Doctoral Student Survey: Results and Follow Up

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Yale University

May 2014
Overview and Recommendations

The Graduate Student Assembly and Graduate School of Arts and Sciences sponsored a survey of doctoral students in years two and beyond concerning their experiences at Yale. We thank our students for their high level of participation late in 2012. Every program received the overall results for the whole graduate school and their division. Programs with more than 10 respondents received their own data and smaller programs received narrative summaries of their students’ responses.

The Graduate School asked every doctoral program to share the results with their students and faculty and to propose actions to deal with their students’ concerns. Over the past year most programs held these meetings and the final section of the report lists a sample of good ideas and constructive initiatives that emerged from this process.

The first two pages of this report summarize the main findings and recommendations resulting from the survey. The following pages provide a more detailed quantitative account of the findings.

Summary of survey responses

Here we summarize survey responses from the three divisions (humanities, natural sciences, social sciences), but note that the range of responses within divisions often varied as much as the overall differences between divisions. The marked heterogeneity of responses between departments underscored the differences amongst the programs and also showed that each program needed to review and address their own survey results and seek local solutions, rather than relying on overall or even divisional results.

**Overall Experience in Graduate School:** More than 90% of doctoral students in all three divisions reported a “Good” to “Excellent” academic experience. If they were to start over, most students would again choose to attend graduate school. Only 10% would “Definitely” or “Probably not choose to pursue a Ph.D.” Nevertheless, students identified many opportunities for improvement particularly in academic advising and guidance.

**Program Atmosphere:** Most students were pleased with the resources and atmosphere in their program, but one fifth reported that their programs were not responsive to student concerns or lacked fair procedures. Many humanities students complained about the lack of workspace on campus.

**Advising and Mentoring:** Half of students thought their advisors were "very effective," but one third rated their advisors as only “somewhat effective.” Both responses varied widely between departments. About two thirds of students agreed that they received constructive feedback from their advisors.

**Dissertation committees:** Students identified dissertation advising as one of the main opportunities for improvement, since less than half found their thesis committees to be very effective. Of students admitted to candidacy those with dissertation committees varied among the divisions from two thirds in the humanities to nearly all in the natural sciences where committees met more reliably than in the other two divisions. Dissertation progress reports revealed that the frequency of students having formal dissertation committee meetings varied from zero to 100% among the departments in all three divisions.

**Teaching:** All students participate in undergraduate teaching, but less than half were satisfied with the teaching allocation process in their departments owing to concerns about its fairness and transparency. The most shocking finding was that faculty observed only half of students teaching, in spite of clear expectations to do so, and nearly two thirds of students received no direct feedback about their teaching. Responses regarding the value of the teaching experience varied widely between departments with zero to 62% of students strongly agreeing that their departments supported them to be better teachers.

**Professional Development:** Most students came to Yale expecting to be professors and their interest in non-academic careers increased over time in graduate school. Many students desired more help from their advisors and program with their professional development. The Graduate School’s McDougal Center offers a wide range of programs for students. The survey revealed a high level of satisfaction with these...
programs but that many students were not aware they obtained these services from the Graduate School.

**Obstacles to academic progress:** The leading obstacles to academic progress were difficulties managing time, academic and/or social isolation, low self-confidence, limited availability of faculty, writing difficulties, current job market, cost of housing, program structure or requirements and physical and/or mental health issues. Few students reported financial hardships with less than one in ten reporting debt related to graduate studies of more than $20,000, most of which was incurred before entering their doctoral program.

**Departmental Discussions of Doctoral Survey Results**

The Graduate School asked each program to organize discussions of their survey results with their students and their faculty to open a dialog about how programs could better serve their students and create a formal plan to address student concerns. Discussions between students and faculty produced many good ideas to provide stronger academic, personal and professional support for their students. The appendix lists the issues and the actions already being implemented across the university.

**Recommendations for the Graduate School**

1. Work with programs to develop standards appropriate for each division regarding dissertation committee meetings and implement these standards more uniformly.

2. Work with Yale College to assure that course instructors observe their teaching fellows directly in the classroom and provide helpful feedback.

3. Rethink the teaching fellow system to make teaching a central part of the professional training of each student and to match students transparently and fairly with teaching opportunities. This process is under way.

