Review of Graduate Programs in Psychology at Texas Tech University
Site Visit February 22, 2010
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Overview:
The graduate program in Psychology has three general areas: Clinical, Counseling and Experimental. The Clinical and Counseling programs are accredited by the American Psychological Association and are both scheduled for a site visit in 2013. The Experimental program is made up of faculty in Human Factors, Cognitive and Social. The Human Factors program was one of few the US accredited by the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society. The department also grants an undergraduate Bachelor’s degree in Psychology. The department list the following as its mission:

“Our mission philosophy includes the following goals: We strive to be excellent teachers, advisors, mentors, and consultants in every possible way. We are absolutely committed to our students learning a tremendous amount, being successful, and engaging in excellent work in further educational settings and the international work force. We are committed to conducting research and scholarship that is interesting, important, and ambitious. We strive to conduct and collaborate on research that will make a difference. We are committed to providing skillful and generous service at every level—the department, college, university, region, state, nation, professional community, service organizations, society, and world—that is effective, professional, and kind. In addition, we understand the crucial importance of strong ethics, impeccable integrity, innovative creativity, extensive multi-cultural diversity, positive economic development, and the relentless pursuit of excellence.”

The department currently consists of 28 tenure or tenure track faculty and a national search for the chair position was done in 2010. There are seven faculty in the Clinical area: one full professor and six associate professors. There are seven faculty in the Counseling area: two full professors and five associate; and there are fourteen faculty in the Experimental area: six full professors, three associate professors, and five assistant professors. Almost half of the faculty are female (46.4%) and one of the faculty is from an underrepresented group. All but one of the faculty appears to be research active having published refereed journal articles or book chapters within the last two years. Since 2004 the faculty have been responsible for 379 refereed journal articles which is an average of 2.7 journal publications per faculty member per year. The exact number of faculty serving on journal editorial boards is not indicated and this reviewer did not consider each and every vita to count them. Faculty research grants have been steadily falling since 2005 such that in 2009/2010 the department has only 3.4 grants for a total of $69,910. Total research expenditures have dropped by almost 50% per year each year since 2005.

Graduate Students:
In 2010 the department lists 119 enrolled graduate students across all three programs. It was difficult to ascertain the specific number of students enrolled given that the department did not complete the full graduate student demographic form, pages 33 and 34 in the graduate report. It appears that from the other information given that both the Clinical and Counseling program are highly competitive with Clinical receiving 146 applicants in 2010 and accepting 5 to 6 students, Counseling received approximately 154 applications and also admitted only 5 to 6 students. The Experimental program received approximately 70 applications and will admit five to six students as well. The admitted graduate students have excellent grade point averages and GRE scores.
Approximately 60 to 80 of these students are funded through departmental funds as graduate teaching assistants. The stipend for GTA positions is $1172 per month and well below peers, along with the low stipend students have an exceptionally heavy teaching load when given GTA positions. All second year students are required to teach two Introductory Psychology sections per semester, and although each section is small, 30 or fewer students, this is extraordinarily heavy load for second year students in graduate school. Few programs if any programs across the country require this level of teaching from their graduate students. Third and fourth year students are also required to teach two upper division classes per semester while on departmental funds. The second year students are required to take a one credit summer course in teaching and are observed up to three times per semester, although most students indicated that they are observed only once per semester and that they are given feedback on their teaching performance based on this observation. The Experimental program is more likely to have students in more traditional GTA positions in their undergraduate courses in Statistics and Research Methods, but advanced students again appear to be involved directly in teaching. The Clinical and Counseling programs have between and 10 and 12 paid practicum positions throughout the Lubbock community that are available to advanced students. Some of the students who have GTA positions are actually funded through work study and one or two students assist in the advising of the almost 900 Psychology undergraduate majors. All in all the stipends for graduate students are very low and the work load for these students is very high, much higher than would find at comparable graduate programs throughout the country. Also the feedback given students regarding their teaching appears minimal at best.

