

H-France Salon

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On the Tallahassee Report**Julia M. Gossard
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The Tallahassee Report is a starting point for historians to discuss some of the major issues facing the fields of Old Regime, Enlightenment, and Revolutionary France. After having the time to reflect on this report, I am excited that we are opening up a conversation about how to bring graduate education and eighteenth-century French history into the twenty-first century. In general, I am supportive of the report's many ideas. Several of the proposed initiatives, though, gave me pause. In particular, the report barely addresses the issues of finances and labor.

As a young career historian, many of the topics raised in this report strike close to home. In 2016, I received a tenure-track job in "the history of Europe in the long eighteenth-century" and not "French history." (It was understood, however, that the ideal candidate for the position would teach a French Revolution course). The job market was incredibly grim that year. Only a handful of positions were advertised and most were "de-specialized," vague postings.

I reflected on my own experience as a graduate student as I read through the Tallahassee Report. Instead of spending twelve (or more) months of continuous research in the archives, I harnessed the power of my digital camera and made several month-long trips over my doctoral career, along with a longer six-month stay that took me to Lyon, Paris, Rouen, and Aix-en-Provence. Furthermore, I was only one of two graduate students specializing in early modern French history in my doctoral program at The University of Texas at Austin, the other (Laurie Wood) also working with my advisor, Julie Hardwick. At times, this created isolation and a range of difficulties. For example, I had trouble creating reading and writing groups with people who shared my interests. But it also forced me to think comparatively, transnationally, and to learn more about other historiographies, including those of the U.S. and the Caribbean. These intellectual endeavors not only pushed me to think more expansively about historiography and methodology, but also greatly enhanced my teaching range.

Given these experiences, I strongly commend the graduate students' decision to form a caucus. For those of us who do not have many French historians training in our programs, this caucus will provide a supportive system for networking that will lead to meaningful academic exchanges. Additionally, the desire to increase the diversity of French history courses is a timely initiative. We need to better teach intersectionality in our courses, addressing race, sexuality, class, and gender across the early modern and Revolutionary periods. I agree with the report's statement that by increasing diverse subjects, it will help to "strengthen the pipeline of students of diverse backgrounds." When our students see themselves in what they are studying, history becomes more relevant in, and impactful to, their lives. Diversity will keep our field dynamic and alive.

While we implement these initiatives, we must consider the financial realities involved with them. The proposed international summer doctoral seminar would be helpful to many PhD students, especially those in programs that do not offer specialized reading courses in French historiography. According to the report, a three-person committee has been created to seek funding for the proposed summer seminar. This is an excellent first step in establishing this program. The committee faces a vital—and monumental—task of securing monetary and institutional support. This initiative will require some creative solutions. As this committee moves forward with their fundraising, I urge them to take the labor of the historians providing these seminars, as well as the finances associated with students attending the workshops, into careful consideration. Since most of this plan is still in the organizational phase, many of the details remain hazy. At the moment, it is unclear who would teach these courses, where they would be held, and if those who lead them would be compensated. The plan also assumes that graduate students have the time in the summer and the funding to travel to this seminar. Many doctoral programs do not provide additional fellowships to their students over the summer. Even fewer programs provide pre-candidate students with summer funding. If programs do provide funding, that may come through teaching positions—either as teaching assistants or, more importantly for their success on the job market, as an instructor of record.

I encourage the committee to look to the example of the National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminars. These seminars provide necessary stipends to attendees and fair compensation to teaching staff. To achieve this type of model, it may mean teaming up with established historical institutions, professional organizations, or archives who have the space, resources, and money to sponsor these types of seminars. In an era where universities are pushing for maximum faculty “efficiency” while simultaneously cutting funding for the humanities, we need to be sure that this plan does not exacerbate a problem across academia—labor exploitation. Without providing compensation to faculty and funds for graduate students, this summer seminar could have the possibility of devolving into a non-inclusive space, reserved only for those from the best-funded institutions.

