

December 15, 2006

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RE: Response to the Graduate School Review Committee Report

The staff and faculty of IAS thank the Review Committee for their thoughtful and enormously helpful review. We appreciate the evaluation of IAS as we deal with current problems in the context of the challenges of continued rapid growth at UW-Tacoma.

The committee's report was received on May 26, 2006 and was forwarded to faculty and staff of IAS, who have all provided input on this response as a result of general departmental discussions as well as focused work in smaller groups. Director Bill Richardson, who has since left IAS for a deanship elsewhere, forwarded his own response directly to the Review Committee in August 2006. Our responses follow; no comment indicates our agreement with the report's findings.

Summary

We thank reviewers for their positive assessment of the IAS program and particularly appreciate that the reviewers "got" IAS' commitment to interdisciplinarity. As noted throughout the review, rapid growth has been both a strength and a major challenge for IAS. Over the last five years the campus as a whole has grown an average of 16% per year, while the IAS program hired 23 of its present 50 faculty members—an increase of 46%.

The major concerns listed by the reviewers are widely shared within IAS. The following list summarizes our responses to each section of the report.

- New leadership is actively working toward greater transparency in governance and decision-making in IAS.
- While IAS has been largely successful in promotion and tenure of faculty, we are doing further work to clarify promotion and tenure processes and criteria and to tailor them to the institutional demands of UW Tacoma and IAS.
- Resource needs reflect an ongoing tension between the demand for new programs and the need to support programs that already exist. In addition, the number of staff is insufficient to meet currently existing needs.
- While we do have policies in place to relieve some faculty workload pressures, we need to address transparency of workload distribution, replacement of faculty on leave, and the monumental workload of our wonderful staff by hiring more help commensurate with staffing levels elsewhere on campus.

- Our ongoing commitment to creating a campus that is welcoming to diverse groups needs to be supported by staffing and resources for recruiting and retaining underrepresented faculty, staff, and students.
- IAS remains strongly committed to its interdisciplinary identity.
- We are currently exploring structures for reorganizing IAS to make administration more efficient and to maintain our interdisciplinary focus.
- Environmental Science faculty all have a proven record of collaborative work on interdisciplinary problems drawing on a diverse set of disciplinary expertise. The ES program needs additional faculty to fill the need for natural sciences across the campus, as well as the resources and staff to support the current program and this future growth.
- The Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies is encouraging more faculty members to work with graduate students and making more electives available to students, while planning for the future implementation of a graduate certificate in non-profit studies.
- Student comments suggest a need to pay additional attention to advertising and recruiting, scheduling courses critical to concentrations in ways that best accommodate students' time on campus, and providing communal spaces and activities for students.

Governance & Decision Making (p. 3-4)

The perceptions of some faculty that governance and decision making are not transparent may be due to lack of clarity on where a given decision normally takes place (e.g., at the campus level vs. the departmental), or due to the rapidity with which changes occur at UWT, which can create a context in which fully-attended, careful deliberations are sometimes sacrificed for the sake of efficiency.

We are working to set up structures, both inside and outside IAS, that increase transparency and that encourage full participation, including setting up town meetings to review the budget, changing faculty meeting time to include broadest participation possible, and continuing to use ad hoc committees to bring options to the larger group for consideration.

Appointment, promotion and tenure issues (p. 5-7)

We are currently researching practices of comparable institutions to help us become more collaborative, transparent, and better tailored to the actual demands of a growing, innovative, and interdisciplinary program.

We are somewhat confused by the committee's recommendations on tenure and promotion issues and believe that it is necessary to draw a clear distinction between process and criteria. Our goal is consistency and transparency of the process, while allowing for criteria that fit our institutional mission and development, as well as the interdisciplinary nature of our faculty's research and teaching.

There is currently no uniformity of opinion among the faculty regarding the criteria for promotion to full professor, which goes to the very heart of our identity as scholars and teachers on a campus that should reward the considerably heavier teaching and service load that is our reality. An IAS committee is going to be considering this issue.

