

GPSS Focus Group Report
Department of Urban Planning and Development
March 2007

On March 2, 2007 the University of Washington Graduate & Professional Student Senate Special Assistant to the President facilitated a 50 minute meeting with graduate students in the Department of Urban Planning and Development. The purpose of this focus group was to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the program from the perspective of these students. This report summarizes students' feedback for consideration in the Graduate Council's review of the Department of Urban Planning Development. All students were invited through department emails.

Program and Requirements

- The suggestion was made to add a negotiations requirement to the core classes because this is an excellent communications skill and currently there is no class that teaches this skill.
- There should also be more emphasis on writing skills so students can write concise arguments on their own without much assistance.
- Students expressed the desire for more non group work in their classes, they feel there is too much emphasis on group work.
- Incoming classes are too big with 50 plus people, students want smaller beginning core classes.
- Students expressed they would like the department to iron out redundancies in the core classes, they feel there is too much repetition in the classes and it is wasting their time and money.
- Students mentioned the curriculum needs to be more difficult, it is really easy for students to sail through the program and not come out of it learning anything.
- Students expressed the want for an English as a second language writing assistance for students in the department. Because of the lack of assistance there is plagiarism and a lack of confidence. If the department addressed this issue head on this could be stopped and could connect English as second language students with native English speakers.

Advising and Mentoring

- Faculty advising is poor, only a few professors know the program requirements and depending on who you ask you get different answers. There is not a lot of consistency.

- Students are frustrated when they try to get an appointment with their adviser it is difficult because the advisers are always busy.
- There is no option for mentoring in the program; students said they would like to have it if it was available.
- Students suggested a better orientation program at the start of the program so students knew what to expect upon entering the program. Orientation now consists of a few students putting something together at the last minute.

Funding

- There is some funding available but not enough. There are a few RA and TA positions available, but there could be more.
- Students expressed the desire for more departmental money to be put towards diversity and diversity training.

Diversity Issues

- There is a huge lack of diversity in the department. There is a lack of resources and support for diversity. The curriculum does not provide knowledge of issues for diverse students or population. Students want more classes devoted to diversity, there are some students who “have no idea what diversity means.”

Professors and Department Leadership

- Students want more leadership and direction from the chair of the department, they know she is busy but she never seems present or available.
- Students suggested having a part time student assistant to help out with advising, career services, alumni relations and job opportunity knowledge.
- Students want things to move quicker in the department, for example, it took over 2 ½ years to set up the website for the department.
- Students expressed concern the lack of leadership in the department is contributing to the lack of enthusiasm and involvement from the students.

Building and Facilities

- Students expressed concern about the lack of space for graduate students, they have nowhere to go in their building. It is frustrating that PhD students have space for themselves but graduate students have nothing.

- Students want their facilities to be taken care of better; right now it looks bad to any visitors to the department. There doesn't seem to be a consistent cleaning schedule or janitorial staff.

Overview

The Department of Urban Design and Planning has some concerns that need to be taken under consideration. The lack of leadership in the department was a huge concern because it starting to filter down into the students attitudes. Program requirements overlap student's feel it is a waste of their time and money. The students are happy with inter-disciplinary work that is offered. The biggest concern students had was the lack of diversity in the department and the fact the department has allocated no money or time to diversity. This is a huge issue and it needs to be addressed.