

Graduate Student Working Group Report

The graduate student working group examined issues facing Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) and the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) female doctoral students and generated recommendations to address these issues. Although the working group focused on female doctoral students in the sciences, many of the proposals would benefit underrepresented minorities, male students, and students enrolled in departments other than the sciences. The working group proposed both short and long term recommendations. Oversight is needed to ensure the implementation of the recommendations as appropriate.

A. Short Term Recommendations

1. Administrative and financial support from GSAS and HSPH for Graduate Women in Science (GWIS) groups.

Currently, funding for the various departmental GWIS groups is uneven (depending entirely on the largesse of the department) and no administrative support is available. We request that administrative support and permanent long-term funding be **immediately** made available to the GWIS groups. The administrative functions that are required include: 1) helping to schedule and organize events, 2) maintaining financial records, 3) maintaining the GWIS website (see Short Term Proposal 2), 4) producing the GWIS handbook (see short term item #), 5) mediating between the GWIS groups and the designated GSAS point person. This administrator would also provide an important component of continuity in the program so that the graduation of active students would not lead to the breakdown of the group. Further discussion is needed to determine if one such person at GSAS would serve both the Cambridge and HMS students. In terms of the financial commitment, we estimate that \$7500 per annum per GWIS departmental group would be sufficient (some of these funds could be used for Harvard-wide events). There are currently groups in Chemistry, Physics and the Biological Sciences and we anticipate the formation of groups at the HMS and HSPH (see below for more information on the proposed activities of the GWIS organization). These funds would not only benefit women students, however, since any invited speakers would participate in events open to all students.

2. Website and information sources

One of the major complaints we heard from graduate women was the difficulty of obtaining various information, from policies on parental leave to career development workshops to GWIS meeting times and contact people. **We propose that a website should be created as soon as possible with all of this information and related links.** Students should be involved in creating this website, but should not be responsible for its design or administration. This website would also be the home for all Harvard women in science group webpages. It would provide a centralized source of links for all Harvard benefits for women as well as other WIS groups around the country. The website should also have links to major job ad sites, funding agencies, fellowship programs, etc. The

centerpiece of the website would be a calendar showing all relevant meetings, seminars, workshops, etc. The existing GWIS groups are already working on designing this website and need GSAS to host it (which seems most logical). The maintenance of this website would be handled by the GWIS administrator (see Short Term Proposal 1 above).

We also propose that a “Handbook for Graduate Women in Science” be created.

This would be a source of information on resources available to women at Harvard and in the Boston area on topics including mental health, stress management, eating disorders, clubs, women’s non-competitive sports, funding sources, and all relevant Harvard administrators/offices/staff. The Organismic and Evolutionary Biology (OEB) student handbook is a good model for this. The GWIS groups would participate in the production of the handbook with the help of the GWIS administrator.

3. Safety Related Issues

The distance covered for taxi vouchers should be **immediately** increased up to eight miles. Massachusetts General Hospital and some other places offer cab vouchers for students to use when necessary. Currently the vouchers are paid for by the PI or the department, but Harvard should standardize and fund these vouchers. The vouchers should replace the current one mile cab system at Vanderbilt. This would put control in the students hands, as they control when the cab is called and therefore can interdigitate that into their work schedule (as opposed to having to walk over and wait for an hour in Vanderbilt Hall). Shuttle service should be extended into Brighton, Allston and Somerville. At Longwood, the shuttle service should be expanded to offsite buildings, such as the Landsdown center and possibly into Brookline. Funds should be made available from GSAS and HSPH to help departments pay for these programs.

4. Sexual Harassment

The policies regarding relationships between faculty and students (undergrads or grads) should be clarified. Faculty need to understand that it is not appropriate to make romantic advances towards students at any level. It seems that some faculty think of “harassment” as only including things like “unwelcomed touching” or violent attacks. Persistent invitations out for dinners or similar romantic advances are also not appropriate and it is clear from our meetings with students this information is not disseminated or fully appreciated.

The University needs to have a clear policy. Explanation of this policy should be included in the training that has been proposed for Deans, Chairs, Search Committees, and in-coming Faculty. Also critical is that this information needs to be personally communicated to faculty rather than simply distributed as a flyer or email.

5. Student Orientation

All graduate programs should be required to have formal, departmental orientation events where students can meet the staff of the Student Affairs office and receive important

information (e.g. GWIS handbook). This would not only benefit graduate women in science but other students as well. See Long Term Proposal Item 5.

