

Computer Sciences Faculty Response to the Ph.D. Survey (Spring 2001)

May 16, 2002

About 60% of the Ph.D. students responded to the survey. Of these, only about 25% are supported by teaching and 50% are supported by research. Most have passed the breadth and depth exams, and their proposals. Although most have an advisor, the fact that some do not may be inappropriate. Please note there is a difference between an initial academic advisor and an advisor to direct your research. Students new to the program may not have a major advisor, but they should be active in determining their interests and locating faculty to help them pursue their goals.

Presentation/Publication Rate

The number of presentations and publications reported was very low and this is a concern. Through the efforts of a few faculty and students, the Ph.D. seminar has been instituted and attendance has been reasonable, but could improve. However, many scheduled speakers have cancelled and this is found unacceptable. The Ph.D. seminar should not be viewed as a forum for polished talks (although some have been) but as an opportunity to present ideas you have been exploring. Mastering communication will be one of the most important skills you acquire. Make every effort to write and present your ideas.

A teaching requirement was seen as a positive step and we are moving in that direction. Today, there is some opposition from the administration in making this a requirement. Any Ph.D. student who wishes to teach should inform their advisor or the department head. Opportunities will be made available.

Your Expectations From Your Advisor

Please note that you must take responsibility to ensure that all degree requirements have been met. Many forms that will help you keep track of this are available at <http://www.cs.fit.edu/wds/forms/forms/>.

Course Work

Identifying appropriate courses was one item brought up, and the faculty agree that advisors should identify courses for Ph.D. students to take. A Ph.D. program of study form is available in the student coordinators office and you should meet with your advisor early on to determine what are appropriate courses based on your background and research interests. Note that 24 credits beyond a master's or 56 credits beyond a bachelor's are *minimal* requirements and eager Ph.D. students will often want to take significantly more credits.

Research Topics

Another expectation of advisors was that they would help you in choosing a research topic. The faculty believe that they have a responsibility to identify general research areas, but not specific topics. Research topics are identified by doing research and that is the responsibility of each Ph.D. student. Faculty can suggest books, journals and conference proceedings for students to study.

Improvement Suggestions

Several ideas for improving the program were suggested.

Support For Conferences

When students have accepted conference papers, the department will make every effort to fund travel and conference expenses. Sufficient notice must be provided to be able to set aside travel funds for this purpose. There are many conferences in Florida. We suggest the Ph.D. students maintain a list of conferences that are nearby and we encourage you to attend these events. Without an accepted paper, it will be difficult to justify support to attend a conference.

Private Working Areas

Room 273 has been made available to Ph.D. students. The room has locking cabinets where you can store your things. There are many computers in the room. It has not been partitioned and will not be unless many more Ph.D. students express an interest in spending time there. Start a petition and devise a plan if you wish to demonstrate the need to partition the room into cubicles.

Comprehensive Exams

The comprehensive exams can be taken all at once or four at a time. With a student's committee's approval, an even finer partitioning of exams may be possible. Please note that the comprehensive breadth exam is written for Master's level students to pass, although Ph.D. students are expected to show a greater comprehension of the subject matter.

Greater Faculty Involvement

We agree that the faculty should be more involved. Efforts under way include the Ph.D. survey and this response to it; the Ph.D. seminar, and the Thursday afternoon "tea."

Greater Involvement With Part-Time Students

Part-time Ph.D. students pose special concerns and they should recognize the risks involved in entering the program part-time: more time to complete course work, less opportunity to spend time with faculty, less time to devote to study and research.

Ph.D. Courses During The Day

Some graduate courses have been and will continue to be offered during the day. This is a disadvantage to part-time students.

Formation of Special Interest Groups

This is an excellent idea and there should be sufficient numbers in some interests, for example, software engineering, to start a group. The faculty encourage this and will participate.