



Retreat Minutes

4th Annual CSE Doctoral Student Retreat

Cupples 2, Rm 100
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Contents

Contents	1
Doctoral Student Retreat 2007 Agenda:	3
State of the Department (by Dr. Turner, Dept Chair)	4
Student Activities	4
Improving Graduate Student Talks	4
Description	4
Discussion	4
Recommendations	5
Resolutions	5
Hot Topics Seminar Series	6
Description	6
Discussion	6
Resolution	6
Description	7
Discussion	7
Resolutions	7
Faculty Candidates and Student Interactions	8
Description	8
Discussion	8
Resolution	8
Dissertation Rejection Policies	9
Description	9
Discussion	9
Resolution	9
Reimbursement Policies	10
Description	10
Discussion	10
Resolutions	10
Teaching Compensation	11
Description	11
Discussion	11
Degree Milestone Spacing	12
Description	12
Discussion	12
Resolution	12
Additional Items	13
Description	13
Discussion	13
Resolutions	13
GSA Specific	14
Responsibility of the GSA	14
Description	14
Discussion	14

Resolutions	14
GSA Specific	15
Inclusion of masters students	15
Description	15
Discussion	15
Resolutions	15

Doctoral Student Retreat 2007 Agenda:

- State of the Department (by Dr. Turner)
- Student Activities
 - Improving Graduate Student Talks
 - Hot Topics Seminar Series
 - General Student Body Participation in Events
 - Faculty Candidates and Student Interactions
- Departmental Policy
 - Dissertation Rejection Policies
 - Reimbursement Policies
 - Teaching Compensation
 - Degree Milestone Spacing
- Additional Items
- GSA Specific
 - Responsibilities of the GSA
 - Inclusion of Masters Students in GSA Board and Retreat

State of the Department (by Dr. Turner, Dept Chair)

09:00 - 09:42

(See addendum, *dss_state_of_dept.ppt*, for slides)

Student Activities

Improving Graduate Student Talks

09:42 - 10:35

Description

The quality of talks at the DSS and Hot Topics seminars is sometimes lacking. What is worse is there is no support for translating the feedback received at the seminar into a better presentation (and presentation skills). What can be done to improve the quality of the talks and help students improve their presentation skills? Proposed Ideas:

- Have additional seminars for students who have bad talks to have another attempt at giving the talk.
- Have a faculty member or senior student sit down with students that gave bad talks and help them improve their talk.
- Extra incentives for taking the DSS talk seriously.

Discussion

Issue: Develop a culture that supports giving good talks

Suggestions:

- Pre-talk given by students to advisor and/or lab
- Provide more opportunity for seminar talks
- **Add 10-15 min feedback session after talk w/ faculty right after the seminar in the same room.**
- Track the progress of student talks (bad and good)
- **Advisors should attend student talks**

Issue: How do we foster improvement?

Suggestions:

- Incentives and/or Penalty
- Coaching and/or Practicing
- Seminar Course
- **Advisor should meet with student before and after talk**

Issue: Incentives vs. Penalty

Suggestions:

- No punitive measures; **DSS is a low-risk talk**
- **Public embarrassment** is already a “penalty”
- Intrinsic consequences such as poor job recommendations
- Students seeking industry jobs are less motivated to improve

Issue: Coaching vs. Practicing

Suggestions:

- Coaching: **some students need more than practice**
- Add a seminar course for credit
- Teachings Center maybe available to give seminar on giving talks (they have given seminars on teaching)

Issue: Is it necessary to have a seminar course?

Suggestions:

- **Current system seems to work for majority**
- New students who will be TAs have to first pass the mandatory speaking evaluation exam. This is being put into effect by the School of Arts and Sciences.

Issue: Is there a mechanism for identifying poor talks?