6. Monitoring of Student Progress

Different departments have varying processes for tracking and enforcing the progress of graduate students. We suggest that annual meetings with thesis committees (lasting at least thirty minutes) should be established early and maintained throughout every student's career. This opportunity to talk with the committee on a yearly basis can provide direction and motivation for students as well as a means for monitoring progress and allowing for communication among the committee members. GSAS and HSPH should investigate the current policies in each department, establish clear guidelines, and also work to enforce this policy.

B. Long Term Recommendations – to be implemented by the end of the 2005-06 academic year

1. Counseling and Conflict Resolution.

The current Student Affairs staff is generally well regarded but concern was voiced on several issues. Many of the students are unaware of the services and resources available to them. Also, students were concerned that the staff may not be familiar with the issues that are specific to science laboratories. We request that at the very least these staff members should receive training that will help them address science-specific issues. Ideally, the students would like to be involved in selecting future staff so that they are more familiar with the personnel and their qualifications. Relevant contacts for this type of input would be the leaders of the GWIS groups as well as other student representatives. In addition, the role of the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) in mediating conflicts should be clarified and all students should know who this person is. The DGS should be responsible for making sure that advisors respond to concerns and meet with the Student Affairs staff when necessary.

2. Professional Development

We believe that it is critically important for all of our graduate students to receive more training in the skills that are required for successful scientific careers. For better or worse, these skills are not limited to being a good scientist but include diverse components such as grant writing, personnel management, and interview techniques. In addition, there are relatively few laboratory technique courses offered for graduate students. Given that female students often do not receive as much informal training in these areas from their principal investigators (PIs) and colleagues, we think that it is critical that departments provide this training in a direct and organized fashion. GSAS appears to recognize these points, which we appreciate. **We propose that GSAS and HSPH require each graduate program to provide training in professional skills and that, in turn, students be required to participate in this training as part of their standard curriculum.** Graduate programs that are sufficiently similar in nature could

collaborate on a single course/workshop that all their students would take. Programs may also consider collaborating with the Office for Postdoctoral Affairs. Any faculty who agree to advise on or develop such courses should receive teaching-relief, particularly in the first few years of program development.

We also propose that new monies be made available to GSAS and HSPH so that financial support can be provided for the development of techniques courses, which are typically lab courses and, therefore, more financially demanding. Following on the course assistant (CA) model for undergraduates, it would be very beneficial to create CA positions for graduate students that would focus on topics such as computer programming or instrument fabrication. These positions would be year-round and would function in lieu of teaching. Some departments already have similar positions, e.g. Scanning Electron Microscope technicians, but we believe these positions should be funded at the administrative level to ensure that every department develops such programs.

3. Parental and Maternity Leave

Leave needs to be available for men as well as women. The burden of family life shouldn't be only on women and academic life should be compatible with family life. Currently, family health insurance policies are too expensive and graduate students cannot afford such insurance. Grad students with children typically rely on a spouses health insurance benefit not their own.

Under the current policies, students are largely guaranteed a parental leave with accompanied stoppage of the "thesis clock" but no reference is made to stipend and benefits for such students. This creates a situation in which each student must negotiate with their department and, often, their PI over what funding they will receive. Furthermore, many students in the biological sciences are on NIH training grants that limit the amount of stipend paid to 30 days. This is not an acceptable situation. **New funds should be made available to GSAS and HSPH so that a Leave Fund can be created.** Such a fund would provide coverage of stipend and benefits for students on parental or maternity leave for 3 months. This will take the decision power out of the hands of departments and PIs. This program should be "opt out" rather than "opt in."

Should family-friendly changes be implemented at the faculty level, these changes should be made known to graduate students, so that they know things might be better by the time that they would be faculty. This may provide a more positive model for future career choices in academia.

4. Childcare Issues

Several different possible solutions exist to help graduate students gain access to affordable childcare. As mentioned above, these include the creation of a sliding fee scale for Harvard childcare and/or a voucher system that would help graduate students. These options need to be evaluated in the context of the larger discussion among both Task Forces regarding childcare at Harvard.

5. Mentoring

There are many questions that mentors could address for graduate women in science. What are the pitfalls for a woman in science? What does a woman have to do to become a successful postdoc or faculty member? What are the female faculty members stories? How did they make it? How are they managing work and family? How do they interact with their male colleagues and department heads? Grad students want to hear the personal stories of the female faculty. They want a better window onto what their futures might look like.

