Graduate School Resource Survey: Graduate School’s Response to the Fields

Thank you to those of you who completed the Graduate School Resource Survey (GSRS) that was administered at the end of the Fall 2012 semester. The GSRS was distributed to 108 fields (including minor fields). With 87 fields responding, we achieved an 80.5% response rate. The survey included a variety of questions pertaining to the following seven areas: partnership programs, teaching assistant training, dissertation support, job talk preparation, student-to-student mentoring, faculty-to-student mentoring, and fellowship preparation. Below, you will find summaries of the responses from the fields as well as the Graduate School’s response to the fields in each of the seven areas.

Partnership Programs

The Cornell Graduate School is committed to supporting the fields in their pursuit of excellence in research and graduate-level education and it recognizes that our strengths as a university can be enhanced by collaborative relationships with domestic and/or international partners. Such relationships have the ability to, and should, serve to strengthen and complement the University’s educational and research priorities and mission. In this context, the term partnership program refers to either formal or informal collaborations between an academic field, group or individual from within the Cornell community and an individual, group or other entity that is external to the University. Because of the vast variety in the types of these academic collaborations, partnership programs are exhibited in many forms.

Field Activity/Needs Identification

The survey identified approximately 11% of the responding fields as currently having a partnership program. Of these fields, 60% report that the relationship has been in existence for one year or less. The remaining 40% of fields that have a partnership program report that the relationship has existed three or more years. Components of existing partnership programs include engaging Cornell faculty and graduate students by sending them to give talks, present posters and plan visits between institutions. In addition to participating in events held by their partners, these fields have also hosted a number of poster sessions, symposiums and other events on campus at Cornell. Fields that have partnership programs have also hosted summer internship programs that included students from partner institutions and have assisted in finding summer placements for students from partner institutions. 60% of fields that have a partnership program engage Cornell alumni located at partner institutions. Promotion most often comes in the form of faculty-to-faculty connections. In addition, publicity via websites and alumni connections is often utilized.

Nearly 90% of the responding fields do not identify as currently having a partnership program. 17 fields expressed interest in learning more about partnership programs, identifying potential partners, and developing partner relationships once they have been identified. According to the survey responses, not knowing about viable avenues for partnerships and lack of financial or human resources to undertake and support such a partnership appear to be the most significant barriers to these types of collaborations. A number of fields expressed that formally centralized or umbrella-type partnership programs might be an effective way to approach and address these issues. Finally, some fields suggested that publicity managed by partner schools may serve to incentivize fields, as well as recruit students.
Graduate School Response and Support
The Graduate School’s Office of Inclusion and Professional Development (OIPD) is committed to directly supporting the fields in identifying and strengthening the University’s partnership programs and their respective efforts to recruit, retain and provide support for students who consider and attend Cornell as a result. To that end, the OIPD makes the following resources available to all graduate fields, Directors of Graduate Studies and Graduate Field Assistants.

- A guide to Best Practices for the Recruitment and Retention of Underrepresented Students – a comprehensive publication that gives a series of guidelines to assist the fields in developing and enhancing recruitment and retention programs. This guide can be accessed via the Graduate School’s intranet portal.

- Director of Recruitment – Anitra McCarthy is committed to assisting and supporting the fields with recruitment activities and partnership programs. As the Graduate School’s Director of Recruitment, Anitra works directly with fields, programs and faculty to determine the best strategies for recruiting students from populations traditionally underrepresented in graduate education. Please contact Anitra at amd78@cornell.edu or (607)254-8907 to discuss how proactive graduate student recruitment may benefit your field or program.

- Graduate School Recruitment Grant – an annual initiative that began in 2012-13 that provides supporting funds to fields and programs that wish to partake in recruitment activities targeting underrepresented minority and first generation prospective graduate students. We encourage all graduate fields and programs to consider this opportunity. Directors of Graduate Studies will be notified of the application procedures and award timeline for the Graduate School Recruitment Grant via email in February 2014.

The Graduate School has made a concerted effort to structure services and resources accordingly so that these important needs are addressed and met. We encourage any graduate field or faculty member interested in the Graduate School Recruitment Grant, diverse student recruitment, or partnership programs to contact Anitra at amd78@cornell.edu or (607) 254-8907 to arrange an individual appointment to discuss your needs.

Teaching Assistant Training
Survey questions on teaching assistant training sought to quantify use of existing programs and presence of field-specific TA training, as well as elicit ideas for further support needed. Responses show widespread usage of Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) programs (74%), including the International TA Program (ITAP) (59%). Additionally, some fields offer field-specific TA training (27%) or participate in Knight Institute training on teaching writing (5%). A few fields raised structural concerns about funding available from colleges for teaching assistantships. General suggestions on support for graduate student teaching related to publicity, timing of CTE programs, and availability of peer mentoring opportunities for TAs.

