April 11, 2011

Response to Graduate School Review Meeting with Provost Smith, Deans Miller and Schovance, Psychology Chair and Chair Elect, Review Committee, et al.

This response will address issues that the Reviewers identified with the Review document itself and then address systematically perceived areas for possible improvement in Psychology, areas of current strength, needs for resources, and briefly, the tying of resources to successful growth.

**Issues with the Self-Study Document**

This document did not conform completely to the directives of the Graduate School. To have done so, we would have added many hours to the extensive hours already required by the 562-page Self-Study that we submitted to the Graduate School. Unfortunately, some of the materials that we included (such as our extensive Graduate Program Handbooks) were not passed on to the reviewers. Thus, some of the frustrations that reviewers experienced in terms of incomplete data could have been avoided if all our materials had been included. In cases where we followed exactly the Graduate School directives (e.g., do not include full vitae for faculty), reviewers were disappointed with the lack of vitae and attributed the omission to Psychology. However, in most cases, the external reviewers and especially the Internal Review Committee was able to look beyond frustrations with the document and view the Psychology Graduate Program as a whole. The reviewers were able to recognize and acknowledge the strengths in our faculty, graduate students, staff, large PhD programs, quality teaching, and extensive publication. For that, we are extremely grateful.

**Areas Identified for Possible Improvement**

A better strategic plan is needed, with goals and plans that more clearly reflect where the department and indeed the whole university is moving currently. Within the next few months, a new Strategic Plan document will be written, congruent with that of the College of Arts and Sciences and the university as a whole, and with the involvement of Psychology Faculty. It is likely that embedded within that new strategic plan will be a Health Psychology/Behavioral Medicine focus for the department. This focus reflects strengths in our Clinical, Counseling, and Experimental Ph.D. programs, and it has already borne fruit such as many of the 32 submitted grant proposals in 2009 and 2010 and the funded CPRIT and Laura W. Bush Institute for Women’s Health grants funded in
2011. Such a focus is also consistent with faculty strengths, student placements, and ongoing partnering with the TTU Health Sciences Center (Departments of Psychiatry, Neurology, Internal Medicine, Family & Community Medicine, Pediatrics via UMC’s Pediatric units, Obstetrics & Gynecology, and Surgery). Another focus will be ongoing support for our stellar program in Human Factors and Ergonomics, which collaborates with other departments on the TTU campus as well as Nursing and Surgery at the TTU Health Sciences Center.

Our extramural funding is modest, currently at about $530,000. However, that amount is six times greater than funding last year and considerably more than funding five years ago (when we had one faculty member, now departed, with large grants). Our grant proposal production is improved, and it needs to continue. It is important to seek more traditional research funding from agencies such as NSF, NIH (including NIMH and NIDA), since current funding is oriented toward training and education. However, we will also work strategically to view our training and education grants as opportunities for both service and cutting-edge research. Moreover, we will continue to be productive in publishing, building on the trend of recent years with over 100 publications in the department per year (107 publications in 2007, 107 in 2008, and 118 in 2009).

It was noted that the Psychology Clinic needs major updating, and that is part of our plan for AY 2011-12. A new director will be taking over the clinic and seeking new sources of clients, new sources of revenue, grants to update clinic equipment, and donations to refurbish the clinic itself. A newly created Clinic Advisory Committee will work with the new director to identify appropriate initiatives and help achieve buy-in and support from faculty who supervise students in the clinic. We expect to seek external funding for some clinic renovations and will work with the TTU Development Office where appropriate.

Our Self-Study document did not effectively communicate the fact that we do track our students. We track where they go for internships and where they are employed professionally after graduating with their doctoral degrees. The three Psychology graduate programs do not all track students using exactly the same methods, so we will work to get all our programs using the same, data-based method for tracking graduates through post-doc and professional positions. For example, the Counseling Program updates its tracking of graduates annually, whereas the Clinical Program tracks bi-annually. The Director of the Experimental Program has a spreadsheet on which he tracks graduates; however, he has noted that it is easier to track graduates in academic institutions than those in industry or the military.

