MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Medicine

Response to Academic Program Review

of

Bio-Medical Sciences and Discipline of Genetics

Memorial University of Newfoundland

By the Office of Research and Graduate Studies

Submitted to Dr. Noreen Golfman,

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Response of Research and Graduate Studies of Faculty of Medicine to APR Recommendations on Graduate Programs in Division of BioMedical Sciences and Discipline of Genetics

Preamble

The Academic Program Review (APR) was carried out in (March - October) 2012 for five programs (Neuroscience, Cancer and Development, Cardiovascular and Renal Sciences, Immunology and Infectious Disease and Genetics) in accordance with guidelines set by the Centre for Institutional Analysis and Planning (CIAP), Memorial University. Each program carried out a self-study in consultation with faculty members associated with the group as well as the administrative head of the Unit (i.e. Associate Dean, Division of BioMedical Sciences and Chair, Discipline of Genetics). Upon the completion of the self-studies, a compilation of each study plus and an executive summary were submitted (November 2012) to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, Memorial University, as the designate Dean of Records for the APR. Preparations were made by CIAP for the site visit to the Faculty of Medicine by the external panel following the acceptance of the reports for the APR by Dr. Noreen Golfman, the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, Memorial University. The composition of the external panel was two faculty members from Memorial University, Dr. Gerard Martin (Panel Chair; Department of Psychology) and Dr. Brian Staveley (Department of Biology), and two from outside Memorial, Dr. Michael Kawaja (Queen's University) and Dr. Peter Pennefather (University of Toronto). The panel visited the Faculty of Medicine on April 26th – 28th, 2013 and met with the faculty, students, staff and administrators. Following the site visit by the APR review panel, a report including recommendations to the Unit was provided to the Associate Dean of Research & Graduate Studies in Faculty of Medicine, by Dr. Noreen Golfman. This report by the panel was circulated among faculty members and administrative heads, including the Dean, in the Faculty of Medicine. The following is a response from Faculty of Medicine to the recommendation made by the APR panel.

Response to the Panel

We would like to thank the panel for visiting our Unit and providing insight on graduate programs in Division of BioMedical Sciences and Discipline of Genetics. The general thrust of the report was quite positive; within the confines of the challenges such as funding and space, it was recognized that the current graduate programs in place are sustainable and viable and that we have demonstrated success in research and graduate studies in the five programs offered in biomedicine. Moreover, it was noted that these programs are home to approximately half of all the full-time graduate students in the Faculty of Medicine. In general, the recommendations made by the panel are partly a crystallization of the views expressed by the stakeholders in their respective self-studies from each program.

There was some misunderstanding by the panel about the administrative and organizational aspects of our faculty that should not distract us from the expression of the constructive recommendations that were made regarding the graduate programs. We offer this point-by-point response to the recommendations made by the panel; where two separate recommendations were intertwined and closely related, a consolidated reply has been offered.

Recommendation for Division of BioMedical Sciences:

1. *The Dean of Medicine expressed his support of the Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Studies and of the Assistant Dean of Graduate studies. Both individuals are clearly empowered to take full advantage of their given mandates. The job descriptions supplied indicate that it is well within their mandates to address the difficulties currently facing the graduate programs in the five sub- groups/disciplines examined. Both individuals should demonstrate their leadership through the development and implementation of new strategic approaches that address the forthcoming recommendations.*

2. *There appear to be several people with the title of Associate Dean, yet the structural map of the School of Medicine would suggest that the Associate Dean of Bio-Medical Sciences and the Associate Dean of Community Health and Humanities report to the Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Studies. Perhaps the "chain of command" would be clearer if the Associate Dean Research and Graduate Studies was elevated to the position of Vice-Dean. The mandate of this Associate Dean, as stated, is quite extensive and pivotal to the functioning of the School of Medicine. Moreover, in the Dean's absence, a Vice-Dean would have the authority to delegate as needed. That person could also coordinate an executive committee with a mandate to explore synergies and cross-cutting educational/research initiatives benefiting all programs.*

Response to Recommendations 1 & 2

There seems to be some misunderstanding of the administrative structure within the Faculty of Medicine by the panel. The Dean of Medicine is the head administrator in the Faculty. There is a position of Vice Dean for the Faculty of Medicine who is second in the chain of administrative hierarchy. All the Associate Deans and Discipline Chairs report directly to the Dean of Medicine. Thus, the Associate Dean of the Division of BioMedical Sciences and the Chair of the Discipline of Genetics directly report to the Dean of Medicine. The Associate Dean of Research and Graduate also directly reports to the Dean of Medicine. We are content with the current functional administrative structure in place in the Faculty of Medicine and there is no need to make any changes.

