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May 2, 2019

To: Robert Stacey, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences  
Suzanne Hawley, Divisional Dean for the Natural Sciences, College of Arts and Sciences

From: Rebecca Aanerud, Interim Vice Provost and Dean  
Kima Cargill, Interim Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Planning

Handwritten signature of Rebecca Aanerud in black ink.

Handwritten signature of Kima Cargill, Ph.D. in black ink.

RE: Review of the Department of Biology (2018-2019)

This memorandum outlines the Graduate School's final recommendations from the Department of Biology academic program review. Detailed comments on the review can be found in the documents that were part of the following formal review proceedings:

- Charge meeting between review committee and administrators (May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2018)
- Self-Study (December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018)
- Site visit (January 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>, 2019)
- Review committee report (February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019)
- Department of Biology response to the report (April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019)
- Graduate School Council consideration of review (May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019)

The review committee consisted of:

**Werner Stuetzle**, Professor, UW Department of Statistics (Committee Chair)

**Munira Khalil**, Associate Professor, UW Department of Chemistry

**Bruce Bowerman**, Professor and Chair, Department of Biology, University of Oregon

**Deborah Goldberg**, Professor, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of Michigan

The Department of Biology offers the following degrees: Bachelors of Arts in Biology, Bachelor of Science, Master of Science, and Doctor of Philosophy. The Department of Biology is located in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Members of the Graduate School Council presented findings and recommendations to the full Council at its meeting on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019. A summary of this report, composed by Graduate School Council Members, is attached to this document.

Graduate School Council Recommendations

The Graduate School Council commends Department of Biology on the strength of its programs, faculty, and students. After discussion, the Council recommended the following:

- Full academic program review in 10 years (2028-2029)
- Interim report in five years (2023-2024) to provide an update on steps taken with regard to the climate concerns identified by the Review Committee. The Department of Biology should actively assess the extent of climate concerns and take action to address them.
  - The Graduate School Council further recommends that the Department of Biology consider conducting the same climate survey in five years to assess whether conditions have improved, using the recent survey as a baseline.

We concur with the Council's recommendations.

cc: Mark Richards, Provost and Executive Vice President  
Patricia Moy, Associate Vice Provost for Academic and Student Affairs, Office of the Provost  
Toby Bradshaw, Chair, Department of Biology  
David Perkel, Incoming Chair, Department of Biology  
Becky Corriell, Director, Academic Affairs & Planning, the Graduate School  
Academic unit Review Committee Members  
Members of the Graduate School Council  
GPSS President

## **Attachment**

### **University of Washington | Graduate Council**

#### **Summary of the review of Department of Biology**

The Biology Department is characterized by a very large undergraduate program coupled with a relatively small graduate program. Its overarching mission is “to discover and disseminate knowledge of the living world through research, teaching, service, and public outreach”.

**Academic Unit Name:** Department of Biology

#### **Degrees/Certificates Included in the Review:**

Bachelors of Arts in Biology, Bachelor of Science, Master of Science, and Doctor of Philosophy

#### **Program Strengths:**

- Determined focus on integrative biology fostered by fact that the Department has not divided into subject matter division, as well the diversity of research interests and strong connections to other units on the UW campus.
- An impressive faculty, including four NAS members, seven members of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, four MacArthur Fellows, 15 Guggenheim Fellows
- Vibrant and large undergraduate program that benefits from the integrative curriculum and courses that exemplify effective, evidence-based and student-focused teaching at UW. There is also significant engagement of faculty with undergraduate students in the intellectual and research missions of the Department.
- The disciplinary breadth of the department’s research coupled with the highly collaborative approach is a is an unusual and important strength for graduate education – one which offers the Department a significant advantage in recruiting graduate students and funding.
- The Biology Education Research Group (BERG) which is nationally known and highly influential for its research, and this research feeds back into the Department’s educational and curricular programs,
- New 160,000SF Life Sciences Building with attached greenhouse that supports the department’s focus on integration and collaboration.
- The governance structure which is exemplified by highly inclusive and democratic committees that investigate issues in depth to formulate recommendations and decision that works within the top-down structure of the Department as a whole. This has proved effective and efficient.
- Demonstrated commitment to diversity

#### **Challenges and Risks:**

**Funding.** There is a continued lack of funding and tenure-track faculty hires, including specific to the Biology Education Research Group, despite these recommendations being made in 2008. The program response indicates two tenure-track hires in this area have been approved.

