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May 28, 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 Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences

This memo outlines the recommendations from the review of the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences (DEOHS) and its Bachelor of Science (BS), Master of Science (MS), and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree programs. This review did not include the Master of Public Health (MPH) degree which is a school-wide program and is reviewed on a separate schedule. Detailed comments on the department and its programs can be found in the documents that were part of the following formal review proceedings:

- DEOHS self-study (November, 2009)
- Charge meeting between review committee and administrators (May 13, 2009)
- Site visit (February 4-5, 2010)
- Graduate and Professional Student Senate Report (March 1, 2010)
- Review committee report (March 3, 2010)
- DEOHS response to the review committee report (April 2, 2010)
- Graduate School Council consideration of review (May 20, 2010)

The review committee consisted of:

Andy Stergachis, Professor, UW Epidemiology and Global Health (Committee Chair)
Jonathan D. Mayer, Professor, UW Geography and Epidemiology
Zelda B. Zabinsky, Professor, UW Industrial & Systems Engineering
Howard Hu, Professor and Chair, Department of Environmental Health Sciences, University of Michigan
Carol Rice, Professor, Department of Environmental Health, University of Cincinnati

A subcommittee of the Graduate School Council presented findings and recommendations to the full Council at its meeting on May 20, 2010. After discussion, Council recommended continuing status for the department, with the next review to be scheduled for the 2019-2020 academic year. Specific comments and recommendations regarding the department and its degree programs include the following:

Program Strengths

- The training, research, and service conducted by faculty in DEOHS is recognized regionally, nationally, and internationally. It is one of the most outstanding departments of its kind in the country in terms of research.
- The department receives significant funding through the Washington State Medical Aid and Accident Fund (MA/AF) and grants. This strength relates to a potential threat to the department if funding from the Medical Aid and Accident Fund changes.
- Graduate students (master and doctoral students) have a history of being completely funded by DEOHS. The graduate students are well-supported with laboratory experiences and internships. Students are strongly involved and engaged with the department.
- The undergraduate students are also well engaged with the department. They are required to do an internship. Many internships are paid and may result in future employment.
- The alumni are well-satisfied with their educational experience. They feel they have been well prepared for their careers.
- The support staff is greatly appreciated by all of the students and alumni, both for the graduate and undergraduate programs.
- The continuing education (CE) and service component of DEOHS is very strong.

Challenges & Risks

The department faces the following challenges and risks identified by the review committee, each of which is addressed in the recommendations section below.

- Long-term funding
- Recruitment of new faculty
- Curriculum
- Faculty workload policy

Review Committee Recommendations

- Develop a strategic plan to address the following issues: long-term funding; recruitment of new faculty; curriculum; faculty workload policy.

Program Response: DEOHS will initiate a strategic planning process by December 2010.

- In view of the uncertain nature of future Medical Aid and Accident Funding (MA/AF) from the state, initiate discussion with college Dean and university officials regarding university funding for the department and graduate program.

Program Response: DEOHS acknowledges the importance of this challenge and will discuss this issue with the UW administration and the Dean of Public Health.

- Develop a strategic plan for recruitment of new faculty to replace senior faculty who are approaching retirement.

Program Response: DEOHS will submit a prioritized recruitment plan to the Dean.

- Develop a more formal and uniform policy relating to faculty workload and course release/buyout (relating to teaching vs. research) that can be utilized in discussions between the Chair and faculty.

Program Response: DEOHS will provide a more transparent picture of how such decisions are made and will develop a policy that is viewed as equitable by all faculty members.

- Increase amount of problem-based learning in courses, and develop a broad introductory/survey course in environmental health for doctoral students.

Program Response: DEOHS agrees with the suggestions that they develop a broad survey course and explore new modes of instruction.

Other Review Committee Suggestions and Ideas:

- Form closer research and educational links with closely allied/like-minded UW graduate programs, such as the Department of Global Health, College of the Environment, and College of Built Environments.
- Explore scientific/research opportunities in emerging areas such as climate change and health, nanotechnology/nanomaterials, and environmental epigenetics.
- Review the Exposure Sciences curriculum for content to ensure balance between industrial hygiene and the newer emphasis of environmental/community health exposures.
- Improve communication with students regarding departmental and faculty funding issues.
- Consider offering more business-oriented courses in the areas of project management and industrial business practice. Other courses might be needed in economics, policy, and behavior, but this is outside the department's current expertise.
- Increase uniformity and clarity of expectations for Master's theses and projects in terms of work effort, complexity, and thesis requirements.
- Increase the visibility of the undergraduate degree program to make students and others aware that DEOHS offers an undergraduate major.
- Consider providing undergraduates with more faculty content and mentorship, including career counseling with regard to graduate study or employment.
- Continue to communicate with university administration regarding the need for DEOHS to have unified (or less decentralized) department space.
- Develop a strategy to plan and implement distance learning programs to meet the future educational needs of the region.

Graduate School Council Recommendations

- Continuing status for the department's degree programs, with the next review in ten years (2019-2020 academic year).

We concur with the Council's comments and recommendations.

cc: Patricia Wahl, Dean, School of Public Health
Frederick A. Connell, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, School of Public Health
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