

Action Plan in Response to APR Recommendations

The Students

Recommendations

1. Establish a budget (in advance) for Student Research Day activities to facilitate the organizational efforts of students.

A budget of \$2,000 will be set-aside for Graduate Student Research Day annually. This allocation does not include costs for the invited speaker, which will continue to be covered separately through support from the Cell and Molecular Basis of Disease Seminar Series, as was the case last year.

2. Develop a more comprehensive integration of MD/PhD students into the BSGP throughout their entire training. This will require careful consideration of clinical training activities during research-intensive intervals as well as of research-related efforts during clinical education and training.

The MD/PhD program director, Dr. Fernando Valenzuela, together with the MD/PhD students has developed a plan for a new Journal Club with a focus on Clinical Translational Research that will be open to all interested graduate and medical students. The goal being to promote intermixing and interdisciplinary discussion around disease oriented clinical research problems. A new T32 training program, to be part of an Integrated Clinical Translational Research Education Program and Center with the same focus, will involve MD, MD/PhD and PhD students thereby also increasing integration of learners from different programs.

3. Establish a program-based advisory process for students, *i.e.*, identify and assign an advisor to each student to provide oversight that begins with student matriculation and continues throughout student tenure in the program. An advisor need not necessarily align with the area of research interest of a given student, but advisors must be available to advisees, aware of BSGP programmatic rules and policies, and willing to interface with the BSGP Steering Committee on behalf of the students. Sharing of successful mentoring plans from various departmentally-based efforts could facilitate a thoughtful programmatic solution

Beginning in Fall 2007, incoming students will be paired with faculty advisors. Faculty advisors will be required to complete a training workshop and be given a notebook that provide an overview of the graduate program requirements, important mileposts, etc.

4. Establish a long-range plan for defining the optimum size and expansion of the program commensurate with faculty size and funded research programs. This planning will require careful consideration of important fiscal constraints associated with student recruitment and 1st year stipend support as well as mechanisms to sustain matriculated students if research funding is lost.

To ensure that annual recruitment meets individual Dept. needs, BSGP steering committee representatives will solicit input from their Dept.

Faculty and Chairs in the fall regarding the number of targeted student recruits and any Dept Scholar slots to be provided. The BSGP director will obtain MOUs for any pledged Dept. scholars. This plan allows admission of 14-20 PhD students annually. Meshing plans for faculty and program growth will be accomplished by establishing an ad hoc committee consisting of representatives from individual Dept., the Office of Research and the BSGP.

The Curriculum

1. A process for the regular review/revision of the entire BSGP curriculum is essential. The external reviewers suggest establishment of a Curriculum Subcommittee consisting of members from the 6 academic BSGP research divisions and the extramural partners, LRRRI and LANL. This subcommittee should be charged with performing regular reviews of the core courses and selectives to ensure that these offerings are meeting the needs of BSGP students. In this process, involvement and/or input of students from each of the BSGP research divisions is critical. Recommendations from the Subcommittee would then provide a basis for further consideration by the BSGP Steering Committee.

A faculty subcommittee consisting of four BSGP course directors and the Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies has been established to address two issues: a) establish a process for regular curriculum review and incorporation of new courses; b) identify the key curricular needs. The directors of a MS in Clinical Research and of an interdisciplinary, NSF-funded IGERT program have also been asked to provide input. Student input will be solicited through small focus groups. We plan to leverage resources available through existing assessment programs in the SOM.

2. The manner in which the qualifying and comprehensive exams are administered should be carefully reviewed to ensure that all committees incorporate rigor in both examinations. Steps should be taken to ensure that the format of the comprehensive examination is consistent among all students.

The qualifying exam has been carefully reviewed. Revised guidelines for student evaluation were implemented with the May 2007 exam and positively received by examiners and students. The exam process and guidelines have been clearly articulated in written form and together with the evaluation form are posted on the web. The Assistant Dean for Graduate Studies and the Qualifying Exam Chair will continue to provide a prep session two-three weeks in advance of both the January and May exam periods. The comprehensive exam guidelines are posted on the webpage and the program office will ensure that examiners and students are apprised of the exam timelines and requirements. A plan for formalized training of all mentors will also help ensure greater uniformity.