In addition, there are challenges and limitations to space, especially for lecturers and instructional faculty who are sharing offices and need confidential space for meetings and discussions with students. This too has been partially

addressed in the review through renovations to one of the older spaces, to create more office space and conference rooms.

Additionally, there is a risk to the quality and size of the graduate program with declining graduate student enrolment rates due to financial constraints; increasing TA salaries, decreasing TA budgets, flat inflation-adjusted research funding.

**Graduate Program Community.** Overall, there is a lack of graduate student culture and community that could be better supported with initiatives like a weekly research symposium series and/or other structural changes to the structure of the graduate program (listed in detail on page 5). There is no core graduate curriculum - a fact that was already noted in the 2008 review and that the response document maintains is by design, and the preference of the department because they cannot come to consensus.

**Climate.** There were some serious comments from the review committee made about the climate of the department with regard to “**unsupportive or even abusive**” behavior and a **culture of fear** with regards to discussing or reporting these incidents. During the review exit meeting, these concerns were surfaced with two points worthy of note. First, the review committee essentially said that people seemed too afraid to talk about the details of what had happened or was happening; second, the committee as a whole seemed to accept that the new incoming Chair would be better equipped to respond to these problems and to rectify these problems - no specifications were discussed, and the new Chair had not yet been appointed. The review committee did provide detailed recommendations on page 6 and page 18. The below quote summarizes the problem:

*“However, we heard concerns about departmental climate from members of almost all the non-faculty constituencies in the department. While we were not given any specifics, the concerns seemed mostly triggered by a few faculty members whose behavior is experienced as unsupportive or even as abusive. There was a lack of trust that filing a complaint would trigger any remedial action by leadership and that complainants would be protected from retaliation. Based on our short visit, we cannot reliably quantify the prevalence of problematic behaviors or to what extent the apparent lack of trust by some has any basis in fact or is due to lack of communication; regardless the consequences for morale are similar. We did not see any evidence that the leadership is condoning inappropriate behavior or is trying to sweep complaints under the rug.” p. 6.*

In the self-study, the department acknowledged some of more general problems with regard to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as well as steps taken to rectify, including an external climate survey and efforts to include/emphasize DEI in hiring especially. It seems that these efforts have not yet made a mark on the non-Faculty community members who have had complaints/concerns to begin with. The response document is agreeable to many of the recommendations put forth by the review committee but there is no clear view to **accountability** or **actionable change** in terms of the complaints and processes set in place. In short, the review and response both address poor climate and *processes* for documentation but nothing to keep administration and faculty accountable to respond and change - only to document responses and changes when they happen, with no mechanism for ensuring that they do happen, at all, and in a way that is regular and timely. Additionally, there is nothing noted to actually find out more details about the level of problems present which are described using the language of ‘unsupportive,’ ‘abusive,’ and ‘harassment’ by the review committee.

**Areas of concurrence:**

- The department does not want to create a common graduate program curriculum.
- The department does not want to proceed with targeted Faculty search in the way proposed by the review committee, though they present an alternative that seems like a compromise.
- The department does not want to create a new, regular research talk symposium as a community building practice but offers other activities/alternatives, as well as explanation as to why this is not their preferred path forward.
- The department concurs with recommendations to revise their documentation of complaints, abuse, and harassment.
- The department agrees more hires are needed to sustain the program and have searches lined up for the coming year.
- The department agrees that more office space is needed for Lecturers and instructional staff and renovations are planned.

### **Graduate School Council Recommendations**

The Review Committee recommended that all degree programs be continued and the next review be in ten years. We recommend further discussion on this recommendation given the notable issue of climate to consider so interim measures for review.