

On April 28, 2005, the University of Washington Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS) President's Assistant II (PAII) met with six graduate students in the Interdisciplinary Nutritional Sciences program. The first session included four students in the PhD program. The second session included two students pursuing a Master of Science and a Master of Public Health in the program. The students that attended the meeting with the PAII came from all years of study in the program. In addition, the PAII observed meetings with the graduate students in program and the University of Washington Graduate School's visiting committee. The purpose of these meetings and observed sessions was to help the GPSS evaluate the strengths and weakness of the graduate program based on the opinions of the participating students. The aim of this report is to represent the views of graduate students in that program to the Graduate Council of the University of Washington's Graduate School, which is currently conducting a review of the Interdisciplinary Nutritional Sciences program.

#### PROGRAM STRENGTHS

Overall graduate students in the Interdisciplinary Nutritional Sciences program seemed content with some facets of their graduate experience. They highlighted several positive features of the program:

- Core coursework (500-series) was described as difficult but well worth the effort.
- Students reported that the program has a lot to offer students with enough initiative and self-motivation.
- Students described inter-program communication as good.

#### PROGRAM WEAKNESSES

The students participating in the reviews raised several complaints about the Interdisciplinary Nutritional Sciences program.

- Some students reported that core coursework has been highly repetitive for students with a strong science background. Other students reported that many classes failed to demonstrate how abstract scientific concepts and practices applied to their nutritional studies.
- All-around, students cited the general funding problems as a negative aspect of the program. Compounding this problem, some students felt that there are students that have been awarded funding through Research or Teaching Assistantships without a satisfying level of transparency. Although student-

solidarity has reportedly kept inter-student tension to a minimum, the reasons for certain allotments of funding have been unclear to some students. Students in the masters programs are generally self-funded. As is the case with many interdisciplinary programs, Teaching Assistantships (T.A.) are rare. The program apparently only offers one Teaching Assistantship per year, which can only be fulfilled by students with a specific background.

- The location of the program on north campus makes it difficult for students to participate equally in north and south campus activities. Most classes and other academic offerings are based in the Health Sciences building.
- Students seemed generally dissatisfied with the spaces offered them in their program's home in Rait hall. Most said that they do not use the spaces offered there. Another effect of the program's location is that it does not foster a sense of community between students, and between students and faculty. For students working/studying at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center (far off campus), this problem is all the more exacerbated. Further complicating any community building efforts in the department, students reported palpable inter-faculty tension.
- While students noted that the program is currently overhauling its core coursework, students complained about the heavy course load during the first year.

## CONCLUSION

While the Interdisciplinary Nutritional Sciences program faces some problems that are negatively affecting graduate student life in the department, the sources of most of these problems can be found university-wide across a broad range of departments. The Interdisciplinary Nutritional Sciences program would surely have a hard time re-locating itself or finding extra funding to better support more or its graduates at a higher level. However, in the areas of community building, core curriculum development—where changes are being made—and funding allocation, the Interdisciplinary Nutritional Sciences program could make some small changes that might greatly improve the graduate experience in the program.

(This report was prepared by Jacob Mundy, GPSS Presidential Assistant II.)