Genome Sciences Program Review Response
February 15, 2007

We would like to express our appreciation to the members of the review committee and the UW Graduate School staff for their many hours of work dedicated to the Genome Sciences academic program review.

It is gratifying to have our strengths – our extraordinary group of faculty & graduate students – affirmed by a committee of experts. We have worked hard to create a collegial, innovative community of scholars, and we are succeeding in this effort. Our department and academic program will continue to grow and improve to meet the needs of our students.

We appreciate the committee's suggestions for ways to improve our program. Our responses follow.

Minority and Female Student and Faculty Recruitment:
The committee correctly observed that the proportion of female students in our graduate program is lower than it should be. While this is a fairly recent phenomenon – as recently as 2003, our incoming class had more women than men, and historically our parent departments (Genetics, MBT) had excellent female / male ratios – it is true that for the past 3 years the gender ratios for our incoming classes have not met our standards. Our faculty and students are enthusiastic about making the necessary effort to change this during our current graduate student recruitment period. We have a very strong pool of female candidates for admission and expect to demonstrate that Genome Sciences is the right place for them.

We have had difficulty as well over the past few years in recruiting female faculty candidates. While we have made extensive efforts, and while there have been outside factors (spousal faculty offers, pipeline issues), the bottom line is that we have not been able recently to recruit new female faculty members. We are currently in the midst of filling two new positions. Our faculty members are keenly aware of the need to address this issue and have made it a priority.

We appreciate the committee's acknowledgement of our extensive efforts to recruit minority students and our relative success in this area. We will continue to recruit actively for minority graduate students and to mentor undergrads in our labs. We will also continue to support our outreach program, whose success brings talented students into the University and addresses the pipeline issues in our graduate and faculty recruitments.

We appreciate the committee's acknowledgement of the need for greater support at the university level in addressing these issues. Spousal hires continue to be a frustrating endeavor at this institution and can only be addressed at the higher levels. We agree with the committee that providing a more family-friendly environment (quality nearby daycare options, etc) would greatly help our faculty, postdocs, and students with families. Families now attempting to enroll in University-affiliated daycare can be on the waitlist for years, and costs are very high.

Student Advising / Community:
Our student advising for incoming classes to this point has been split between the faculty member who serves as Graduate Program Coordinator and a staff member who assists with administering the graduate program. Students meet with the GPC

for initial advice on setting up rotations & course suggestions, and go to the staff member for assistance with registration and other bureaucratic hurdles. Students often seek out additional faculty members as well for informal advice on rotations & related issues. Additionally, our website clearly lays out the relevant guidelines for each stage of a student's academic career.

The comments gathered from our students by the committee indicate that some of them would benefit from more formal and comprehensive advising. The options suggested by the committee, including designating a team of faculty advisors (to include at least one female faculty member) will be discussed, and changes will be implemented for the next incoming class. One possibility to be considered involves setting aside time at our annual department retreat for first-year students to meet with faculty to go over rotations, faculty expectations, coursework and other issues.

We also plan to address the need for more comprehensive career advising for our students. In particular, we plan to take advantage of our strategic connections to the biotech community to make our students aware of pathways other than academic research.

Other Graduate Student Issues:
The committee mentioned other issues related to our graduate program, including the need to maintain a sense of community with students at remote locations (e.g., FHCRC, other UW locations).

To date, our departmental community, facilitated by strong attendance by faculty and students alike at weekly events (Research Reports, Journal Club, Genome Sciences & COMBI Seminars, Friday social hour), has been one of the great strengths of our program.

However, because many of our adjunct faculty - and our students who choose to work with them – are located off campus, we are soliciting feedback from them on how best to schedule events and other suggestions to allow for maximum participation. We will explore the use of communications technology to provide easier access for students in off-campus labs.

Another item involved having our incoming grads apply for National Science Foundation and other outside funding, in order to extend our departmental resources. While we have always encouraged our students to apply for NSF funding, we will likely make this mandatory, as suggested by the committee, possibly as part of a "Grants 101" workshop to be conducted by our Grants Manager and an appropriate faculty member. We will also be addressing the possibility of our students' eligibility for the Molecular & Cellular Biology Training Grant.

Curriculum Organization and Support:
The committee suggested several possible revisions to our current graduate curriculum. We are in the process, begun last fall, of revising our graduate and undergraduate courses and have received extensive student input to assist us in this endeavor.

A challenge, due to the unique dual computational / experimental nature of our program, is that our graduate students come from highly diverse educational backgrounds. We will discuss further refinement and expansion of our course

offerings to meet this challenge, including the possibility of adding a statistics course and expanding our current introduction to programming course.

As the committee notes, the high degree of involvement in undergraduate education by our faculty and students is unusual compared to our peers at other major research universities. We are committed to maintaining and improving our undergraduate course offerings and are grateful to the committee for calling for a remedy to two particular sources of frustration:

1. Unlike other programs in the School of Medicine and elsewhere, we receive no university funding for our Teaching Assistants. The reason for this is unclear to us.

2. Obtaining space for Genome 371, the Intro to Genetics course required for Biology & Biochemistry majors and taken by over 700 students per year, has been an ongoing quarterly struggle. While the new auditorium in the Foege Building has resolved past difficulties with finding space for the Genome 371 lecture, problems persist in securing space for the accompanying lab sections. We realize that adequate lab space for courses is a campus-wide issue. However, because this course is so important to large numbers of students, many of whom go on to medical, graduate, or professional school, we hope some accommodation can be made. Securing a permanent reservation for lab space in either the Health Sciences complex or Dept. of Biology-controlled space in Hitchcock Hall would be very helpful in allowing us to continue providing quality, comprehensive undergraduate instruction.