

Biological Sciences Department

Status of the Graduate Program

a report to the Faculty

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Graduate Coordinator
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The Graduate Program is critical to the faculty's efforts as educators and scientists, and it is hoped that the information in this brief report is helpful in those efforts. Your comments on this report (especially with respect to how it can be improved) are welcome, and should be directed to Dave Moriarty. Previous reports were issued in Fall 1996 and Fall 1997

Enrollment

As of October 30, 1998, the program has 72 classified graduate students (list appended). These numbers fluctuate continually as students enter and leave the program. It is important to realize that not all of these students enroll in classes (supervisory or traditional) every quarter. Some students take formal leaves of absence, and many graduate students are adept at "stopping out" for a quarter without losing their enrollment.

Enrollment in the graduate program, as measured by the number of students taking classes in Fall Quarter, is strong (Fig. 1). Enrollment in Fall 1998 is 55 students, the second highest ever (Fall 1996 had 58 students).

Admissions

The table below shows Admissions activity over the past three academic years. Data for 1995-96 are approximate because the database to track activity was not implemented until midway through the period.

	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98
Admitted Classified	~14	11	16
Admitted Conditional	~6	6	5
Denied	~4	9	12
Incomplete/No Action	~26	25	15
Total	~50	51	48

In the spring of 1998, the Biological Sciences Department faculty adopted new policies and procedures for admissions. The new procedure eliminates the Graduate Admissions Committee and requires applicants to be sponsored by a faculty member before the applicant is admitted. A document detailing the new procedures is appended. Of the 16 students admitted classified in 1997-98, three were admitted under the new procedure.

Information Requests

Requests for information are received by mail (electronic and traditional) and the telephone. Informational packets were sent to 81 domestic addresses and 1 foreign address (India) during the past year. In 1996-97 there were 133 total requests; in 1995-96 there were 94. Although the substantial variation in this area is unexplained, some drop in total requests might be expected as more people access the information over the world wide web rather than direct contact.

By the summer of 1997, it became apparent that the Graduate Coordinator was receiving "form" email messages sent by students from the Peoples Republic of China to many universities in the United States requesting application materials. As many as 5 to 10 requests per week were being received. Because the application packet is large and fairly expensive to mail (especially outside of the USA), the graduate coordinator stopped sending a packet in response to these requests. Instead, a response containing all application information is sent via email. This does not provide the prospective applicant with the Admissions booklet, but they are invited to request a booklet by traditional mail from the Cal Poly Admissions Office (they are told that email requests will not be honored). Applicants are also given the URL of a web site maintained by the Chancellor's Office which allows them to apply online, thus negating the need for an application booklet. ***If you object to this procedure, please discuss with Dave Moriarty. If necessary, the matter could be discussed at a Department Meeting.***

World Wide Web Site (<http://www.csupomona.edu/~biology/gradprog.htm>)

The Graduate Program home page is effective as a recruitment medium and for the dissemination of information in an efficient manner. A graduate policies page has been implemented, so that policies and procedures adopted by the faculty can be permanently accessible.

Faculty Membership on Thesis Committees

Appended is a list (***not available in web version***) of thesis committee membership for each faculty member. Students for whom the faculty member is the major professor are indicated. ***Please inform the graduate coordinator of changes that should be made to this information.***

Students Who Have Not Filed a GS-101

Appended is list (***not available in web version***) of students who have been classified graduate students for at least one year, but have not yet filed their GS-101 (program of courses). The major professor for each student is also listed. Faculty are urged to have their students file the program as soon as reasonably possible.

Graduate Faculty Information

Included with this report is a listing (***not available in web version***) of graduate faculty and research interests and/or other pertinent information. This information is included in the informational packets sent to prospective applicants (remember, 82 were sent out last year alone), as well as on the Graduate Program world wide web page (see above). ***Please inform the Graduate Coordinator of any changes to your information.*** Informational packets are printed "on demand", so your changes become effective as soon as they are received. The web page will also be updated as information is received. If you have a personal web page that is not currently linked from the graduate page, please send your URL to the graduate coordinator.

New Admissions Policies and Procedures

On May 19, 1998, the faculty voted to substantively change the admissions policies and procedures. Admissions are no longer decided by a committee. Under the new procedures, faculty determine when an applicant should be admitted. This allows the faculty to decide how many and which students should be in the program. The new policy is described in an appended

document.

Do We Offer Enough Graduate Courses?

The number of courses offered at the 500-level is often an area of concern. Graduate students will sometimes complain that too few courses are offered. First, let us examine exactly how many courses at the 500-level were scheduled recently. In Spring 1998, ten 500-level courses were in the schedule. In Fall 1998, five were scheduled, and two are scheduled for Winter 1999.

