



UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

SCHOOL OF OCEANOGRAPHY
Box 357940

April 13, 2011

To the Graduate Council:

The School of Oceanography (SoO) received and reviewed the report provided by the 10-year review committee. The report was delivered to faculty via email by the then-Director Russ McDuff and first discussed at the December faculty meeting in 2010 and at subsequent meetings in early 2011. The elected Faculty Council of the School reviewed the discussions and worked with me to develop priorities. I am pleased to send this letter, which represents my views as Director and the integrated views of the faculty.

The School appreciates the committee's conclusion that there is no need for another review prior to the next scheduled 10-year review. We were pleased to read of the committee's acknowledgement of the strengths of our program. To quote from their report "Our overwhelming impression of SoO is one of an extremely healthy program making important contributions to both the overall mission of UW and to the science of oceanography on the global stage." We also appreciate the committee's carefully considered suggestions for how to further strengthen the School.

The School of Oceanography's success is built upon a synergy between our research and teaching programs. Our research focuses on two interdependent areas: observing and understanding natural cycles in the marine realm, and understanding how the marine environment responds to human impacts. The caliber of faculty, infrastructure strengths, and the resulting research opportunities attract the best graduate students in the country who become future leaders in the field. The research activities also provide the framework for a distinctive, nationally renowned undergraduate oceanography majors program that highlights experiential learning and couples field and laboratory research with formal classroom learning. We pride ourselves in being the only academic institution with a research vessel that operates on a global scale with significant dedicated funding for educational activities. No other oceanography program in the nation offers such a close interaction between research and graduate and undergraduate education.

I review here how the School will incorporate the committee's suggestions to help set both near-term and long-term priorities.

Administrative Leadership:

The School was in a leadership transition period at the time of the review. The panel provided many suggestions on potential Director qualifications and leadership structure. I became the Director of the School of Oceanography in late February, with the support and encouragement from the Dean of the College of the Environment to maintain my research program. The Faculty Council has been re-invigorated, and as suggested by the review committee, will serve both to advise and to share the administrative load. The School's financial situation remains in flux with continued erosion of state support for our educational mission and federal support for our research mission. The thoughtful suggestions provided by the committee are now viewed through this lens of declining funds. For example, after careful consideration, I have chosen to not appoint additional Associate Directors in the near-term and will instead strive to distribute tasks across the faculty, the Faculty Council, the Associate Director of Undergraduate Education and the Associate Director of Facilities and Ship Operations.

One key point I have taken from the review is that the "new leadership needs to enhance communication and collaboration across the School." This will be essential as the School sets priorities and works towards a more fully articulated shared vision. As suggested by the committee, a school-wide seminar series is an easy and important first step towards building bridges across disciplines and ultimately with other units across campus, depending on the breadth of invited speakers. In addition, I will work with the faculty council to develop an annual "State of the School" event to which all faculty, staff and students are invited.

Faculty Structure:

Developing a plan for the future structure of our faculty is of the highest priority. Identifying the optimum balance between tenure-track and WOT faculty, and the balance between months of state (teaching) and research support for faculty of different ranks, requires careful evaluation of where the School wants to be over the next 10 years, particularly given that about a third of the faculty are expected to retire during this interval. As stated in our current 10-year report, the School has a shared goal of "maintaining our international leadership role in oceanography and our commitment to experiential learning." In discussions with Dean Graumlich, it is clear that she too shares our commitment to research and educational excellence. The field of Oceanography is changing rapidly as it moves from a data-poor to a data-rich discipline. Developing School-wide research and educational interactions across the College of the Environment as well as to other disciplines across campus is essential to obtaining our goals. We currently have in place a 10-yr hiring plan, interrupted by a University hiring freeze, that will nonetheless be updated and revised to create a "living document" that fosters innovation and positions us to capitalize upon emerging research opportunities. In developing this plan, we will continue to evaluate the proper balance between discipline-based versus theme-based research and education. This may ultimately require revision of course requirements, such as the addition of required interdisciplinary, problem-focused courses. We will also work with Associate Dean Parrish to help diversify the faculty.

