

November 28, 2006

Dr. Amy B. Wohlert
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and
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University of New Mexico
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Dear Provost Wohlert:

The Academic Program Review team for the Program in Nutrition/Dietetics would like to thank you for the opportunity to visit the administrators, faculty, staff, and students affiliated with the nutrition program. The on-campus visit was extremely well organized and conducted in a timely manner. The supportive materials were more than adequate in scope and depth and the document was very well written.

Enclosed please find a copy of the final report; this document represents the input and consensus of the entire team. Please feel to contact me or any of the team members should clarification and/or expansion be of assistance.

Sincerely,



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DEC 05 2006
Academic Affairs

**Academic Program Report, Program in Nutrition/Dietetics
University of New Mexico - November 7-9th, 2006**

Executive Summary

The review team visit coincided with internal assessments by the nutrition faculty, who have been engaging in program planning over the past year in anticipation of the impending (Spring 2007) retirement of one tenured faculty member and the anticipated retirement of the remaining two tenured faculty within five years or so. Thus, the timing of this academic review stimulated additional internal discussions.

The undergraduate Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD) is one of only two such accredited programs in the state of New Mexico. There seems to be an acceptable, although occasionally variable, rate of student placement into Dietetic Internships. Most UNM nutrition students are "place bound" in Albuquerque, thus many only apply to the UNM Internship. There has been an acceptable pass rate for program graduates taking the Registration Examination for Registered Dietitians (RD). The small "n" of students taking the exam skews results when even one student does not pass the first time. The review team suggests **the addition of a specific one-semester course in biochemistry** in order to strengthen the rigor of the dietetics curriculum, the preparation of students for a wide range of careers, and to qualify them for graduate programs. We also suggest **expanding the scope of undergraduate concentrations** to better serve those students with professional goals other than the RD credential.

The graduate program does not appear to have clearly delineated goals other than serving as a vehicle for the accredited Dietetic Internship. The state of New Mexico is very well served by the Internship as it is the only one available in the state, it accepts a relatively large number of students each year (14-16), accepts a high proportion of New Mexico residents, and provides significant funding (from an external grant) for a total of four interns each year. The review team sees the need for **a clearly defined graduate program mission and vision for the future** beyond the role of graduate study tied to the Dietetic Internship. We also recommend **reallocation of faculty and administrative efforts** to better support the research mission of the graduate program. Finally, we advise **improved communication related to program goals, offerings, and requirements** in order to maximize student recruitment and retention at the graduate level.

The nutrition/dietetics program is positively regarded across the University however **the program suffers from limited visibility**. The review team identified no compelling reason for the program to move from its current administrative home in the College of Education, Department of Individual, Family & Community Education. We do feel, however, that **linkages between nutrition and other COE programs, as well as other researchers outside the college, can and should be strengthened**.

The Nutrition Program currently has three full-time tenure-track faculty. One member of this faculty has announced impending retirement. It is critical that she be replaced. If the program is to manage current and projected teaching and research responsibilities with less reliance on part-time instructors and increase research involvement and productivity, an additional tenure-track line should be provided. The Nutrition Program should be staffed at four full-time tenure track faculty.

We make the following five recommendations:

1. Clarify the identity of the graduate program
2. Reallocate efforts towards graduate education
3. Broaden the offering of specified undergraduate concentrations by realigning existing nutrition and other courses
4. Increase the visibility of the program internally and externally
5. Increase full-time nutrition tenure-track faculty lines from three to four.

Undergraduate Program in Nutrition

Strengths: Over the past several years, there has been a steady increase in the demand for undergraduate nutrition courses and in the production of student credit hours (SCH). Many of the undergraduate courses serve the university as a whole and, in particular, other health professions majors. In addition, the number of nutrition majors has increased from 44 (2000) to 65 (Fall 2005 data). These areas of growth provide direct support to the University's strategic direction of enhancing professional programs.

The Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD) is one of only two such programs in the state of New Mexico and provides the first step in the credentialing process for Registered Dietitians (RDs). Dietitians and nutritionists (as licensed by the state) are in strong demand, provide cost-effective health care (promotion, prevention, and treatment), and are highly relevant to the University's goal of serving the citizens of New Mexico. UNM dietetic internship placement rates exceed the national average on most years. The curriculum is solid and maintains appropriately rigorous entry requirements. Nutrition courses are offered on a regular and predictable basis so that students can graduate in a timely manner.

The nutrition faculty are cohesive, dedicated, student-centered, open to suggestions, and anxious to improve the program. The full-time faculty are a stable group however, as noted above, retirements are likely, over the coming five years, for three of the tenured faculty. Faculty are well suited to the courses they teach although, as will be discussed shortly, many core courses are currently taught by part-time instructors on semester-by-semester contracts. There is a strong plan in place for the assessment of student learning outcomes and it is in active use by the nutrition faculty and DPD director.

Based upon input from the students who participated in the review process, they are actively engaged in the program, contribute to a strong pro-active student culture, and are "anxious to be heard". They recognize the strengths of the nutrition faculty and agree that the faculty put forth tremendous effort to support students and ensure their academic success.

Challenges: As currently designed, the undergraduate nutrition program offers no academic option other than the DPD; there are no clearly defined programs of study for persons wishing to follow non-dietetics career paths. Without the need for additional course offerings, it would be feasible for the nutrition faculty to develop undergraduate concentrations in, for example, food and nutrition management (remove most of the upper division nutrition/metabolism/medical nutrition therapy and organic/biochemistry courses; add business and related courses). There could be a child nutrition track that would fit well within the nutrition program's current administrative home and/or a "preprofessional" concentration for pre-med, pre-dental, pre-osteopathic students (remove all or most foods and food management courses; add physics and other science courses). These additions would appeal to a broader range of students, provide alternative pathways for students meeting limited success in upper division nutrition courses, and enhance the visibility of the program across the college and university.

Within the DPD concentration, students are lacking adequate preparation in biochemistry. The students who met with the review team specifically noted the absence of a "pure" biochemistry course requirement. Currently, dietetics students are required to take a one semester course that combines organic chemistry and biochemistry. This approach does not match the rigor of the biochemistry requirement of most dietetics programs across the US. The nutrition faculty, in conjunction with administrative support, will need to work with the chemistry department to identify course offerings (including appropriate prerequisites) that will allow dietetic students to take a one semester biochemistry course without unduly adding to their total graduation requirements. The addition of a biochemistry requirement will enhance the preparation of the undergraduates and make them more competitive for admission into Dietetic Internships, graduate programs, and professional schools.

Although SCH production and the number of majors have increased significantly over the past five years, faculty staffing has not kept pace. A large number of undergraduate courses, both lower and upper division, are taught by part-time instructors. Although these instructors appear to be highly qualified, and many return year after year, they are not available to contribute to the "culture" of the department nor do they provide the same level of professional counseling as is offered by full-time faculty. Over reliance on part-time instructors for course instruction increases the service demands placed upon full-time faculty and limits the cohesiveness and consistency of related courses. The review committee recommends that use of part-time instructors be gradually reduced over the next few years and that the current full-time tenure-track faculty

allocation be increased from three to four (replacement of impending faculty retirement and the addition of a fourth tenure-track line).

Some, but not all, of the undergraduates who met with the review team perceived a lack of communication regarding the process of applying to Dietetic Internships and non-dietetics career options. Other students, however, were quick to note that several courses did cover Internship application processes and non-dietetic jobs thus there was some discrepancy within the group. Although the students were greatly appreciative of the advising efforts of the nutrition faculty, the review team recommends that all routine academic advising be provided by the centralized college advising office and that nutrition faculty limit their advising efforts to professional development issues. In place of the time currently spent on individual undergraduate course advising, the faculty could consider providing a 1-credit course in Fall semester of senior year that focuses on preparation of the dietetic internship applications and/or graduate and professional school applications.