Second, let us consider a simple model of demand at the 500-level. The MS degree requires 45 units. Of these, 13 are required: seminar (680), thesis proposal (693), research (694), and thesis (696). Therefore, 32 units of course work must appear in the program. Students are allowed to use up to 21 units at the 400-level (and most seem to come very close to 21), so the demand for 500-level courses can be estimated as $32 - 21 = 11$ units.

Examination of the catalog reveals that our 500-level courses average 3.8 units ($n = 22$, $s = 0.7$). Therefore, to obtain 11 units, students need three graduate courses. Assuming that the average student takes 3 years to finish the degree (which seems reasonable), the average student would need one grad course per year. If we have 75 students wanting one course per year, that's a demand of 25 students per quarter. Assuming an average enrollment in grad courses of 10 students, that's 2.5 courses (we'll call it three) courses per quarter.

Therefore, it would seem that our offerings are reasonable. If students take longer than three years, then the demand is less than three courses per quarter. Some students also use directed study (691) and independent study (692) in their programs to meet the 11 units, so that also reduces demand. While students (and probably faculty) would like to see a large offering of grad courses each quarter, it is unlikely that there is sufficient demand.

As graduate coordinator, I don't recall ever dealing with a student who had completed their research, analyzed their data, written their thesis, defended their thesis, and was being prevented from graduating due to a lack of courses. The research and thesis seems to be the limiting factor, not course availability. This situation is so common in academia that there is an acronym for it: ABD = All But Dissertation.

A related suggestion is that the department develop a two-year (or longer) plan of graduate course offerings. Given the small number of courses per quarter, and the uncertainties associated with faculty work, a few random events could easily destroy the entire plan. The faculty are the best judges of when their courses should be offered, and perhaps they should make this decision.

Acknowledgment

I thank the faculty for their strong support of the Graduate Program. The faculty are not credited for the WTU they generate through graduate supervisory courses, for serving as major professors, or for serving on thesis committees. I know you do this work because you recognize the critical importance to our students (both graduate and undergraduate) and to our faculty of a strong graduate program. Thank you for your sacrifices. You are a credit to the profession, and I am proud to be your colleague.

sDavid J. Moriarty

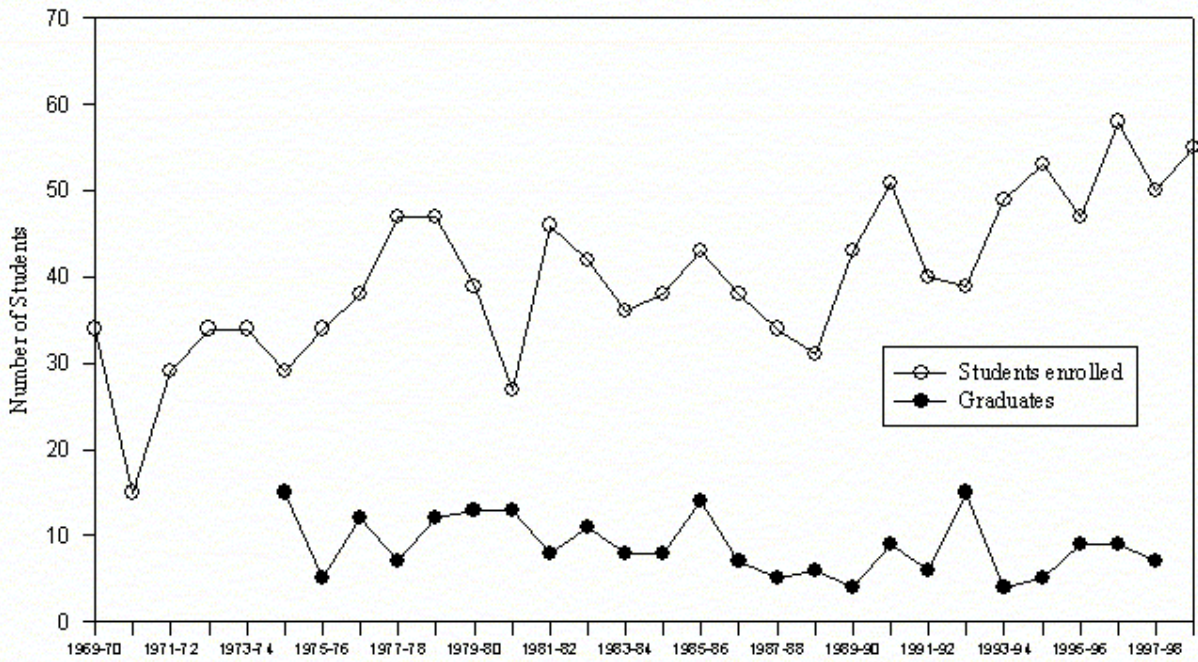


Fig. 1 Students enrolled in Fall Quarter from 1969-70 through 1998-99 (open circles), and students graduated from 1974-75 through 1997-98 (filled circles).