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June 8, 1999

To: Lee L. Huntsman
Provost

From: Marsha L. Landolt
Dean and Vice Provost



Re: Department of Pathobiology 5-year review

Recommended Action: At its meeting of May 20, 1999, the Graduate School Council considered the results of the 5-year review of the Department of Pathobiology. The department offers Pathobiology tracks within the School of Public Health and Community Medicine's MS and PhD degree programs. This is a relatively young program that has gained an outstanding national reputation. The department has benefited enormously from having Professor Ken Stuart as Chair. The Graduate School Council recommended conversion of the MS and PhD Pathobiology tracks from provisional to continuing status with a review in 10 years. I concur with this recommendation.

The self-study, the report of the review committee, and the Group's response to the report are attached.

Background. The committee that originally reviewed the proposal to establish graduate degree programs in Pathobiology recognized key features that differentiated the program from others in the biomedical sciences. They defined Pathobiology as, "The application of modern concepts in the isolation, identification and prevention of infectious diseases and neoplasia with emphasis on population based research, on preventative rather than curative approaches to disease problems, and on a broader ecological viewpoint in analyzing host-parasite relationships." This definition describes a diverse undertaking, ranging from epidemiology to molecular biology. The department has emerged as a national leader in the field.

The doctoral program had as its forerunner a special individual PhD program that was administered through the Graduate School. That program ended in 1985. The current graduate program admitted its first students in 1991. There are currently 40 faculty members (only 4 of which are state-funded), 34 graduate students (31 PhD and 3 MS) and 28 postdoctoral fellows. The high degree of faculty leverage is facilitated through the cooperation of the Seattle Biomedical Research Institute. The current program had graduated 10 PhDs at the time the review was initiated. Graduate student research in the current program has resulted in over 230 publications.

Since the inception of the new program, there has been a succession of departmental chairs. Previous chairs have been somewhat inattentive to the needs of the program and, in one case, the incumbent was ill suited to the position of Chair. The current Chair is not only well qualified, but performs his duties admirably. Even though his primary appointment is in the Seattle Biomedical Research Institute, he devotes as much attention to, and shows as much concern about, this graduate program as could be expected from an individual with a full time University appointment.

Among the strengths cited in the review are:

1. The successful differentiation of departmental mission from that of other programs on campus.
2. The leadership of Ken Stuart. He has made important alterations in the allocation of space to productive individuals, has recruited outstanding new hires and has an open approach to problem solving. Dr. Stuart is also director of the Seattle Biomedical Research Institute. He is committed to the development of the department and the program in the face of both his other responsibilities and minimal financial support from the state. He clearly is the best Chair the department has had and is uniquely valuable to the program.
3. Newly recruited faculty have developed strong research programs. Extramural support is generally adequate to support students in the program.
4. The faculty believe in the importance of graduate education. They have worked hard to develop a structure for the program with little state support.

Areas needing improvement are as follows:

1. Selection of advisors and laboratories for first-year rotations is limited due to financial constraints imposed by individual faculty grant funding. Professor Stuart has taken action to address this concern by making departmental support available in the first year. In addition, Professor Lee Ann Campbell, Departmental Associate Chair, has successfully applied for an NIH training grant. Meetings are now held to advise students of the choices available to them and to explain the financial issues.
2. The distribution of faculty salary support from the state is unequal and sometimes odd. This is due to commitments that predate the present Chair and Dean.
3. The paucity of state funding makes it difficult for the department to provide support for visiting lectureships, to maintain the undergraduate course offerings it currently supports, and to provide support for grant writing and processing. The latter situation encourages faculty to submit grants through off-campus mechanisms.
4. As is the case generally in the School of Public Health and Community Medicine, space is widely scattered and often poor, requiring arrangements such as those with the Seattle Biomedical Research Institute.
5. In spite of the excellence of Professor Stuart's leadership, having an off-campus chair makes little long-term sense. The present situation is tolerated only because of the School's financial constraints. In the not too distant past, this situation has led to disastrous leadership and is the most serious threat to the department and to its educational programs.

The Chair, Associate Chair and faculty addressed the concerns of the review team between the time of the review and the consideration of the review by the Graduate School Council. They have paid particular attention to communicating with and mentoring students early in the program. As mentioned above, they have made some funds available for additional speakers and have devoted departmental money to better support a range of choices for lab rotations for the first year.

The most precarious outstanding issue is the situation of the Chair. The University obtains valuable benefit from the commitment of this faculty to education. It is well beyond what should be expected from the financial support they receive.

Attachments

c: Richard L. McCormick, President
Patricia Wahl, Dean, School of Public Health and Community Medicine
Debra Friedman, Associate Provost for Academic Planning
John Slattery, Associate Dean for Academic Programs
Kenneth Stuart, Professor and Chair, Pathobiology
Members of the Review Committee
Graduate School Council
Augustine McCaffery, Assistant to the Dean
Beatrice Greenwald, Assistant to the Dean
(All without attachments)