

GPSS Report  
Graduate Program Review  
QERM (Quantitative Ecology and Resource Management) Program

On April 16, 2009, the University of Washington Graduate & Professional Student Senate had one GPSS Senator attend a 60-minute program review meeting with approximately 15 graduate students in the QERM (Quantitative Ecology and Resource Management) program. Students were in both Master's and PhD programs.

The meeting was also attended by a 5-member peer faculty committee, who facilitated and asked students questions pertaining to their program. This discussion provided an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the QERM program from the perspectives of the students. This report summarizes students' feedback for consideration in the Graduate School Council's review of the program. It includes 17 responses from the UW Catalyst survey. All students were sent the survey and invited to participate in the discussion with the committee through email messages.

**Overall high level of satisfaction about program**

- Students reported that they chose QERM because of the rigor of the foundation statistics courses. They said they were trained to the same level of Statistics students, taking the same first-year course sequence and having the same qualifying exam. This allows them to “hold their own” in any quantitative analyses or discussions. They reported choosing QERM over other alternatives because few or no programs offer equivalent depth of quantitative preparation outside of Statistics.
- Advisors are selected at the end of the first year, and they come from outside the program (fisheries, forest resources, etc.). Students report it may take some time to interview faculty for advisors, but that time to form their committee wasn't impacted.
- Students reported a strong sense of rapport within their year's cohort, and among various years' cohorts. They have a weekly seminar in which 1-2 students present on their research, and they have a weekly “soup night,” in which students get together in community.
- Although they take classes in other departments/schools/colleges, they report no problems getting into the classes they need.

**Career goals**

- Most said they were planning to work for an agency or government doing research or consulting.
- Some reported considering pursuing a faculty position.

**Funding**

- Grants fund many students' work (NOAA, etc.). About 1/3 of the students that were present have had TA positions, both in their own program and in other departments (statistics, biostatistics, etc.). One had been an instructor for an ecology course. No comments on how the funding might change under impending budget cuts.

### **Concerns**

- Program courses in public policy. Several students mentioned a desire to have more exposure to public policy, because eventually they will be consulting with agencies or decision makers, and they would like more background beyond quantitative and disciplinary knowledge.
- Basic courses in ecological concepts. Currently, the first year is spent immersed in statistics course, and then the 2<sup>nd</sup> year and beyond involves taking courses in a disciplinary area (such as fisheries, forest resources, etc.). For students coming in from a purely math or statistics background, they may not have knowledge of ecology.
- Disparate physical locations. Students spend their first year together in offices in Loew Hall, but after the 1<sup>st</sup> year, they move to be co-located with their disciplinary area (biology, forest resources, etc.). They are probably in 7-8 buildings, as are faculty. They mentioned it would be preferable to somehow be closer together in physical space after the first year.

### **Overview**

Students expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their program. They felt the strong statistical basis of the program prepared them uniquely well for their eventual work in advising managers on ecological concerns; no other program across the U.S. has such a strong quantitative basis. They described a strong camaraderie and support among fellow students within their cohort year and outside their cohort year. They expressed confidence in the level of funding. Their only suggestions were to add public policy and resource management to the curriculum, to provide basic ecological concepts knowledge to first year students who did not already have that background, and to try to sit together in classes, if possible.