We note that annual reviews do almost always predict the outcome of tenure and promotion. In the past decade there has been only one instance in which this has not been the case, and the highly specific circumstances of that case make it an inadequate basis for generalization.

Resources (p. 7-8)

We could not agree more regarding the pressing needs for additional staffing, faculty resources, new program resources, and community intellectual life. Many of our resource problems stem from the fact that a number of new programs have been brought on line in IAS with insufficient resources to support them. If we do not get additional resources, we have few options. UWT's trajectory and legislative mandate mean that we cannot stop growth. We cannot sustain existing unfunded curricular operations without adequate resources, and certainly cannot expand into new programs without the associated resources to support them.

Workload (p. 8-9)

Hiring sufficient staff would alleviate workload issues for both staff and faculty.

We must provide a clear explanation for the differential workload that exists in our program above and beyond course buyouts from grants and fellowships. We are exploring other options for increasing transparency of workload distribution. We have instituted faculty colloquia following each regular faculty meeting to improve collegiality and morale.

We do have policies to protect junior faculty from excessive workload, including restricting their participation in service during their first year and providing a research quarter free of teaching and service during their third year. We must recognize that institution building is an integral part of IAS/UWT and clarify how it is acknowledged and rewarded.

Diversity (p. 9-10)

IAS has articulated its commitment to diversity from the beginning, and we need to continue working to recruit and retain a more diverse faculty, staff, and students, and maintain an environment that is welcoming to a diverse population. As a program we will continue to stress that diversity is valued in IAS and not a marginal issue.

While we continue to make progress in hiring a more diverse faculty, we are aware that we must work to retain those we hire, through mentoring, support, and clarity about what it takes to succeed as a faculty member in IAS.

The campus and IAS must do more to recruit students from underrepresented groups. Programs to reach students from underrepresented populations must be supported by budgetary resources, including IAS staff to do the out reach work (i.e. outreach in the K-12 system, community outreach, etc.), organize student ambassadors, and help with recruitment and advising.

We recognize that diversity is never "solved," but requires ongoing commitment, resources, and work. Everyone in IAS who is genuinely interested in recruitment and retention of underrepresented groups needs to be involved in this effort. Efforts should include participation in events such as discussions on diversity and meetings with diverse groups of students to promote our program, and engagement in mentoring of students and new faculty members from diverse groups. We will also continue to develop diversity initiatives and ways to acknowledge the diversity-related work of IAS faculty and staff.

Interdisciplinarity & IAS Reorganization (p. 11-14)

Interdisciplinarity, as difficult to define a notion as this might be, is our program's strength, and a major reason that we are able to integrate professional and other specialized programs on campus around the intellectual core of the Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences Program. While interdisciplinary programs at UW Seattle tend to involve the coordination of two or three specific disciplinary units, we would like to consider the majority of our curricula, and even courses,

interdisciplinary in themselves. We are fortunate to have hammered out this vision when we began as an idealistic, pioneering faculty of 12 in 1990, and we continue to debate what interdisciplinarity can mean as growth obliges us to multiply and divide.

We are committed to regular dialogue about the meaning of interdisciplinarity, in order to socialize new faculty colleagues and to allow the interdisciplinary model to grow and evolve along with our program. Most recently, we institutionalized an annual discussion of interdisciplinarity during our fall retreat.

We continue to defy the pressures of dividing into the expected categories, and consider it a challenge that constantly renews us in our mission to provide a 21st century college education to our students. Where there has been administrative pressure to create degrees with recognizable disciplinary names for marketing purposes, we have worked to maintain our interdisciplinary approach within these traditionally-named programs. Our general education program developed for new first-year students is built around a series of team-taught core courses that are interdisciplinary and globally themed.

We disagree that junior faculty have less “buy-in” to interdisciplinarity. In fact, the opportunity to work in an interdisciplinary environment is often what attracts faculty to IAS.

