
On November 6th, the University of Washington Graduate & Professional Student Senate had two GPSS Senators attend an afternoon program review session with 14 graduate students in the Department of Physics (DOP). This review evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the program from the perspectives of the DOP students. This report summarizes students' feedback for the consideration in the Graduate School Council's review of the DOP program. All students were invited through department emails with 14 students attending, consisting of 1st year through graduating students.

Overall Summary

- While citing the need for improvements in several areas, to be discussed below, most of the students were pleased overall with the quality of the program and would enthusiastically recommend it to prospective students.
- At the root of most issues discussed was a breakdown or lack of communication between students, faculty and/or the department.
- Students feel the department is beginning to improve, if not rapidly, in the areas discussed below.
- Students made special note of the relationship and efforts of the Departmental advisors Steve Sharpe and Jennifer Lehner, whom they gratefully thank for their endless support.

Communication

- Most of the students felt misinformed about the “true” intentions of the department’s long-term focus, most directly with regards towards hiring new faculty and admission of new graduate students. In particular representatives from Condensed Matter physics noted the department pledge (for the past few years) and failure to hire new Condensed Matter Faculty. One noted they would have left the program had the department not told them Condensed Matter physics was going to be a priority. Several students also noted the excess admission of particle physics students compared with other disciplines.
- Most felt the department is receptive to student concerns but slow to act on those concerns. Cited was that students had expressed concerns with the department qualifying exams and while the departments pledge to make changes they are still waiting for meaningful action.
- Most of the students felt the faculty and department are reactive to student problems, being poorly informed about the ongoing concerns of students, resulting in problems not being managed well.
- The graduate students recognized their need to better organize communication with the department.

- Students felt an overall lack of departmental unity. All of the students desired a greater sense of awareness of the current activities of other research groups, to be better facilitated by the department.

Advisors

- Most felt their advisors were overall very supportive and helpful.
- Several students expressed difficulty in finding a research advisor initially, suggesting the department could do more to facilitate how students and faculty engage.

Student progress

- Some students expressed major concern with year-to-year funding especially during the later stage of the program when trying to focus on research.
- Students felt departmental expectations are fairly clear, if not minimal. Outside of actual research, self-reliance seemed to be the overall departmental message.

Resources

- Students expressed a strong concern for dwindling resources and recent losses in research support groups such as with the glass, mechanics, and electronics shops
- Student felt computer support was excellent.

Recruitment

- Students felt the overall recruitment process was comparable to other programs they visited.
- Many students wanted a more in depth follow-up after their visit. They did not cite specific suggestions but some felt a lack of follow-up was partly responsible for the lack of diversity in the program.
- Most of the students strongly suggested that the department provide an up-to-date summary of ongoing department research and upcoming specific research opportunities
- Most of the students wished they had been informed of the current distribution of grants currently held, number of graduate students each faculty was working with and how many more they could take on, and future grant plans.
- Many of the students would have preferred contact with all the research groups during their recruitment visit.
- Students would like to see the historical biographies of each research groups: grants, students, and faculty.

Diversity

- Most students feel that diversity is a major problem underlying many problems especially underlying a lack of support for female students.
- Students feel faculty diversification should be made a priority.

Career Development

- Not enough departmental advice on grants and grant seeking opportunities.