

**GPSS Focus Group Report**  
**Department of Communications**  
**October 2007**

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On October 29, 2007 the University of Washington Graduate & Professional Student Senate Special Assistant attended a focus group of graduate students in the Department of Communications. There were thirty students present at the meeting. Of that thirty, there were six Masters students and twenty-four PhD students. The purpose of this focus group was to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the program from the perspectives of Communications students. This report summarizes students' feedback for consideration in the Graduate School Council's review of the Communication program.

*Please note: The Graduate & Professional Student Senate (GPSS) and the Graduate School Council are in the process of revising the GPSS focus group report process and procedures. This report is in an interim format until the new process is established in January 2008. The data you see here are the notes the special assistant took at the focus group. The opinions stated here are Communication student opinions and observations, the author of this report did not synthesize any information or make any conclusions.*

**Program courses and requirements**

- There is no clear consistent plan of what courses to take when.
- There is constant confusion of what courses will be offered when/what term.
- One student mentioned they were told a class would be offered when she was considering coming to UW, but when she got here it was no longer offered.
- The introduction courses are a strong component of the program.
- Inter disciplinary work is excellent in this program.
- Students expressed their desire for an affiliation with Jackson School in order to take courses through that School.

**Mentoring**

- Collaborations between students and faculty are strong.
- There is a lack of faculty in certain areas; the example given was the culture and theory area.
- Some students mentioned having to go outside of the department for mentoring, particularly for faculty of color or faculty who have diverse backgrounds.
- Students like the idea of expanding the mentoring component in order to have more than one mentor.

### **Strengths of program**

- One student mentioned they came to this program because of the critical and cultural studies in the department.
- This program provides new thinking, new ideas, fresh people and professors.
- Everyone in the department is eager to help, they are welcoming and there are options for making connections.
- Communication from faculty prior to arrival on campus made a huge difference in easing the transition into the program.
- There is strong emphasis on public scholarship in this department.
- There are TA positions available, which is helpful.
- One student mentioned they appreciated that the university as a whole values teaching which provides ground work on being a good instructor.
- It is refreshing to see the value of teaching modeled by chair of this department.
- Funding opportunities in the program are acceptable, but departments always need more money for students.
- This program provides flexibility with life challenges such as children, elderly parents, etc.
- This program has great faculty, communication and community.
- Travel funding opportunities are available and helpful.
- Professional seminars put on by the department are helpful.
- Students appreciate the coaching they receive for job placement.

### **Improvements**

- Some students expressed interest in the department conducting a survey to get student's feedback on issues such as courses, funding and mentoring.
- There is always a need for more money. There are gaps in administration, staffing and faculty salaries and because of these gaps the department is losing good people to higher paying universities.
- There is sometimes a disconnect between areas of student interest and courses available.
- Some faculty profiles are geared more towards research than teaching.
- There needs to be more recruitment of international students. One student thought there were low numbers of international students because of deadline requirements.
- The concern was raised that the primary measure of success in the department is if a graduate is hired at an institution to do research. Good teaching skills should also be a measure of success.