TO: Dean Harvey Brooks
FROM: R. V. Jones
SUBJECT: A Critical View of the Graduate School

In response to your recent request, I will try to outline the essence of my critical views on graduate education at Harvard and, in particular, on the leadership role of the administration of the GSAS. I suppose my quarrel is not so much with the performance of the current incumbants, but rather with the role that has been defined for the Graduate School by the administration and faculty of the FAS. In this critical period for all educational activities, the survival of graduate education seems to pose its own set of vexing problems. Both internally and externally, fundamental assumptions about the value of graduate study are being questioned. Graduate student morale is low and financial problems are sobering. Yet we lack a focal point of leadership to help define and articulate some corporate view of the value of graduate education. As currently operated, the GSAS is to a large extent, an administrative clearing house reflecting some sort of average of departmental attitudes. In asking for more from the GSAS, I do not question the departments' traditional prerogatives. In matters of academic and scholarly standards, it is entirely appropriate that the effective operating and decision-making powers reside in the departments. However, the graduate school administration should play the role of a counterforce in behalf of student and community interests.

Given the current employment situation, a good deal has been written about the rather shaky foundations of graduate education as it has developed over the last twenty years. In my view, we have yet to face up to the fact that we are offering by and large, professional education and certification. Can it be doubted that the overwhelming majority of our students are motivated, at least by some extent, by the potentials of career rewards and prestige? Certainly, the faculty sees the definition of professional standards as an important part of its function. However, in the structure of our graduate schools we seem to be reluctant to recognize the professional basis of our enterprise. This
reluctance puts the student in an ambiguous position. The rhetoric of graduate life celebrates the Ph.D. thesis as the pinnacle of scholarly life, whereas in most cases it is the vehicle of certification and the first step on a professional ladder. In most fields the period of postdoctoral research is assuming increasing importance. This trend necessarily decreases the relative value and importance of the Ph.D. degree. If we recognized the professional character of the graduate experience I think we would be in a position to deal more positively with many student concerns. At least some consideration might be given to the employment potentials of the profession. In my various administrative activities I have been struck by the contrast between the GSAS and some of the major professional schools at Harvard — viz. HBS, HLS, HMS and HSPH. Naturally styles and objectives differ, but quite generally I sense that genuine efforts have been made to meet the career and personal needs of the student bodies. Students are conscious of the objectives of their work and have a clear sense of the time commitment they are making. With this awareness, both students and administration are in a position to make more rational programmatic and financial judgments. On the social side, students in the professional schools seem to have a much better esprit de corps. There is little cohesiveness in the graduate student body and students correctly perceive of the GSAS as a satellite of Harvard College. Given the diverse interests of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, perhaps my comparisons with the professional schools are unfair. My point is that similar concerns are involved and the graduate school has the responsibility to do more to meet some of these problems. Let me turn to more specific issues.

The Graduate School should take the lead in finding ways to limit the time spent working toward the Ph.D. degree. I realize that Dean Elder made some attempts in this direction some eight or ten years ago. Unfortunately, I don't think that you can put an arbitrary time limit on the

+ Symptomatic of this problem is the fact that so many graduate students seek rooms in Harvard Houses even at considerably higher cost and greater inconvenience.
Ph.D. degree program until we have defined more carefully the generally accepted expectations for the degree. There have been numerous suggestions of three and four year degrees with rather specific requirements and time commitments. English universities have been able to maintain such time limitations without ill effect. Obviously, the GSAS could not impose any particular plan on the faculty, but it could be the rallying point for discussions of this matter. In particular, the administration of the GSAS ought to take the lead in convening a group of departmental representatives for the dual purposes of information exchange and, possibly, policy initiation. I think that there is rather little understanding among the departments of the problems, standards and practices of other, even closely related, departments. This lack of information breeds hostility (particularly in the area of scholarship allotments) and hinders the development of a corporate sense of the objectives of graduate education. Out of such an inter-departmental exchange there might emerge some consensus of what it is that we are seeking to do in graduate education. Locally, such a consensus could form the guidelines of faculty policy and the focal point of communication with the student body. Given Harvard's position in graduate education, a well articulated consensus would have national importance and, perhaps, some impact on policies of the federal government.

You know, I hold strongly that the GSAS should take the lead in establishing a financially sound student loan program. Unquestionably, a greater reliance upon loan funding is going to be necessary to fund graduate education in the future. As you know so well, the federal support is eroding fast. As yet I don't think that the administration of the Graduate School has really faced this problem. In recent years, the professional schools at Harvard have given consideration to and put into effect a number of imaginative ideas. In my view the Graduate School should move in two areas. First, a multiplier scheme should be initiated to provide support of a broad loan program from external financial sources. Second, the student body must be made aware of the necessity for and the advantages of such loans. Of course, loans will find greater acceptability when the time commitment to graduate education becomes better defined.
The graduate school has been remiss in not taking active leadership towards defining a better graduate student life here at Harvard. In spite of the fact that we tell students that they are part of the community of scholars, I think they see few demonstrations of any corporate sense of scholarship. Again I think the contrast with the professional schools is marked. In the professional schools the student organizations play an important role in dealing with the loneliness and difficulties of student life. To take one example, the Law, Medical and Business Schools have very effective operations for helping the wives of graduate students with their particular set of problems. It is difficult to be completely specific here. However, a discussion with a group of graduate students in any department invariably turns up the same kind of complaints. Some of these complaints have no remedy. They result from the hard edges of the competitive and demanding burdens of scholarly life. However, other complaints at least need exposure. So many stem, I think, from the students' need to find a place in the community here. Graduate students are an important part of this community, but after a short period here many students come to doubt it. The doubt often turns to bitterness and hostility. I do not assert that this is by any means a trivial problem. I do assert that it would be helpful if the student perceived of the administration of the GSAS as his advocate.

I will not further belabor the point. The future health of graduate life at Harvard depends to some extent on a re-definition of the functions of the GSAS. Frankly, it seems to me unlikely that such a re-definition is possible.