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The Graduate School

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March 28, 2003

To: David Thorud
Acting Provost

From: John Slattery
Associate Dean for Academic Programs

Re: Individual Ph.D. Program Review

Summary and Recommended Action

At its meeting of March 6, 2003, the Graduate School Council met with members of the team reviewing the Individual Ph.D. Program as well as with Marsha Landolt, Dean of the Graduate School and Program director, and Julia Carlson, Program coordinator. The Council (with Marsha Landolt absent) recommended continuation of the Program, with its next review to be conducted in 5 years (2008). This recommendation followed considerable discussion of the merits of such a small but unique program within the context of limited institutional resources. While it did not recommend a significant infusion of funds to the program's budget, the Council did support modestly expanding its visibility on campus through more effective promotion and through the appointment of a faculty member as Graduate Program Coordinator.

Background

The Graduate School has for over thirty years maintained the Individual Ph.D. Program for exceptionally able students in high academic standing whose objectives for study are so truly interdisciplinary that they cannot be met within one of the University units authorized to grant the Ph.D. degree. The Program allows students to integrate coursework and recruit supervisory committee members from two or more UW PhD degree-offering units so as to form a program of study without having to satisfy each academic unit's individual requirements. Though there are a number of Canadian universities that offer similar programs, the IPhD is unique both within the UW and nationally. A total of 112 degrees have been granted since 1970.

The current review was undertaken at a time of serious challenge for the Program. These challenges ranged from the dwindling level of faculty participation, to the quality of student programming, time-to-degree, and the size and quality of the applicant pool. Over the past 9 years, for instance, the number of IPhD applicants and enrolled students has substantially declined. At the time of the last review (1993), there were 12 enrolled students. At present, the

Program enrolls two students with no new students entered in Autumn 2002. Given these challenges, and given that the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of graduate programs at the University potentially obviates the need for the IPhD, the review committee was charged to evaluate whether the Program should be continued.

In reporting to the Graduate School Council, the team chair admitted that initial discussions had tended toward recommending the Program be discontinued. Over the course of the site visit, however, the committee encountered considerable enthusiasm for the opportunities the Program affords students whose projects would otherwise fall outside the boundaries of established departmental emphases. The review team emerged from these interviews in strong support of the Program and with specific recommendations for its improved administration. The Council, too, emerged from its discussion in support of the Program and in support of appointing a Graduate Program Coordinator in order to provide the Program a faculty proponent. The Council was careful, however, to limit the Program's growth in the context of other graduate program needs on campus. In this regard, the Council recommended that, while the Program should be more widely advertised on campus through GPCs, there should be no recruitment outside the UW campus. In addition, the Council advised against Graduate School funding for students in the program, preferring instead that student support remain available only through the regular support network.

cc: Lee Huntsman, Interim President
Marsha Landolt, Dean and Vice Provost
Julia Carlson, IPhD Program Coordinator
Members of the Review Committee
Graduate School Council
Heidi Tilghman, Assistant to the Dean
Augustine McCaffery, Assistant to the Dean/Manager