



MEMO

December 30, 2011

To: Gerald J. Baldasty
Vice Provost and Dean, The Graduate School

From: Ana Mari Cauce, Dean, College of Arts & Sciences

RE: Review of the Interdisciplinary Individual PhD Program

This memo outlines the recommendations from the review of the Interdisciplinary Individual PhD Program. Because this program is administratively housed in the Graduate School, I am serving as proxy dean throughout this review, including formally communicating to you these final recommendations from the review committee report and Graduate School Council discussion.

The Individual PhD program is a small interdisciplinary PhD program administratively housed in the Graduate School. It was formally established as a degree program in the late 1960s and was last reviewed in 2002-2003, at which time the final recommendation was made to re-review the program in five years. The stated goal of the Individual PhD program is to offer exceptional and highly motivated students in high academic standing a doctoral program in areas where other UW PhD degree-offering units cannot accommodate the students due to the highly interdisciplinary nature of their research interests.

Detailed comments on the program can be found in the documents that were part of the following formal review proceedings:

- Charge meeting between review committee and administrators (May 22, 2009)
- Individual PhD self-study (February, 2010)
- Site visit (April 5, 2010)
- Review committee report (May 21, 2010)
- Individual PhD response to the review committee report (June 28, 2010)
- Graduate School Council consideration of review (December 9, 2010 and April 7, 2011)

The review committee consisted of:

Lee Ann Campbell, Professor, UW Epidemiology (Committee Chair)
Philip D. Schuyler, Associate Professor, UW School of Music
Lori Wiest, Professor and Associate Dean, Washington State University Graduate School

A subcommittee of the Graduate School Council presented findings and recommendations to the full Council at its meeting on December 9, 2010. After discussion, Council requested that the review committee, Individual PhD program representatives, and the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences attend a future Council meeting for further discussion. This subsequent meeting was held on April 7, 2011.

Graduate School Council members presented the following background on the program, based on the review documentation and follow-up conversations with the review committee, on December 9, 2010.

Program Strengths

- The program provides an interdisciplinary course of study with individualized coursework and research opportunities for highly motivated and independently minded students.
- The program fosters cross-departmental research activity among both students and faculty.
- Graduates are highly sought after for academic and government positions in the United States and elsewhere.
- While the graduate program is small, the program is run at low cost and is well regarded by current students and recent graduates, and is enthusiastically endorsed by the Standing Review Committee that oversees admissions and student progress.

Challenges and Risks

- As was true during the 2002-2003 review, enrollment has declined while time-to degree has increased, and there have been few graduates since then.
- The program lacks visibility within the university due to its small size and the distribution of its students in different fields across campus. This lack of visibility in turn contributes to its decreasing size.
- The program lacks a clear vision of its future direction, especially with respect to enhancing the program's visibility. An unresolved issue from the 2002-2003 review is whether to recruit students actively within the university, but also whether the program should have flexibility to recruit outside the university, which the current review committee recommends.
- While the program sponsors annual gatherings of students and faculty to discuss research and encourage interaction, this program lacks a strong sense of community, largely a function of the individualized nature of student coursework and specialties. Students, however, did not cite this as a significant concern.
- The program has a very small operating budget from the Graduate School to cover a portion of the salaries of the Program Director and Program Coordinator. Any effort to raise the profile of this program would require some amount of additional funding for support staff, recruitment, and possibly student support.

Areas of Concurrence

- In its response to the review committee report, the program agreed to develop a five-year vision plan to address the above issues, including: enrollment, visibility, community building, affiliation with other UW interdisciplinary programs, review committee membership, and student funding opportunities.

Follow-up Discussion

The Graduate School Council invited Individual PhD program representatives and the review committee to attend a Council meeting on April 7, 2011, to discuss the academic program review and recommendations. During the discussion, the program was asked to respond to questions and give background information on a number of topics the Council had identified in advance, including: what progress and changes have occurred since the previous program review; what are indications of the quality of students and their research; how does the program define admissions standards; what evidence is there that student research could not be completed in existing graduate programs; to what extent do students identify with the program and experience peer learning; and how does the university benefit from having this program.

After hearing the program's responses and comments, including input from Individual PhD students and staff, the Council asked follow up questions and then discussed the program at length. The following issues were identified by the Council:

- *Program cost.* The Individual PhD program is small, with a modest operating budget, and may offer an avenue for students to do work they would not otherwise be able to in other existing programs. But there are also hidden costs for faculty, such as serving on committees and advising students above and beyond their normal departmental load, as well as hidden institutional costs, such as acquiring library holdings for individual students or conducting the current program review. There would, however, be limited cost savings were the program discontinued.
- *Institutional structure and program size.* The Council agreed that this program, if it continues, should remain small. It is not a scalable model and cannot address more generally the structural impediments to interdisciplinary work at UW.
- *Interdisciplinary nature of program.* The Council discussed at length to what extent this program is truly interdisciplinary, both in terms of the courses students take and faculty they interact with, as well as in terms of student research activities. The program's existence may be a result of challenges to doing interdisciplinary work at UW.
- *Student quality.* The Council agreed with the review committee that the quality of the students and their research is high.
- *Program vision.* The program lacks a clearly stated vision of its own identity and a "game plan" for moving forward.

Recommendations

- The Council recommended the Individual PhD program develop a more clearly articulated "vision plan" that outlines its goals in terms of ideal number of students, program identity, and direction for the future.
- The program should submit an interim report to the Graduate School in 2013-2014 that describes its vision plan and what progress has been made on the points articulated in that plan. The program should continue to track information demonstrating student interest and activity in the program (e.g., student inquiries, applications, offers, accepts, and student progress) and include that information in the interim report.
- After reviewing the 2013-2014 interim report, the Graduate School Council will decide on the timeline for the next academic program review.

I concur with the Council's comments and recommendations.

c: James S. Antony, Associate Vice Provost and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, The Graduate School
 Gordon Bradley, Director, Interdisciplinary Individual PhD Program
 Members of the Interdisciplinary Individual PhD Review Committee
 Members of the Graduate School Council
 David Canfield-Budde, Academic Program Specialist, The Graduate School
 GPSS President