4. Develop strategies and programs to help students deal with challenges they face in managing time, academic and/or social isolation and low self-confidence.

5. Clarify what constitutes advising on professional development and make sure faculty advisors are aware of the resources available to students.

6. Work with the University to address the availability of affordable, high quality housing. The University has announced the construction of a new apartment building targeted for graduate students.

7. Repeat survey at intervals of two to three years to track progress toward goals.

**Recommendations for the Doctoral Programs from the Graduate School**

1. Where student have concerns about the adequacy of advising, the faculty should work with their students to establish departmental standards for the frequency of student-faculty meetings to discuss research and to devise methods to improve the quality of communication and guidance.

2. Provide students with clear written expectations concerning their academic progress and requirements and offer orientations to new students. Where students have expressed concerns, review and reform procedures to assure that they are fair, transparent and equitable, including the process to allocate teaching. Emphasize that helping students become excellent teachers is a major goal of their studies.

3. Sensitize faculty to the issues that impede students’ academic progress and consider strategies to deal with the challenges faced by students with managing time, academic and/or social isolation, self-confidence, limited availability of faculty, writing and physical and/or mental health issues.

4. Provide professional development for graduate students, including training in professional ethics, academic writing, avoiding plagiarism and cultivating professional contacts outside Yale.

5. Encourage students to investigate their options for fulfilling careers inside and outside academia, especially in fields with limited academic job prospects.
Detailed report of findings

Survey process
The survey was a team effort by the Graduate Student Assembly, Graduate School staff, Faculty Advisory Committee of the Graduate School and Yale Office of Institutional Research, which administered the survey. We thank our students for their high level of participation; the overall response rate including partial responses was an excellent 62% across the divisions.

We report responses from the three divisions (humanities, natural sciences, social sciences), but note that the range of responses within divisions often varied as much as the overall differences between divisions. Departments received specific information about responses from their own students, so that they could address any perceived weaknesses identified by students. The marked heterogeneity of responses between departments both underscored the differences amongst the programs but also showed that each program needed to review and address their own survey results, rather than relying on overall or even divisional results.

Overall Experience in Graduate School
More than 90% of doctoral students in all three divisions reported a “Good” to “Excellent” academic experience. If they were to start over, most students would again choose to attend graduate school. Only 10% would “Definitely” or “Probably not choose to pursue a Ph.D.” Nevertheless, students identified many opportunities for improvement particularly in academic advising and guidance.

Program Atmosphere

Resources and responsiveness: Most students agreed that their program offers a vibrant intellectual community, the resources required to succeed, collaborative opportunities and an inclusive climate for women and minorities. However, 20% of students did not find their programs responsive to student concerns and some students felt that procedures were not fair and equitable (with more concerns reported by women, URM and humanities students). The largest source of concern from humanities students was the lack of workspace on campus.

Outside academics: Most respondents agreed that their fellow students are collegial and feel included in informal networks although again, women and URM students report feeling somewhat less included. Additionally, social sciences students (24%) reported more “Poor” or “Fair” non-academic/student life experiences than humanities (19%) and natural sciences (16%) students.

Advising and Mentoring

Written expectations: Most students responded that their programs provided written expectations about academic progress and requirements (humanities 79%, social sciences 93% and natural sciences 93%) but the responses were inconsistent within most programs. A substantial majority of respondents attended a program orientation, but 26% of humanities students reported that no orientation was available to them in spite of other students in the same departments reporting an orientation.

Advising: Fifty percent of students across all divisions thought their advisors were "very effective," with departmental responses ranging from about 25% to 80% in all three divisions. However, about 35% rated their advisors as only “somewhat effective,” with responses from individual departments ranging from 10% to 57%. In all disciplines, 70-78% of students were satisfied with the amount of contact they had with their advisor, but more contact and guidance was desired by a quarter of students in the humanities (with departmental responses from 0 – 45%) and social sciences (with departmental responses from 9 – 39%). The frequency of doctoral students meeting with their advisors was highest in the natural sciences (60% met weekly; departmental responses ranged from 31 – 86%) and more than half of natural science students strongly agreed that their advisors provided adequate opportunities to discuss their research. In the social sciences 55% of students met with their advisors at least twice per month, while humanities
students were more likely to have at least monthly meetings with advisors. The humanities and social science students split between “strongly” and “generally” agreeing that this frequency provided adequate opportunities to discuss their research, but at least 10% desired more discussion of their research.

