



# UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

## *The Graduate School*

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August 24, 2005

To: Phyllis M. Wise, Provost  
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From: Elizabeth L. Feetham  
Acting Dean and Vice Provost

Re: Neurobiology and Behavior Ph.D. Program 10-Year Review

### *Summary and Recommended Action*

At its meeting of June 2, 2005, the Graduate School Council met with members of the team reviewing the interdisciplinary Ph.D. program in Neurobiology and Behavior; the program co-directors; the Vice Dean for Research and Graduate Education in the School of Medicine; and the Divisional Dean for Sciences in the College of Arts and Sciences. The program has been responsive to a number of issues raised by the review committee, and the Council recommended reaffirmation of the continuing status of the Ph.D. degree program with the next review in 10 years (2014-2015). The Council was encouraged by the remarks about the Program's high quality, but would hope to see additional data on this subject as time goes on. The Program co-directors are effective in their roles, but other administrative structures in the program, particularly those having to do with mentoring and monitoring of student progress, could be improved and also provide more clarity about degree requirements. Much of the meeting's discussion, in both the open and the closed portions, centered on the lack of stable funding and structures available to this interdisciplinary program. The Council recommends that the University develop ways to assist high-quality programs like this one with space and resources to ensure their continued success.

I concur with the Council's recommendations and comments.

### *Background*

The interdisciplinary Ph.D. program in Neurobiology and Behavior in its earlier iteration (called the Joint Program in Physiology and Psychology) began in 1968 and was reviewed by The Graduate School in 1992. In 1996, a more diverse and broadly encompassing neurosciences graduate program was created called the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program in Neurobiology and Behavior. Departmental partners included Biology, Biological Structure, Pharmacology, Physiology and Biophysics, and Psychology. The program faculty has now expanded to more than 100 members, from these and other programs, as well from laboratories at Harborview Medical Center, the Regional Veterans Affairs Medical Center, and the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center. The program typically enrolls around 65 students, and 10 students have received Ph.D. degrees between autumn 2001 and 2004.

## *Review Process*

The review committee included five members, three internal and two from peer institutions. The committee was chaired by Christopher B. Wilson, Professor and Chair of Immunology, and included as the other internal members Stanley Fields, Professor of Genome Sciences, and David R. Morris, Professor of Biochemistry. External members of the committee included Eve Marder, Professor of Biology at Brandeis University, and David Van Essen, Professor and Head of Anatomy and Neurobiology at Washington University in St. Louis. The review site visit was conducted on March 31 and April 1, 2005.

## *Review Findings*

The co-directors of the program, Tom Reh and Michael Shadlen, are viewed as an effective leadership team by faculty, staff, and students alike. The review team also found the quality of the students in the program, particularly in the last few years, to be quite high, with a steady state enrollment at 65 optimal for the program. However, the committee also found that clarity of requirements and consistency across students in the program was sometimes lacking, and that this and other problems might be ameliorated by modifying the administrative structure of the program to encourage more cohesion. While most of the program's curriculum works well for the students, NEUBEH 501 is not effective and needs to be rethought and restructured. The committee voiced some concern about the fact that students appeared to be setting up lab rotations before they had had a chance for personal conversations with faculty. Another finding concerned the need for more faculty involvement in Journal Club and in the other program activities. By far, the major concern of the review team about the program was the lack of a stable budget commensurate to the program's needs, a common problem for interdisciplinary programs. Five key areas that would benefit from additional funding were identified: seminar series, annual retreat, retention of staff, students travel to meetings, and courses. Possible avenues to explore for funding were also identified.

## *Council Recommendations*

The Council valued the thoughtful response of the program directors about the problem areas identified by the review team. The program has already begun to address issues around graduate student mentoring, the Journal Club, and the structure and concept of NEUBEH 501, and will give some additional consideration to logistics related to first-year lab rotations. While the Council was impressed with the quality of students in the program and other program indicators, it suggested that more data be developed to compare this program to similar ones at other institutions. The primary core of recommendations made by the review committee, the Vice Dean of the Medical School, and the Council concerned stable funding for this program and similar interdisciplinary programs. While the College of Arts and Sciences is becoming more involved with this program, this involvement does not solve issues related to funding, space, equipment, faculty teaching time, and other structural problems that plague this and other interdisciplinary programs. The Council encouraged The Graduate School to be an advocate for solving this university-wide problem.

c: Mark A. Emmert, President  
Susan A. Ortega, Vice Provost and Dean, The Graduate School  
Susan Jeffords, Vice Provost for Academic Planning, Office of the Provost  
Albert Berger, Vice Dean for Research and Graduate Education, School of Medicine  
Michael Shadlen, Associate Professor, Department of Physiology and Biophysics,  
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Augustine McCaffery, Senior Academic Program Specialist, The Graduate School  
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