Related to finances as well, the report discusses the changing nature of doctoral research. The report states, “The availability of so many print sources online, and the ability of students to take thousands of digital photos of manuscript sources quickly, only increases the temptation to undertake short, intensive research trips as opposed to long, immersive stays in the country.” The word “temptation” here is problematic. Most doctoral students in French history would jump at the opportunity to spend a full year or more living in France, immersing themselves in the language, the culture, and the history. But most doctoral fellowships, whether internal or external, no longer provide the type of funding that allows for these lengthy stays. Although many of us have found creative ways to stretch our budget, the reality is that moving to and living in France, especially Paris, is expensive. When we consider the fact that many doctoral students also have spouses and children, these financial obligations are prohibitive. Furthermore, many doctoral programs at well-funded, public universities provide, at most, one year of funded dissertation research. The remaining years are made possible through teaching appointments as teaching assistants, assistant instructors, or lecturers. These graduate students are essential to meet many doctoral-granting institutions’ teaching missions. The financial burdens associated with doctoral

research, details of funding packages, and universities' dependency on graduate student labor are realities we must address head-on.

Even students who receive a departmental or prestigious fellowship, like the Fulbright, find that their stipend barely covers costs. In addition to a roundtrip plane ticket (which from certain cities in the U.S. can cost upwards of \$1600 USD), students have to pay for visa-associated costs (including travel to the French consulate for the visa appointment); housing; food; international student insurance (which many universities do not cover but require); public transportation; bank fees; storage and/or subleasing fees at their home institution; cell phone/wifi fees; archival fees; and shipping anything abroad they cannot bring in their suitcase. For many, these costs far exceed the fellowship stipend. In those cases, a shorter visit is all they can reasonably and responsibly afford.

In light of these very real financial concerns, we should recognize that the ability to take thousands of pictures of archival documents is a real power that we can and should harness. That does not mean a doctoral student should go to France and only take pictures without reading and engaging with documents. It just means the time spent at the archives may have to be shortened, with more students undertaking analysis and writing at their desks in front of a digital copy of their documents instead of under the gorgeous dome of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Richelieu. We should not expect or encourage graduate students to go into financial debt in order to undertake dissertation research.

To mitigate the financial burdens associated with research further, we should carefully consider how much research can be accomplished using the vast number of online sources already available to us. For instance, those working on the French Revolution might first try to see how much they can find in the Newberry Library's French Revolutionary Pamphlet Collection. This is not an exhaustive repository of every French Revolutionary pamphlet, but it is a starting point. I have just begun my second project on revolutionary inculcation of children by drawing from these resources. These digitized sources have provided a solid understanding of the major debates surrounding youth education in various revolutionary committees. Although I will be traveling to Paris in the spring to examine additional documents, I was able to save a considerable amount of money and time by doing some of the initial research online.

There remains, however, a stigma against using open-access digital sources. Just because someone chooses to use online resources does not mean their methodology lacks rigor. For certain projects, seeing or touching the original documents (no matter how transformative that experience can be!) does not matter. Instead, being able to read the document is the most crucial part. Until we can better address the financial obligations associated with international research, we need to accept that the most fiscally-responsible option for many will be to take shorter research trips, armed with a digital camera, in addition to the use of Gallica, the Newberry Library, and other online repositories that provide access to important source material.

The Tallahassee Report and this issue of *H-France Salon* is a timely and pressing conversation for the fields of early modern and Revolutionary French history. I commend the summit attendees' tenacity for having these difficult conversations and creating some enterprising solutions. As we

debate these suggestions, I hope we will carefully consider the role that labor and finances play in these plans. As the report stands, the labor and costs involved remain vague.

I am certain that some will not agree with my assessment. They will likely argue that the need for these programs outweighs any potential costs associated with the plan. I would strongly urge us to find a middle ground – one where we can implement these needed and innovative plans but fairly compensate those involved with them. I also hope that the responsibility of implementing these plans and finding creative solutions does not fall squarely on the shoulders of our female colleagues, most of whom are stretched thin with considerable service obligations, both in the historical profession and at their institutions. As a point of conclusion, I would like to thank Rafe Blaufarb for convening this productive summit. Thank you, also, to the all-female volunteer committee for coordinating this issue of *H-France Salon*, including Dena Goodman, Sarah Maza, Christy Pichichero, Cathy McClive, and Paris Spies-Gans.

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