

On May 2, 2008 the University of Washington Graduate & Professional Student Senate Special Assistant participated in a discussion with graduate students in the Department of Industrial Engineering. There were fifteen students present. Of that fifteen, four were Master's students and eleven were PhD candidates. The purpose of this discussion was to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the program from the perspectives of Industrial Engineering students. This report summarizes students' feedback for consideration in the Graduate School Council's review of the Industrial Engineering department.

The following comments are a combination of the short answer survey results from the Catalyst survey sent out to all students in the department, comments made at the discussion and individual emails the GPSS special assistant received prior to the site visit from students in the program.

#### **Program courses and requirements**

- Lack of graduate courses offered in variety and number.
- There is sometimes poor quality teaching in faculty absences.
- Because the faculty is so small, whenever there is an extended absence by a faculty member, due to sabbaticals, one-year leaves, or resignations, the number of courses offered, and the quality of the courses is severely impacted.
- The IndE 315 course in particular has suffered from inconsistent teaching quality. Although this is an undergraduate course, graduate students who have served as TAs in the course during those quarters of poor teaching have been subjected to a much higher stress load, a consequence of poor instruction by the professor.
- Graduate student classes have also been inadequately taught, or not even offered, due to faculty absences.

#### **Community**

- There is almost no involvement of more experienced students in the weekly seminar. This represents a missed opportunity to develop a strong student community, which will help students with networking in graduate school, and in future careers.
- It was suggested to make the weekly seminars mandatory for all students, both first-year and more experienced, then students would have an opportunity to build community and develop professional skills.
- The seminar could be a venue for practicing and giving research presentations, gaining teaching experience by teaching peers, or working on projects or solving engineering problems together, to name a few possible activities.

## **Mentoring**

- The seminars are great opportunities to hear about other student's research.
- Most faculty members are approachable and are available for questions and help.
- It is difficult when something goes wrong with a student's advisor, the student does not know where to go to get assistance.
- Students who are planning to go into industry feel that sometimes they do not get the same attention from faculty members as the student's who are planning to go into academia do.

## **Funding**

- Greatly inadequate funding. The majority of department funding today is in TA positions. The department is dominated by International graduate students, and the funding tends to be awarded to those students on entry, due to the much higher cost of International tuition.
- U.S. students usually have to struggle to find funding outside the department each quarter.
- It is not healthy for the community when some students have funding and some do not.
- It is more difficult for Master's students to received funding than PhD students.

## **Strengths of program**

- Generally there is a good sense of community between students.
- Small classes and a small department provide the opportunity to interact with faculty.
- Master's students also have the ability to interact with PhD students for peer to peer guidance.
- There is a lot of diversity in the program.

## **Improvements**

- Teaching opportunities are rare in the department.
- Ph.D. students in particular should be given more teaching opportunities.
- Those students who have been given full responsibility for a class seem to be given these positions secretly, and on the basis of funding commitments, bypassing students who genuinely wish to get teaching experience.
- The department maintains an electronic suggestion box. However, no announcements are made regularly to inform students of the suggestion box, and most students are unaware of its existence. No acknowledgement is made of suggestions that are submitted, so it seems useless to the students who do participate.
- There is no established grievance procedure in the department. Students generally do not know what they should do when a problem arises in their program that cannot be addressed by their advisor.

- Because the faculty is small and fragmented between different areas of research, if a student has a problem with the faculty member in their area you can rarely find another faculty member to work with on that topic.
- If a grievance process were in place, the students would have clear knowledge of the steps they must take when a problem arises with their advisor or their work. They could work to resolve problems that arise with an advisor or committee chair, without feeling as though their entire career were at stake without recourse.
- There is no TA mentoring or training through the department. The only training is through the CIDR/Graduate School annual TA Conference, which the students must decide to participate in on their own.
- It would be nice if the department took on some of the responsibility of both faculty and peer mentoring.