeton and Berkeley - it was felt that a joint PhD program between the Department of Classical Studies and the Department of History was needed. The hope was that the expansion of our program to include courses offered by the History Department would enable the next generation of students bring new questions and approaches to their study of ancient history. Furthermore, we hoped that this broader training would help some graduates of our program find employment in History departments, where further such cross-fertilization between fields might take place.

We admitted our first student in 2002, and each year since we have admitted two students per year. The total number of students who have been admitted to our program therefore to date is 17 – by no means an adequate sample size for statistically significant analysis. Nevertheless, our experience at the University of Michigan, I believe, does reflect some trends. Specifically, I suggest that our program reflects the increasing participation of women in the field of ancient history, and that – given current demographic trends in higher education – women’s participation in the field will in fact overtake that of men in the near future.

The second part of my paper aims to provoke discussion about the pedagogical and institutional factors that may affect levels of female participation and success in the field of ancient history at the graduate level. Such factors might include: 1. The nature of course offerings, reading lists and exams in ancient history at the undergraduate and graduate level. 2. Ratios of males to females among the faculty of both undergraduate and PhD programs in ancient history. 3. The existence of a critical mass of female students in ancient history PhD programs. The factors listed above are only a sample of those that might be considered relevant to the question of female participation and success in graduate programs in ancient history. I hope that the audience will come with their own observations and suggestions about the ways that graduate programs can foster success among female students.