

TO: Dr. Rob Roy McGregor, Chair
UNC Charlotte Graduate Council

CC: Members of the UNC Charlotte Graduate Council

FROM: Tom Reynolds, Dean
The Graduate School

RE: Graduate Program Review

DATE: January 11, 2011

As presented in its mission statement “UNC Charlotte is North Carolina’s urban research university. It leverages its location in the state’s largest city to offer internationally competitive programs of research and creative activity, exemplary undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs, and a focused set of community engagement initiatives. UNC Charlotte maintains a particular commitment to addressing the cultural, economic, educational, environmental, health, and social needs of the greater Charlotte region.” Important to realizing these objectives are the development and maintenance of high quality graduate programs in the University. Although degree programs are usually reviewed carefully when they are first proposed, once they are approved they may never be evaluated again. Since graduate programs are dynamic due to changes that occur as faculty come and go, student applicant pools increase or decline, and academic disciplines naturally evolve, it is important that all graduate degree programs should undergo evaluation by the University on a regular basis.

The primary purpose of program review is the improvement of graduate programs, as measured by the quality of the faculty, the students, library and other educational resources, the curriculum, and available facilities. By creating a structured, scheduled opportunity for a program to be examined, program review provides a strategy for improvement that is well-reasoned, forward-thinking, and is as apolitical as possible.

Proposal

To ensure the progressive advancement of graduate programming at UNC Charlotte, it is proposed that the University Graduate Council develop and adopt the policies, guidelines, and procedures for a regular and systematic review of doctoral programs at UNC Charlotte. Although a similar review for the master’s programs would be beneficial, it is proposed that the review of doctoral degrees be initiated first since they are fewer in number, more uniform in structure, and all have been implemented since 1994.

When considering a plan for review, a central feature would be the program’s purpose, mission, and goals. The supporting evaluation would address programmatic or departmental, faculty, and student profiles, which will allow the program to establish a baseline of information that could then be monitored for changes over time.

In structuring a review, the following should be considered. The review must:

- provide value to all participants
- be objective and evaluative, not just descriptive

- focus on program improvement, not current status
- be based on the program's strengths and weaknesses, not just ability to attract funding
- produce clear, concrete recommendations that can be implemented
- not be overly burdensome to the faculty

Components of the Review

1. To evaluate the general characteristics of the program, a series of "quality indicators" should be utilized. These indicators can be both quantitative and qualitative but the data should be collected annually. It is suggested that the sources include the Graduate School, Institutional Research, the individual programs. Academic Analytics and the NRC Survey of the Research Doctorate may also serve as resources.
2. It is recommended that data for the quality indicators be collected annually and that the formal review be done on a regular cycle of every 5 years. It is further suggested that programs be grouped in disciplinary areas (e.g., natural sciences, social sciences, engineering and technology) for this cyclic review.
3. For the review there must be a clear and consistent set of guidelines which include the purpose, the process to be followed (including an agenda and timeline), instructions for what should be included and the data sources, and the principles on which the review will be used. The role for each unit participating in the review should be defined.
4. Some form of self-study should be incorporated into the review. The self study should employ an analysis of the cumulated quality indicators which are assessed in light of:
 - a. the program's purpose
 - b. the program's effectiveness in achieving its purpose
 - c. the program's overall quality
 - d. the faculty's continued vision for the program
5. The Graduate Council should consider whether or not there should be a review committee in the review process. If such a committee is employed, what is its composition and role in the process?
6. There should be a final report that includes a brief overview of the program, its strengths, areas that could be improved, and recommendations. The guidelines for Program review should specify the nature of the report and who prepares it. In addition to the Dean of the Graduate School, college dean(s), and Provost, who else should receive the report and review?
7. What type of follow-up should be included? Should there be an action plan for improvement and follow-up reports until change is implemented?

Time Line

Given the caveat that the quality of the Graduate Program Review Policy is much more important than how quickly it is prepared, I propose a goal to have at least a draft completed by the end of the spring term 2011.

Administrative Support

The success of the Graduate Council in this initiative requires the commitment of the individual members. In recognition of this commitment, all members of the Graduate Council are assured of a strong and reciprocal commitment from the Graduate School staff to provide support, information, and expertise necessary for development of and follow through on initiatives developed through their efforts.