

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

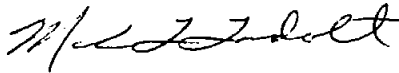
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May 28, 1999

To: Lee L. Huntsman
Provost

From: Marsha L. Landolt
Dean and Vice Provost



Re: Program in Nutritional Sciences 10-year review

Recommended Action: At its meeting of February 18, 1999, the Graduate School Council recommended continuation of the authorization to offer the MS degree and the Nutritional Sciences track that is offered through the MPH degree program in the Department of Epidemiology. Due to the difficulties the Nutritional Sciences program has encountered in the past several years (which are being addressed with the appointment of Patricia Wahl as Dean and Adam Drenowski as Director), it was recommended that the PhD Program in Nutritional Sciences not be converted to continuing status. Each of these degree programs is to be reviewed in 5 years, with a progress report due in 2 years. The progress report should demonstrate success in improving time to degree in the PhD program, a record of graduating PhDs, evidence of appropriate placement of graduates and strengthening of relationships with the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center and the Clinical Nutrition Research Unit at the University. Improved relationships with the latter units is particularly recommended as it should strengthen the research base and provide opportunities for student thesis research. I concur with these recommendations.

The self-study, the report of the review committee and the faculty's response to the report are attached.

Background. The Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences targeted the forerunner of this program for elimination in 1984 in response to the financial exigencies of that time. However, the graduate portion of the program was retained and transferred to the Graduate School. In 1993, faculty in the Interdisciplinary Group joined the School of Public Health and Community Medicine, which now controls its budget with the Graduate School continuing to play a role in its administration. Core faculty are largely drawn from several departments in the SPHCM.

At the time of the review, the program was in considerable disarray, although it was comprised of a dedicated and hard-working faculty. Its lack of stature in the School was clear in that the Acting Director was an Affiliate Assistant Professor. Open faculty spots were being held pending the appointment of a permanent Director. Research productivity suffered as the faculty focussed disproportionately on teaching. PhD students had limited access to appropriate research instrumentation and little sense of direction.

Findings of the review committee. The committee remarked positively on the commitment of the faculty to all degree programs. The courses taught in this program serve several departments whose students need such instruction in nutrition. The MS-RD program is the only one in the region associated with an academic health sciences center. Its students are satisfied with the program and value the academic/clinical mix. The importance of nutrition in public health is clear and warrants continued support of the program. The committee commented on the dispersion of nutrition research and teaching. In particular, they cited the research strengths of the Clinical Nutrition Research Center (as well as its teaching role within the UW School of Medicine) and the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, with its epidemiologic and intervention work directed toward understanding the relationship between diet and cancer. It was the committee's very strong opinion that if the strengths in nutritional sciences in the Seattle area were more effectively brought together, national and eventually international prominence could be attained.

The weaknesses of the program included the following areas.

1. Lack of vision and a unified mission.
2. Lack of leadership.
3. Poor integration into the SPHCM, perhaps due to the focus historically on dietetics and the lack of a permanent director.
4. A feeling of disorientation among MPH students in the program.
5. Low morale but "infinite hope" among the faculty.
6. Lack of access of students to research laboratories.
7. Lack of consistent mentoring of PhD students, including a lack of an organized approach to exposing students to multiple faculty and methods.
8. Limited funding opportunities for PhD students.
9. Lack of mentoring for junior faculty.
10. Competition among the RD and PhD programs for support and faculty attention.
11. Failure to fully exploit links with CNRU and FHCRC.

Among the suggestions for improvement were the following items.

1. Develop a strategic plan within which faculty prioritize their work.
2. Re-evaluate the program in 5 years.
3. Prioritize student financial support and seek a training grant.
4. Gradually eliminate the administrative link to the Graduate School to place Nutritional Sciences more on par with other graduate programs in the SPHCM.
5. Seek better integration with the Clinical Nutrition Research Unit and the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center.
6. Phase out the MS-RD program in favor of the MPH-RD program.
7. Strengthen the PhD program through collaborative research opportunities for students.

Response of the Program. Patricia Wahl, then acting Dean of the School of Public Health and Community Medicine, was well aware of the problems facing the program and the opportunities for developing an outstanding program, given the research strength in nutritional epidemiology at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center and the strength in clinical nutrition research at the UW School of Medicine. Accordingly, she gave high priority to recruiting a director who could lead the reshaping of the program and capitalize on the assets in surrounding units and institutions. This recruitment succeeded in bringing Adam Drenowski to the campus. He arrived in between the time of the site visit and the time of the Graduate School Council's consideration of the Review Committee's report. Professor Drenowski lead the program's response to the 10-

year review and very successfully convinced the Graduate School Council that the program faculty were committed to the revitalization of the program and that he could successfully lead the effort. This commitment, supported fully by Dean Wahl, was key to the recommendation to continue the degree programs. Short of this development, it is likely that the PhD program would not have been granted a second year 5-year provisional status.

The top priority is the revitalization is the PhD program, the second is the MPH and the third is the clinical dietetics program. Through the Clinical Nutrition Research Unit and the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, new core faculty have been added. The faculty have stated a commitment to contribute actively to PhD education, including chairing and serving on committees, providing laboratories for rotations, and teaching courses (assuming salary support is provided for the latter activity). These ties have introduced strength in both the clinical and epidemiologic aspects of nutrition. Dropping two classes devoted to dietetics for Registered Dietitians has focused faculty effort; comparable offerings are available at Shoreline Community College. Access to the MPH track in nutrition has been improved with the deletion of the requirement of a RD for admission. The faculty have decided to retain the MS-RD program because of its uniqueness in the region. Milestones to be achieved in the next two years are (1) to focus more on the public health as opposed to clinical aspects of nutrition, (2) to increase the involvement of appropriate faculty currently not participating in the Program, (3) to increase the number of graduates, and (4) to submit a training grant application to improve student support and training possibilities.

Dean Wahl intends to integrate the Nutritional Sciences program more fully into the School. As of this spring, all classes will be taught in the Health Sciences Building as a way to enhance the visibility and interdisciplinarity of the program. The program faculty still face considerable challenges. To be able to continue to accept students they must show improvements in the PhD program over the next two years. The commitment of the faculty, the appointment of Professor Drewnowski and the support of Dean Wahl make it likely that sufficient improvement will be observed in the 2-year report to warrant continued admission to the PhD program and that considerable improvement in all educational and research programs will be observed at the next review in 5 years.

c: Richard L. McCormick, President

Patricia W. Wahl, Dean, School of Public Health and Community Medicine

Thomas D. Koepsell, Professor and Chair, Department of Epidemiology

Adam Drewnowski, Professor and Director, Interdisciplinary Nutritional Sciences Group

Debra Friedman, Associate Provost for Academic Planning

John Slattery, Associate Dean of Academic Programs

Graduate School Council

Review Committee

Augustine McCaffery, Assistant to the Dean

Bea Greenwald, Assistant to the Dean

(All without attachments)