Students also need guidance on many topics such as: lab management skills, scientific presentations, assertiveness and confidence, and alternative career paths. As stated above, male students receive more informal mentoring than female students. Additionally, faculty members need to be trained in recognizing the different modes of interacting with women and men. Lastly, some form of peer mentoring would also be helpful.

6. Security Related Issues

GSAS and HSPH, with the help of the Task Force, should negotiate with Parking Services to provide free or inexpensive evening/overnight parking for graduate students.

7. First Year Student Offices and/or Events

Several departments have created centralized office space to be used by first year graduate students. Students in these departments greatly appreciate this system and report that it is important for creating a sense of community among students, as well as helping to create long-term support networks. All departments should be encouraged to create similar office arrangements. Perhaps new funding could be provided to GSAS and HSPH in order to subsidize the necessary renovations. We realize that due to space constraints, this may not be possible for all departments. Other excellent options include the creation of a graduate student lounge, the organization of retreats to the Harvard Forest or other sites, and “Parade of Stars” courses, which meet on a weekly basis and allow the students to meet all the faculty in the department. In lieu of a “Parade of Stars” course, even a single meeting at the beginning of the semester with all faculty and new graduate students would be helpful. These types of meetings are generally important to help students pick an advisor. While the creation of physical spaces for G1s will take longer term planning, the organization of other events could be implemented immediately.

8. Female Faculty

Among the top priorities of all the graduate women groups that we spoke with was significantly increasing the number of female faculty at Harvard. The consensus is that while female students generally feel supported by their departments, the dearth of female faculty, especially at the senior level, served to discourage them from continuing in

science. While this is obviously a long-term goal, one shorter-term solution would be to create a special sabbatical fund to encourage female faculty to visit and teach at Harvard.

9. Stipend Support and Travel Funds

A greater effort should be made to generally raise and standardize the stipends paid by science departments. More funds should be made available to help students avoid heavy teaching burdens in their later years.

10. Subsidized Graduate Student Housing

Given the proposed expansion of the science faculty as well as the physical expansion of Harvard into Allston, it will be critical to provide more conveniently located, subsidized graduate student housing. Allston could provide ideal space for this need.

11. Monitoring of GSAS and HSPH Response

It remains unclear to us how to ensure that these proposals, especially the long term ones, are seriously pursued. Our current suggestion is that GSAS and HSPH should be required to report to the Deans, the faculty, and Faculty Council at six month intervals for the next three years on the status of these proposals.

C. Why it is important to have a well-supported GWIS network at Harvard and what this program might offer

Many of the Harvard graduate programs in the sciences are currently at or close to parity in terms of gender. Despite this large number of female students, there is a small minority of female faculty. Also, female students are often in the minority within their laboratory. These labs are generally led by male PIs and often populated by a large number of male postdocs and technicians. Students realize that discrimination is to come at the next stages in their career and this sets up an odd dynamic as to the efforts one puts forth as a graduate student. For these reasons, having an active GWIS program at Harvard is very important for supporting the future careers of what are often the brightest and most promising young female scientists. The following outlines the types of activities that the GWIS groups would like to organize. It is worth noting that many of these will also help the University by recruiting more female students and helping them to complete their graduate study. In addition, we believe that the activities of these groups can be a positive recruitment point for new faculty.

1. Recruitment and Orientation

a. Recruitment

- It would be beneficial if current female students called accepted female students to encourage them to matriculate.
- There should be a special Women in Science (WIS) event during the recruitment weekend so that accepted female students can meet current female students, postdocs, and faculty.

b. Orientation

- There should be a special WIS event very early in the school year so that new female students can meet their female colleagues and so that they can be educated about policies, programs, funding opportunities, etc. The WIS handbook should also be handed out and reviewed.

2. Graduate Student Life

WIS Groups and Events

- It would be beneficial if at least once a year, the departmental seminars (or other established seminar series) hosted an invited female speaker. The speaker would be on campus for two full days and would participate in many activities including: a formal open seminar, an informal “chalk-talk” for female students, meals and receptions with female students (some focused on one stage (i.e. undergrad or grad), others open to all female students), and one-on-one meetings.
- Other possible event ideas: day-long or weekend retreats for WIS, informal dinners with female Harvard faculty.
- GWIS leaders should coordinate with Student Affairs staff to provide needed support and advice for students.