3. A multidisciplinary course on the Responsible Conduct of Research should be provided on an annual basis and be required for every BSGP student. In this

course, the participation of representative faculty from each of the research divisions would be extremely beneficial.

Drs. Hjelle and Wandinger-Ness have taught an existing course on Responsible Conduct in Research since 2000 on a biannual basis. Discussions are in progress among Dept. Chairs to identify additional faculty who could participate in the teaching of this course at least annually or possibly every semester to allow more students to be served. The pool of faculty to be asked to participate in teaching the course includes current training grant directors and mentors with training grant supported students.

4. Students should receive information and engage in discussions about alternative careers in science.

The Biomedical Graduate Student Society has taken the lead in inviting speakers (3-4/year) to discuss various career tracks at an annual retreat held in September each year. Speakers in the past three years have covered careers in science writing, as administrators in private science foundations, in pharmaceutical industry, among others. The retreat is open to all graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

In addition, a new monthly series on career development and career options will be developed and integrated with similar efforts in the Clinical Translational Science Center (CTSC) and College of Pharmacy (COP). A leader for this initiative needs to be identified.

The Faculty

Recommendations

1. The Program Director needs to ensure that faculty are better informed about program requirements, particularly those concerning the comprehensive exam. This could take the form of scheduled sessions in departmental faculty meetings, though there could be many alternative strategies.

A faculty training workshop has been developed and was first offered in Fall 2006. A second workshop will be run in Fall 2007. Faculty attending the workshop receive a handbook that includes information about program requirements, mileposts, etc. and mirrors information given to all entering students. In addition, all student handbook information is regularly updated and posted on the BSGP webpage. Senior Associate Dean of Research, Dr. Richard Larson, will discuss with Dept. Chairs the implementation of a policy that requires all prospective mentors to complete the training workshop. Mandatory training could be tied to requests for approval as graduate training faculty (by the BSGP and OGS), renewable every 5 years.

2. The School of Medicine and/or the OGS needs to better monitor and credit faculty effort in graduate education, similar to that which is apparently already in place for crediting faculty effort in medical professional education. The departmental

and school administration need to recognize the value of faculty efforts in both formal lecture hours and less formal, but equally important, individual mentoring of graduate students. The School should recognize that faculty efforts in graduate education are of comparable value to that of medical education for a Tier 1 research institution.

An Ad-Hoc Committee with representation from each department involved in graduate education within the School of Medicine has been formed to address this issue. The committee has met and established a rough guideline of what activities need to be captured, how they should be valued across departments, and how they will be reported within the BSGP structure and in the Faculty Activity Database (FAD) with SOM Administration. The committee will continue to meet and revise the proposal of this tracking mechanism and align the collection, valuation and reporting as closely as possible with professional medical education tracking and reporting. The committee's proposals will be shared with the Chairs of each Department for input and approval. The goal is to bring equal recognition and distribution of faculty effort in clinical and graduate research education and training.

The Facilities

Recommendation

One of the clearest examples this issue is in the Brain and Behavioral Illness program, in which the Department of Neurosciences is a very central player. Establishing an interdisciplinary research center in this area should be carefully considered, one that coordinates research, grant administration, and training efforts with the Main Campus, MIND Institute, the labs, and other entities. Although funds appear to be earmarked for construction of a new facility adjacent to MIND Institute that would house translational neuroscience research from the Departments of Neurology and Psychiatry, it is unclear as to whether this new facility would directly support the more basic neuroscience research components critical to the BSGP.

A number of funded research centers and extramural partnerships provide students with access to state of the art resources, e.g. Cancer Center microscopy, proteomics, flow and genomics facilities, COP animal imaging resources, LRR environmental testing resources and Neurosciences animal and Brain imaging facilities, among others. Most of these facilities have technical support staff to train faculty, staff and students and serve as a model for future centers, e.g. a partnership between Neurosciences and the MIND institute. Students have expressed a need to have greater technical support in utilizing these facilities, particularly with trouble shooting experimental strategies. This will need to be negotiated with individual facility directors.

