

## HISTORY GRADUATE STUDENT JOURNALS

Jean-François Lozier, PhD Candidate, University of Toronto  
Graduate Student Representative, CHA Council

In 1971 two doctoral candidates, James W. Cortada and James H. Stone, penned an article in *The History Teacher* on the subject of graduate students and publication. Although some of their recommendations are dated (their injunction, for example, to “Use an electronic typewriter”), their introduction will doubtlessly resonate among current graduate students: “In the past several years the number of Ph.D.’s produced [...] has outstripped the number of available jobs. The present economic crunch is making prospects even more dismal. As a result, competition for positions is increasing considerably. This condition is forcing many graduate students to reconsider what they can offer prospective employers. [...] One obvious way in which a graduate student can make his job application more appealing than the others in the seven-inch pile on the chairman’s desk is to include a list of several scholarly publications.” [i] The more things change, as the saying goes, the more they stay the same.

Cortada and Stone’s article went on to encourage fellow students to target journals wisely and to think about submitting material to state, local, and thematic journals that were more likely than more major journals to welcome the contributions of graduate students. In the last four decades, the scholarly publishing scene has changed a great deal. Graduate students eager to publish the fruit of their research are spoilt for choice. Major journals are arguably more open to submissions by graduate students now than in the past, provided of course that these student contributions meet high standards. *The Canadian Journal of History/Annales canadiennes d’histoire*, for example, awards the CJH Graduate Essay Prize – \$500 – annually for the best article written by a student in its pages. Well respected thematic journals and iconoclastic interdisciplinary digital venues have multiplied. More to the point of this article, a new category of journal has emerged and proliferated: the graduate student journal of history. As a follow up to my earlier column on graduate student associations and colloquia (34.2, Summer 2008), I thought it of some interest and utility to survey the country’s half-dozen such journals.

The oldest of these journals, the Université de Montréal’s *Cahiers d’histoire*, was launched in 1981. It has been published with some irregularity over the last three decades: recent years have seen the publication of three yearly issues, but the current editorial team thought it best to settle on two (a fall issue containing conventional articles and a winter issue containing papers presented during from the Association des Étudiant(e)s Diplômé(e)s du Département d’Histoire de l’Université de Montréal’s annual colloquium). A decade after the launch of the *Cahiers d’histoire*, students at the Department of History and Classics of the University of Alberta inaugurated the annual *Past Imperfect* (1992), while their peers at York University inaugurat-

ed their own bi-annual *Left History* (1993). In 1998, a group of students from the University of Saskatchewan founded *Gateway*, which put out nine issues of occasional papers in the five years before it ceased publication. Artefact, Laval’s graduate history association, for its part began publishing the annual *Actes du Colloque étudiant du département d’histoire* in 2002.

More recently, the fall of 2009 saw the birth of two new journals. In September, students at the University of Victoria inaugurated *Preteritus* (“the past” in Latin), whose primary focus is to highlight the research presented at the Qualicum History Conference, the annual student conference sponsored by the University of Victoria, Simon Fraser University, and the University of British Columbia. In December, their peers at the University of Ottawa followed suit by launching *Strata*, a bilingual journal aimed at encouraging a “holistic approach to history” while allowing students to develop professional skills.

The professional development of historians-in-training, their introduction to the publishing process, is the primary *raison d’être* of most graduate history journals. For the select few who have the opportunity serve on their editorial boards, it is a valuable initiation to skills that range from the solicitation of funds and of material, to the juggling of authors and referees, to copy-editing and layout, to the coordination of printing and distribution. For student authors, these journals provide a forum for publication that is more sympathetic and less intimidating than the average mainstream scholarly journal. To put it more bluntly: articles drawn from seminar papers or preliminary thesis research unlikely to make the cut in other journals are more likely to make it here. Hiring committees are well aware of this, and are accordingly likely to attribute less weight to half a dozen articles published in student journals than to a single one published in a major journal (something to consider for students intent on making their eventual job application stand out in this era of fierce competition for positions).

