



## **The Graduate and Professional Student Senate**

### **School of Law Program Review**

**Winter 2013**

*The Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS) conducts reviews of academic programs that coincide with the Graduate School's Program Review process. GPSS reviews are a vital component of the final Program Report. The data collected and presented by the GPSS serves as a primary source of graduate and/or professional student feedback in the Program Review process.*

*For more information about the GPSS Program Review process or questions regarding this report, please contact [gpssex@uw.edu](mailto:gpssex@uw.edu).*

#### **Review Scope and Purpose**

This review contains a summary of graduate student opinions and feelings regarding their department. It does not seek to give a general overview of the academic program or the department. The report and Catalyst survey were prepared by GPSS Special Assistant Leo Baunach. For more general information regarding the academic program, faculty, courses, and research, please see the School of Law Self-Study.

The Graduate and Professional Student Senate sponsored a Catalyst Survey for LLM and PhD students February 6<sup>th</sup> through 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013. 22 of 160 students in the program, 14%, completed the survey. Except for the General Law LLM, all graduate programs of the School were represented: PhD (3), LLM in Global Business Law (2), LLM in Asian Law (3), LLM in Sustainable International Development (4), LLM in Health Law (1), LLM in Intellectual Property Law and Policy (2), and LLM in Taxation (6). Because the numbers from each group are small, statistics are split between the different LLMs. Comments from the site-visit were used to provide more information on specific aspects of each LLM and the PhD.

Most questions used a five-point scale, for example 'Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, Poor,' or 'Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree.'

A complete compilation of the data is presented in the appendix. The original survey data is available from the GPSS upon request.

## **Executive Summary**

LL.M and PhD students in several sub-disciplines were satisfied with the academic experience provided by the UW Law School. The program was praised for its commitment to attracting and supporting international students. Students were happy with opportunities to take coursework outside their program but needed greater guidance on this subject. There was approval of overall academic advising. Career counseling was seen positively and students hoped to see continued development and improvement in this area. Slight improvements are needed in regards to faculty availability and the encouragement of collaboration among students. PhD office space is not commensurate with the facilities provided to students in similar programs. A majority anticipated debt upon degree completion to exceed \$25,000.

### **I. Academic Program**

There was broad approval of academic standards and integration of current developments in the field of law. Roughly 60% rated both of these aspects of the Law School graduate program as very good. Among respondents, 90% felt that their program supported their professional and research goals. 95% rate the intellectual quality of the faculty as very good or excellent, and 77% of students believed that the amount of coursework was appropriate to their degree.

Students praised the ability to tailor their experience and learning to their interests. For example, students in the Tax Law LL.M were pleased with the ability to focus on international or domestic subjects. International students felt that the program was relevant to their home countries. Among international students, which comprised just under half of the response pool, 60% felt academically supported by the School. 40% were neutral about support from the School or felt somewhat unsupported.

There was less confidence among students about collaboration, interdisciplinary learning and opportunities to take coursework outside of their program. 59% agreed that the program encouraged collaboration and teamwork, but 32% felt neutral about this aspect of their experience. One student commented “I recommend more team work to develop a sense of community and strong alumni network.” Similarly, 32% were neutral or unsure about opportunities to take courses outside their program and 58% agreed that there were adequate opportunities. Students found coursework outside their program to be rewarding, and hoped for more advising on interdisciplinary opportunities and how best to plan such activities. They also expressed an interest in continuing and expanding interdisciplinary initiatives with other departments, like a recent research tutorial with the Jackson School.

### **II. Research Experience**

Among students that had begun their research, 65% felt they had received a very high or high level of training before beginning their own projects. A comparable percentage had received excellent or very good guidance from faculty in formulating a research project. 70% perceived

faculty guidance while they conducted research as excellent or very good and 29% felt guidance was good or fair. Just under half of the respondents had attended a professional or academic conference.

Some LLM students had selected UW because of its focus on coursework and practicum/externships rather than a thesis. Overall, most felt that the writing project and coursework were well integrated, and found the writing project a rewarding experience. It was a valued opportunity to focus on a topic of individual interest and work with a faculty member, including adjuncts that are professionally involved in the topic of the project. One student noted that coursework early in their LLM program helped to identify, refine and focus their initial interests into an effective project. Students in the Health Law LLM indicated that their writing project needed more structure. Greater guidance could be made available to students who are interested in publishing their writing projects.