Dissertation committees: Of students admitted to candidacy those with dissertation committees varied among the divisions: 63% in the humanities (range among departments: 69-100%), 91% in the natural sciences (with departmental responses from 69 – 100%, with a majority at 100%) and 75% in the social sciences (with departmental responses from 56-100%). The fractions of students with at least one annual committee meeting as a group ranged from 84% in the natural sciences (departmental range of 45-100%) to 52% in the humanities (departmental range of 42% - 83%) and 48% in the social sciences (departmental range of 7% - 89%). In all three divisions 51-69% of students felt the amount of contact with their committee was correct within a range, but 43-50% of humanities and social science students felt that the frequency of thesis committee meetings was insufficient or were unsure if they met frequently enough. Dissertation progress reports revealed that the frequency of students having formal dissertation committee meetings varied from zero to 100% among the departments in all three divisions (see figure).

Constructive feedback: Across all divisions 42-46% of students strongly agreed and 32% generally agreed that they received constructive feedback from their advisors. However, less than half of students found their thesis committees to be very effective (humanities 34% overall with department ranges from 8-50%; social sciences 30% overall with department ranges of 20-38%; natural sciences 22% overall with department ranges of 0 – 41%). An additional 40% found their committees somewhat effective.

Teaching

Teaching opportunities: Most doctoral students had taught recently (74% overall and 84% among students admitted to candidacy) with 53% leading semester-long discussion sections. Eighty five percent of students taught in an area related to their program of study. Only 5% of respondents, most in the humanities, had participated in independent teaching as PTAIs (teaching or co-teaching a seminar, or as Associates in Teaching). No students in the social or natural sciences reported co-teaching an independent seminar as a PTAI. About 40% of students in all three divisions were satisfied with the teaching allocation process in their departments but many students (36% humanities, 23% natural sciences, 28% social sciences) felt that the process was not fair and transparent.

Feedback from professors: An overwhelming majority of students who taught reported that faculty clearly explained their expectations (89%) and course goals (92%). Sixty percent of respondents who had taught met weekly with their course instructor, but overall only 54% of students reported being observed by faculty while teaching, and in the social sciences only 16% of students reported being observed. Of the students who had been observed, 75% received helpful feedback from their instructor, but 19% received none. Thus, about 60% of students received no direct feedback about their teaching.

Preparation: Students regard developing teaching expertise to be important for securing faculty (71%) and non-faculty (53%) positions. Most respondents felt prepared to teach at Yale (76%) and to deliver an introductory course (71%), an advanced seminar (57%) or a graduate seminar (48%) in their fields. Seventy-five percent believed they had access to resources to become better teachers, but only 49% considered their programs to be supportive of students becoming better teachers.

Departmental ranges: Response differences between departments were striking with regard to students’ preparation to teach and departmental support for teaching. Depending on the department, between 14-73% of students strongly agreed they were prepared to teach an introductory course, while 6-45% of students strongly agreed they were prepared to design and deliver an advanced course in their field.
Depending on the department between zero and 62% of students strongly agreed that their departments supported them to be better teachers.

**Professional Development**

*Career plans:* Most students (82%) came to Yale expecting to be professors with the highest proportion in the humanities (92%) and lowest in the natural sciences (75%). One third or less initially considered other academic careers or business and government careers as additional or principal options. After one or more years at Yale, the number of students who saw themselves in the professoriate dropped modestly by 7% in the humanities, 5% in the social sciences and 17% in the natural sciences. While interest in the professoriate remained high, students also think about other options as they progress. The proportion of students considering non-academic careers increased from 56% upon entering to 93% currently, so more advanced students were considering careers in industry (+21%) and government (+15%).

