

On May 16, 2005, the University of Washington Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS) President's Assistant II (PAII) met with fifteen graduate students in the Political Science graduate program. This session started with the PAII observing a meeting with the graduate students in program and the University of Washington Graduate School's visiting committee. Following this meeting, the PAII met with the students without the committee. The purpose of these meetings was to help the GPSS evaluate the strengths and weakness of the Political Science graduate program based on the opinions of the participating students. The aim of this report is to present these views to the University of Washington Graduate School, which is currently conducting a ten-year review of the undergraduate and graduate degree programs offered by the Department of Political Science.

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

Graduate students in the Political Science program participating in the review voiced a high degree of satisfaction with their program. While they had some complaints, they were quick to underscore several positive features of the program. These included the following:

- All around, students felt that their education is preparing them for their future academic and/or professional lives in almost all respects. Students seeking academic career paths expressed a strong confidence in the skills they are obtaining.
- According to these students, the program appears to be doing a good job of financially supporting its students. In fact, this appeared to be the number one reason why several students chose this graduate program.
- Since most funding comes in the form of teaching assistantships, students reported that they were gaining adequate skills in course preparation and instruction.
- Students expressed appreciation for the highly interdisciplinary nature of the program, which is facilitated by the various centers maintained by the department and in conjunction with other programs, departments and schools.
- Students also liked the sense of community in the department and the number of casual events staged by the department.

PROGAM WEAKNESSES

Graduate students in the Political Science department did note some problems within their program. These included the following:

- Students noted that the loss of faculty has hurt many graduate students. Students also complained about the lack of professors working in political theory. Furthermore, it was noted that conflicts between faculty in comparative politics have made some students lives difficult, especially when it came to dissertation committee formation.
- Students also complained about their facilities and spaces. The only students with office are TAs, and there are four TAs to an office, with no phones, computers or internet available in the offices. The students would also appreciate the creation of a student lounge.
- While funding seems to be generally satisfactory, many students felt that the program could be doing more to help students finish. Funding, which is apparently front-loaded in order to attract prospective graduate students, does not adequately cover the final stages of research and dissertation writing. Foreign students options are even more constrained since they are unable to apply to some of the key funding sources (e.g., Fulbright and Foreign Language and Area Studies fellowships).
- Although there are provisions in the department for teacher training, some students expressed a desire to have a more rigorous teaching methodology and pedagogy course. The current mode of teacher training was described as simply a “therapy sessions” for TAs (i.e., a forum to air complaints rather than constructive process of feedback and instruction). Given the lack of teaching feedback and controls, some students felt that a bad TA could make it through the program without any faculty or staff ever taking notice.
- Students wished that the department could offer more assistance for conference travel; what is usually granted is hardly enough for either airfare or hotel accommodations.

CONCLUSION

The overall impression given by graduate students participating in the review is that the Political Science graduate program is doing a good job of meeting student’s academic and professional needs. These graduate students’ warm opinion no doubt stems from the

comfortable level of funding that most students receive that allows students to focus on their studies. The Political Science graduate program should be congratulated on its performance to date. The GPSS hopes that it will also see some room for improvement in the areas where Political Science graduate students raised concerns.

(This report was prepared by Jacob Mundy, GPSS Presidential Assistant II.)