

On May 3, 2005, the University of Washington Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS) President's Assistant II (PAII) met with nine graduate students in the Oral Biology graduate program. This session started with the PAII observing a meeting with the graduate students in program and the University of Washington Graduate School's visiting committee. Following this meeting, the PAII met with the students in another room without the committee. The purpose of these meetings was to help the GPSS evaluate the strengths and weakness of the Oral Biology graduate program based on the opinions of the participating students. The aim of this report is to present 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 ten-year review of the Oral Biology program.

## PROGRAM STRENGTHS

Students participating in the review described a wide variety of positive features in the Oral Biology graduate program. Some of these included the following:

- Students seemed happy with their level of participation in the program (e.g., student representation on the faculty committee). Students also claimed that there are plenty of informal channels for the program to receive feedback from students.
- In almost all respects, students said that they were getting the necessary skills for their academic and/or professional development.
- Students said that guidelines for dealing with faculty-student conflict are well known and firmly established.
- Students welcomed the program's commitment to building a sense of community between faculty, students and staff. Students expressed appreciation for the number of parties and casual gatherings hosted by the department for various events like graduation, marriages and Christmas.
- Participating students said that they had no communication problems with faculty.
- Students praised the commitment of the program's chair, and said that the chair was always available and open for communication.

## PROGRAM WEAKNESSES

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While students seemed generally content with the Oral Biology graduate program, they expressed a set of complaints in both sessions. These included the following:

- Students all voiced concerns about the lack of funding within the program, especially students in the M.S. program who apparently have no funding opportunities. Students in the PhD program, who have some funding opportunities available, still felt anxious about their funding situation. International students expressed confused ideas regarding their ability to receive funding.
- Students also wished that they had more opportunities to become teaching assistants (TAs), not only for funding reasons but also to gain more teaching skills.
- Students complained that the program's requirements for finishing were not as clear as other requirements met earlier in the program. This was more so for PhD students than M.S. students.
- Students seemed divided over the necessity of a program-wide journal club. Some students felt that they either had no time for a journal club or they did not see the purpose of an interdisciplinary journal club. Some students have journal clubs in their labs, which they said is sufficient, along with the weekly seminars, although other students expressed a desire for a program-wide journal club.

## CONCLUSION

Given the diversity of graduate degrees offered within Oral Biology, the program appears to be doing a good job of meeting a wide array of student interests and needs. The program, however, should make efforts to address the concerns raised in this report. The GPSS hopes that the Oral Biology program will endeavor to make an already great program even better.

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