*Career building activities:* Over 80% of post-candidacy students had attended a conference, and over half had published, submitted an article or grant, or presented at a conference. As expected, natural science students were more likely to have submitted a grant application (52% vs. 38% humanities and 43% social science) or article (53% vs. 37% humanities and 45% social science), while natural science and social science students were slightly less likely to have attended a conference (humanities 85%, social sciences 79%, natural sciences 74%) or presented a paper or poster (humanities 71%, social sciences 59%, natural sciences 62%). Variability among departments within a division was higher than between divisions. For example, paper or poster presentation varied between 22%-90% by department, article submission varied between 15% and 94%, and grant submission varied between 0% and 74% in all 3 divisions.

Between 40-55% of post-candidacy students had received no training in academic writing, grant preparation, publishing or developing professional contacts outside of Yale. Federally-mandated programs assured that virtually every natural science student had training in academic and research ethics, but many post-candidacy students had no training in avoiding plagiarism (humanities 62% with departmental ranges of 45-79%; social sciences 59% with departmental ranges of 38-68%) or training in research ethics (humanities 63% with departmental ranges of 50-78%; social sciences 41% with departmental ranges of 14-73%). (Note: this survey result prompted the Graduate School to require a training session on professional ethics including avoiding plagiarism as part of orientation.)

*Support from program and advisor for professional development:* Many students “strongly” or “generally” felt their advisors needed to provide stronger promotion of their professional development. Thirty two percent of respondents either disagreed or were neutral responding to the statement “My program is preparing me adequately for my current career goals”. This number was actually higher (35%) for post-candidacy students than for those preparing for candidacy (28%), and slightly higher for women (36%) than for men (29%).

*Support from the Graduate School:* The Graduate School’s McDougal Center offers a wide range of programs for doctoral students. Annually these programs serve about 900 unique students for career services, 500 for diversity activities, about 800 for teacher preparation, more than 1000 for student life activities and about 800 for help with writing. The Office of International Students and Scholars also serves about 800 doctoral students per year. The survey revealed a high level of satisfaction with these programs but that many students were not aware they obtained these services from the Graduate School.

**Obstacles to Academic Progress**

*Obstacles to progress:* The leading obstacles to academic progress (combining major and minor obstacles) were difficulties managing time (58%), academic and/or social isolation (42%), low self-confidence (42%), limited availability of faculty (41%), writing difficulties (41%), job market (38%), cost of housing (37%), program structure or requirements (35%) and physical and/or mental health issues (32%). Only one of the major obstacles differed substantially across divisions: more students in the humanities (26%) than natural sciences (12%) or social sciences (16%) cited the job market as a major
problem. More URM students (27%) had major difficulty managing their time than students overall (16%).

Writing was a major problem for 10% of students, more frequently in the social sciences (20%) than the humanities (13%) and natural sciences (5%). Immigration laws and regulations were problems for 35% of international students versus 13% overall. Difficulties with the English language was a major or minor obstacle for 24% of international students versus 9% overall.

Differences between departments were the most striking aspect of the major obstacles to academic progress: current job market (0% to 38%, cf. 17% overall); difficulties managing time (0% to 36%, cf. 16% overall); low self-confidence (3% to 36%, cf. 15% overall); academic and/or social isolation (0% to 33%, cf. 12% overall); limited availability of faculty (0% to 25%, 11% overall); program structure or requirements (0% to 31%, cf. 7% overall); unsupportive climate in program (0% to 23%, cf. 9% overall); insufficient financial support (0% to 31%, cf. 8% overall); and writing difficulties (0% to 33%).

Eighty two percent of doctoral students expected to have no debt related to graduate studies when they receive their degree, and only 8% reported debt related to graduate studies of more than $20,000, most of which was incurred before entering their doctoral program.

Departmental Discussions of Doctoral Survey Results

Discussions between students and faculty produced many good ideas for programs to provide stronger academic, personal and professional support for their students. The appendix lists issues and the actions already being implemented across the university. Here we highlight a few of these good ideas received from the programs.

