

April 18, 2006

TO: Suzanne Ortega, PhD  
Dean, Graduate School  
Box 353770

FROM: Adam Drewnowski, PhD  
Program Director, Nutritional Sciences Program  
Box 353410

Re: Program response to reviewers' report

Dear Dean Ortega:

On behalf of the Nutritional Sciences Program, I wish to submit the Program's comments on the Graduate School Committee Report. The Program was reviewed in 2005 by a committee composed of Dr. Deborah Ward from the School of Nursing (chair), Dr. Deborah Bowen, Health Services, and Dr. Daniel Bowen-Pope, Pathology. The two outside reviewers were Dr. Benjamin Caballero, Johns Hopkins University and Dr. Johanna Dwyer, Tufts University and the National Institutes of Health.

The committee very astutely identified the strengths and the weaknesses of the Program. The Program faculty readily concurs with the major points made in the report and with most of the committee's recommendations.

The cited strengths were the Program's "excellently trained, productive, and dedicated faculty with a charismatic director". Serving as the major focus of nutrition at the UW, the Program was said to be nationally visible and well-regarded, probably ranking among "top ten programs in the US". The competitors were listed as Harvard, Johns Hopkins, North Carolina, Tufts, and University of California Davis as well as nutrition programs in Schools of Public Health at Minnesota, Michigan, and UCLA.

However, the committee also stressed that although the Program was well situated to attract top faculty and students, it was prevented from realizing its potential by the current UW administrative structure. Its report noted that competing programs were structured with more autonomy, had more resources, and benefited from a "clearer strategic vision on the part of the larger University" than did our Program. The committee identified sufficient problems related to

administrative structure, indirect cost recovery, and weak support by home departments to warn that the present administrative arrangements were not sustainable in the long term. As noted below, many of these administrative issues also apply to other interdisciplinary programs, and warrant concerted action by the Graduate School, the Deans, and the Office of the Provost.

The review committee did emphasize the need for more interdisciplinary collaborations – an area of interest to the Graduate School, as evidenced by a recent report on the Network of Interdisciplinary Initiatives. Referring to the national trend toward large-scale systems approach in all branches of science, including nutrition, the Committee stressed the need for more broadly based interdisciplinary research and training. The Committee emphasized the point that such commitment must not only be voiced at the University level, but should be fully supported through concrete budgetary and organizational measures. Program faculty agrees with that sentiment and looks forward to increased support by the University of all interdisciplinary graduate programs, including that in Nutritional Sciences. We want to emphasize that the viability of the Nutritional Sciences Program is not in question since, despite the limitations cited by the Committee, the Program has continued to thrive and expand and continues to attract and successfully graduate highly qualified applicants.

The Committee's key recommendations were:

1. **Continue the degree programs with a review in 5 years.** The current degree programs are successful, as documented in the Program self-study.
2. **Appoint a co-director of the Program.** The co-director would be responsible for academic issues, allowing the current Program Director to focus on external funding and expanding research opportunities. This recommendation has already been met, in part, by having Dr. Rosenfeld, the Graduate Program Coordinator, assume many of the responsibilities for academic issues related to the Masters and PhD students. However, we agree with the Committee that appointment of a co-director in addition to the GPC would further enable the Director to focus on the other issues outlined by the review committee.
3. **Create an effective student home in Raitt Hall.** The perennial complaint is that students feel isolated on the Upper Campus as they are away from their peers in the School of Public Health. The small student library and computer room provide insufficient physical space for students to sit and interact with each other. To remedy this, the SPHCM Dean has allocated funds for renovation of student space at Raitt Hall. A task force, chaired by Dr. Rosenfeld, has been meeting to identify the most pressing needs and plan for future use of the available space. The Program Administrative Assistant keeps in touch with students by email, advising them of opportunities and events. The annual Student Leadership Award provides another opportunity to promote student activities and interactions. Program faculty has also been working with the office of the Dean to develop and sustain contacts with Program alumni.
4. **Make nutrition a core competency in the School of Public Health and Community Medicine.** The core disciplines in public health, as defined by the Association of Schools of Public Health, are biostatistics, epidemiology, health services, and environmental health sciences. Nutrition is not one of them. The Committee emphasized that “a number of the better schools of public health include nutrition as a required subject of their curriculum”.

This is a recommendation that needs to be addressed by the SPHCM and its curriculum committee rather than by the Graduate School. The Program has taken steps to develop Nutrition 511/PHARM 510, a course for non-majors in collaboration with the School of Pharmacy. Scheduled to be taught in autumn, 2006, Nutrition 511/PHARM 510 may also appeal to students in the School of Dentistry.

