The Education Meeting was convened by Prof. Samir Khuller at 2:10pm. The single topic was to discuss a revised proposal for Ph.D. program requirements, with the first proposal discussion having occurred at the first meeting of the fall 2007 semester. Please refer to the attached document to review the details of this proposal.

A. Coursework Requirements

The committee’s objective was to develop requirements that ensure some breadth in students’ course work as well as provide them with an option to take courses of interest while covering key areas of the discipline. The proposal requires that students take one course from each of the four groups listed and another three courses from any other area.

It was pointed out that the term “Software Systems” should read “Software Engineering”.

Much of the discussion centered on the grouping of the specialty areas within the “applications” group and the need to redefine which areas should be included. There was also concern regarding the use of the word “applications” and that another term should be selected to describe the grouping.

There was further discussion regarding the requirements of other computer science depts./schools, especially those of which the department compares its program. Some programs have exemptions exams (students can take an exam approximately one month after the semester begins and if they pass, they do not need to take the course). Other programs have a longer list of areas which students must cover and from which they can develop their course schedules. Stanford University was used as one example of the exemption exam option and the question of whether a course based system such as Stanford’s should be further investigated and considered by this department was raised.

The proposal committee attempted to construct a recommendation that would be better than the current system and provide a mechanism to have comp-bio courses added to the CS program. The proposal was meant to be an incremental change with the understanding that it is not a perfect solution to the issues associated with the current graduate program.

A suggestion was made to increase the number of core courses from four to five, with two of the courses required to be taken from two of the areas listed under the “applications” designation. AI, vision, NLP, HCI and graphics).

It was also pointed out that with some courses, students must implement work to really comprehend the subject matter. Passing an exam is not sufficient to develop an in-depth understanding of the subject.

B. Reading List Exam
Samir then moved onto a discussion of the “Reading List” which was part of the committee’s proposal.

The intent of the reading list was to ultimately create a set of papers that must be read and understood by all students in a particular area. Each student would be required to pass an exam by the end of their third year. The proposal further defines who the examination committee should consist of and the timeline that the student must follow regarding submitting information to the committee members prior to the exam.

Concerns expressed regarding this portion of the proposal were:
1. This exam could be difficult to schedule
2. Many faculty members will not want to take the time to be on these exams
3. Does not like separating a reading list exam from a student’s proposal
4. What does this actually achieve

Under the current system, students can remain in the program for up to five years before anything official happens to their status as graduate students. It is felt by some faculty members that the department should get rid of students earlier in their graduate experience if it seems that they will never receive their Ph.D. This should be viewed as a responsible move on the part of the department not as a negative reaction to under-achieving students.

An opinion was expressed that more time should be spent discussing a program for academically strong students vs. the time being spent on the discussion of students who should not be in the program. There seemed to be some agreement that there is a need for some checks to be added to the program which are objective and anonymous. A reading list exam could be viewed as too personal and not serving either faculty or students.

Two suggestions did receive general approval. The first was that a student be required, by the end of his/her third year, to receive a letter from a faculty member (advisor) who agrees to work with the student to obtain his/her Ph.D. In turn, the student should be required to stipulate, in general terms, what research he/she will be conducting. The second suggested that students should propose by the end of their fourth year. Students would still have the option to file an appeal.

Samir asked that members send any comments/ideas to one of the proposal committee members. The information will be collected and another proposal developed and presented during the spring 2008 semester.

There was a question regarding the current “Black Friday” process and whether it was of value. Samir said that it had reduced the number of students who were lagging behind but there were still students that remained in the program longer than they should. One person said that there was not sufficient time to discuss in detail all of the students within a half day period.
The meeting was adjourned at 3:30pm.