• As current thesis committee meetings after candidacy are insufficient, the department will recommend meetings begin prior to candidacy as well as better and formal communication with committee members; faculty will also consider and encourage more informal interactions.
• Use a form to provide clear feedback from the thesis committee, which the DGS will discuss with each student. Increase frequency of thesis committee meetings after year 3 to increase feedback on the project.
• Provide formal written evaluations of teaching analogous to formal written evaluations from thesis committee meetings.
• Institute standardized method for observing and reporting of student teaching that will be fed into student’s dossier, which can be used for letters of recommendation.
• Post policy or guidelines for making TA assignments on the program website.
• Since a large number of students found writing to be an obstacle to their progress (which surprised the faculty) implement a seminar course on academic writing, use university tutors more widely and encourage closer interactions between the advisors and their students when working on joint papers.
• The DGS launched a series of job market workshops consisting of “hands-on” faculty feedback on components of the job application, discussions with recent graduates with success on academic job market, mock conference, Skype interviews and job talks, and panel discussions on careers with former students now working in publishing, public history and arts and non-college teaching.
• Discuss each student’s career development planning and activities as part of thesis committee meeting and record the outcome on the evaluation form (adopted by multiple biomedical science programs).
Departmental discussions of doctoral survey results

Summary

More than 90% of doctoral programs held discussions of the doctoral survey results with their students and faculty as requested by the Graduate School. These meetings allowed students to raise concerns for open discussion, leading in many cases to implementation of specific recommendations to address the concerns. Students in all disciplines had concerns in five broad categories: teaching, professional and career development, advising, program atmosphere and curriculum.

General comments about the doctoral survey

While many programs were pleased with the overall positive assessment they received in the survey, some programs also expressed concerns about the data. For example, only a small fraction of students in some programs took the survey, so the faculty worried about whether the respondents were representative. In some cases the results did not mesh with the feelings or experiences of students at the discussions. In other cases changes had been made or are underway so survey results did not reflect current conditions. For confidentiality reasons small programs received only division-wide and not program-specific data, although many requested and received summaries of their results. For combined programs, the survey was not as useful, since it had not been designed to elicit responses about each component program.

Despite its limitations, most departments deemed the survey to be useful in sparking fruitful discussions between students and faculty (“while the survey itself served mainly as a starting point for our conversation, gathering together to discuss it did in the event lead to a congenial, consequential, and altogether productive meeting;” “the very existence of the survey is stimulating discussions and reflection that may not have happened otherwise”). In one department, the students even initiated “their own internal survey more finely tuned to their particular situation” and presented the results with concrete recommendations that were considered and accepted by the faculty. Several departments requested that the Graduate School repeat the survey in a few years time, while other departments indicated that they now plan to hold regular meetings with students.

The following comments came directly from reports submitted by doctoral programs and were edited to provide a consistency of style.

Teaching

Students’ concerns about teaching focused on 1) inadequate feedback on their teaching from instructors, 2) insufficient teaching opportunities or teaching experience types, and 3) lack of transparency about teaching assignments. Departments addressed these concerns with simple to novel remedies.

1. To provide better feedback to students about their teaching:

   • Remind faculty of their obligation to observe and evaluate student teaching.
   • Forward Yale College course evaluations to teaching fellows.
   • Ask instructors for brief summary of feedback to be given to TA’s.
   • Provide formal written evaluations of teaching analogous to formal written evaluation of thesis committee meeting.
   • Institute a standardized method to observe and evaluate teaching to include in student’s dossier for later use in letters of recommendation.
   • Encourage dissertation advisors to observe their students teaching so they can provide firsthand knowledge of their teaching abilities in letters of recommendation.
   • In a team taught course each instructor should provide written feedback to the TA and copy the course organizer who will discuss the evaluations with the TA.
   • Circulate a set of “best practices” about “teaching with teaching fellows” to all faculty/instructors.
2. To enhance teaching opportunities and experiences:
   - Urge instructors to give discussion sections more structure and involve TA’s in organizing the course.
   - Enhance and restructure special training for students teaching undergraduates.
   - Request instructors to post expectations of TA’s, possibly on list of courses seeking TA’s.
   - Make available information about teaching opportunities in other departments.
   - Provide students with teaching experiences beyond the introductory level such as public talks at the Leitner Family Observatory & Planetarium (for which they will receive guidance on giving good public talks through the Professional Seminar series) and special summer teaching opportunities.

3. To make teaching assignments more transparent:
   - Post all TA assignments for students to choose 3, which the DGS will use to make assignments.
   - Post policy or guidelines for making TA assignments on the program website.

