

Response to Committee Report

Computational Molecular Biology Program
University of Washington
Seattle, WA

February 26, 2014

We appreciate the helpful feedback provided by the review committee. This document outlines our response to the many useful suggestions provided in the report. We have organized the response in the same order as the report itself and inserted responses to each of the committee's suggestions.

1 Broadening participation

- “It may therefore be worth considering broadening the possibilities for the central courses to make the program more attractive to other students.”

Although we appreciate that taking these courses may be more difficult for some students than others, we also hope to provide a coherent experience for students in the CMB program by requiring them to take a core set of courses. At the next bi-annual meeting of the CMB steering committee, we will discuss the possibility of replacing one of the two required courses (GENOME 541) with a choice of electives.

- “It was also observed that there are some logistic barriers to participation from students from other departments because of scheduling of coursework. As Dr Noble has already initiated, continued negotiations with chairs of participating departments might help to alleviate these issues.”

The faculty members within each participating department are best suited to identifying these logistical barriers. Accordingly, we will ask each steering committee member to report, during our next meeting, on how the CMB requirements mesh with their own program requirements. Thereafter, for any department for which a problem is identified, Dr. Noble will work with the corresponding steering committee member and the department chair to try to lower these logistical barriers.

2 Program requirements

- “Beyond coursework, the program requirements are stated to include a laboratory rotation and a capstone project, as well as participation in the seminar series and symposium. These requirements would benefit from clarification and could be more directly communicated to the students.”

We agree that, overall, more frequent communication with the students is needed. We will discuss, at the next steering committee meeting, how best to clarify and/or modify these

requirements. In particular, we will consider the committee's suggest to allow "shadowing" in place of a wet lab rotation, as well as clarifying the number of quarters of participation in the seminar and journal club that are required for the certificate. Finally, to improve transparency, Brian Giebel will implement a system for tracking which requirements each student has completed, and will communicate this status to students on an annual basis.

3 Activities

- "More communication about these activities and expectations of attendance is encouraged."

Brian Giebel will send to the CMB mailing list a weekly email reminding students and faculty about the journal club and seminar presentations for the week. In addition, as mentioned above, each student will receive an annual email summarizing the extent to which they have completed CMB requirements.

- "It is possible that holding them in alternating locations would increase mixed participation, which would be highly desirable."

Moving the seminar series would be quite difficult, due to the challenges associated with finding a suitable venue and in communicating the changing location to attendees. On the other hand, the journal club location is assigned on a quarterly basis by Classroom Services. Dr. Ruzzo, who currently coordinates the journal club, will explore the possibility of varying the location of the class more broadly across campus, on a quarterly basis.

- "Some students noted that the seminar series could help to satisfy interest in engaging with faculty from FHCRC, ISB and other Seattle institutions. Career development would also be aided by occasional talks from local industry representatives."

During the summer, Dr. Noble will work with Phil Green, the faculty member responsible for scheduling the CMB seminar series, to increase participation of speakers from non-profit and for-profit institutions in Seattle.

4 Increasing community

- "Funding for a start-of-year social event, support for the symposium and perhaps a yearly external speaker to raise the profile of the symposium across campus would all be highly effective."

Of course, we wholeheartedly agree with this suggestion. Dr. Noble is exploring possibilities for an off-campus setting for the spring symposium, and will also work with Brian to organize a one-day fall retreat, also off campus. We will be investigating possible sources of revenue to support such activities, including participating departments, industrial partnerships, and the university administration.

With respect to raising the profile, CMB is helping to sponsor Prof. Valerie Daggett's Ames nomination to bring Michael Levitt, Nobel laureate in chemistry 2013, to the University of Washington next year. We will hold a reception associated with the lecture and will invite CMB students.

5 Recruiting

- “While CSE includes the program as an option on its admissions webpage, which has helped to alert some students to its presence, the program does not yet appear on the Genome Science webpage, even though GS attracts many computational students.”

In fact, the webpage did include a link to the CMB program, but based on this feedback from the committee, we have made the link more prominent (<http://www.gs.washington.edu/academics/gradprogram/applicants/index.htm>).

- “Other participating departments/institutions could be asked to provide a link from their graduate program web-pages.”

Brian Giebel will follow up with each participating department to ensure that their pages include prominent links to the CMB program.

- “Some thought could also be given to organizing short courses (perhaps with graduate student participation) offered to undergraduates and post- graduates interested in acquiring specialized computational and bioinformatics expertise.”

While we agree that such courses might be of interest, offering such courses is likely beyond the scope of what our certificate program can offer. Nonetheless, we will add this as an item to be discussed during our next steering committee meeting.

6 Future outlook

- “The program could also consider trying to initiate efforts to attract external funding, such as an IGERT. Studentships might be available through the Data Science initiative.”

Subsequent to the committee’s report being written, the NIH issued a “[Notice of Intent to Publish a Funding Opportunity Announcement \(FOA\) for Predoctoral Training in Biomedical Big Data Science](#).” This FOA will provide support for graduate training very much in line with the existing CMB program. In response to this announcement, Dr. Noble has already been in touch with individuals involved in the NSF IGERT, the existing Genome Training Grant, and chairs of several departments. He plans to coordinate a submission to this program, once the FOA is released.