Specific suggestions were also given on topics for new teaching assistant (TA) programming, all of which were shared with CTE director Theresa Pettit as well as Graduate School Staff. Fields felt that new TAs needed more guidance in policies related to teaching and that in general graduate students needed the following types of training: effective communication, balancing TA responsibilities with other commitments, leading discussion sections and instruction for quantitative methods courses.
As teaching resources have greatly expanded in the last five years, several are highlighted below:

- Cornell’s Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) provides graduate-level teaching support via GET SET programming (Graduate students, future Educators, and Teaching Assistants pursuing Scholarship and Excellence in Teaching). These include half-day university-wide teaching workshops in early fall and spring that are useful for new and returning TAs, a peer-led workshop series on teaching, leading to certificates of participation, informal pizza discussions, semester-long courses, and high-engagement fellowship programs. The Cornelia Ye Outstanding Teaching Assistant award was established in 2012. Additionally, language assessments, courses, and workshops are provided to international teaching assistants via ITAP. For more information, visit www.cte.cornell.edu/programs-services/grads-future-educators-tas/index.html

- In keeping with the wide number of fields who have established learning outcomes related to teaching for their graduate programs, the Graduate School has worked with the Center for Teaching Excellence to define transferrable skills related to teaching that would be of use in any work context, and has gathered teaching-related professional development activities from six units in a central webpage linked to the Graduate School calendar: www.gradschool.cornell.edu/professional-development-3

- In 2012, the Graduate School established the Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching, and Learning (CU-CIRTL; Director Dr. Colleen McLinn, mclinn@cornell.edu, 5-2030) to provide enhanced future faculty preparation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and social, behavioral, and economic sciences. Through a national consortium of 23 research universities and partnerships with local units such as CTE, CU-CIRTL is able to offer a wide range of ways to learn more about STEM faculty preparation (e.g., book and journal clubs focusing on implications of STEM education research; webinars with a wide range of faculty panelists; graduate seminars taught by experts in specific pedagogies; in-person workshops and symposia on important topics such as assessing student learning). Recent series include “Building Mentoring Skills for a Career in Academia” (Spring 2013; expected to repeat), “Career Development for Postdocs and Graduate Students” and “Teaching in the Large Undergraduate STEM Classroom” (both scheduled for Fall 2013). A modular certificate program will be announced in Fall 2013, tied to national learning outcomes supported by the National Science Foundation. For more information, visit: www.gradschool.cornell.edu/cu-cirtl.

**Dissertation Support**

Responses indicated that there are many different models of writing support that each field offers their students. Some fields view dissertation writing support as the same as writing support and thus writing mentorship is provided primarily by the faculty mentor. Other fields support dissertation writing with scholarships, student-run discussion groups on dissertation writing, courses designed to specifically support dissertation writing, and formal programs involving faculty feedback. While most fields report that the existing field level of support for dissertation writing is effective, most also identified that additional support for dissertation writing from the Graduate School would be useful and effective. As a result, the Graduate School is supporting the following efforts.

- **Graduate School Bootcamps** – The Graduate School has piloted three Dissertation Writing Boot Camps which are intensive six-day workshops and writing communities for students who are post-A Exam and who have an approved dissertation proposal, who have completed their dissertation research, and who are writing chapters of their dissertation. New in Summer 2013, we piloted a Thesis Writing Boot Camp, for master’s students who have an approved thesis proposal, who have completed some or all of their research, and who are writing chapters of their thesis. We also piloted a Proposal Writing Boot Camp, for students who have an approved thesis or dissertation topic and who are...
writing their proposal or prospectus. The next events will be publicized in Graduate School Announcements. Fields may contact Jan Allen (jan.allen@cornell.edu) for more information.

- **Thesis and Dissertation Write-Ins** – Starting in the Spring 2013 semester, on Mondays-Fridays, from 8:00 AM – 11:00 AM, the Big Red Barn Student and Professional Center has transformed into a community of scholars who have writing goals and deadlines. Students sign-in with writing goals for the period of time that they are writing. When students leave, they indicate how they achieved their writing goals. Coffee is provided. This provides a safe-place for students to write and establishes a writing community. Plans are to continue this through the academic year. The Graduate School Announcements will publicize this event to our students. If you have questions, please contact Janna Lamey (janna.lamey@cornell.edu).

