



## UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

### *The Graduate School*

OFFICE OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

*G-1 Communications*

*Seattle, Washington 98195-3770*

### **Notes from Meeting of Interdisciplinary Programs Housed in the Graduate School and IGERT Programs with Provost Phyllis Wise April 24, 2007**

#### Attendees:

Suzanne Ortega, Vice Provost and Dean, The Graduate School  
Melissa Austin (Public Health Genetics), Associate Dean for Academic Programs,  
The Graduate School  
Maresi Nerad, Associate Dean, The Graduate School  
Tom Gething, Associate Dean for Post Doc Affairs, The Graduate School  
Don Wulff, Director CIDR and Associate Dean, The Graduate School  
Loveday Conquest (QERM)  
Woody Sullivan (Astrobiology)  
Gordon Bradley (Individual PhD/IGERT Urban Ecology)  
Doug Sprugel (Masters in Science for Biology Teachers)  
Resat Kasaba (Near & Middle Eastern Studies)  
Craig ZumBrunnen (Urban Ecology)  
Tom Hinckley (Multinational Collaboration on Challenges to the Environment)  
Lee Ann Campbell (Pathobiology)  
Greg Shelton (GTTL)  
Marina Alberti (Urban Design & Planning)  
Henk Roelink (Molecular & Cellular Biology)  
Richard Wright (Linguistics - IGERT hopeful)  
Mark Bothwell (Neurobiology & Behavior)  
Francois Baneyx (Nanotechnology)

Dean Suzanne Ortega asked all attendees to introduce themselves.

Provost Phyllis Wise shared comments on the interconnectedness of the intellectual pursuits in the University's programs. Since arriving in August of 2005, she has been meeting with faculty directors individually, and in groups, to understand the UW's programs. In the process, work on a vision statement for the UW emerged in three parts:

- 1) Students - as an educational institution the UW has chosen a body of students that is diverse on many levels.
- 2) Discovery - discovery is at the heart of the university.

- 3) Service to the citizens of our community and state - as a large institution the UW carries a responsibility that smaller institutions don't have.

Although the UW Vision Statement (<http://www.washington.edu/discovery/>) could easily apply to many universities, seven additional statements were developed that are uniquely Washington and help define the UW. One feature that makes a university successful is the graduate programs offered, because graduate students are the leaders of the future.

#### TOPICS COVERED DURING THE OPEN DISCUSSION

Interdisciplinary programs are represented at the UW, yet academia is set up by disciplines and a tension exists between the two. It would be appreciated if central administration would nourish interdisciplinarity. What ideas do you have?

*Provost:* The tension is there and many reports have been done over the years to consider the challenges. The Provost does not plan to create a Vice Provost for an office of interdisciplinary programs. Instead, an interdisciplinary Council will be formed, with representatives from Vice Provosts of the Graduate School, of Research, and of Undergraduate Education, along with other faculty representation. A chair of this committee has not yet been designated and therefore cannot be announced. The purpose of the committee will be to meet regularly, take recommendations from reports and programs, and then implement recommendations. Some financial support will be provided.

But we must carefully choose which interdisciplinary areas are important to pursue. When some programs outlive their initial student interest or leadership, then we must also be able to disband them.

It can be argued that interdisciplinary programs attract some of the best students.

*Provost:* Academic disciplines are the intellectual areas that have met the test of time. Interdisciplinarity can be taught within a discipline, such as in foundational introductory courses, and could be used to maintain enrollment in 101-type courses.

Interdisciplinarity at the expense of traditional disciplines should not be a problem since they enhance each other. However, some disciplines have individual cultures that are hard for interdisciplinary interests to penetrate.

There are institutional barriers for junior faculty who want to create new interdisciplinary courses. In addition, junior faculty have a difficult time having their interdisciplinary research valued since their publications are in journals outside those of their traditional discipline.

*Provost:* The methods used to evaluate faculty need to be corrected so that interdisciplinary efforts are valued and counted.

On the issue of resources, it can be difficult for interdisciplinary programs funded by agencies that have strict guidelines on how funds can be spent. The money vanishes after 5 or 10 years unless it is structured to handle a transition to self-sustaining. Can any resources be funneled to sustain interdisciplinary programs? And how does the administration plan to play a role in participating in global affairs?

*Provost:* Interdisciplinary programs should not be started unless they can be sustained, which means provisions have to be made right from the beginning on how funding will continue. It's not a sustainable model to fund a startup program for one or two years without planning for what comes next.

On global affairs, Susan Jeffords' office is actively involved in looking at which programs in which countries will get our attention. Not all the opportunities can be accommodated and the UW will be selective in where we participate.

It would seem that interdisciplinary programs might best fit the second part of the UW vision statement, concerning discovery. The intent of interdisciplinarity supports discovery and independent thinking, but needs resource commitment to be sustainable.

*Provost:* Discovery is not done better by either traditional disciplines or interdisciplinary programs; it takes many forms. There is much impressive work going on in humanities and arts that are done in a single department. This is not to undervalue the importance of interdisciplinarity, but it's not the only place where discovery happens.

IGERTS are education grants, but is there an expectation at the UW that they are attached to research grants? Is there a relationship between continuation of IGERT grants and research grants?

*Provost:* IGERTS are thought of as being a product of faculty research grants; they enable faculty to be more capable in their research. As soon as a program is initiated, planning for how it will be sustained must be addressed. Requests for administrative funding for new projects that ring most true are those that have matching funding from a department to share in the investment; training grants and title nine funds don't begin to cover the expenses to sustain a new program.

Some of the interdisciplinary programs are among the most innovative and have the potential for funding development. Considering the Graduate School has little money to support these programs, shouldn't the development aspect be tapped?

*Provost:* It would be great to endow the Graduate School (and the Honors Program and the Robinson Center), but it's difficult to convince a donor about the value of graduate education. Donors recognize the connection between

getting a degree from a school or college and tend to make their contributions in those places. Contributing to graduate education in general is a fairly esoteric concept to most donors. It will also take a huge amount of educating the legislature to invest more in graduate education.

Central advancement on funding graduate education is on the radar with development. We are discussing interdisciplinarity as area on which we want to build. (Graduate School Development Director)

Resources could be used to fund an RA to assist IGERTS going through the application process; sometimes it takes several application attempts to be approved for funding.

*Provost:* When programs come to request funding from central administration, they will be asked if they have first gone to their dean, because we will want to know where, on the dean's priority list, the request might stand. If support is recommended, it should be included when the dean comes to the Provost's office to talk about their budget.

The tension between interdisciplinary programs and the disciplines shouldn't be framed as a competition. There is a need for educating the campus community about interdisciplinary programs so that they are not perceived as a drain, or a take away. We want the same high standards to apply to interdisciplinarity as apply to the disciplines.

*Provost:* Yes, this is absolutely the challenge we face. An inspirational talk by UW women's volleyball coach, Jim McCloughlin, once included the statement: "If you can't measure it, you can't tell if you're making progress." This is how we should approach evaluating interdisciplinary programs. We have to be selective in which ones earn the support needed to succeed, and it should be expected that for every one that makes it, four will have been denied. It is imperative to build the important interdisciplinary structures that will allow interdisciplinary programs to succeed, but we cannot support all of them. And we agree, the same level of standards will apply to interdisciplinarity.