As UWT moves to a four-year curriculum, we, of course, will be obliged to teach courses that are not inherently interdisciplinary. Beginning language courses and foundation courses that are expected in graduate programs are some examples.

Budgetary and institutional constraints made an administrative reorganization of the program impossible in the last year, despite our intentions to do so. To address the need for reorganization and to consider the concerns of the Review Committee, an ad hoc committee has been constituted to explore possible structures for reorganization.

The Environmental Science Program (p. 14-18)

The ES faculty sees interdisciplinarity as one of the unifying themes of environmental science. While the reviewers recommended that future ES faculty should be transdisciplinary, scientists do not tend to get interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary PhDs. We aim to hire faculty who have an in-depth knowledge of one discipline, but a proven track record of solving interdisciplinary problems, collaboration, and an ability to work outside their “narrow” disciplinary area.

We agree with the Review Committee’s suggestion that more should be done to incorporate natural science throughout the IAS curriculum and that natural science is underserved at UWT. We would welcome opportunities to do this, given appropriate support.

We felt that the reviewers sent rather a mixed message. They stated that the natural sciences were underserved on campus, yet they wanted ES to become more interdisciplinary. Before we can add anything new to the ES program, we need the resources for our current program to function effectively. We strongly agree that ES has an urgent need for additional faculty, as well as staff support.

Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies (p. 18-19)

The majority of the faculty has been consistently generous in working with IAS’s graduate students. To date we remain unaware of any case in which a student was ultimately unable to proceed because he or she was unable to recruit a suitable graduate committee. To attract more faculty participation in the MAIS, we have instituted a system of specified course reductions in

exchange for participation on MA thesis committees. While we can make participation an explicit “condition and expectation” for new faculty hires, we still need to develop a modality for encouraging the more senior faculty to participate in graduate student thesis work.

On an experimental basis, we plan to double our offerings to two elective graduate courses in the 2006-2007 academic year. Of course, MAIS students may also take elective courses in other UW units.

The MAIS has so far operated with a generous admission policy, resulting in quite a range of levels of preparation and ability among students in the program. To be more selective would require either serious recruitment efforts for which MAIS has inadequate resources, or alternatively, a willingness on the part of administrators to be satisfied with lower FTE numbers than those targeted for the program. However, it is not clear that an “evenness” or uniformity among students is desirable or even possible for a student-centric interdisciplinary degree such as ours. All of those admitted will have demonstrated excellence in one or more areas; however, some have had stronger backgrounds in community activism or work experience than in intellectual history.

We eagerly look forward to the day when we can implement the planned graduate certificate in non-profit studies to complement the program. The faculty has voted to recommend promoting Dr. Steve DeTray, who has significant non-profit expertise and has almost single-handedly developed non-profit studies here on the undergraduate level, from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer. In his new capacity he will be able to participate in the graduate program and help us develop this initiative.

Comments from Students and Alumni (p. 20-23)

Although the alumni interviewed reported little interest in a single-discipline graduate program, we have been successful in placing many students in traditional disciplinary masters and PhD programs, such as psychology, engineering, history, and social work.

We are currently examining our scheduling procedure to find ways to minimize conflicts for required courses.

We need to work to improve the effectiveness of UWT’s central advertising and recruiting effort for IAS, with particular attention to recruiting students from underrepresented groups. We also need to set up an extensive alumni student tracking database and enhance alumni relations and involvement on campus. We need to ensure disability accessibility in all UWT buildings. We also need a student mentoring program.

UWT has made an effort in recent years to provide gathering spaces for the campus community. A new student center occupying most of a floor in one building has now caught on with students; in addition, the campus recently inaugurated a new community space in the old Longshore Workers’ Hall that will include spaces for recreational sports and a social hall.

Conclusions

This review has been very helpful to IAS in considering our current strengths and weaknesses and in planning for future growth. We thank the Review Committee again for their time and effort and look forward to meeting with the Graduate Council in January.