PhD students were content with their research experience so far, and with the resources and training provided before and during their research.

### **III. Career Counseling / Job Search**

The externship system and the School's extensive network of contacts were considered very important and rewarding. International students suggested an international alumni network to provide better contacts and opportunities for the many students who do not stay in Seattle at the end of their studies.

Half of students were satisfied with the career counseling they had received through the Law School and 17% were dissatisfied. A significant number, 27%, felt neutral about career counseling. 49% felt that advice on employment opportunities outside academia was good or fair, 14% felt it was poor, and 31% perceived it as very good or excellent. There were similar opinions for advice on how to search for a job, prepare a resume, and prepare for an interview. In all of these areas, most students rated the quality of guidance and advice as good or fair. A particularly high number, 63%, rated advice on how to prepare for an interview as good or fair.

Students in the Sustainable International Development Law LLM indicated that greater career counseling was needed. Health Law students praised recently hired career counseling staff. For other LLMS, some felt that career counseling was frontloaded in the program, and that a more even distribution would be useful. Career Center planning sessions and receptions with local firms were commended.

### **IV. Advising**

Around 65% were satisfied with the amount and quality of communication with their advisor.

Among respondents who had begun research or writing projects, all felt they had received adequate advice on developing a proposal and selecting a faculty advisor. A majority had

received sufficient advice on written examinations, conducting research and drafting their final product. Among the five respondents who had finished their oral examinations, two felt they had not received adequate advice. There was an even split on guidance among students concerning preparation for their final defense.

Unlike LLM students, PhD students are not provided with structured course planning. In particular, they felt that advising on coursework outside of the Law School would be beneficial. For PhD students, the assigning of a faculty mentor was considered enormously helpful, and was often a valuable source of information.

## **V. Departmental community**

58% felt that the sense of community in their program was excellent or very good, and 35% found it good or fair. 87% approved of the School's openness to diversity, and 78% perceived an excellent or very good commitment to attracting diverse students. 64% approved of the level of support for diverse students as excellent or very good, and 26% found it to be good or fair. Among international students, 80% found the program supportive in transitioning to life in Seattle.

PhD students were pleased with the recently initiated colloquium. It has helped build community and provides an additional avenue for informal peer advising. PhD students felt that the colloquium was beginning to address the lack of communication between first and second year students. However, contact remains hamstrung by inadequate office space. No access or space is provided for first year students. For those with access, the resources in the office are limited and the location is less than ideal.

There was virtually no contact or even acquaintance between LLM and PhD students, outside of occasional overlaps in coursework. Students were interested in better contact between JD students and LLM/PhD students, but believed that such relationships would not arise without a structured venue.

## **VI. Funding**

Students expected to have significant levels of debt upon graduation. Only 23% expected to complete their degree without debt. 19% expected to have less than \$10,000 in debt. The largest grouping was \$40,000-\$55,000 in anticipated debt, with 28%. Among respondents, 14% expected over \$100,000 in student debt.

The most common sources of funding were need-based loans or financial aid and personal resources. A small number had received non-service fellowships. One student suggested "More chances for TA/RA-ship for PhD students."

Opinions were lukewarm about the clarity for financial support in the program. 45% felt that the criteria for support was sometimes but not always clear, 14% believed it was never clear and

36% felt that criteria were always clear. 27% felt that adequate funding for students was provided by the School, 36% felt funding was inadequate and 32% were unsure.

## **VII. General**

Respondents did not identify any major obstacles to degree completion and success in their programs. 68% found course scheduling to be 'somewhat of an obstacle' or a minor obstacle, and one student noted that overlapping times for key classes caused frustration. Faculty availability was a problem for some. One respondent saw this aspect as a major obstacle, and 36% found it somewhat of an obstacle or a minor problem. All student-parents felt supported by the School.

81% of students would definitely or probably recommend the program to prospective students. 68% felt encouraged by the School to use the skills they acquired in the program for the greater good.