Professional and career development

Students across the disciplines desired professionalization activities to develop skills of the profession, especially writing. They also requested career development activities geared not only to academic but also to non-academic careers. Departments considered or implemented a variety of recommendations in response.

   - Launch a series of job market workshops from the DGS office consisting of “hands-on” faculty feedback on components of the job application; discussions with recent graduates with academic jobs; mock conference, Skype interviews and job talks; panel discussions on non-academic careers with former students now working in publishing, public history and arts, and non-college teaching.
   - Initiate a biannual Professional Seminar series with outside speakers in non-academic careers, and sponsor sessions on field-specific writing issues.
   - Have faculty provide more formalized critiques and feedback on the qualifying exam proposal and prospectus as one form of training in scientific writing.
   - Begin academic professionalization earlier in graduate school and have writing in courses be more oriented toward publication of publishable papers.
   - Support students who organized a biomedical sciences career fair featuring PhD scientists in diverse careers, academic and non-academic, with support of faculty and funds from departments.
   - Discuss career development plans and activities as part of each thesis committee meeting and record the outcome on the evaluation form (adopted by multiple biomedical science programs).
   - Reinstate professional development workshops with new sessions dedicated to dissertation writing and publications.
   - Help students organize a seminar series featuring speakers using their scientific training in interesting and diverse ways; help students identify appropriate alumni speakers.
   - Appoint a faculty coordinator and a student representative to organize faculty-led workshops on professional development topics (job applications and interviews, publishing, leading seminars, etc.).
   - Formally assign to the assistant director of graduate studies for each sub-field the responsibility for providing sub-field specific advice on career and professional development issues.
   - Approve departmental funds for student events on professionalization and career development.
   - Plan semi-regular workshops or brown-bag lunches on professionalization topics.
   - Produce models and guidelines for graduate-level seminar papers and publishable articles.
   - Integrate more structured writing assistance into seminars.
   - Collect information on Slavic-appropriate internal/external fellowships and grants, as well as tips on archival research, on the classesv2 portal.
   - Ask the Graduate School make Yale fellowship database more user-friendly and provide better guidance for internal/external fellowships.
• Propose several remedies to address the large number of students saying that writing is an obstacle to their progress (which surprised the faculty) including a seminar course on academic writing, wider use of university tutors and closer interactions between advisors and students when working on joint papers.
• Create alumni blurbs and contacts (those in and out of academia) for the website, both for a sense of continuity and for building professional connections.

Advising

The discussions revealed students’ concerns about shortcomings in advice from thesis advisors and committees. Other discussions revealed that the most appropriate types of advising might change during the course of graduate study. Faculty in various departments considered and/or implemented the following recommendations in response to these and other concerns about advising.

• Encourage busy advisors to make more time for their students who need extra help.
• Recommend thesis committee meetings beginning in the year after qualifying and insist on better, formal communication with committee members, since current committee meetings are insufficient; encourage faculty to have more informal interactions with their students.
• Insist that faculty attend official graduate student talks to provide more input from people other than their adviser. (Faculty made a renewed commitment to attend the talks.)
• Strengthen the existing guidelines governing student progress in the combined program for approval by both departments and posting online. Consider the use of progress checklists to help track student progress more clearly and efficiently.
• Use a form to provide clear feedback from the thesis committee, which the DGS will discuss with each student after the thesis committee meeting. Increase frequency of thesis committee meeting after third year to increase feedback on the project.
• Assign temporary advisors to first year graduate students.
• Assign an official second advisor to each student to enhance mentoring especially about non-academic careers and have this second mentor submit a supplement to the thesis committee form on career planning. Provide faculty with advice or training on effective mentoring, perhaps during the faculty research-in-progress series.
• Offer incoming students an individual faculty mentor for their years of coursework. Have the DGS meet with relevant faculty in January to discuss student performance during the first semester, and provide feedback to students if needed. Follow up at the annual faculty meeting in May.
• Recommend thesis committee meetings every 6 months following approval of thesis prospectus.
• Provide students with different kinds of advising/monitoring during two transition periods. 1) From course work to QP/prospectus toward the end of the second year, more structured discussions between student and his/her mentor should take place and be ensured by the DGS. Each student should have two or three potential QPs in mind, and one of the QPs or the prospectus should be presented in the spring work-in-progress seminar of their third year. 2) From prospectus to completion of dissertation, require a meeting between student and his/her committee members by the end of each spring. The student is expected to work on the dissertation based on the committee's suggestions and to present at each fall work-in-progress seminar. Strive to have committee member(s) at that presentation.
• Clarify the program requirements for the combined program and post to the website. Institute annual cohort meetings with DGS to discuss general expectations for each year of study (for example, a 2nd-year meeting to address preparation for the qualifying exams, minor field, and language needs).
• Consider replacing the annual Dissertation Progress Colloquium with an annual Dissertation Committee Meeting, where student would meet with the entire committee to discuss overall progress and specific feedback on one or more completed chapters.
Program atmosphere

