

GPSS Report
Department of Geography
January 2008

On January 28, 2008 the University of Washington Graduate & Professional Student Senate Special Assistant attended a group meeting of graduate students in the Department of Geography. There were twelve students present at the meeting. This meeting was conducted as part of the Geography program review by a faculty review committee. Of that twelve, there were two Masters Students and eight PhD students. The purpose of this meeting was to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the program from the perspectives of Geography students. This report summarizes students' feedback for consideration in the Graduate School Council's review of the Geography program.

Please note: The Graduate & Professional Student Senate (GPSS) is in the process of revising the GPSS report process and procedures. The data you see here are the notes the special assistant took at the group meeting. The opinions stated here reflect Geography student opinions and observations; the author of this report did not synthesize any information or make any conclusions.

Admissions and New Student Orientation

- This department has a great reputation.
- There are a lot of faculty members to choose from to do research with.
- There is no department orientation put on by faculty and staff; the students' organize the orientation.
- You have to be self-motivated in this department to get help and guidance.
- When you are accepted to the department you have to have faculty members interested in you and your research. However, the student is not told which faculty member vouched for them when they are accepted. It would be nice to have this information available to the student. The students have formally asked the department to disclose this information to them, but it has still not happened.

Mentoring

- Mentoring is improving in this department. One student said "mentoring has grown out of necessity."
- There is a lot of professional support in this department.
- There is also peer mentoring, this is informal, but most graduate students participate and find it useful.
- There is no training for TA's by the department. No pedagogical training or information is given. This needs to change in order for TA's to be effective teachers.

Community

- There are a lot of social events in the department.
- Cohorts are usually close, not much interaction with other cohorts.

- There is a “core group” of students who all have funding and they are very close because they share an office.
- The students without funding are not as close to this core group, some disparity.
- There needs to be more feedback from faculty on professional development.
- There is a colloquium series on Friday afternoons, but faculty no longer participates in this event. It is difficult to get faculty to attend.
- Faculty initiated coffee hour during the week, but now they rarely attend.
- There is a very low level of faculty involvement in student events.

Funding

- There is a disparity between the number of students admitted and the number who receive funding. Three years ago there were 22 students admitted and only 4 received funding. The ratio is better this year, but still not great.
- TA positions are not offered to new, incoming students.
- There were a lot of empty promises of funding, and then no follow through. The department lost good students because of a lack of funding.

Improvements

- It is challenging to form thesis and dissertation committees. Faculty members are stretched too thin.
- There is no travel funding available from the department, have to go outside of the department for funding, this is very frustrating for students.
- There is no formal help with grant writing, there is one class offered every other year. The students want there to be more classes or workshops.
- There needs to be a class on research design, this would be very useful to students.
- There needs to be better access to method classes in other departments. Students have to take these courses but find them hard to register for and find.