

Q&A With Mabel Lee, Graduate Advisor

Professor David Henkin recently sat down with Mabel Lee to catch up with Student Services and see what's new with staff

For the more than six hundred of us who have attended Berkeley's doctoral program since 1988, Mabel Lee was more than a trusted guide; she humanized graduate school and personified the institution at its best. Mabel was kind enough to answer a few questions from her unique vantage point with UC Berkeley alumnus and professor David Henkin

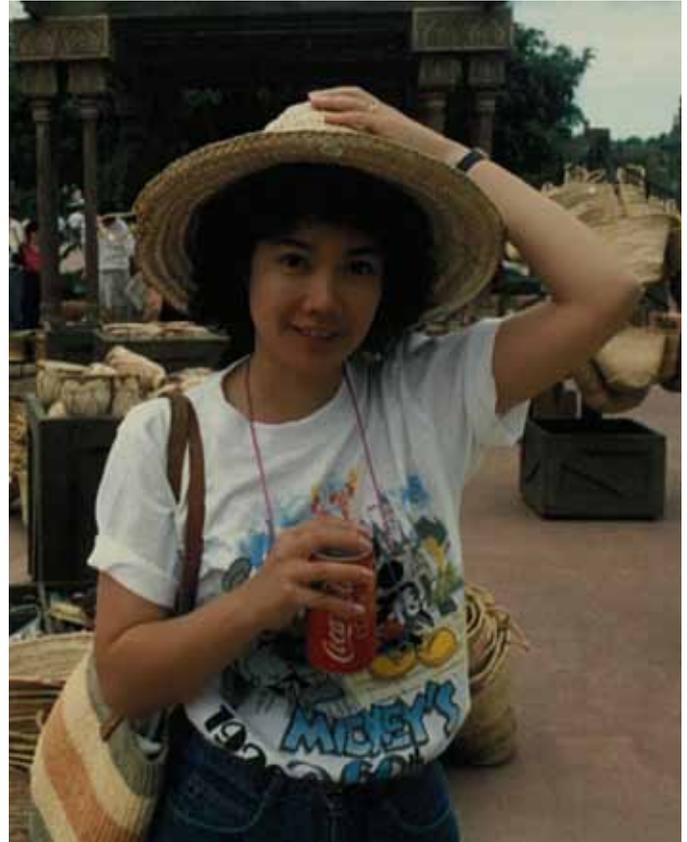
Q: Before you joined the History Department in 1988, what had been your previous connections to UC Berkeley? To the historical discipline?

A: I've been at Cal since studying here as an undergraduate and have yet to leave. I worked at the ASUC and at the East Asian Studies Library as a student and transitioned to a career position as a Student Services Advisor in the Department of Oriental Languages and Literature (now East Asian Languages and Cultures) shortly after graduation. I moved to the Department of Zoology (now Integrative Biology) and then to the School of Business Administration before arriving in the History Department.

My connection to the study of history was coursework in American history, regrettably not at Cal since over the years I've come to realize the caliber of our students as GSIs. The closest connection at Cal was a couple of courses in Classical Archaeology taken with Professor Crawford Greenewalt.

Q. How has the job changed over your long tenure as Graduate Advisor?

A: The University has vacillated between centralization and decentralization over the course of my years spent at Cal, with the current



Mabel Lee on her honeymoon three months after she started at UC Berkeley. Stop by in 3310 Dwinelle to see her now!

trend seemingly moving back to centralization with the creation of Campus Shared Services. However, with regards to funding, decentralization more accurately characterizes the trend with the awarding of Block Grant funds and Summer Grants left to the discretion of the departments. Decentralizing the Block Grant funds and using them with endowment funds has enabled the department to offer multi-year fellowship packages to all of our admitted students. In earlier years, funding ranged from no offer of funding to, at most, one year of tuition and stipend. As a result, accounting has increasingly been more of a demand on my time along with the offering of GSI and Reader positions.

Email has greatly changed the response time and the interaction I have with my students. The good is not having to rely on snail mail or catching me in my

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office. The bad is not having as frequent in-person contact with the students.

Q: How, from your perspective, has the Department changed?

A: Since the addition of two floors to Dwinelle Hall, the department has acquired more space and has made a conscious effort in expanding the facilities available to our graduate students and improving the graduate student experience. The lounge, library, and exam rooms did not exist when I first started. No longer are doctoral qualifying exams held in the faculty offices and the computer lab moved from its previously cramped space in 3207 Dwinelle. Presented with the availability of new resources, which could have been used in other ways, I believe that the department has kept the best interest of the students in mind.

Q: How have your relationships/connections to graduate students changed?

A: The greatest change is a result of moving the student mailboxes from my office to the lounge. I had more of a pulse on the whereabouts of my students when their mailboxes were in my office, more so than I do now. At times it was like Grand Central Station, but I felt more connected with their lives with casual chats as they popped in to check their mail.

Q: What are your thoughts about the graduate program?

A: The graduate program had seen a high of an entering cohort of 52 to a low of 19 (our most recent cohort). I am sure that this has changed the student dynamics and I hope that students continue to find the support within their cohort regardless of the numbers.

The program has worked to stay in tune with changes in the field from lowering our admit quota to be more in step with the job market, offering fellowship packages to remain competitive, and hiring faculty in areas that reflect the changing trends.

Q: What changes in the program are you most proud of?

A: I believe the biggest change and one with the greatest impact has been the offering of multi-year fellowship packages to all admitted students. Although it has been a challenge to keep up with the private institutions, Carla Hesse's and Mark Healey's vision of a funding package has kept us competitive.

Q: What do you foresee as the next major changes in graduate education at Berkeley?

A: I think with the continuing delicate job market the perception of what a graduate education provides will change. I think that graduates will still seek the traditional track of academic employment, but I foresee a greater acceptance of alternative careers and a greater acceptance that the skills acquired with a graduate education will lead to successful careers outside of academia.

Q: Do you maintain close contacts with students after they leave?

A: With over 600 students coming through the program since I've been in the department, close contact wanes as the years since graduation progresses, but it is always a pleasure when former students drop by to say hello or I receive an email or a letter with news of additions to their family or an update in their professional career. I hope that I have made a difference in their time spent in the program.