Students in many departments expressed the desire for more and better activities that promote the intellectual and social life within the department, as well as for better faculty participation at such activities. A very small fraction of students in many departments reported hearing disparaging remarks based on personal attributes made by students, postdocs and/or faculty. In most cases, the students present at the discussions did not have the same experience. Nonetheless, the faculty made it clear that such behavior is completely unacceptable.

- Promote dialogue between sub-fields with either all-department required seminars for advanced grad students to discuss their work (variation: an end-of-career keystone talk by each student, since we do not have a formal dissertation defense) or a weekly class or colloquium organized by students for professors and students from each sub-discipline to present their work.
- Start a department Facebook page as a community message board to enhance communication within a department where students are dispersed across the university including the West Campus.
- Approve modest funding for students to invite provocative speakers for departmental events and organize 3 to 4 faculty talks per term to promote the intellectual community in the department.
- Schedule biannual pizza meetings for all students and the DGS to discuss the program, implement changes and obtain feedback to be shared with the faculty. Have students organize an informal biweekly lunch for 10 students and two faculty members to discuss a variety of topics.
- Consider ways to improve faculty attendance at research in progress (RIPs) presentations and thesis defenses, since some students feel ignored at times. Merge student and postdoc RIPs to increase faculty attendance and provide the best possible feedback for students.
- Sponsor events/activities to promote grad student community building (e.g. grad student happy hour) and foster better department atmosphere.
- Seek ways to reallocate funds to support graduate student participation in conferences.
- Continue the fall and colloquia receptions and encourage all members of the department to attend; produce a coordinated calendar (Google Calendar) for better scheduling of events; spread events more evenly throughout the semester.

Curriculum

In many departments, the faculty accepted a variety of recommendations from students to improve the curriculum, including suggestions for new courses on disciplinary topics as well as workshops or seminars with practical goals such as developing a seminar paper into a publishable article, how to approach orals, and grant and paper writing.

- Approve the students’ wish for a graduate seminar on various topics in applied math.
- Improve the availability of graduate courses by scheduling courses to avoid conflicts with courses of interest in other departments, move up required courses as early as possible in the sequence so that prerequisites for advanced courses can be met early on, and improve the awareness of the faculty regarding courses suitable for students in other departments, such as the Chemistry department.
- Update the graduate program information on the departmental web site, which clarifies requirements and expectations, and created a graduate student edited wiki style guide to the graduate program.
- Reduce the course requirement from 6 to 5 to allow students to get immersed in their projects sooner; move up qualifying exam from spring to fall of second year.
- Revive an open-topic research seminar in the second year with the aim of turning a seminar paper into a publishable article; revisit the Program’s language requirements, and the need for the faculty to be clearer in spelling out the reasoning behind their expectations.
- Organize a workshop with faculty and student panel on how to approach orals.
• Propose five new graduate courses oriented to second year graduate students and implement two of them this year.

• Consider requests from students for an early course in grant and paper writing, and that the qualifying exam be written on the thesis topic.

• Revise curriculum to decrease the number of required courses, thus addressing student concerns of heavy course demands (to be implemented in the Fall of 2014). Consider a summer boot camp to help students prepare for doctoral study. In addition, address time management in one of our courses and require all students in the dissertation phase to meet monthly as a small group with faculty and other students to address issues related to dissertation implementation.