

Report of the Ad hoc Review Committee for the Program in Nutritional Sciences

September 1998

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This review represents the collective view of the entire committee since
there was agreement on all major points.

The committee was provided with a limited self-study document of the
Interdisciplinary Graduate Program in Nutritional Sciences, as well as with faculty
vitae, student information, listing of research grants and activities, as well as
other materials.

After elimination of the School of Nutritional Science in 1984, the
Interdisciplinary Graduate Program in Nutritional Sciences was organized in 1984
and subsequently placed in the School of Public Health and Community
Medicine. The program is administered jointly by the Department of
Epidemiology and the Graduate School. Faculty who compose the core program
faculty have their appointments in several departments across the School of
Public Health.

The internal committee met on 2 occasions prior to the actual site visit. During the site visit the entire committee met with the core faculty, the prior director, the acting director and administrator, and the Chair and Associate Chair of the Department of Epidemiology. In addition, the committee had the opportunity to meet with a variety of present and past graduate students; including 2 doctoral program graduates, 3 Doctoral students, graduates students in the MS, MS-RD and MPH programs. The Director of the Clinical Nutrition Research Center, School of Medicine also met with the committee.

STRENGTHS

The committee found several significant and important strengths. These are described as follows:

- A small group of caring core faculty who work hard to support the graduate (masters and PhD) students in this program. With respect to student education the core faculty have managed in spite of dwindling resources to provide a quality MS-RD program.
- Based on discussions with both masters and PhD students there is a majority view that the courses currently available meet their needs. In addition, courses appear to be well taught.
- Space, in terms of actual laboratory and office spaces, seems to be excellent.
- Overall there are strong interdisciplinary ties in the greater university community. There are clearly multiple departments and clinical programs with nutrition as a focus who benefit from the teaching and research performed by the program.

- The MS-RD program meets a regional need. It is one of a limited number of programs in the northwest and the only one in the Seattle area and the only one associated with an academic health sciences center. Masters students come here for the strong clinical MS-RD program with the clinical internship. Discussions with several groups of students in this degree program convinced the reviewers that students were satisfied with the program. Students stated that this program is in top tier of comparable programs and serves them well to prepare for a future as clinical dietitians.
 - The belief that nutrition is integral to the education of all health care professionals is another strength of this program. In addition, nutrition science is particularly critical to meeting community needs related to disease prevention, and overall health promotion in the state of Washington. If such a need is envisioned and more fully articulated, this program, with growth, could provide the basis for an interdisciplinary center for nutrition.
 - Despite the distribution of core faculty across several departments, a Nutritional Sciences Executive Committee meets quarterly to monitor and discuss student progress.
 - For the most part, core faculty bring strengths in nutrition science research and are well respected within the scientific community.
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WEAKNESSES

At the same time, several weaknesses were also identified. These include:

- The apparent lack of a vision for a unified mission for programs in nutritional sciences. This is most likely attributable to the lack of leadership within the program. There also appeared to be an atrophy of the program in terms of faculty commitment. This may be due, in part, to the lack of integration of

nutrition sciences into Departments within the School of Public Health and Community Medicine. It may also be explained by the traditional focus on dietetics which has hindered articulation of the nutrition research science program with other schools in the health sciences. At the current time, the university has a piecemeal approach to nutrition education and research, e.g., CNRU teaches medical students and supports research, FHCRC does nutrition-related research, the nutritional sciences program trains RDs and PhDs. If aggregated, there is strong potential to better provide interdisciplinary nutrition education and establish a national presence in nutrition. The lack of a clearly articulated vision may also explain the confusion surrounding the placement of the MS-RD and PhD programs in the School of Public Health, as opposed to another School such as the School of Medicine.

