

GPSS Focus Group Report
Department of Philosophy
January 2007

On January 29, 2007 the University of Washington Graduate & Professional Student Senate Special Assistant to the President facilitated a 70 minute meeting with graduate students in the Department of Philosophy. The purpose of this focus group was to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the program from the perspective of Philosophy students. This report summarizes students' feedback for consideration in the Graduate Council's review of the Department of Philosophy. All students were invited through department emails.

Program and Requirements

- The students said the program has improved since they arrived and this is a great strength. They like to see the department is going somewhere and is not at a stand still.
- Most of the emphasis is put on the students first two years of study and the students wish this would change. They think it would be more beneficial to have the emphasis on the 3rd or later years.
- Dissertation talks do not begin until at least the students third year and this becomes difficult. Students want discussions about their dissertations to begin earlier.
- Students did not express interest in changing any aspect of the course requirements; however, they did mention the logic requirement in the program is too broad and needs to be better explained.
- Students expressed the desire to have a clearer definition from the department as to what "good progress" means. Students hear that phrase a lot are not given guidance as to where to go from there. Students want more concrete program benchmarks to go by.
- There needs to be more inter-disciplinary opportunities in this department. Students think it is an administrative issue and the department does not know how to handle it.
- Students would like to see more classes in 20th century European Philosophy, existentialism, and meta physics.
- Students suggested having a professional seminar during the 3rd year of study to help students who are putting together their dissertation.

- Students suggested having a class for 2nd year students who are working on their Master's paper process.

Mentoring

- Students mentioned that professors have a hands off approach when the students need the most help. Mentoring is often underplayed between faculty and students.
- Students were very excited about the student to student mentoring offered in the department. This is a great aspect of the program that needs to continue to thrive. Students are mutually supportive of one another.
- There could be more department leadership in faculty to student mentoring so that aspect can really be more available and work for the students interest.
- Students expressed the desire to have a better record of where graduates and alumni end up after they leave the UW. Some sort of record of job placement would be very helpful as students near the end of their academic career.
- Students want to have someone they can go to in their 3rd or 4th year of the program to talk to about where to go next. There is a lack of leadership on the faculty and staff to guide students through this transition.

Funding

- Students reported their main source of funding is through TA positions. About 90-100% of students who want to teach are given the opportunity.
- There are not many RA positions available, that could be something to be improved upon.

Diversity Issues

- There is little support for parents in the department and this is a huge issue. For example, the time schedule says a class is offered from 3:30pm-5pm, but when the students get to the class this time is more of a guideline and professors do not stick to it. One day the class might get out at 5pm, or 5:15pm or even sometimes 6pm. Students have huge concerns about this, they want the time schedule to accurately reflect the actual time of the class. This does not just pertain to parents, but to all students. Parents have a harder time because they need to stick to a strict schedule for their kids and day care providers.

Professors and Department Leadership

- Faculty members are very dedicated to students and want to help when they can. Students expressed they would like faculty members to be given a definition of what good guidance should be, that way everyone has the same expectations.

Building and Facilities

- There is a lack of updated computers for student use in the department, most are out dated and do not work well. Students also notice the technology support staff seem over worked, and are not able to help when students need them.
 - Students want a quiet place in the department to read or study. Right now none of the walls go from the floor to the ceiling so there is no where that is quiet enough to do work.
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Overview

Over all, the Department of Philosophy is doing a great job working with their students and being an advocate for them. Students expressed the interest for some changes in their curriculum and the desire for new classes to be offered. Inter-disciplinary work needs to be addressed in this department in order for students to have that opportunity. The issue of parents in the department not being given support is a huge issue that also needs to be addressed. The department of philosophy has great faculty members who sometimes need more direction in how to help students in the most effective way.