

Language Science IGERT Advisory Board

2011 Report and Recommendations

[This is based upon a spoken report presented by the advisory board at the end of the meeting on 5/13/10. The text is only lightly edited from remarks presented to the group by Mitch Marcus.]

The first thing to say is that we were all remarkably impressed by what we saw today. What you have done in the last year is tremendous: the quality of the research is amazing; the way that the students have stepped forward is amazing; we were remarkably impressed at what a great job you did at selling the program to us, at selling interdisciplinarity. The level of change in the past year has been remarkable. Some of it was responsive to things that we said last year. I have never been on a committee before where the folks getting our advice actually followed it!

We have just come from speaking to the deans. The deans were extremely supportive, and they are willing to invest in this area. One idea that interested them was cluster hiring of faculty. The overall idea of Language Science really grabbed their attention. They understood that this is something that has a great deal of potential and that they can sell to others in the university.

We have several suggestions. A couple things that we think need to be looked at are not news. We do not have suggestions on exactly how to address them, as we don't know enough yet. You raised the issues, and we agree that they should be looked into.

(1) Rotations really need to be looked at: we suspect that there needs to be additional infrastructure to get this to work out.

(2) The breadth of the language diversity courses should be addressed. Some students perceive current courses as not meeting their needs. There needs to be some approach to solving that problem. We cannot tell you how to do that, but something needs to be done.

(3) We noticed one thing that has not been discussed today. We are not clear what happens after people finish their 2 years of being formally in the program. There needs to be an 'alumni association'. There needs to be a way to make sure that people who have been involved and are still students here remain involved and attached, so that the community is strengthened by the experience of the people who have been through it.

(4) We would like to suggest a change in the format of next year's review meeting. We propose a closed lunch panel with only students and the advisory group. This would allow us to have a free ranging discussion about what's working and what's not.

We would like to again point out that we were really very impressed. You have created something that could be a national model for how an interdisciplinary graduate program works, which could really be quite powerful.

Other suggestions emerging from Advisory Board discussion during the day:

(5) The best aspects of the program are supposed to outlive NSF funding, e.g., Winter Storm. How do you plan to ensure that this can happen, via support from a broader constituency?

(6) There is a need to get the word out more broadly about what you are doing, both within the university and across institutions. An improved on-line presence could really help this along. Also, the university administration could do more to act as advocates for your efforts, to get the word out. You have created a 'talent magnet', and more people need to hear about this.

(7) Students conveyed uncertainty over their expectations, both during and after their 'fellowship years', and uncertainty over whether they were making adequate progress. This extends beyond the uncertainty over rotation requirements.

Issues raised in the presentation by IRPA (internal assessment team)

(8) There is a continuing perception of contrasts between Linguistics and non-Linguistics students in their access to program information and ability to benefit from the program. Students also perceive a departmental imbalance in the degree of faculty involvement.

(9) Students and faculty have differing perceptions of faculty involvement. Students perceive most faculty as being less involved; faculty perceive themselves as being quite active.

(10) There are some differences in attitudes to the program and its goals between new students and graduating students. The new students are more likely to have a rosy view of the attractions of interdisciplinary training, while the more advanced students are more likely to recognize the challenges that this poses.

(11) There is a broad perception that the university has not yet recognized what the language science community, and the IGERT program in particular, has achieved.