

**GPSS Report
Interdisciplinary Policy Dimension of Earth Sciences
November 2006**

On November 6, 2006 the University of Washington Graduate & Professional Student Senate Special Assistant to the President facilitated a 70 minute meeting with three graduate students in the Policy Dimension of Earth Sciences Program (PDES). The purpose of this focus group was to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the program from the perspective of PDES students. This report summarizes students' feedback for consideration in the Graduate School Council's review of the PDES program. All students were invited through department emails and the three students in attendance reflected both first and second year students in PDES.

Program Requirements and Advisers

- Students reported the program at UW fits with their main research programs and there is funding available. They expressed satisfaction that they get to interact with different departments; and that there is a lot of inter-disciplinary work.
- Advisers have connections and relationships with other departments which means student get exposure to other departments. Students mentioned it was a natural fit; they wanted to take on other courses in other departments and this program allows them to do that.
- Student mentioned they would recommend this program to prospective graduate students because it is a great way to “cross check what you are learning in your main field of study with other disciplines.” However, because there is ambiguity and confusion with requirements it can sometimes be difficult to know exactly what needs to be done to satisfy the program requirements.
- Students reported there is some confusion regarding when you have to take courses and what quarters they are offered. Students wish the requirements were more clear and straightforward.
- Students wish there was more flexibility in the program requirements, especially regarding when you have to take courses. They mentioned it would be more useful to have requirements formally written out for both students and advisers.
- Students said their advisers are available and willing to help them, however, they are not always knowledgeable. A lot of times students have to explain the program requirements to their advisers or professors. Students want a clearer process of admission.
- It was reported it is difficult to understand the expectations of the self designed program because the expectations are not clearly identified.

Mentoring

- Regarding mentoring in this program, students are given many opportunities. Students explained the best way they find mentoring is through their adviser's connections with other departments. Students reported most of the time their adviser found mentoring for them, they did not have to go search for it.

Funding

- Students reported they feel they are receiving adequate funding. When students apply for the program they are automatically considered for two terms of funding. However, it is not clear how it is decided who gets funding and who does not. Students wish the requirements to receive funding were more clearly defined.
- Student explained that department funding is very little and that affects their program. Students expressed they would like more tenured, full time professors.
- More funding for conferences would also help the program gain recognition because it would enable students to be able to attend conferences.

Diversity

- Students expressed they want more diversity in their program, particularly economic diversity. They used the example that they would like to see a "fisherman from a small coastal town in their program not just a group of white kids from private school." Students explained that they do not feel diversity is discussed enough in their program and wish that would change.

Professor and Departmental Relationships

- Students reported their relationship with Professor Ed Miles is great. One student said, "He is very knowledgeable and willing to help all students." They also reported that Victor Yagi who works in the office is very helpful as well. The only downfall student's run into is there is not a lot of institutional knowledge in the office staff because there seems to be a lot of turnover in these positions.

Thesis and Dissertation Committees

- Students described seating their thesis or dissertation committees are a challenge in this program because the requirements are unclear. Students suggested it would be helpful if there was an orientation session at the beginning of the year for all new students. One student said, "Right now there is no orientation program, you are thrown into the program and hope they figure everything out. Handouts or booklets would be helpful."

Student to Student Relationships

- Students reported that student relationships are the strongest part of the program. They said some of their best educational conversations have been in the capstone seminar all students are required to take. There is however a downside to the way the program is set up; students do not take the capstone class until winter quarter so they don't meet anyone until then. This is where an orientation session fall term mentioned above would be helpful.
- Students reported since there is not much departmental funding there is no money to have department events or conferences. Students wish there was more funding to put these events on, because they would participate.

Overview

Overall the students gave the impression they are pleased with this program and are excited it is offered at the UW. The Policy Dimension of Earth Sciences program helps students to not feel like visitors in classes from other disciplines. It is also a huge bonus that funding is provided for students in this program, this is an immense strength of the program. This program could benefit from streamlining and centralizing their program requirements and processes. This fact is a huge concern for the students in the program. This is a great program and is growing, hopefully with some reorganization it can continue to become an even larger program offered to more students.