February 28, 2011

**External Program Review: Department of Psychology, Texas Tech Univ.**
**Reviewer: Ryan P. Brown, Ph.D. (Department of Psychology, The University of Oklahoma)**

The following report summarizes my independent assessment of the Psychology Program at Texas Tech University, Spring 2011. Within each of three primary areas (faculty, graduate students, and facilities and resources), I describe what I perceive to be the primary qualities and strengths to be, as well as what I believe the current needs and challenges are. Given the University’s current commitment to competing for state funds associated with obtaining tier-1 status in the near future, my recommendations are, in part, targeted toward ways in which I believe that the Psychology Department might play a role in meeting this challenge. Although this was not explicitly part of my mandate as an external program reviewer, I believe that the Psychology Department has a great deal to offer Texas Tech at the university strives toward this ambitious goal, so this program review comes at a crucial time in the life of the university.

**Faculty**

I believe that the number one strength of the Psychology Department is the quality of the faculty. Across the three areas of clinical, counseling, and experimental psychology, the faculty teaches course loads consistent with peer institutions, while also mentoring and supervising a large, above-average number of graduate students. A substantial number of the faculty are also involved in practices associated with clinical or counseling duties, which takes an enormous investment of time and attention. In addition, the department has the largest number of undergraduate majors of any program at Texas Tech. The department was more evenly balanced in terms of gender, across all levels of seniority, than any department of psychology that I have ever seen at a research-oriented university. Several members of the department also fulfill major administrative duties for the department and the university alongside their teaching and research. Despite this, the faculty maintains a remarkable level of research productivity. Not counting new assistant professors, faculty members in the Psychology Department have, on average, published around 2.5 articles, chapters, books, or refereed professional proceedings per year over the last 6
years. In addition, faculty involvement in seeking (and in many cases, procuring) external as well as internal funding for their research has been strong—this despite the gloomy economic backdrop of the last 3 years! The faculty’s overall productivity across the domains of teaching, research, and service is truly admirable.

I would be remiss if I did not note one additional strength of the department related to the faculty, and that is the high level of collegiality within the department. Academics are frequently more introverted than the population at large and in my experience tend to be, for lack of a better description, more socially awkward as well. Thus, it is refreshing to encounter a department full of academics who clearly get along so well with one another. To make this feature of the Psychology Department all the more noteworthy, psychology programs that encompass clinical or counseling programs alongside experimental programs are not particularly common, in part, I think, because they tend to find their interests to be non-overlapping and competing. The creation of the Association for Psychological Science is a case in point, insofar as this professional society began in large part out of the frustration of scientific psychologists at the lack of representation they felt they had within the American Psychological Association, which they perceived was dominated by the interests and voices of clinical and counseling psychologists. With this prototypical antagonism in view, I found it surprising that programmatic antagonisms with the Psychology Department at Texas Tech were virtually non-existent. Indeed, faculty members seem to enjoy a healthy degree of collaboration and cross-fertilization across areas, building a strength out of what is so frequently a cause of division and strife.

To achieve tier-1 status, the university should consider making an investment in the department of at least 3 new faculty lines. Given the typical number of graduate students trained by faculty members, in the department, such an investment would substantially increase the number of graduate students from its already high current level, as well as help meet the teaching needs of the programs in the department, which seem particularly tricky within the clinical and counseling programs (due to a large extent to the curriculum requirements imposed by accreditation standards). Increasing the number of faculty lines could also enable the department to make sure that the large cadre of grad student instructors remains well supervised in their teaching responsibilities.

**Graduate Students**

The Psychology Department currently has a large number of graduate students for a program its size. In examining the statistics provided to me and in meeting some of these students, the overall quality of the graduate student pool seemed strong. Graduate students take classes, are heavily involved in research, and serve as TAs or instructors for 2 courses every semester. In addition, students in the clinical and counseling programs also maintain professional contacts with clients as part of their training.
To achieve tier-1 status, the university must take a serious look at the high demands placed on grad students in the psychology department. The stipends for graduate teaching assistants and instructors are deplorably low for the amount of services they provide to the university, far exceeding levels at other tier-1 universities in the region (I am thinking particularly of The University of Oklahoma and The University of Texas at Austin). The ability of the Psychology Department to recruit graduate students of the highest caliber is severely hampered by this work load, although some of the grad students who enter the department do so partly because they know that they will be able to obtain a great deal of teaching experience. Even so, pairing this high teaching load (which can be the same as that for tenured faculty members!) with the low stipends offered to grad students currently can only hinder the recruitment of the best students, particularly students of color.

Facilities and Resources

At present, the space needs of the department are barely being met with respect to offices for faculty and grad students, laboratories, classrooms, and the needs associated with the clinic. Furthermore, although computers and furniture appear to be of fairly recent origin, the monitoring equipment within the clinic is ancient to the point of being ridiculous. Because the clinic offers services to the university by providing counseling services to students when the university-wide counseling clinic experiences an overflow of patients—and does so, apparently, without receiving any portion of student fees ostensibly designed to cover the costs of such services—I think it is incumbent upon the university to make a meaningful contribution toward addressing this simple equipment deficit within the clinic.

I have already noted the need for several additional faculty lines to meet the teaching needs of the department, which would simultaneously facilitate an increase in the graduate student body (between 9 and 15 additional students, I would estimate, depending in part on the academic area of any new hires). Any such increases in faculty members and grad students would push the department past the breaking point with respect to its space needs. This fact alone seems to obviate my recommendations for additional faculty lines, does it not? The answer is clearly “yes,” unless the university were to also create some additional space for the department, preferably new space next door to the department to prevent the programs from becoming too spread out across campus. If Texas Tech is able to procure money for new facilities, it seems that the Psychology Department is well positioned to bring strong returns to the university on such an investment, and to do so in relatively short order, as the department already graduates a sizeable proportion of the university’s total number of PhDs each year and might even be able to increase this number prior to the funding of additional faculty lines with the addition of a meaningful amount of office and lab space. At present, there is simply nowhere to put any more bodies without giving up lab space, which is already in short supply.
Summary

In sum, the Psychology Department at Texas Tech is strong, with its greatest assets its faculty. The department is on a positive trajectory in terms of undergraduate and graduate teaching, research productivity, and external support, but this trajectory will prove difficult to maintain in the future without substantial support from the university. The primary forms of the needed support are, in order, (1) graduate student stipends and teaching loads, (2) faculty lines, and (3) space. If the university is serious about achieving its goal of attaining tier-1 status in the near future, the Psychology Department appears well-positioned to help it reach this goal, with relatively small investments that will also reap meaningful benefits toward the university’s larger, ongoing mission.