

TO: Mike Mahon
President

DATE: March 30, 2011

FROM: Bob Boudreau
Chair, University Review Committee

RE: Ph.D. Program Academic Quality Assurance Review

In accordance with the U of L *Academic Quality Assurance Policy and Process*, the University Review Committee approved the Ph.D. program review results at its February 2, 2011 meeting. The Ph.D. quality assurance review produced four documents:¹

- 1) *PhD Program Review Committee Report* (August 27, 2009) – self-study report drafted by the Program Review Committee.
- 2) *Review of the PhD Program, University of Lethbridge* (November 2009) – prepared by external reviewers Susan Apostle-Clark (Trent University) and Deborah MacLatchy (Wilfred Laurier University).
- 3) *External Review of the PhD Program – Comments from PhD Review Committee* (May 2010) – the response of the Program Review Committee to the external review.
- 4) *PhD Program Review: Dean's Response* (January 18, 2011) – response to the review, written by Robert Wood, Dean of Graduate Studies. Robert Wood presented the results of the review to the University Review Committee on February 2, 2011.

The self-study noted that the Ph.D. program is “viable and evolving” and “attracts high quality students.” Graduating students’ publication and employment rates show that the program is meeting its objectives well. Program design is robust and surveys reported high levels of satisfaction with quality of student work, knowledge and skill acquisition, length of program, and student-supervisory committee interaction. Faculty member support for the Ph.D. program is strong.

The self-study reported several challenges to be addressed: student dissatisfaction with courses provided; lack of courses developed specifically for each of the Ph.D. majors; inadequate recognition or compensation for faculty members teaching graduate courses; insufficient financial resources to meet the needs of the students and faculty members; need for standardization of comprehensive examinations, dissertation final exams, and dissertation documents across all majors; and a lack of a graduate culture at the U of L.

¹ All documents are available upon request.

The external review praised the Ph.D. program, noting that it “is of very high quality and very clearly meets the standards expected of such programs in the Canadian university system.” The reviewers made several suggestions to strengthen the program:

- Determine if the capacity and interest exists to change the interdisciplinary majors to single discipline majors.
- Review admissions procedures for applicants with Master’s degrees.
- Review the procedures for transfer from Master’s to Ph.D.
- Develop a policy for students to take Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Ph.D. degrees at the U of L.
- Develop plans for recruiting international students.
- Develop a plan for offering courses and integrating the teaching load for core courses into faculty workload.
- Periodically review financial assistance for Ph.D. students.
- Review library resource needs.
- Review the provision of study/work space for graduate students.

In its response, the Program Review Committee noted the external reviewers’ suggestions for improvement and provided some commentary. The Committee had mixed response to moving to single discipline majors, citing positive and negative aspects on both sides. There was agreement with reviewing admissions and transfer procedures. Undertaking all degrees at the U of L is an individual choice, the Committee felt, but there should be increased Doctoral student recruitment efforts. Recruitment of international students could be enhanced through offering financial incentives. Core courses should be introduced that accommodate students from various departments. Student support information should be complete and up to date, and centralized in the School of Graduate Studies. Department representatives on the existing Library committee should survey Ph.D. students annually about required resources. And, finally, there was agreement with the need for graduate study space, and also for Graduate Students’ Association office space.

In his response to the review results, Dean of Graduate Studies Robert Wood provided additional commentary regarding the recommendations that arose from the review:

- The U of L should adopt a hybrid Ph.D. program structure, maintaining interdisciplinary majors while moving to discipline-specific majors as appropriate.
- Applications and admissions procedures must be reassessed, and two ongoing groups are currently tackling this. Relatedly, the School of Graduate Studies should abolish the requirement for an applicant to identify a Ph.D. supervisor at the time of application.
- The principle behind creating a new committee structure to handle departmental vetting of applicants is sound and should be built upon.
- Restructuring the transfer exam so that it acts as a substitute for the Ph.D. comprehensive examination merits serious consideration, with the caution that the M.Sc. degree not be viewed merely as a stepping stone to a Doctoral program.
- The decision to take all degrees at the U of L should remain a personal choice.

