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March 5, 2013

To: Robert C. Stacey, Dean, College of Arts & Sciences
Werner Stuetzle, Divisional Dean of Natural Sciences, College of Arts & Sciences

From: Gary Farris, Interim Dean
Rebecca Aanerud, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

RE: Review of the Graduate Certificate in Astrobiology (2010-2011)

This memo outlines the recommendations from the review of the Graduate Certificate in Astrobiology. Detailed comments on the program can be found in the documents that were part of the following formal review proceedings:

- Charge meeting between review committee, program, and administrators (November 19, 2010)
- Astrobiology self-study (February 14, 2011)
- Site visit (April 15, 2011)
- Review committee report (May 3, 2011)
- Astrobiology response to the review committee report (October 14, 2012)
- Graduate School Council consideration of review (February 22, 2013)

The review committee consisted of:

Thomas P. Ackerman, Professor, UW Atmospheric Sciences (Committee Chair)
Christopher House, Associate Professor, Department of Geosciences, The Pennsylvania State University

A subcommittee of the Graduate School Council presented findings and recommendations to the full Council at its meeting on February 22, 2013. After discussion, Council recommended continuing status for the graduate certificate program, with the next review to be scheduled for the 2020-2021 academic year. In addition, the Council requests an interim report in 2017-2018, as described below. Specific comments and recommendations regarding the program and its degree programs include the following:

Program Strengths

The review committee found that the Astrobiology (AB) Program is justifiably a very highly ranked program and a recognized national and international leader in astrobiology graduate education and research. Specific strengths articulated by the committee include:

- *Faculty.* Outstanding faculty who are highly respected in the field and make this program an international and national leader. The breadth of faculty participating in the program is “remarkable,” with faculty representing most of the central topics in astrobiology.
- *Grant Support.* Support from two NSF grants and two NASA grants.
- *Students.* Excellent and productive students who have received many conference awards and published numerous scientific papers in prestigious journals. Faculty are attracted to AB because of extraordinary students, many of whom bring funding.
- *Interdisciplinary focus.* This is an “exciting and timely” interdisciplinary field. The program has demonstrated the ability to maintain a distinct intellectual community despite its interdisciplinary focus.
- *Curriculum.* Graduate students value the core classes, including an outstanding required weekly seminar, and feel that core AB faculty do an excellent job of providing a sound education in Astrobiology. There is good communication and networking in the first year of the program.
- *Research rotation.* Requirement that all AB graduate students spend a one quarter rotation in a research lab or group other than their own is unique and enjoys broad support across the program.

Overview of review committee recommendations and unit responses

The program responded in detail to the review committee recommendations, many of which were successfully addressed in the period between the review committee report and program response. Recommendations included:

- Initiate the change from a certificate program to a coordinated dual-title PhD program option offered through participating units.
 - Response: The dual-title PhD program options have been created (Summer Quarter 2012). The graduate certificate program will be maintained to provide flexibility and recognition for students who will benefit from the certificate, but would not benefit from the more extensive requirements for the dual-title PhD option.
- Hire a fourth Astrobiology tenure-track professor and begin strategic planning for the replacement of essential faculty.
 - Response: In the absence of current resources to hire dedicated Astrobiology faculty, the program is working to recruit new Astrobiology faculty from among existing UW faculty members.
- The review committee strongly recommended that the AB program continue to receive institutional support for a half-time administrative staff person, and that the program and administration work together to find support for student research rotations. The committee expressed that it is unrealistic to operate a program as diverse as AB without some minimal level of central support.

- Response: The program would welcome dedicated institutional support. Currently, support for staff and graduate student rotations is provided by the university through matching grant funds on a five-year grant.
- Initiate a change in AB program leadership and organization. The Astrobiology program should prepare for leadership change with enough time to allow for the transition to a new leader under the mentorship of the current director. In addition, formalization of the constitution and responsibilities of the Steering Committee is needed.
 - Response: The transition to a new program director has successfully occurred. The director's first priority was to implement the Dual-title Ph.D program options as well as to bring in RA and administrative funding for the coming five years. Top priority now is to formalize the program structure and role of the Steering Committee.
- Integrate the postdoctoral research associates into the AB Program. Postdocs associated with program were anxious to become more involved with program activities.
 - Response: The program welcomes the postdoctoral research associates' interest and has taken a variety of steps to integrate them more fully into the program. This effort will continue over the coming years.

Graduate School Council Recommendations

The Council endorses the review committee's findings and recommendations, and acknowledges the progress the program has made since receiving those recommendations. The Council specifically recommends:

- Continuing status for the Astrobiology Graduate Certificate, with subsequent review in ten years (2010-2011).
- An interim report to be submitted in 2017-2018 to the Graduate School and the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences. This report should:
 - 1) provide an update on program funding in light of the current dependence on grant matching funds of limited duration to provide staff support and student research rotations;
 - 2) describe the success of the newly initiated dual-title PhD option, offered in coordination with affiliated units.

We concur with the Council's comments and recommendations.

cc: Ana Mari Cauce, Provost and Executive Vice President
Victoria S. Meadows, Associate Professor and Director, Astrobiology Program
Members of the Graduate School Council
David Canfield-Budde, Academic Program Specialist, The Graduate School
GPSS President