

GPSS Report
Department of Genome Sciences Focus Group Number 2
January 2007

On January 26, 2007 the University of Washington Graduate & Professional Student Senate Special Assistant to the President facilitated a 60 minute meeting with graduate students in Genome Sciences. The purpose of this focus group was to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the program from the perspective of Genome Sciences students. This was the second focus group conducted by GPSS in order to receive more diverse feedback from a larger range of students. This report summarizes students' feedback for consideration in the Graduate School Council's review of the Genome Sciences program. All students were invited through department emails.

Mentoring

- Students said they are frustrated with the mentoring program in regards to their lab rotations. Some professors take graduate students into their lab even if they don't have room and are not upfront with the students about this. If a student goes into a lab that does not have room for them then they will not be paid and are essentially providing free labor. The students expressed concern that professors need to be upfront about the number of students in their lab and if they are offering a student a position they need to let them know if they will be paid or not.
- The collaboration between faculty and students is helpful especially in the area of research.
- Students expressed the desire for more faculty feedback about their progress during the first two years of study. Students have concerns if they are on the right academic track and are progressing at a satisfactory level. They feel like there is no one to go to in order to check on their progress. Students receive an email from the department saying either they are "doing well" or "improvement needed." However, no explanation is provided for what "well" or "improvement" means. This issue needs to be addressed in order to provide students with more constructive feedback on their progress.

Labs

- There are some severe problems regarding labs particularly for first year students. Each quarter students are passed around to different labs and no one is looking out for them to make sure they are getting what they need. It seems like there is no one to turn to for guidance. Students reported they have to seek out advice and there is no one to go especially if you have a negative experience with your lab assignment.
- Student suggested a solution to this problem would be to better define the position of the faculty member in charge of lab assignment and the lab processes. It might

also help to have a faculty member in charge of each area of study so students feel like they are talking to someone who knows what they are going through. This will also create accountability between the faculty member and the student; the faculty member will be responsible for this student's success.

- Students expressed the interest of having a statistics course offered in the department. They have been told this hasn't happened yet because of the lack of available faculty.

Funding

- Funding is guaranteed to all students in the program. Students are sometimes encouraged to find grants. The students suggested the grant writing class be moved to the first year of study. Currently, the grant writing class is during the second year of study and it is too late for the students to use what they learn in that class to actually write grants.
- Students would like to see the graduate school provide more funding for travel grants. Genome sciences department does what it can to provide money to students for travel however they have a limited budget.

Diversity

- The issue of gender issues was brought up in the focus group, and was a concern for the students. Women faculty in this field of study are scarce and hard to come by. This impacts the students in the department, particularly the women. Students expressed concern the department is not doing enough to make sure women can apply for open jobs and to make it easy for them. When the director of the department was asked about this issue, students did not feel they received an adequate response or were taken seriously.
- It was also mentioned, this is a nationwide issue when it comes to this career choice. It is not just UW, and students feel like there needs to be collaborative effort between faculty members and students to deal with this gender equality issue.

Department events and relationships

- The students have a great relationship with Brian Giebel, the program adviser. They spoke very highly of him and are very thankful he is always willing to help.
- Inter-disciplinary work is available and is beneficial to the students' studies. They want to make sure the access to these opportunities does not go away.

Overview

This second focus group was very successful, GPSS is very happy with the amount of feedback they received for the participants. Overall, the students in genome sciences are happy with their department and spoke highly of the program and the faculty members. The issue of gender equality is very important and should be addressed quickly. Also, clearer clarification during the students first couple years of study is of concern. Genome sciences department is a close knit community with open lines of communication and the students are excited about where the department is headed.