Which is not to say, of course, that graduate student journals have no standards. Like other scholarly publications, the journals that I cite here rely on an anonymous review process to assess the rigor of article submissions. In most cases a combination of students and professors from the journal’s home department act as referees; *Left History* appears to represent an exception, as its articles are circulated to two or three outside experts in the field. These student journals end up rejecting on average almost half of the articles that they receive.

*Left History’s* review process, which resembles in every way that of any major scholarly journal, leads me to stress the ambiguity of the “graduate student journal” as a category. Since its

inception, the *Cahiers d'histoire* has solicited and published articles by both students and established scholars. Though the contributions of professors have now become rare, they in fact made up the majority of the *Cahiers'* content during its first decade of existence. Similarly, while *Left History* has always been run by students, it has from its inception branded itself as a thematic journal – devoted to “feminist, marxist, and postmodernist deliberations” on a wide variety of topics – and has not sought to make distinctions between authors. *Left History*, indeed, rivals most major Canadian history journals in the calibre of its editorial board (which features many of the country's most prominent historians) and reviewers, as much as in its wide circulation (it has hundreds of individual subscribers and close to fifty institutional ones, and is even available in a number of bookstores). On the topic of journals that have been shaped by graduate students without ever being branded as student journals, *Mens* also deserves mention. This journal, devoted to the intellectual and cultural history of Francophone North America, was founded in 2000 by a group of graduate students from McGill and Université de Montréal (some of whom went on to pursue their studies at Laval and York). Several of these founding members, having moved on from graduate studies to positions in archives, universities and colleges, continue to form the core of this journal's editorial team.

*Left History*, like most major journals, is available both in print and online. When *Gateway* was launched as an online-only journal in 1998, its editors presented it as “the dawn of a new era in historical scholarship. By utilizing the medium of the internet, *Gateway* explores the study of history through a multi-disciplinary approach and makes it accessible to a global audience.” The digital medium and ethos has since become the norm. *Left History*, *Past Imperfect* and *Preteritus* are all made available online using the open source journal publishing software Open Journal Systems. Though *Strata* is available online, its ambitious editors have also distributed printed copies of their inaugural issue to libraries and history departments in the optimistic expectation of netting subscribers. It is to be hoped that U de M's *Cahiers d'histoire* and Laval's *Actes du Colloque* will soon take the digital turn, as both are as of yet available only in print.

In terms of constructive criticism, I would also suggest that the editors of student journals would do well to look into the possibility of having their journals indexed in databases such as Historical Abstracts or America History and Life (only *Left History* and *Past Imperfect* appear to have made sure of this). It is one thing to publish someone's work, but quite another to make sure that this work reaches as broad an audience as possible.

Attached to this article is a list of journals run by and for graduate students throughout the country's history departments. By all means – and whether you're a student looking for a place to share the fruit of your research or thinking of launching with friends a journal of your own, whether you're a professor interested in supporting your students in their first brushes with publishing, or whether you're merely on the lookout for stimulating work – have a look at these web sites!

#### **Canadian Graduate History Journals Revue d'histoire des cycles supérieurs au Canada**

##### ***Cahiers d'histoire* (Université de Montréal), 1981-2010.**

<http://www.hst.umontreal.ca/cahiers/>  
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Les-Cahiers-dhistoire/239573047120>

##### ***Past Imperfect* (University of Alberta), 1992-2010.**

<http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/pi/>

##### ***Left History* (York University), 1993-2010.**

<http://www.yorku.ca/lefthist/>

##### ***Gateway* (University of Saskatchewan), 1998-2003.**

<http://grad.usask.ca/gateway>

##### ***Actes du Colloque étudiant du département d'histoire* (Université Laval), 2002-2010.**

<http://www.artefact.asso.ulaval.ca/PUBLICATIONS.htm>

##### ***Preteritus* (University of Victoria), 2009-2010.**

<http://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/preteritus/>

##### ***Strata* (Université d'Ottawa / University of Ottawa), 2009-2010.**

<http://artsites.uottawa.ca/strata/>

---

[i] James W. Cortada, James H. Stone, “The Graduate Student and Publications”, *The History Teacher*, 5 (November 1971), pp. 61-65