5. **Modify the funding stream to the Program.** The Committee focused on two important issues. The first issue had to do with indirect cost recovery. As of now, indirect costs, generated by Program faculty, are shared by the University and the School with the remainder going to the principal investigator's home department, and exactly zero funds accruing to the Program. Despite the University's voiced commitment to collaborative research, this traditional funding stream actually sabotages interdisciplinary collaborations. Neither the Program faculty nor the existing Center for Public Health Nutrition can originate grant proposals; instead they need to be sent out of a department that does not help with grant preparation and sometimes has only the most tenuous connection to the work being done. When it comes to the captured indirect costs, home departments have sometimes used those funds to support the department's (but not the Program's) students or to support the department's (but not the Program's) professional staff. Although - in theory - the departments are supposed to provide the Program with fiscal, administrative, and other support - in reality they do not. Some departments are more helpful than others. The Committee report emphasized that steps must be taken to correct this situation.

Interestingly, the Committee's comments are a virtual echo of the Graduate School's own Interdisciplinary Initiatives Working Group. In recommendation 4, dated June 1, 2005, Marina Alberti wrote that the existing administrative infrastructure did not meet the needs of interdisciplinary programs, since the "traditional administrative support and procedures, allocation of space, and indirect cost recovery are departmentalized". While informal arrangements exist within the UW to deal with indirect cost recovery, "no formal policy exists to standardize these arrangements". The Working Group recommended that the procedures for indirect cost recovery be standardized across campus, with a portion of funds, currently allocated to each College, going to the interdisciplinary team.

Capturing revenue also applies to undergraduate teaching. Following the departure of Dr. Faye Dong (Fisheries), the Program ended up with the responsibility for her course Nutrition 300 - but not her FTE. As the course now attracts over 470 students each autumn quarter, the Program has become a major presence in undergraduate education. By temporary arrangements, negotiated with the School of Nursing, the Program supplies the instructional FTE and 1 Teaching Assistant (TA), whereas Nursing supplies another Teaching Assistant (TA) and a Reader. The Committee stressed that the UW needs to decide whether an undergraduate nutrition course is a part of its educational goal. Warning against unfunded teaching obligations, the Committee stressed that - if undergraduate teaching is a priority - additional support for undergraduate teaching should be made available from University sources.

6. **The responsibility for advising master's students should be more broadly shared and better compensated.** We are in the process of spreading the responsibility of mentoring masters' students to a larger number of the Core and affiliate faculty. However, the key issue is that instructional salaries are largely limited to classroom instruction and the number of classroom credits, with no funds left over for student mentoring, advising, and the

supervision of master's level research. This is an important point when many students are pursuing MS or MPH degrees, both of which require a research thesis. Such students are unlikely to be funded by NIH grants and are unlikely to contribute substantially to their mentors' research projects. The Committee recommended that supervisory efforts be included in teaching compensation.

7. **The MPH thesis** The external reviewers strongly felt that the MPH thesis was not a productive use of the faculty or student time. However, that is a school-wide requirement that needs to be addressed jointly, the Nutritional Sciences Program and the School.
8. **The Registered Dietitian (RD) Program.** The Committee also sympathized with the teaching faculty responsible for the RD program, describing them as overworked and underappreciated. Describing the RD program as one of the "best programs in the Northwest" and with a bright future, the Committee Report recommended taking steps to fully address this issue. Since then, the RD training program has moved to expand the number of dietetic intern placements from 8 to 12. This was made possible by the commitment and support of local preceptors who mentor and advise students, while receiving no compensation from the University. Yet the dietetic program is a key to recruitment of master's level students, with 4 out of every 5 opting to enroll in the didactic program or the dietetic internship. Without the RD program, the MS program would be limited to at most 2-3 students per year. Supporting these students and our dietetic faculty is therefore a high priority. We hope to establish an equitable balance of teaching resources to cover RD training and, while complying with the accreditation guidelines set by the American Dietetic Association, move to make the program self sustaining in the long term.

In the main, the Committee Report repeatedly made the point that if the University wants to have a first class nutrition program, it should be prepared to pay for it. The current structure depends too much on the good will, personal relationships and collegiality of the principals involved – but is not sustained by any meaningful fiscal or administrative framework at this time. We look forward to discussing these issues with the Graduate School Council and the Deans.