



UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
The Graduate School
G-1 Communications
Box 353770
Seattle, Washington 98195-3770

Telephone: (206)543-5900

Fax: (206)685-3234

May 24, 2010

To: Phyllis Wise, Provost
Douglas J. Wadden, Executive Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Planning

From: Gerald J. Baldasty, Vice Provost and Dean
James S. Antony, Associate Vice Provost and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

RE: Review of the Department of Biochemistry

This memo outlines the recommendations from the review of the Department of Biochemistry and its Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), Bachelor of Science (B.S.), Master of Science (M.S.) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree programs. Detailed comments on the department and its programs can be found in the documents that were part of the following formal review proceedings:

- Biochemistry self-study (August, 2008)
- Charge meeting between review committee and administrators (September 30, 2008)
- Site visit (October 23-24, 2008)
- Graduate and Professional Student Senate report (November 19, 2008)
- Review committee report (January 3, 2009)
- Biochemistry response to the review committee report (March 2, 2009; revised April 2, 2010)
- Graduate School Council consideration of review (May 6, 2010)

The review committee consisted of:

John I. Clark, Professor, UW Biological Structure (Committee Chair)
Merrill B. Hille, Professor, UW Biology
Leo J. Pallanck, Associate Professor, UW Genome Sciences
Christopher K. Matthews, Professor Emeritus, Department of Biochemistry and
Biophysics, Oregon State University
Katherine L. Wilson, Professor, Department of Cell Biology, Johns Hopkins University

A subcommittee of the Graduate School Council presented findings and recommendations to the full Council at its meeting on May 6, 2010. After discussion, Council recommended continuing

status for the department, with the next review to be scheduled for the 2018-2019 academic year. The Council also requested an interim report from the department after five years (2013-2014) that addresses issues raised in the review committee report. Specific comments and recommendations regarding the department and its degree programs include the following:

Program Strengths

- The Department of Biochemistry is a prominent program that has maintained a distinguished tradition of excellence in research and education since its founding.
- Overall, the review committee appreciated the Department of Biochemistry's commitment to science, faculty, recent hires, renovated laboratory space, facilities, and external funding for undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral programs.
- The Department of Biochemistry has a strong record of funding (approximately \$20 million in the most recent reporting year), which can be expected to continue even under the current economic conditions.
- The faculty are scientifically diverse and interdisciplinary with interests that include molecular structure, biophysics, cell and molecular biology, aging, development, stem cells, transcription, translation, infectious diseases, genetics, computational biology, gene therapy, drug design and vaccine development. Faculty members are unified and passionate in their commitment to excellence in research and education. Faculty have received numerous awards, including the Nobel Prize.
- Recent facility renovations have improved laboratories in the department.
- Teaching strengths were identified for undergraduate and graduate students, as well as for post-doctoral scholars, and in providing training in teaching biochemistry through innovative use of teaching assistants (both undergraduate and graduate students).

Challenges & Risks Identified by Review Committee

- Managing inadequate school and university resources and "systems" support for undergraduate education in light of the department's large and expanding commitment to teaching.
- Providing adequate opportunities for student research presentations and faculty feedback.
- Identifying an appropriate size of the graduate program; the department may benefit from a larger incoming class of students even though student funding may become a challenge.
- Improving graduate student diversity.
- Documenting student progress and maintaining quality of graduate student advising.
- Maintaining equity in teaching responsibilities across the faculty. This challenge may increase as faculty retire and the department's teaching activities increase.
- Documenting and communicating policies for WOT and Research faculty who teach; adequately recognizing those who are actively teaching.
- Recruiting and hiring women and minority faculty.
- Lack of central administrative support for directors of graduate training grants.
- Articulating clear promotion requirements and maintaining clear communication with and guidance from the chair as well as senior faculty regarding promotion.
- Articulating departmental vision and strategic plan, specifically in a way that will improve faculty morale and sense of engagement with the department as a whole.

Areas of Concurrence and/or Disagreement

The department generally concurs with the review committee's recommendations resulting from the identified challenges and risks. Areas of disagreement include:

- Increasing the size of the graduate student class: the department responds that current funding levels cannot support additional graduate students.
- Distribution of teaching responsibilities: the faculty has a Teaching Advisory Committee, but faces challenges in long-term planning due to uncertain faculty composition.
- The department feels the WOT faculty are recognized and valued by the faculty as a whole and that research faculty enthusiastically and willingly teach.
- Recruitment of minority and women faculty: the department has actively recruited women and minority faculty, but offers have not been as competitive as at peer institutions and thus the department has not been able to make key hires.

Graduate School Council Comments and Recommendations

- The Council recognizes and commends the department for providing quality a educational experience to its students.
- The Council encourages ongoing departmental strategic planning that includes all departmental faculty.
- The Council recommends that the Department of Biochemistry continue to offer its graduate and undergraduate degree programs and that its next review be undertaken in 10 years (2018-2019).
- The Council requests an interim report from the department by December 31, 2013. This report should outline the status and progress on areas outlined in the review committee report and departmental response, specifically addressing (1) those items where the department stated agreement with the committee and has outlined plans to address the issues and (2) areas where the department stated disagreement with the review committee report.

We concur with the Council's comments and recommendations.

cc: John T. Slattery, Vice Dean, Research and Graduate Education, School of Medicine
Werner Stuetzle, Divisional Dean for Natural Science, College of Arts and Sciences
John D. Sahr, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Academic Affairs
Alan Weiner, Chair, Department of Biochemistry
Members of the Biochemistry Review Committee
Members of the Graduate School Council
David Canfield-Budde, Academic Program Specialist, The Graduate School
Jake Faleschini, President, GPSS