Suggestions:

- **Important for student to number their slides (to facilitate comments)**
- **Include a check-box for faculty forms: “Is this a problem talk?”**
- **2/3 “problem talks” means Department need to contact student**

Recommendations

- **No laptops** in the room except the speaker’s and the DSS chair

Resolutions

- Improve faculty evaluation forms
 - Include a check-box for “Is this problem talk?”
- New requirements for slides
 - Include #'s on the slides
- Post-presentation meeting
 - Student meet (privately) with faculty one at a time after talk
- Advisors support
 - Must attend the student’s talk
 - Should meet with student before and after talk

Hot Topics Seminar Series

10:35 - 10:50

Description

The Hot Topics Seminar series was started recently to broaden the knowledge of students who are getting ready to enter the market. The idea is to introduce students to the important topics in a field of Computer Science which they are not active in. The format of these talks has been a 30-40 minute talk followed by questions. It is held instead of a Doctoral Student Seminar talk on Friday at 12:30. Proposed options:

- Require graduating doctoral students to give a Hot Topics talk in their field instead of the Doctoral Student Seminar talk they would normally give.
- Give the option to any student to give a Hot Topics talk instead of their Doctoral Student Seminar talk.

Discussion

Issue: Format of the talk

Suggestions:

- Spread the talks out throughout of the semester
- 30 min talks (similar to DSS Talk)

Issue: Quality of the talk

Suggestions:

- **Not everyone “can” do a Hot topics talk**
- Only 3-4 per semester
- Faculty members should do talks
- Descriptions of what the talk should be send out
- Dissertation defenses could be used a Hot Topic talk

Issue: Solicited vs. Mandatory

Suggestions:

- **Solicited is better; esp. for quality control**
- Talks are not practice, but to inform audience
- **Replacement for DSS talk; esp. for graduating students**
- Student should be in the last year of program

Resolution

A Hot Topic talk is an optional replacement for a DSS talk. Students will be solicited to give a Hot Topic. There will be 3-4 talks in an academic year.

General Student Body Participation in Events
10:50 - 11:10

Description

The students who participate in student activities always seem to be the same students. Members of different labs tend to have little interaction and some ethnic subgroups have formed their own community. This is really too bad, since interaction with a broad set of people enriches us both personally and academically. Is there anything we can do to involve all students in the department on a personal and professional level?

Discussion

Issue: How can we encourage Asian students to attend events?

Suggestions:

- Discuss culturally diverse topics at social events
- **Include a description of events** (social or academic) in emails
- **Invite them to organize events**
- **Reach out to advisors** to encourage students to participate
- Form a committee of Asian of students and faculty to address the problem
- Persuade non-Asian students to invite Asian lab mates to events

Issue: Why is it important that Asian students attend events?

Suggestions:

- To improve **social skills**, which are invaluable in the real world
- To improve their English speaking skills
- To help improve the **quality of talks**

Issue: Do they know what the GSA does?

Suggestion:

- **Outline the purpose of the GSA at the Orientation**
- Describe events in GSA email

Resolutions

- Involve Asian student in organization of events
- Include event description in all GSA event-emails
- Ask advisors to encourage their Asian students to attend non-social events
- Introduce the GSA at the new student Orientation

Faculty Candidates and Student Interactions

13:30 - 13:40

Description

There has been some effort to have job candidates interact with the graduate student body. Past efforts have included scheduling a meeting with several students, and having candidates attend happy hour. Is there enough interest from students (especially students near graduation) to have a standard meeting scheduled for all candidates? This also extends to having students meet colloquium speakers. One idea was to have a graduate student take the Candidate to breakfast.

Discussion

Issue: Colloquium speaker vs. Faculty Candidate

Suggestions:

- Group meetings for faculty candidate since their schedules are more packed
- Individual meetings for Colloquium speakers
- Colloquium speakers are better networking opportunities

Issue: Students do not know they can request to meet with a Colloquium speaker?

