

University of Washington Correspondence

INTERDEPARTMENTAL

SCHOOL OF OCEANOGRAPHY

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TO: John T. Slattery, Associate Dean for Academic Programs
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RE: Reply to the Report of the Review Committee for the Departments of Atmospheric Sciences and Geological Sciences, Geophysics Program and the School of Oceanography

Overview

The review committee's report was distributed to all faculty, staff and students in the school and comments were solicited. Replies were received from 22 faculty, 1 graduate student and 1 former graduate student now a postdoctoral research associate in the school. The large number of responses from the faculty in particular reflects their interest in the review process as a means for objective evaluation and constructive criticism of the school—its strengths and weaknesses—and as a source of specific recommendations for continued improvement of the school.

While the faculty noted the review committee's generally laudatory assessment of the school, they felt that the structure of the review, its broad scope, and the brief time available to the committee did not permit in-depth treatment of specific issues deemed to be of greatest importance to the school. In short, the faculty were dismayed by the cursory examination of the school. Nevertheless, the review committee did make several recommendations specific to the school. The following comments respond briefly to those recommendations and, in addition, touch upon areas of continuing concern to the faculty.

Faculty Issues

The review committee and the letters of all external members of the review committee stressed faculty salary levels as one of the potentially most serious issues for the school. The school faculty did not comment on this, but salary levels have lagged relative to those of our peer institutions and this has strong implications for recruiting and retaining top-quality faculty, for

morale of the faculty, and for continued commitment of faculty to the mission and goals of the school and University. The Dean of the College of Ocean and Fishery Sciences is currently conducting a thorough comparative study of salaries in peer institutions.

A related recommendation of the review committee was to accomplish the conversion of junior faculty appointments (assistant and associate professors) from the present 6-month state supported academic appointments to 9-month appointments. This is extremely important given the present funding environment and increasing pressure for jointly taught courses emphasizing collaborations across campus. At current staffing levels the school is barely able to teach its undergraduate and graduate curriculum, leaving little room for innovative collaborations of the sort envisioned by the review committee.

Education

There was not great enthusiasm for the review committee's recommendation for a 5-year "terminal" MS degree in earth sciences or on the earth and its environment. A compelling rationale was not presented. Perhaps a more effective way to achieve interdisciplinary educational goals in earth sciences is through graduate certificate programs, such as the Astrobiology program and the Global and Environmental Chemistry program (each of which currently involves several school faculty). However, even these programs need to be evaluated for the possibility that excessive course work is being required of the students.

The review committee mentioned favorably the 45 days of R/V *T.G. Thompson* ship time that the state provides for undergraduate and graduate research. Experiential learning in oceanography incurs substantial costs besides ship time, however, and the school needs additional funding to support infrastructure (technical support, equipment, supplies, travel to/from the ship at distant ports) associated with educational use of *Thompson*.

Opportunities for Interdisciplinary Research

The faculty are genuinely interested in ways of developing interdisciplinary research in the earth sciences, but the review committee's recommendations did not appear to strike a chord. Given that interdisciplinary research typically emerges through the visionary leadership and efforts of one or a few energetic individuals, the review committee's recommendation that the Deans of earth sciences units facilitate the hiring of a team with members from two or more earth science units has merit. Such recruitment was successfully accomplished with the hirings of the Earth Surface Processes Initiative. The school faculty see global climate change, including its paleo aspects, as an obvious theme to promote.