UW Medicine
UW SCHOOL
OF MEDICINE

MEMORANDUM

Date: November 16, 2015

To: David L. Eaton, Ph.D., Vice Provost and Dean, The Graduate School

From: John T. Slattery, Ph.D., Vice Dean, Office of Research and Graduate Education, School of Medicine

Re: Interdisciplinary Neuroscience Graduate Program

This memorandum outlines the recommendations from the review of the Interdisciplinary Neuroscience Graduate Program Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree. Detailed comments can be found in the documents that were a part of the following formal review proceedings:

- Charge meeting between review committee, program faculty and administrators (March 9, 2015)
- Program self-study (April 23, 2015)
- Site visit (May 28-29, 2015)
- Review committee report (June 10, 2015)
- GPSS report (June 1, 2015)
- Program Response to review committee report (July 15, 2015)
- Graduate School Council consideration of review (October 15, 2015)

The review committee consisted of:

Joan Goverman, Professor and Chair, UW Department of Immunology (Committee Chair)
James Champoux, Professor and Chair, UW Department of Microbiology
Hollis Cline, Professor, Departments of Molecular and Cellular Neuroscience and Chemical Physiology, The Scripps Research Institute, La Jolla, CA
Darwin Berg, Professor, Division of Biological Sciences, Chair, Neurobiology Section, University of California, San Diego, CA

A Graduate School Council representative presented findings and recommendations to the full Council at its meeting on October 15, 2015. Specific comments and recommendations regarding the program and its Ph.D. degree include the following.

Program Strengths:
The program review committee's report noted that the graduate program overall is "very healthy with a bright future" and identified its major strengths.

1. The program has a large, diverse and high quality faculty. Approximately 135 faculty, drawn from 27 different departments, participate in the program. Achievements of the training faculty in the form of publications, grants, and research awards reflect a strong scholarly impact.

2. The program features a curriculum that is both broad-based and rigorous, and elective and lab rotation experiences provide opportunities for students to acquire depth in specific application areas.

3. Program faculty, staff, and strong academic leadership of the current co-directors provide a highly collegial training environment for participating students.

4. Students are supported by the faculty in their thesis research, and they reported strong comradery and support within the student community.

Challenges & Risks:
The committee identified the following challenges and risks that face the Neuroscience graduate program.

1. The program's successes receive less recognition than it deserves. The program's local, national, and international reputations—while still strong—appear weaker. The stakeholders believe that the lack of a formal entity (such as a center) serving as a physical and mental locus of thought for the program inhibits development of a stronger reputation. Such a reputation would enable the program to recruit better and more diverse students and faculty, and a strong reputation may allow the program to draw additional financial resources.

2. The lack of dedicated physical space for students to congregate and for more formal meetings makes forging connection more challenging and may inhibit information flow between stakeholders. It also likely contributes to the program's inability to match its reputation to its empirical success.

3. Escalating costs for attracting, supporting, and retaining both students and faculty—coupled with decreasing federal funding—present a material risk to the program's success over the long term. Growing the program's reputation, physical spaces, and faculty involvement entails substantial financial investment, and these and other proposed investments that engender the program's success appear infeasible with current resources.

4. Students in the program take an average of 6 years to graduate. They appear to complete the required and elective coursework as scheduled in years 1 and 2, and they also seem to complete general exams and thesis proposals on deadline in year 3. Completion of the dissertation, presumably intended for year 4, takes much longer on average than planned, and this seems to be the source of students' delay in completing their training.

5. Faculty contribution to the program varies greatly across faculty members. It appears that a small fraction of the faculty contribute disproportionately to the program's success. Some faculty

contribute less than they otherwise would as they respond to department-level (rather than program-level) incentives. The program's co-directors appear to have little control over each faculty member's decision about how much effort he or she will contribute to the program.

6. Current students express some dissatisfaction with specific courses and skill development opportunities, information disclosure related to thesis completion requirements, faculty attendance at seminars, equity in TA assignments, and the previously mentioned lack of a gathering place which would serve as an environment for informal discussion of research and student development.

Areas of Concurrence:
The Neuroscience faculty concurred with the following areas of the committee's findings and recommendations.

1. The review committee and unit exhibit broad agreement regarding (A) the need for clear communications to students regarding program graduation criteria, (B) improvement in teaching and learning in certain key courses (principally NEURO 501 and NEURO 559), (C) management of student progress toward graduation by Individual Development Plans (IDPs) and consistent mentoring, and (D) possible growth in the number of students enrolled. Moreover, the unit appears to be well on track to developing and/or executing plans that address these issues.

2. The review committee and unit further exhibit broad general agreement regarding key issues related to (A) creation of a campus-wide entity to enhance visibility of UW neuroscience, (B) dedicated space for the program, (C) more equitable distribution of program responsibilities across faculty, and (D) better connection with Advancement both to more effectively tell the story of UW neuroscience and to invite additional philanthropy. However, it seems that plans to advance these issues remain in nascent stages.

3. The unit disagreed with the committee's recommendation of adding a faculty member as a Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC) to manage progress toward degree completion. Although the review committee views this as a prudent path to manage student IDPs and general progress to degree, the unit believes that such a position would be redundant and unnecessary as these responsibilities should properly fall to a revitalized Graduate Training Committee working in conjunction with program co-directors to mentor first-year students, provide advice about lab rotations, and discuss other topics as necessary. The unit believes that productive conversations early in each student's program of study will enhance the Graduate Training Committee's effectiveness in counseling students later in the program.

Graduate School Council Recommendations:
The Graduate School Council made the following recommendations regarding the Interdisciplinary Neuroscience Graduate Program.

1. Communication to students should articulate clear expectations for program completion and that completing the program requires more than four years. Also, that the Graduate Training Committee support students' Individual Development Plans to enable progress to degree completion.

2. The program faculty should developed a strategic plan that outlines options for creation of a campus-wide UW neuroscience entity, acquisition of dedicated space for the program, and community engagement for the purposes of enhancing reputation and raising financial support.

3. The Council reaffirmed continuing status for the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program in Neuroscience program, with the next review to take place in 10 years, specifically in the 2024-2025 academic year.

I concur with the Council's recommendations.

Cc: Jane Sullivan, Associate Professor and Co-Director, Interdisciplinary Neuroscience Graduate Program
David Perkel, Professor and Co-Director, Interdisciplinary Neuroscience Graduate Program
Patricia Moy, Associate Provost for Academic and Student Affairs, Office of the Provost
Rebecca Aanerud, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Planning, The Graduate School
Neuroscience Graduate Program Review Committee
Graduate School Council
Augustine McCaffery, Senior Academic Program Specialist, Academic Affairs and Planning, The Graduate School