While the current incumbent Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Studies and the Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies are relatively new in their posts, the actual administrative positions of Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Studies and Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies are not new and have been part of the administrative structure in the Faculty of Medicine for several years.

3. *Increase stipends for students to $18 K/annum for Master's and to $21 K/annum for PhD's. As repeatedly pointed out by the faculty members the minimum of $12,500/annum is too low to support a graduate student. These levels of stipend support would be in-line with those at other national academic institutions.*

Response to Recommendation 3

The minimum stipend is $12,000 per annum, and we agree with the view expressed by the review panel that it is too low. Most faculty members are also of the opinion that the minimum baseline is low, and provide higher support for their graduate students that range between $15,000 to $18,000 per annum.

The office of Research & Graduate Studies in Medicine will move to increase its funding contribution as it becomes available; however, the current level of leverage funding from Research and Graduate Studies cannot be increased without further support from either the School of Graduate Studies and/or the Faculty of Medicine.

4. *Create a unified mechanism for graduate admissions. The duty should come under the leadership of the Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies in consultation with the 4 Program Coordinators. Currently, students are accepted and funded on a first-come basis. A single admittance with exceptions when necessary would ensure that the better students get funded, that students would move through program as a cohort and would create efficiencies with respect to applications for external awards and distribution of internal grants.*

Response to Recommendation 4

There was general consensus that such a mechanism could be implemented, however, there are pros and cons associated with a closed date for the admissions process of graduate students. There are times when applications from highly qualified students may have to be deferred to the next cycle and such applicants' may be missed. A set admission date while making the administrative process easier for the office of Research & Graduate Studies may also lead to hasty decisions by the faculty in accepting less stellar students in order to take advantage of leverage funding. An open and flexible date for accepting applications for our graduate programs is also more accommodating for international student applicants that require visa and permits in order to join a graduate program in our faulty. Certainly, this is an important issue for all the stakeholders and we plan to have on-going discussions relating to this matter.

5. *Create a uniform program identity for students that includes the existing sub-disciplinary foci including a common "Introduction to Graduate Studies in Bio-Medical Sciences" course. This would help with standardization of the curriculum and might create efficiencies in terms of joint meeting rooms, laboratory and office standards.*

Response to Recommendation 5

There was general agreement that a sub-disciplinary course would be a useful method to standardize our graduate curriculum. An overarching course could help to create a uniform bond for all the biomedicine graduate programs and improve the sense of community for incoming graduates. The stakeholders will work together to identify common and pertinent topics to incorporate into such a course. A course, perhaps with a structure of some common and some chosen modules, would be helpful to a graduate student early on in their field of study as well as later in the program, irrespective of their particular discipline.

6. *Develop a M.Sc. – M.D. program to draw upon strengths of the students and rewards their career aspirations. An important component of medical training is research. Many students now enter the Master's program with the hope of entering Medical program. It would seem advantageous to recognize the aspiration of these students by accepting students into the Master's program with the understanding, not promise, that completion of the Master's of Science in Medicine degree would substantially improve the likelihood of admission into the Doctor of Medicine program. Development of program should come under the leadership of the Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies.*

Response to Recommendation 6

This is an interesting proposal that needs further discussion. The Master's program in our faculty is not exclusive to Sciences' but is also in other fields and sub-disciplines. In recent years, approximately 20% of students admitted to our medical school have post-graduate degrees. Moreover, potential applicants to the Medical School already very much recognize that a Master's degree would have a positive impact on their application to Medical School, and furthermore that such a degree will be helpful later on in their careers as physicians and if they wish to become clinical instructors and faculty members in a medical school at a future date.

7. *Negotiations should take place to incorporate the discovery pillar into the M.D. degree for students who do not enter the Medical program with a Master's of Science. Expansion of this pillar could be carried out through development of M.Sc.-M.D. cohort.*

Response to Recommendation 7

This is also a subject that is more related to the MD program than the graduate programs. However, the office of Research & Graduate Studies (Medicine) is very much proactive to ensure medical students are able to get involved in all aspect of research in our faculty and not only basic medical research. We have our Summer Undergraduate Student Research (SURA) program in place that targets medical students to get involved in research activities with faculty members in Medicine. There are both internal and external funds available to provide stipends for medical students that are interested in taking advantage of this initiative.