Graduate Program in Nutrition

Strengths: The Dietetic Internship, housed within the graduate offerings of the nutrition program, accepts an ambitious number of students; as noted above, this is the only accredited Dietetic Internship in the state of New Mexico thus is critical in meeting the academic goals of dietetic students who are unable to relocate. Students who have completed the UNM Internship have a good cumulative pass rate on the Registered Dietitian exam; the program is relatively new thus even one failure can impact pass rates for a few years. The LEAP grant provides full funding for a total of four interns each year (two new students, two continuing students); the grant supports completion of the MS degree as well as the Dietetic Internship. The review team encourages resubmission for continued funding of this program as it allows recruitment of very high quality students. The internship has a strong history of accepting New Mexico students into the program thus meeting the University's goal of serving the citizens of the state.

Challenges: The graduate program has suffered at the expense of the undergraduate program. The graduate program in nutrition has no unifying vision or goal apart from the Dietetic Internship. This lack of vision is reflected in the fact that many students leave the graduate program after completing the Dietetic Internship (some do return within the next few years and complete course requirements). It was of concern to the review team that virtually no students have selected the thesis option (just one student out of 30 over the past five years). Graduate research can support faculty research efforts, enhance graduate student professional development and career opportunities, and improve the overall visibility of the graduate program in nutrition. In addition, an enhanced graduate program will facilitate the recruitment and retention of strong tenure-track faculty.

The graduate program in nutrition is not as effectively managed as is the undergraduate program. There are very few regularized content courses within the nutrition graduate program; most students select "topic courses" that are offered every other year or so. Several graduate students expressed concern that the advising of graduate students was inconsistent; students did not always feel informed about course offerings, graduation requirements, expectations for final papers, etc. This may partly be a lack of initiative on the part of graduate students but could be remedied with a more specific, mandatory advising process that is initiated when students begin the graduate program. Continued registration for classes, for example, could be contingent on completion of a planned program of coursework as approved by a nutrition faculty advisor. The printed material describing the graduate program did not provide any details regarding course offerings that could be used to enrich students seeking a "Public Health" or "Health Education" focus. By listing specific courses, graduate students would have an easier time envisioning their graduate program of study, thus students might be more likely to complete their MS degree.

Currently, graduate students are able to choose the topic of their final paper; the topic does not have to complement the professional strengths of graduate nutrition faculty thus the faculty are forced to spend considerable amounts of time researching each topic in order to effectively evaluate each paper. This is a very inefficient process and should be modified as soon as possible. Each student should be provided a list of faculty interests and should be directed to choose a topic that falls within those scopes of expertise in consultation with nutrition faculty. This would facilitate faculty research efforts and reduce the time devoted to supervision of individual graduate students without compromising the training of graduate students.

There is no apparent graduate student "culture" within the nutrition program. The students did not have the same cohesiveness and unity seen within the undergraduate students. Part of this may stem from the fact that many graduate students are part-time with full-time jobs and/or family commitments thus do not spend a lot of time on campus apart from class sessions. However, there are possible actions (hosting nutrition conferences, establishing start-of-semester receptions, encouraging collaboration with other College of Education graduate students, etc) that might enhance the collegiality among nutrition graduate students and support their identity as College of Education graduate students.

Resources:

Strengths: As previously noted, full-time faculty are dedicated, collegial, and well matched to the courses they teach. They currently devote a lot of time to student advisement. As a group, they demonstrate strong program management skills with the possible exception of the MS program. They persist in their efforts to secure external funding and publish/present peer-reviewed research. Individually, the tenured faculty have adapted to the lack of dedicated labs for the

nutrition program and the overall lack of fiscal and research staff resources. The nutrition faculty are very active within the Albuquerque and New Mexico communities and serve national organizations as well. They are anxious to move the nutrition program forward.

