

GPSS Report
Graduate Program Review
Department of Germanics

On November 17, 2008, the University of Washington Graduate & Professional Student Senate had two GPSS Senators attend a 60 minute program review meeting with approximately 15-20 graduate students in the Department of Germanics. There are about 25 graduate students in the department (including both M.A. and Ph.D. students). The program review was also attended by a peer committee, who facilitated and asked students questions pertaining to their program. This review evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the program from the perspectives of the DOB students. This report summarizes students' feedback for the consideration in the Graduate School Council's review of the Germanics program. All students were invited through department emails.

Department reputation and climate

- Graduate students are attracted to the UW Germanics program because of a high ranking and department reputation.
- Relationships among graduate students are good (cooperative, not competitive), and faculty are approachable and available.

Greatest concern

- Decline in number of faculty in the department, including retiring faculty and regularly absent faculty (on leave), which creates a risk for students trying to complete the program successfully.
- Of 7.5 faculty currently, at least one (sometimes more than one) faculty are away at any particular time.
- Absence of faculty sometimes delays the Ph.D. committee formation in the 2nd year, since the committee is almost completely composed of department faculty, and it can be hard for a student to meet the necessary faculty by that time.
- Because faculty are busy, students often rely on peer information for presentations, term papers, and conference preparation.

Funding situation

- Funding is adequate (through TAs of language courses), but decreases after the first year.
- Ph.D. funding is only guaranteed for 5 years, which is often not long enough.
- Students would like more opportunities to teach literature courses rather than being limited to language courses only.

Career development concerns

- Students would like to know: "What does our profession mean?" (e.g., Being a professor, being in industry, or other careers.)
- Students would welcome more department discussions of choices or options within and outside of academia, such as liberal arts college professor, industry positions, etc.

- Students wanted more study abroad opportunities, and to have the department supply information on more opportunities. Students also wanted more transparency on the selection process for students who get the existing study abroad opportunities.

Attrition from M.A. to Ph.D.

- Students said it is a very demanding path through M.A. to Ph.D.; that students need to be self-starters.
- The guidelines for progressing from M.A. to Ph.D. could be clearer.
- For some students, the M.A. may be a “trial” graduate program, where student leave after the M.A. if they decide not to pursue further graduate study.
- Economics was mentioned as a factor; there is attrition from students who get well-paying jobs at Amazon or Microsoft with their M.A. degree.

Overview

Overall, the students reported high satisfaction with the support from within the department and from fellow graduate students. They felt there could be clearer guidelines for progressing from the M.A. to the Ph.D. program. They were significantly concerned about the decline in faculty from retirements and temporary absences. They also expressed concerns about continued funding, as well as wider career advice and study abroad opportunities.