

GPSS Report
Graduate Program Review
School of Social Work

On March 1st, 2010, the Graduate and Professional Student Senate had the Chief of Staff and a GPSS Senator attend the School of Social Work Program Reviews. In total 2 BASW, 3 1st year, 3 2nd year, and 7 1st year PhD students attended the peer review session, while 72 SSW students responded to the Catalyst Survey. The Chief of Staff attended the BASW/1st year MSW session, while the GPSS Senator attended the 2nd year MSW/PhD student session. This report comprises the overall concerns and sentiments of the graduate students both from the Catalyst survey sent out prior to the review sessions, and the review sessions themselves.

Communication

- There are highly polarized responses to this question. Many students were very dissatisfied with the level of communication, especially from their advisors. Several students stated they had never communicated with the advisors, whereas some students had a great deal of praise for their committee, faculty, and advisors.
- Some students had praise for their practicum coordinator
- Students expressed a desire for more consistency in terms of guidelines and requirements, feeling they changed too frequently, year to year.

Sense of Community

- Again, with the high level of responses, there have been mixed answers to this question. Some students stated having no sense of community, some stated feeling closer to their cohorts after their first year, and still others stated feeling very close to their cohorts and department.
- However, for the most part, students felt fairly close to their peers, and some even stated feeling as though they were a second family.
- Students also stated a shared passion for social issues bonds them together.
- Students would like to learn how to resolve conflicts between cohorts, student-to-student, student-to-faculty, and faculty-to-faculty

Intellectual Support

- A couple of students brought up concerns with their advisors, once more. They did not understand the purpose of having an advisor.
- For the most part, students felt they were getting enough intellectual support from their faculty, administration, and peers.
- Students expressed praise for their faculty, who provided a great deal of support.
- Students found value in mentorship and wished faculty members could be more involved in mentoring
- Students also felt mentorship was inconsistent because funding is a determining factor of whether or not mentoring continues

Personal and Emotional Support

- Most students expressed receiving enough personal and emotional support. There were some students who stated they weren't receiving enough support, but did not explain why.
- Some students stated relying heavily on their cohorts and faculty for support, which they appreciated.
- Students stated that the nature of the program, being involved in social issues, facilitated these relationships.
- A couple of students stated they did not feel too comfortable being so open with their cohorts, and preferred keeping things private.

Funding

- Students were quite concerned with funding, and wished more financial aid was available to them.
- Students wished the program offered more TA/RAships, more scholarships/grants, and more internal funding opportunities. Several students stated going outside of their department to find funding.
- Students were displeased that their funding and mentoring being cut due to budget constraints
- Students stated that the school offers a variety of funding methods, including commitments on grant writings, and publishing

Climate and Diversity

- Students stated that although there are diverse students within the program, the program may not necessarily provide support for those students.
- It seems the issue of diversity is a touchy subject, as some students feel they cannot express themselves or their opinions on race or racial matters.
- Some students felt diversity was well addressed within the program.
- Some students believed that the school's diversity policy was more on paper rather than in practice
- Faculty of color have specific roles but they are outnumbered by their white peers
- The program promotes diverse indigenous science
- Students recommended that some faculty members got more training on how to teach and manage cultural competence, strategy skills, group dynamics and social justice
- Students suggested that the program needs more faculty members with diverse backgrounds. Most importantly, they felt faculty of color needed to increase
- Students expressed that diversity among students and faculty needed to be improved
- Some students felt that political diversity was not encouraged in the program. Some students felt they could not express more conservative beliefs or ideology due to the liberal leaning of their cohorts and faculty

Strengths

- Almost all of the students had different strengths they liked about the program. Some of these include: focused curriculum or social issues, their cohorts, the quality of faculty and research, the flexibility of the program, and the diversity of the students.

- Students like the interdisciplinary nature of the program
- Funding for the first 3 years is a great asset and a top priority for the program
- Students felt their research opportunities were great, especially because they could be interdisciplinary

Weaknesses

- Similarly, there were a variety of concerns the students had regarding the program: lack of support for students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, lack of support for students of color, lack of access to mentors and resources, access to funding, lack of communication, and political bias within the curricula.

Would they recommend this program to other students?

- For the most part, students stated they would recommend this program to other students, but that students would have to be prepared to enter a challenging program.
- Some students stated they wouldn't for several unrelated reasons.

Timeline

- For the most part, students felt the program did help them to keep track of their progress.
- Some students stated they kept of their degree progress on their own, without help from the program.

Conclusion

The high degree of responses from SSW was a pleasant surprise. The responses were diverse and varied significantly between each respondent. For the most part, students seemed satisfied with the program, but felt their voices needed to be heard through this survey. The in-person survey was equally useful as we were able to cross-match the survey results with the peer review session results. Overall, the students seemed to feel their academic programming was strong, but also felt that the culture of the department could be worked on.