

Introduction to the GSPAN Special Issue

In April 2022, the History Graduate Association at the University of Arizona hosted its first graduate student conference for Graduate Scholarship on Power, Adversity, and Networks (GSPAN) with the theme of Crisis, Continuity, and Change. As the conference chair, I hoped to bring together students from a variety of disciplines to share their academic work and network with one another. Emerging from the isolation of the COVID pandemic, the organizing committee wanted the GSPAN conference to be a forum for discussion, collaboration, and scholarly innovation. We saw it as a way for graduate students to demonstrate their scholarship in a safe environment, while also trying to generate a sense of normalcy. This conference was our attempt at getting life back to a familiar rhythm.

Building a two-day event presented a number of challenges, but the members of the conference committee, the History Graduate Association board, and other graduate students in the department made this endeavor not only possible, but successful. Faculty members from the Department of History and other university programs graciously served as panel chairs. Students from UA and across the country presented their papers, resulting in a conference that was truly organized “by graduate students, for graduate students.” As such, every aspect of the conference, from the meeting location to the keynote speaker, reflected innovative ideas and cross-disciplinary collaboration.

In selecting a theme, the committee considered current events and broader, historical trends with which multiple fields and disciplines could engage. We decided on Crisis, Continuity, and Change. As students of history, we appreciated how states of affairs did or did not alter with time. We reasoned that continuity and change are themes that exist across multiple disciplines. The third component of our title, Crisis, added a different element to these classic narratives. We saw the post-pandemic world as a chaotic place. With the Russian-Ukrainian War raging, alongside other instances of political and social unrest, crisis seemed an appropriate term to describe our current moment. Nothing appeared normal, reliable, or predictable, and this feeling permeated our conversations of the future. How would we plan for a future that seemed so uncertain? We reflected on times of chaotic upheaval that may have presented the people of the past with the same uncertainties. Adding the third element, crisis, to the theme was our acknowledgement that change and continuity are often treated with a certain expectation, but crisis introduces the ultimate unpredictability of the future as experienced in the past and present.

The articles contained in this issue are a sampling of the submissions that we received for the GSPAN Conference. The event featured ten panels and one roundtable for a total of twenty-nine presentations. Students discussed state formation, material culture, identity, memory, medical history, indigenous history, bodies, philosophy, propaganda, and the environment. Each panel engaged multiple fields and created conversations that echoed the theme of the conference, but also demonstrated new approaches to ongoing discourses. The legacy of GSPAN is now being preserved in *Footnotes*, a journal dedicated to the publication of student work. The conversations initiated through the GSPAN conference continue, demonstrating the long-lasting

effects of collaboration, cooperation, and collegiality. Thank you to all the participants, committee members, University of Arizona graduate students, and faculty who were involved in the creation of the 2022 conference. Thank you as well to the editors of *Footnotes*—Johanne Harrigan, James Paules, and Zelin Pei—for creating this special issue.

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