- It is also likely that lack of a director has seriously limited the integration of the program into the School of Public Health.
- The PhD program would be strengthened by examining models which integrate research, education, and practice.
- Students in the new MPH program seemed less satisfied with their program. Criticisms shared with the committee include the limited number of courses, lack of linkages to other departments, and sense of isolation from the health sciences.
- Overall there was a sense of low morale but infinite hope on the part of faculty and some doctoral students. At times the interdisciplinary ties appeared to exist more on paper than in reality. This was evidenced in the statements of the students regarding their lack of access to laboratories and research facilities of other schools or departments. Another factor which may contribute to the lack of strong interdisciplinary ties is the physical isolation of the

program from the health sciences. Linkages with the CNRU in the School of Medicine and the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center (FHCRC) at present are underdeveloped.

- The lack of consistent mentoring of some PhD students was mentioned. Students described a number of situations in which they felt unsupported in their efforts to identify resources. Students shared with the reviewers that they had established a journal club to which faculty were invited to participate with only some faculty consistently present.
- There are no training grants to support the students. However, a limited number of funding opportunities as research or teaching assistantships do exist. This may account for the low number of students enrolled in the PhD program as well as the length of time for students to graduate.
- There was a lack of evidence related to the mentoring of junior faculty. The heavy teaching loads may also jeopardize the success of the junior faculty. For example, one faculty member teaches 3 core courses and chairs the admission and student affairs committee. The executive group, charged with overseeing the program, seem unaware of the teaching and service burden placed on junior faculty.
- The structure and identity of the program are loose thus making it difficult for doctoral students to understand their roles in the program. There is uncertainty about student funding and lack of clarity in information provided to students prior to entry. There also appeared to be a lack of an organized approach to expose students to multiple faculty, methods, and other investigators outside of the core teaching faculty.
- The combination of the RD and PhD programs in terms of resources may have created some problems. This situation may have led to

misinterpretation of the degree of support for the doctoral program. If a decision is made that the master-RD program is necessary to meet state needs then separate FTEs should be allocated to the masters-RD and PhD programs.

- Budget cuts without comparable cuts in programs have challenged the faculty in this program and reflect a lack of advocacy at the highest level of decision-making. For example, the nutrition program sustained a disproportionate cut relative to other programs in the School of Public Health. These cuts appear to have been made with little input from the core faculty.
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SUGGESTIONS

The committee respectfully submits the following the suggestions for strengthening the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program in Nutrition Sciences.

- There is an acute need for strategic planning to occur. This plan should be submitted to the Deans of the School of Public Health and the Graduate School for review.
- It is recommended that the program be re-evaluated in 5 years. The problems facing this program are serious enough to warrant closer scrutiny of the program and its offerings.
- Identify funding sources to enhance student and faculty resources. This would include the writing of training grants to support graduate student fellowships and research. If a strong department in nutrition is developed, it would enhance the university's ability to attract funding for center and program initiatives focused on nutrition.

- The administrative link to the Graduate School should be gradually eliminated. The appointment of a strong Director, a clearly articulated mission statement related to program goals, and integration of core faculty into the School of Public Health will decrease the need to be linked to the Graduate School. However, until that time, the connection with the Graduate School should be maintained.
- There needs to be greater communication among the Schools of Medicine and Public Health, and the FHCRC related to nutrition programs.
- Shift to an MPH-RD program (phase out the MS-RD program) would be a mechanism to strengthen the ties with the School of Public Health. It is likely that the future of graduate training of RDs will be more at the level of community with populations, rather than acute care based. Thus, this shift would better prepare students for future opportunities. The limited amount of resources may make it difficult to sustain the MS-non RD option.
- It is important to strengthen the PhD program. The organizational presence of a PhD program is essential for the program to establish credibility and collaborative opportunities both within the university and with outside agencies such as FHCRC.
- Re-establish the reputation for nutrition sciences research at this university. This would hopefully make the university's program appealing to potential graduate students. An available mechanism for accomplishing this goal may be to initiate strong collaborative ties with both FHCRC and the School of Medicine. The Schools of Public Health and Medicine and the FHCRC should meet and consider their needs with respect to graduate nutrition education and help set the parameters for the faculty and new director. This would hopefully ensure the successful participation of these schools in the PhD program and the training of nutrition scholars.