- **The Productive Writer List** - The Productive Writer (http://www.gradschool.cornell.edu/about/publications/productive-writer-1-getting-started) community includes over 4100 subscribers from over 146 graduate institutions, including students, faculty and research fellows from universities as far away as Turkey, Norway, India, and China. The bi-weekly Productive Writer newsletter combines research on writing and productivity with tips, encouragement, and resources designed to more productively manage writing. Associate Dean Jan Allen created the writing listserv to help students toward timely degree completion.

- **English Language Support for international graduate and professional students** - Through a collaboration with the Graduate School and Knight Writing Institute, academic English language courses as well as individual consultation, peer coaching and mentoring, and other activities in support of international students’ writing, speaking and acculturation will commence in 2013-14. Finally, the Graduate School welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with fields to create a culture for supportive writing communities. If you have additional ideas or suggestions, please contact Jan Allen (jan.allen@cornell.edu).

**Job Talk Preparation**
Several needs were identified regarding job talk preparation. Resources available from the Graduate School and other sources are described for each:

**Field-specific workshops** - At the request of a humanities DGS, the Graduate School, Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE), and Career Services collaborated on a half-day field-specific graduate student retreat on teaching and job search preparation in Spring 2013. Cornell’s new Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching, and Learning (www.gradschool.cornell.edu/cu-cirtl or contact CU-CIRTL Director Dr. Colleen McLinn at mclinn@cornell.edu or 5-2030) offers programming on the academic and alternative academic job search for those in natural and social science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, through online discussions with faculty from the 23 CIRTL Network universities. We also sponsor local events in collaboration with the Office of Postdoctoral Studies. Fall 2013 programming includes monthly 5 p.m. Career Development webinars and a program on applying to community colleges.

**Centralized job search resources** – The Graduate School has reorganized website content to link to resources, timelines, programs, and relevant offices at the following URL: www.gradschool.cornell.edu/professional-development/career-services. Cornell and the other 23 CIRTL Network universities share STEM job postings, announcements, blog posts, and
resources through a central portal at: www.cirtl.net/learningcommunities/academiccareer. Please contact Elizabeth Ellis, Graduate School Communications Director (ene4@cornell.edu) with other suggestions on website organization.

Opportunities to practice interview and presentation skills with peers - A lunchtime series on "Building Mentoring Skills for a Career in Academia," sponsored by CU-CIRTL in Spring 2013, incorporated mock interview questions and peer feedback on research statements and mentoring philosophies for various settings (STEM departments at 4-year colleges). CU-CIRTL has limited funding on a competitive basis for high-impact experiences such as travel to STEM education meetings and exchange visits within the CIRTL Network of 23 research universities (which include a practice job interview experience with all expenses paid; information at: www.gradschool.cornell.edu/cu-cirtl). Central Research and Conference Travel Grant funding is also available from the Graduate School. See www.gradschool.cornell.edu/costs-and-funding/fellowships for details.

Mentoring (Peer or Student-to-Student and Faculty-to-Student)

Results demonstrated broad interpretation and diverse strategies for mentoring of graduate students. Most fields relied on the role of the DGS, Special Committee or more organic arrangements to provide mentorship, and quite a few fields sponsor peer mentoring groups for incoming students with more senior students. Still others were unsure about the role of the Graduate School, but were interested in learning about best practices for mentoring. As a result of these responses, the Graduate School will be revisiting the notion of a mentoring best practices guide for fields. We will also analyze the role of mentoring as it helps to establish a sense of community for our graduate students. We plan to have this documented by the end of 2013-14 academic year and look forward to sharing this with you for your feedback and comments. In the meantime, if you have some suggestions for the role of the Graduate School as it pertains to mentoring and what we can do to assist your efforts, please contact Janna Lamey (janna.lamey@cornell.edu).

Fellowship Preparation

Regarding support for helping students prepare competitive fellowship applications, 30 fields reported that they offer some form of support; 15 fields suggest that fellowship preparation workshops would be useful for their students. Fields requested updated information about fellowship availability and deadlines. Some fields indicated a need for a central office or resource that could provide information, workshops, and consultation to students writing fellowship proposals and applications. An additional suggestion was writing support groups for students who were applying for specific fellowships, e.g., NSF, SSRC, Fulbright, etc. In fall 2013, the Graduate School piloted an effort to address these needs. An NSF technical information session, attended by 65 students, was held with Associate Dean Jan Allen
presenting information and advice and a panel of current students who are NSF Fellows providing additional tips. Subsequently, four afternoons in October were designated for NSF walk-in consultations for students to bring and discuss their application drafts and receive feedback. Jan Allen also served as the consultant for the walk-in sessions.