Graduate students have far greater concerns than the weekly discussion sections they teach. On top of classes, work and teaching sections, the graduate student experience culminates in a dissertation. Dissertations can run for hundreds of pages and can take up to a decade to write. They are also the last thing a Ph.D. student produces.

The last thing Ph.D. students do is write a dissertation, according to Peter Brunjes, Associate Dean of Graduate students and head of the fellowship committee.

“A dissertation is an intellectual masterpiece,” Brunjes said, adding that they are documents setting people up for their academic careers.

Less than two weeks ago, the Graduate Year Fellowship awards were granted to 19 graduate students. According to Brunjes, the recipients were the very best students of the different graduate programs around the University.

Brunjes said the University has been granting this prestigious award to the school’s best graduate students for the last 16 years.

The Award

The fellowship award grant process begins within the departments and programs nominate their best students who are working on their dissertations for the award, Brunjes said.

Brunjes said the award frees graduate students from all other obligations so they can focus solely on their dissertations.

The award package, which includes an $18,000 grant, enables graduate students to quit the extra jobs they hold to fund their education. The package includes the stipend and a year’s worth of tuition and insurance.

“What we’re doing is taking the very best students with the very best dissertations and their dissertations.

“These students go all over the world, collect information in libraries, archives, field stations, archaeological digs,” Brunjes said. “They go to unbelievable amounts of places around the world and around the University.”

This award, Brunjes said, allows the students the opportunity to pull off the experiences together.

And the Winner Is ...

Among the 20 winners of 2006, 16 different graduate departments are represented including anthropology, art history, biology, classics, economics, English, environmental science, government and foreign affairs, history, mathematics, music, philosophy, physics, psychology, religion and Spanish.

Oleksandr Zhilyevsky, a winner from the Economics department, said the application process was limited enough that he somewhat expected to win.

“I couldn’t be sure 100 percent but it was expected,” Zhilyevsky said.

Kojs, on the other hand, said he was quite surprised to discover he won the Graduate Year Fellowship.

“It’s a huge honor,” Kojs said. “I know there are many applications and many wonderful students.”
The Process
Graduate students submit a variety of paperwork, including recommendations and dissertation chapter outlines, Brunjes said.

Then, Brunjes said everything goes to the selection committee where about half of the nominated students are awarded fellowships. There are about 20 recipients a year.

Music department winner Juraj Koj said he owes this fellowship in large part to his advisor, Judith Shatin, who supported him throughout the process.

“My advisor and committee members have been very helpful with the application process and I’m sure the help was reflected in the application,” Koj said.

English department fellowship winner Bradley Tuggle said, like most graduate students, this was not the only fellowship for which he applied.

He said applying to all the fellowships was pretty standard, so it wasn’t an insufferable process.

Joanne van der Woude, another English department winner, said English department candidates were required to submit an abstract of their dissertation, a 20-page excerpt from a chapter, letters of recommendation, a resume, and a schedule that showed how the dissertators planned to complete their dissertations.

That was it — anti-climatic perhaps, but true,” Van der Woude said.

The Committee met over two weeks ago, Brunjes said, and the applicants received e-mail notification about a week and a half ago.

Review Process
Brunjes said the committee looks at every graduate student objectively.

“There are no departments more likely to receive fellowships. There is no bias towards specific fields,” Brunjes said. “The Committee looks for best applications, but also the best applications within departments.”

Brunjes said the committee makes sure the awards are distributed among departments.

“They try to spread money around so there’s happiness all over,” Brunjes said.

Money to Survive in Academia
What that money is — basically that’s just the money I will live on,” Tuggle said. “I won’t be doing anything special with that money.”

He said students could use the money for the travel necessary for dissertation research, but he said there are also other funding packages for travel.

Koj said he too would spend his stipend on living expenses.

“It is wonderful,” Koj said. “But it will go to living expenses.”

Tuggle added that the Graduate Year Fellowship will allow him to stop teaching for funding.

“To survive, we have funding packages, but the only way we can get funding is through teaching,” Tuggle said. “What this $18,000 does is allows us to not teach next year. All we will be doing is working on [our] dissertation. This will be my living expenses.”

Van der Woude agreed the fellowships would go primarily toward graduate student living expenses.

“I think most of us plan to live off of the money, seeing as it approximates our usual yearly salary and stipend,” Van der Woude said. “This fellowship will help tremendously because it relieves us from all teaching duties, which are very heavy in the English department and tend to slow everybody’s dissertations down dramatically.”

Van der Woude said she puts up to 20 hours a week into teaching on a regular basis.

“I just can’t wait to have my days to myself next year to really focus on the dissertation and get lots of writing done,” she said.

Zhylyevsky, who estimated he is about a year and a half away from finishing his dissertation, said he cannot pinpoint exactly what he will do with the stipend.

Living expenses, travel, overseas conferences — he said there are plenty of things the money can go toward.

Zhylyevsky, who currently teaches a microeconomics discussion, said he won’t miss his TA position during the year of the fellowship.

The winners of this prestigious award spend several years on

2006 Graduate Year Fellowship Award Winners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Recipient</th>
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<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Leslie Kaiura</td>
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