The review committee pointed out a number of ways to enhance mentoring of more junior faculty. I am committed to conducting the yearly review of assistant professors, two-year reviews of associate professors, and the three-year reviews of full professors, providing feedback on both research and educational activities. In light of the UW's suspension of faculty salary raises in the past few years, annual merit reviews have tended to become minimized. I will work with the faculty to revamp merit reviews to provide more detailed feedback at all ranks. I will also work with the Faculty Council to more fully develop a climate in which junior faculty are

routinely incorporated into larger research programs led by more senior faculty. I will also engage the Dean Emeritus to provide additional advice to assistant professors about their academic and research concerns.

Educational Priorities:

The committee correctly recognized the tension members of the School feel about fulfilling the educational aspect of our mission in a time of perceived budget-driven pressures to increase student credit hours (SCH). The School prides itself on the strength of our undergraduate major program that emphasizes experiential learning. We agree wholeheartedly with the committee's conclusion that we do not need to dramatically alter our educational program. As stated by the committee "any changes radical enough to substantially increase SCH would jeopardize the quality of undergraduate and graduate education the SoO currently offers. We strongly encourage the SoO to continue to emphasize the high-quality education that has garnered it national recognition, and to develop additional strategies to attract SCH only if such strategies do not jeopardize the focal curriculum." The Dean agrees with this assessment as well.

The review committee provided detailed suggestions to help further enhance both the undergraduate and graduate program, which we will have to prioritize, at least in part, based on availability of state funding. The committee offered a number of valuable ideas to improve the undergraduate program that align with our own vision including reinstating our "dormant" BA in oceanography, exploring potential on-line course selections, and incorporating data management, visualization, and simulation into our undergraduate experiential learning projects. We will similarly prioritize within the graduate program. We will further clarify and make more uniform the requirements for the current master's program. I will work with the College to enhance the number of privately endowed scholarships as a means of providing increased student support rather than refocusing funding from WOT support, as suggested by the committee. The School will also re-evaluate its current, minimal requirement of 1 quarter of teaching assistantships (TAs) per graduate career as a means of increasing support of the graduate student population. The challenge with this approach is that decreasing state funds limits TA numbers. Development of a professional master's program will likely have to await new funds. Finally, we agree with the review committee that enhancing diversity at all levels is critical to our own program, as well as to the field of oceanography as a whole.

Staff:

As noted by the review committee, Oceanography is a highly technical field and the School has a large number of extremely capable staff committed to the research and educational mission. Most staff are supported either directly or indirectly via research dollars, which by definition, injects a level of uncertainty into future planning for both individuals and the School. I will meet with the staff as a whole to learn first-hand of their concerns and their ideas for addressing issues around funding volatility. I will also work with them and the Faculty Council to develop ways for the faculty, particularly junior faculty, to become more aware of staff capabilities. I will also work with the School's administrator to ensure that all staff are aware of opportunities for professional development, including classes at the UW, and make them and the faculty aware of other means to reward staff for their quality work. The School's long-term planning will include further evaluation of ways to provide more funding stability for staff.

Infrastructure:

The School appreciates the committee's recognition of the critical importance of the University's operation of the global class research vessel, the R/V Thompson. Essential to this operation is

the University's continued commitment to provide 45 days of ship time for educational activities. I will work with the Associate Director for Facilities and Ship Operations to educate agencies and the University on the upcoming need for a mid-life refit for the Thompson. The School also appreciates the committee's recognition of the importance of replacing our regional vessel, the R/V Barnes. I have spoken with the Dean and she agrees that raising funds for a Barnes replacement is an important priority for the College.

In the interim since the 10-year review, the immediate staging needs associated with the Ocean Observatories Initiative's Regional Scale Nodes have been alleviated through acquisition and renovation of additional space at a close-by, off-campus site. A longer-term goal that the School will work towards is the enhancement of a staging area in close proximity to the dock.

As noted by the review committee, computing infrastructure within the School requires updating. I will work the UW eScience to help School members capitalize on the UW's shared, high-performance computer cluster for research computing (Hyak) and file-based storage service data storage resources (Iolo). I will work to find means to expand the Spatial Analysis Lab to more effectively capitalize on the teaching opportunities offered by the ocean observing platforms. I will also work with the College to develop a plan to renovate and update our teaching spaces, particularly room 14 within the Ocean Teaching Building, which is woefully out-dated.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this response to the 10-year review committee's report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Virginia Armbrust', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

E. Virginia Armbrust
Director, School of Oceanography
Lowell and Frankie Wakefield Professor