We will also work to place more of our students in academic institutions (research-intensive as well as teaching-intensive), though that will not be accomplished immediately. Nevertheless, many of our former students hold academic positions in peer institutions, such as Oklahoma State University and Auburn University. In addition, recent students have had internships at such institutions as the University of Florida, the University of California, San Diego, and Brown University. Post doctoral positions include such places as MD Anderson, the University of Washington-Seattle, and the University of California, San Francisco. These are some of the elite health psychology
and Behavioral Medicine academic research settings in the U.S. In addition, our Human Factors students secure internships at such major companies as Intel, Dell, Honeywell, and Sandia National Laboratories.

Needs of the Psychology Department

Unquestionably the most immediate and consistent theme among those presented by the reviewers was the extremely low stipends for our doctoral students and their extremely high teaching loads. This imbalance cannot continue if we hope to maintain the doctoral student quality that we have enjoyed over recent decades. We are not competing adequately with sister schools who are offering a waiver for all fees and tuition and $20,000 – 12 month stipends. As a result, we are losing many of the most gifted students from our recruitment pools. Successfully attracting more of these students would most certainly lead to enhanced research productivity within the department as well as more students seeking academic positions after they graduate.

We are currently exploring ways to teach larger classes, with fewer classes taught by each student. Large classes can also be taught by faculty, who would then have students as TAs rather than as the instructors of record. Both approaches would reduce somewhat the teaching burden on students, reducing their stress and allowing more time for their research. The matter of stipends is of great concern, and we will initiate small increments in AY 2011-12, consistent with what was done before the last two years of especially tight budgets in Psychology. We do not view it as wise at this time to try to strengthen our doctoral program by accepting fewer students, since that is an option in direct opposition to the university’s push toward Tier One Status. We get close to 350 applications per year overall for our three doctoral programs, and we accept 18-21 students. We hope not to reduce that number.

The Psychology Department needs a larger AOF budget to meet its goals and the goals of Texas Tech University. In response to this, the Dean of CAS has been very helpful in allotting additional funds to our AOF budget. However, further growth in our AOF budget is still needed. The key to improving doctoral student stipends for the largest doctoral program on campus (100+ students) in a department that has a large number of undergraduate majors (over 1000) who require a comprehensive teaching curriculum, is to provide the department with greater resources. The department is under-resourced in terms of graduate student stipends, graduate student time for classwork and research, faculty mentors, and department space and facilities. This under-resourcing seriously hampers every action that the department takes, whether it is curriculum planning, research, grant writing, attracting the best applicants, preparing undergraduates for graduate school, and so on. Until the matter of resources is addressed beyond the College level, where the Dean is aiding the department as much as possible, big improvements are unlikely to occur. AOF funding and space are especially pressing needs. A relatively small initial investment in Psychology (e.g., 500K for AOF and related areas) could have a huge ripple effect in terms of productivity, including doctoral degrees granted annually by TTU (Psychology: 12 in 2009 and 13 in 2010).
Within the “cycle of poverty” that Psychology has been in for decades, it is remarkable that we have three strong doctoral divisions, with the Clinical and Counseling Programs accredited continuously by the American Psychological Association since 1972 and 1964, respectively, and the Human Factors Program accredited by the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society for many years. Psychology’s faculty teach broadly (including classes for the Honors College), and are well-represented in the TTU Teaching Academy (43% of the Psychology faculty vs. 15% of the faculty university-wide). Our faculty publish articles (often involving doctoral students and sometimes undergraduates), chapters, and books, present work at scholarly conferences, and write grant proposals. The faculty carry heavy service loads, ranging from program and departmental levels all the way to national and international levels. We attract fine students to our doctoral programs, and they do well, as we noted earlier. The faculty and staff do well also. With substantial additional resources, we could all do even better.

Respectfully submitted,

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Chair

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Chair-Elect