Some of the physical facilities available to the nutrition program are highly desirable. Faculty have spacious, well appointed offices that are in close proximity to the building housing the rest of the department and are very close to the University Medical Center, including the Clinical Research Center (GCRC). The newly constructed foods lab will be a great asset to the program, not only for the foods lab but for other classes that will now be able to incorporate food demonstrations, etc into their lectures.

The nutrition program has ready access to the largest school district in New Mexico, thus could generate opportunities for school-based research. There appears to be an adequate pool of professional mentors and preceptors for undergraduate field placements, including those professionals working at the University Medical Center.

Challenges: There is a lack of focus and targeted vision in the individual research agendas of the nutrition faculty. Each faculty member has a number of diverse interests but each has failed to narrow their interests into one area of expertise. This has limited their professional visibility, across campus and external to the university. In addition, the heavy advising and administrative loads they carry limit the time available for programmatic research, as does the lack of a strong research-based graduate program.

Although in very close proximity to the University Medical Center and the Generalized Clinical Research Center (GCRC), the nutrition faculty have not maximized opportunities for collaborative research. Students utilize the facilities for course-related projects and activities but the faculty themselves appear to have little professional involvement with the Medical Center nutritionists. The review team suggests that the nutrition faculty consider inviting some of the active researchers utilizing the GCRC for projects related to nutrition faculty interests to give seminars to the department and include some of these GCRC researchers on thesis committees. In addition, nutrition faculty should utilize the UNM research division to organize joint research discussions or use other methods to develop connections, stimulate collaborations, and enhance the rate of proposals submitted to and funded by the GCRC.

Unfortunately, there are no scientific ("wet") labs dedicated to nutrition faculty. This absence will limit the program's ability to attract and retain faculty whose research depends upon lab analyses. While some nutrition faculty have access to wet labs in other departments, it is not an ideal situation and would not be attractive to a new hire. The university should either consider building laboratories for nutrition faculty, encourage targeted recruiting of new hires whose research does not rely on laboratories (e.g. community or school interventions), or more fully develop the connections to GCRC mentioned above. There is no apparent space within the building that would encourage students to mingle and socialize. Such a space would encourage the development of a

strong student culture and identity, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Classrooms varied in their provision of state-of-the-art audiovisual equipment. Having access to the latest technology in all classrooms would enhance the instructional capabilities of the faculty.

The nutrition faculty perceive a lack of qualified, accessible staff support for administrative duties. As such, they take on these duties at the expense of their research and scholarship efforts. The availability of a dependable, trained individual, who could provide specific administrative support to the nutrition program, would free up faculty for higher priority responsibilities. This could be achieved by assigning these specific duties to one of the department's office support staff who could be trained to handle these responsibilities consistently and efficiently as they arise.

Conclusion:

The nutrition program at the University of New Mexico is a valuable asset, providing an academic curriculum and professional career pathway that are in high demand. The faculty are dedicated, collegial, and work collaboratively. The future success of the program requires planning for the upcoming retirement(s). The program would be best served by a total of four full-time tenure-track faculty and a reduction in part-time instructors. The program needs to increase its visibility, both within and external to the university. The undergraduate program would attract additional students if curricula were broadened beyond the dietetics concentration. The graduate program in nutrition needs to sharpen its identity, vision, and course offerings while encouraging student participation in research areas that are within faculty areas of expertise. Stronger research collaborations with the GCRC, local schools, and community agencies would enhance faculty opportunities for external funding. The nutrition program is well-placed in its current administrative home and the review team found no compelling reason to move it to another unit.

The primary recommendations of the review team are as follows:

1. Clarify the identity of the graduate program
2. Reallocate efforts towards the graduate program
3. Broaden the offering of specified undergraduate concentrations by realigning existing nutrition courses
4. Increase the internal and external visibility of the program
5. Increase full-time tenure-track nutrition faculty lines from three to four.