Suggestions:

- Extend same open invitation sent to faculty to grad students
- **Let students know that they can request to meet with the Colloquium speaker**

Resolution

Let students know that they can request to meet with any Colloquium speakers by sending an email to Myrna. This is mainly applicable for Colloquium speakers and not faculty candidates. Faculty candidates have a tight schedule and only if time permits, students will be allowed to have some time with them.

Departmental Policy

Dissertation Rejection Policies

13:40 - 13:48

Description

There are new policies concerning the Dissertation Defense. The committee size for the Dissertation Defense must be comprised of 6 members. Each member can choose to accept the dissertation, conditionally accept the dissertation with modifications, or reject the dissertation. If one member of the committee rejects the dissertation then the Dean of Engineering decides whether the student will be awarded a degree or not. If two members of the committee reject the dissertation then the Dean instructs the Department to form a committee to review the Dissertation and decide whether the student will be awarded a degree. However, there is no requirement that the committee be formed in a timely fashion, effectively also giving the department chair the ability to fail the student. Is this the policy we want?

Discussion

Issue: Is this a “pocket veto” clause in the policy?

Resolution

No, there is no “pocket veto” power give to the department chair. Someone else can identify the three faculty members of the committee, and these members can come from any department in any school. The clause in the policy will be rephrased.

Reimbursement Policies

13:48 - 14:00

Description

Unfortunately reimbursement has become an issue again due to departmental changes. Students are expected to pay for expenses (conference registration, travel, etc) themselves, and then be reimbursed. The reasoning is that if expenses are paid for by credit card then a reimbursement can be secured before the balance on the card is due. In practice, this does not always work, especially for international students, which must obtain a travel visa, substantially before the trip.

Discussion

Issue: We need an “advance” system esp. for foreign travel

Resolution: An “advance” system is in place, but limited to 30 days

Issue: Can the advance system be extended to 30 days?

Resolution: The policy for extension in unclear

Issues: Is there another way for advances; e.g. a departmental credit card?

Resolutions:

- No, but the dean is trying to address the issue; it's a university level issue.
- A delegation of students (presidents of the various student organizations) can go to the Chancellor, if the issue cannot be addressed by the dean

Resolutions

Dr. Turner will clarify the policy for extending the current “advance” system.

Teaching Compensation

14:00 - 14:10

Description

There has been an issue with some students not being compensated for the classes they taught recently. Some of this has been due to the departmental shift in teaching policy. What is the policy for teaching compensation? Will students who fulfill their mandatory teaching requirement be compensated? Will students who teach a class after they have completed their teaching requirement be compensated? What is the policy with Teaching Assistants? What should these policies be?

Discussion

Issue: When exactly do you get compensation for teaching?

Resolution: Dr. Turner will address the issue

Issue: Do you get compensation when fulfilling the TA, PhD requirement?

Resolution: No, this is an education requirement.

Issue: What if you go beyond the teaching requirement of the PhD?

Resolution: Dr. Turner will clarify the issue

Issue: What is the difference if you are on the Department funds vs. Grant funds?

Resolution: If the department supports you then you are teaching for you assistantship. On grant fund, there is a potential for compensation.

Issue: What about international students who are teaching?

Resolution: For international student there is 20hr cap except for summer semesters. Nonetheless, teaching about 20hrs during the semester does **not** reduce OPT or CPT; Sharon can work her *magic* to fix the “overload” situation (by increasing the student’s hourly pay).

Degree Milestone Spacing

14:10 - 14:49

Description

There is a new requirement that the Dissertation Proposal Defense come at least 6 months before the Dissertation Defense. Additionally, the order between oral and written qualifiers is no longer important. Are these policies likely to change soon?

Discussion

Issue: Can the oral and written qualification be done in any order?

Resolution: No. Refer to the doctoral student guide to know the order.

Issue: Is the 6-month rule enforced?

Resolution: Yes, this requirement is mandated by the graduate school of Arts & Sciences.

Issue: Some students/advisors are unaware of the forms/procedure for the proposal defense.