The Administration

Recommendations

1. The BSGP program coordinates with many other UNM administrative units. Discussions with both students and faculty revealed some frustration in interactions with the Office of Graduate Studies (OGS). In particular, students reported several episodes of not getting paid in a timely fashion. Further, they complained that getting disenrolled for late tuition payment coverage was not uncommon. However, OGS worked effectively with the MD/PhD program to handle instances of students finishing their dissertation before completing all course requirements. Additionally, the rather complicated set of transactions required for enrollment, requiring interactions with the Registrar, Bursar, Financial Aid, and OGS, places strains on students and program staff alike. Clearly, this problem is not unique to the BSGP.

Need help from main campus to work with BSGP representatives and Mike Swantes and Ava Lovell designee from HSC.

2. The extensive administrative activities of the Program Director suggest that 50% time commitment would be more appropriate.

Sr. Associate Dean for Research, Dr. Larson, has received verbal commitment from Vice President HSC, Dr. Paul Roth to increase % effort and/or to spread across two positions.

3. The BSGP strategic plan suggested that one position of Program Coordinator be changed from exempt (hourly) to non-exempt status. Given the need to coordinate diverse activities outside the regular workday (*i.e.*, recruitment), this would seem to be a good idea.

The senior leadership considered this recommendation, but expects to keep the PC, grade 10 position as an exempt position to allow the individuals in this role to earn overtime. Changing to non-exempt status would not substantially increase pay for this position, but would prevent OT from being accrued.

4. Centralized data tracking is an issue that emerged in several discussions. Tracking of current BSGP students as well as program graduates would significantly aid in the development of competitive training grants.

Current student tracking is done using an Access Database managed by the BSGP administrative team. A faculty subcommittee has been established that will review all student progress on an annual basis and issue letters of progress to both students and mentors. Will explore long-term graduate tracking through existing assessment and outcomes tracking programs for medical students.

5. The BSGP Steering Committee could be better utilized. Based on input to the review committee, two recommendations seem warranted. This group should continue to work on developing a sense of program identity (in addition to departmental identity) for BSGP students. Second, they might profitably direct more attention to regular program evaluation, data tracking of individual students, and utilizing more formal reviews of teaching effectiveness and course coverage. Greater use of subcommittees might be an effective mechanism towards

achieving these goals (e.g., Recruitment Subcommittee, Admissions Subcommittee, and Curriculum Subcommittee).

The BSGP steering committee unilaterally rejected the recommendation to have an admissions subcommittee. However, subcommittees are regularly used to address specific needs such as the development of a strategic plan, administration of the qualifying exam, curriculum revision etc.

6. Based on input from several sources, greater budgetary autonomy and authority for the Program Director would be helpful.
Regular monthly meetings of a newly hired accountant (Cindy Brindley), Sr. Assoc. Dean for Research (Dr. Richard Larson), MD/PhD program director (Dr. Fernando Valenzuela), BSGP manager (Mr. Ignacio Ortiz), and Assistant Dean for Graduate Studies (Dr. Angela Wandinger-Ness) are planned to allow regular review of budgetary issues. Currently, the Assistant Dean for Graduate Studies is part of the budget planning process and provides input from the MD/PhD program director. Regular budget reports have been lacking in part due to the grave illness and death of our previous accountant, Ms. Valerie Burge.
7. There also appears to be a need for more and better designed office facilities. Ideally, appropriate space for confidential advising, as well as a student gathering area, should be provided.

A plan for accommodating the BSGP administrative team in new space in Rib II, under construction and to be completed in Fall 2007, is under development. The BSGP team would be housed in shared space with the administrative team leading the CTSC Education Core.

8. Regarding tuition return, greater transparency in the process would be highly desirable. At the very least, this might help to alleviate a rather widespread perception of “unfairness”. If more tuition funds could flow to the program, it could be very effectively utilized to increase the number of stipends offered to first year students, a critical need identified by faculty. The precise details of how tuition is handled should be explored and widely disseminated to faculty.

Tuition remission for the BSGP and associated graduate training programs has been authorized by the Provost, but the funds are not yet being returned to the HSC based on discussions between Sr. Associate Dean Larson and HSC chief financial officers.