It appears that graduate students are able to find positions after they graduate but the report is less than thorough in this area stating:

“First, we would like to acknowledge that this is a data-tracking and analysis area where, with more resources allocated to it, we could—and should—do better. Therefore, the below discussion is based on a much-less-than-perfect data base.

To the best of our knowledge, we think that for the last 20 years (including 2004-2010) virtually 100% of the doctoral students in psychology at TTU, who have sought professional jobs immediately after their PhD graduation, have secured such jobs within a year of graduation.”

Less than perfect is an understatement to say the least. To state that to the best of our knowledge virtually 100% have been employed does not give us sufficient actual data or detail to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. I assume that the report is correct, but without hard data this is only an assumption. It does not take significant funding to track students and it is required by APA for both the Clinical and Counseling programs.

Summary and Recommendations:

The Graduate programs in Psychology at Texas Tech are very good with excellent faculty and excellent students. The students from this program appear to be successful in competing with other graduate students from across the country for national internships (APPIC ratings of 80% or better) and the Clinical and Counseling students appear to receive licenses (according to the 2010 licensing exam data released by EPPP all the students in both Clinical and Counseling passed the test in 2010). The Human Factors program is one of only 10 in the country with accreditation and has excellent national visibility. The faculty are highly productive with respect to publications and national presentations. Other major assets within the department include but are not limited to the departmental staff, which have been with the department for some time and are excellent...
ambassadors for the graduate program. The collegiality and morale among the faculty is also extraordinary when compared to other psychology faculties with whom I am familiar.

The faculty and these programs have evidenced this success with some significant handicaps. For example:

1. The previous five year report and APA site visit reports have recommended renovation of the psychology building. The building is cramped, dreary and in need of updating. While the site visitors were touring the building it appeared that at least two rooms one in the basement and one on the first floor had water leaks in the recent past. A building in this state limits graduate recruitment and limits the ability of faculty to develop new labs. Many labs were too small for the needs of the faculty and this could well limit external funding.

2. The stipends for graduate students are low and the amount of work required for teaching assistantships is too high. The undergraduate program has essentially be taught by the graduate students at Texas Tech for some time except for Statistics and Research Methods, and although there appear to have been historic reasons for this development, at this point and in this evaluator’s opinion, the graduate student load is detrimental to their productivity and progress. Stipends should be increased and work load should be decreased. The only method that I can recommend at this time to accomplish this reallocation of resources is for faculty members to teach larger sections of the various undergraduate courses currently being taught by graduate students. This would allow for moving graduate students to more traditional graduate teaching assignments. Although the current state of affairs is sometimes rationalized by indicating students receiving higher education positions in teaching schools. However, I believe that this decreases the students’ time for involvement in research and therefore decreases their competitiveness for top tier University positions. Secondly, the reasons for this current situation are not based in sound pedagogy for either the undergraduate students or the graduate program. Even though the graduate students receive excellent teacher ratings, there is more to sound pedagogy than teacher ratings; for example few undergraduates get to know the faculty in psychology and this results in fewer students being able to get letters of recommendation from faculty. It also limits the mentoring of undergraduate students.

3. The department needs to develop a concerted effort to increase its research funding. It is well below its peers in research funding and has been on a steady decline over the last five years. Efforts should focus on collaborations with existing funded programs such as Engineering or the Medical School and release time for new faculty proposal should be considered.

4. The department also needs to develop a clearly articulated strategic plan with a focus on hiring. The current mission statement is too broad and the faculty could not articulate a clear strategic plan in our discussions. Where does the department want to go and how does it want to get there? The focus should be on strategic partnerships with entities on campus and beyond. Some of these partnerships are already occurring with the Medical School, but more needs to be done to enhance the development of the partnerships in order to bring more indirect dollars into the department and in order to fund more students.

5. There is a plan to enhance diversity for both faculty and graduate students and this should be applauded. However even more rigorous attempts should be made to diversify the departmental faculty.

6. Lastly, the report from the department was poorly written and was missing important data. It is important in the future for the department to take the time to give site visitors the full
information regarding their program. If this report is duplicated in 2013 during the APA site visit accreditation will be in jeopardy.