8. *The Dean needs to implement a transparent mechanism where requests for new space are considered and adjudicated. Currently, there does not seem to be widespread understanding of the implications of Genetics moving to its new space. Nor does there seem to be a way to redistribute space assigned to inactive faculty members.*

9. *The Dean should designate some of the reclaimed space available with the exodus of the Genetics faculty as "open space" that is not assigned to an individual PI.*

Response to Recommendations 8 & 9

It was agreed that the broader implication of space limitation extends to training and educating graduate students. However, to suggest that there is no transparent mechanism where new space is considered and adjudicated is not factual. There may be a perception of lack of transparency which may be due to limitation of availability of space, but there is currently a clear mechanism in place for assigning space, and it can be found at following site: http://www.med.mun.ca/Medicine/Leadership/SpacePlanning.aspx. There is a space committee in place where requests made for space are adjudicated on case-by-case basis on the premise of priority, need and availability.

10. *To provide a broader base for Bio-medical research and graduate education, the group should be proactive in seeking more interactions with appropriate groups in other parts of the university. Currently, much to the credit of the various disciplines, there are interactions between the disciplines and other groups. As the Bio-medical group has a lot to offer, this could be expanded.*

Response to Recommendation 10

We are very much in agreement with the idea that BioMedical researchers and graduate educators need broad interactions with appropriate groups. Efforts are being made to have wider interaction among researchers within and outside of the Faculty of Medicine. Examples include the Research Forum organized by the Division of BioMedical Sciences, symposia arranged by the various programs such as Neuroscience and Immunology groups as well as close interaction by members of Cancer & Development with Discipline of Oncology, and participation by all faculty members in Medicine in Grand Rounds which is organised by Discipline of Medicine of our faculty. Faculty members in Division of BioMedical Sciences and Genetics also have interaction with members of other faculties and schools such as Sciences, Engineering and Applied Sciences, Human Kinetics and Recreations, Ocean Sciences, and Pharmacy. The issue of broader interaction among BioMedical researchers was also well recognized as an important ingredient for advancement of knowledge and public engagement in the retreat organized by Division of BioMedical Sciences in November, 2011.

11. *Recruitment of new faculty should be contingent on increasing cohesiveness and strengths of the Bio-medical group. It should not be based on increasing or maintaining faculty numbers in any one of the identified four divisions.*

Response to Recommendation 11

We agree that recruitment of new faculty should be based on increasing cohesiveness and strengths of the Division of BioMedical Sciences. However, the direction of recruitment must be a collegial process. We are less enthusiastic with the view that recruitment should not be based on increasing and maintaining any one of the identified four programs as such a direction in the long run could have detrimental effects leading to the demise of a program and further limiting our ability to effectively offer a comprehensive suite of graduate programs.

Discipline of Genetics

1. *Continue to expand your successful enterprise as it captures, so beautifully, the Memorial Model described by the Dean of Medicine.*

Response to Recommendation 1

We would like to thank you, the panel, for your recognition of this facet of the Discipline of Genetics

2. *An identified program co-ordinator with a clear mandate to support and advocate for graduate students is needed*.

Response to Recommendations 2

There is a need for a program co-ordinator for graduate students in Genetics. However, the number of current graduate students enrolled in the Genetics program is not high enough to warrant a full-time co-ordinator solely designated for the purpose. Division of BioMedical Sciences has recently put a staff member in place as a graduate student co-ordinator but this individual is currently more than occupied with this task. Genetics will work with BioMedical Sciences to find some mechanism of joint co-ordination of the graduate students.

3. *They need clear oversight of the graduate student progress. Currently, it does not seem that the graduate students have an identified individual to whom they can consult.*

Response to Recommendations 3

The graduate students progress is matter dealt with by the Supervisory Committee which is composed of the Supervisor and/or Co-Supervisors and Committee members. Supervisory Committee and graduate students are expected to meet regularly to assess and determine the progress of the students in the program. The Committee and the student must submit supervisory reports to Research & Graduate Studies at a minimum of once per year with landmarks identifying student's past, present and future progress.

The view that graduate students do not have any one to consult is not strictly true. First, there is the program coordinator in Genetics and this is an individual that a graduate student in Genetics can consult. Second, there is the Assistant Dean for Graduate Studies (Medicine) that is also available for consultation by students in any program. There are also three staff members in the office of Research & Graduate Studies that can also be consulted by the students.

4. *Identify consistent expectations of graduate students by supervisors and vice versa.*

Response to Recommendations 4

Students and supervisors are provided with information and guidelines of expectations at the on-set of the program. The school of Graduate Studies has guidelines on their website for both students and supervisors: http://www.mun.ca/sgs/responsibilities.pdf. Paper copies of the guidelines are provided and included in package to the student and the supervisor when each student starts a graduate program.