

g. Recruitment, Mentoring, and Retention

g.1 Recruitment

As noted above, our program follows a discipline-plus model, and thus students are recruited into one of the seven participating academic departments. Conceptually, we maintain two streams of applicants to the program. One stream consists of students who apply directly to one of the participating departments, while the other stream includes people who apply directly to the IGERT program. Currently, we maintain a web site with a pre-application form, mail posters, place advertisements in newsletters, electronic announcements, and many other mechanisms to attract program applicants. We also make targeted mailings to people who take the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), and who majored in relevant disciplines. An additional stream of applicants is obtained from the participating departments, who screen expressions of interest and applications for potential interest in the IGERT topic. Promising departmental applicants are encouraged to write application essays regarding their IGERT interests, and strong applicants to IGERT are urged to apply to one or more of the participating Ph.D. programs. Participating faculty are supported in recruitment activities on behalf of the program while visiting other institutions or attending academic meetings. We will continue to recruit potential applicants from under-represented groups, by participating in targeted recruitment fairs conducted by the University, and by mailing IGERT recruiting materials to participants in programs targeted to underrepresented minorities, such as the Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation, among others. We also plan to take full advantage of the efforts of the IGERT National Recruitment Program at the University of Michigan.

g.2 Mentoring

Of course, all Ph.D. students at UB receiving mentoring from their advisors and from other members of their committees and home departments. Mentoring for the IGERT Fellows is further enhanced through additional guidance that trainees receive from the Project Director, the program staff, and the Advisory Board. To date, peer mentoring from other trainees has been important but informal; in the next phase of the project, we will formalize this by pairing each incoming student with a more senior student in a peer mentoring arrangement. Close monitoring and assessment of all Fellows in the project will trigger additional specific mentoring as needed.

g.3 Retention

The retention record of the program so far has been excellent, both in an absolute sense and in comparison with baseline retention rates for the relevant departments. As noted elsewhere, of 25 trainees who have enrolled in the program so far, none has left the program voluntarily. Twenty-three of 25 remain in the program, and two were asked to leave after unsuccessful performance in departmental Ph.D. exams. We attribute this excellent retention record to the with program's intellectual coherence, the collegiality and sense of community among trainees, our assessment and mentoring efforts, and of course the generous levels of financial support received by the trainees. We will continue all of these program elements in the program future, and will continue to monitor retention rates and to take additional measures if problems arise.

g.4 Diversity

Our efforts to foster diversity within the program to date have focused on encouraging members of underrepresented groups, women, and disabled persons to apply to the program. We plan to continue such advertising efforts, since a large pool of strong minority and female applicants is a key to achieving higher program participation rates. Our current IGERT program has been moderately successful in promoting diversity: among the 25 trainees who have enrolled in the program so far, four (16%) were members of underrepresented minority groups (African American, Hispanic, Native American), a proportion that exceeds the averages for the participating academic departments, and for the National IGERT program in total. In addition, the program is projected to continue to attract

both mature students (career changers) as well as those of traditional college age. Our trainees currently include two women with dependent children, and we plan to continue the program flexibility and personalized arrangements that support such efforts.