Resolution:

Policy will be clarified on the Doctoral student guide, and students should inform Madeline of their upcoming defense.

Issues: When should a student propose?

Suggestions:

- Make the gap between the proposal defense to the defense longer than 6 month
- Gap should be 18 months
- Student should have completed 1/3rd of the work done (or 20%-30%)
- 6 months is too short
- No accepted proposal in your 4th year then you should be kicked out
- Students should get a pay rise for each milestone completed
- The proposal is contract with students committee; before the work is done
- Impossible to plan research since, by its nature, research is unpredictable
- Proposal should be written based on an NSF grant format

Resolution

The 6-month rule remains, but advisor can extend it at their discretion. This issue may be re-addressed at the faculty level.

Additional Items

14:49 - 15:10

Description

Items that are not on the agenda, but that come up during the retreat and need further attention.

Discussion

Issue: How do we disseminating info to new students?

Suggestion: Use the department wiki server

Issue: Who will maintain the wiki?

Suggestion: Wiki is self-maintaining

Issue: CTS's wiki is hard to find

Suggestion: Add a link to CTS website on the CSE webpage

Issue: Students need to focus on ethical questions in their fields

Suggestions:

- Introduce the a course on ethics
- Include research tips as well as general ethics
- Have an ethics PPF
- Have colloquium have a researcher talk on ethics (from CMU)

Resolutions

- There is a wiki server, where any one w/ a CSE login can create an edit a page.
- All system admin is being centralized; CTS will no longer be a part of CSE, but part of a larger engineering school-wide sys admin. Hopefully, there will be improvements
- Students should make a list of issue with CTS so Dr Turner can address them

GSA Specific

Responsibility of the GSA

15:10 - 15:41

Description

The GSA has had a rough time with the complete turn over of its executive body. There has been a lack of volunteers in organizing events such as the summer picnic. We would like the GSA to be a stable organization that continues for many years. However, this requires that we look at the responsibilities of the GSA and compare them with student enthusiasm and time. It helps no one if the GSA collapses under its own weight. Does the GSA do too much?

Discussion

Issue: How do we increase volunteers for GSA events?

Suggestions:

- Recruit people at DS talks
- Rely on friends of the board
- Get students to think they are part of GSA; the GSA is not an exclusive club
- Email is a bad way to solicit for help
- Nominate people who do not attend GSA (executive) elections
- Have a GSA mole in every lab
- **Outline specific tasks (at each event) that we need volunteers for**
- Keep a list of all the students who have not volunteered

Issue: How do we reduce the load on the executive?

Suggestions:

- Reduce the responsibilities of the GSA
- Hand back some responsibilities of GSA to Myrna
- Overwork executive is the norm for all-volunteer organizations like GSA
- Rotate responsibility for happy hours among labs
- 1st or 2nd year grad students are more appropriate for GSA executives
- Expectation that every student servers in the GSA
- Have elections every semester

Resolutions

- Make new students aware that they ALL members of the GSA.
- Advisor should inform students that it's beneficial to contribute to the GSA
- Use lab rotation for happy hours

GSA Specific

Inclusion of masters students

15:41 - 15:51

Description

What is the involvement of Masters students in the GSA? The policy is that Masters students can hold any position on the GSA board except president. Since the GSA board is present at the Doctoral Student Retreat, there is the possibility of a Masters student being at the retreat as part of the board, but general Masters students are not invited. Does this make sense? Should this retreat be opened to Masters students (and renamed Graduate Student Retreat)?

Discussion

Suggestions:

- Yes, why not.
- No, very few issues relate to the master's students
- Inclusion of master reduces the # of PhD students
- Not a good idea to exclude potential PhD students

Issue: Do we rename the retreat to Grad Student Retreat?

Resolution: No

Resolutions

Door is not closed to Masters Students. Masters students involved in research can be invited to attend future DS retreats.