The following assessment of the Doctoral Program in Human Development and Family studies (HDFS) is based on a review of the materials provided by the department, a 2-day visit to the campus (February 18-19, 2009) which included interviews with the Department Head, current and previous Graduate Program Coordinators, graduate students, and faculty, as well as a tour of key facilities. These interviews were conducted with my fellow review team members, Dr. Lloyd Heinze, Dr. Howard Curzer, and Dr. David Rudd.

In each of the sections below, I follow my appraisal of the HDFS doctoral program with specific recommendations that I believe will significantly strengthen the program and promote its national prominence. In the final section of this report, I describe some additional issues that merit consideration and offer some additional recommendations.

I heartily commend the Graduate College for providing a mechanism by which a thorough and constructive review can be enacted.

Program Overview and Vision
Assessment: Excellent

The Department has a clear and exciting vision for its future—a vision that I believe can be achieved with the provision of adequate resources and planning. Priorities are clearly outlined that will lead the unit towards greater excellence in the quality of its research, educational, and outreach programs. Continued and expanded productivity will most assuredly contribute to a stronger national prominence.

Most exciting is the Department’s devotion to addressing problems experienced in the course of human development and doing so in ways that respect the cultural, historical, and social contexts in which these problems arise. This unique approach, in which research-based information about issues people truly care about, is developed, tested and disseminated, serves a critical function in today’s society.

Faculty Productivity
Assessment: Very Good to Excellent

The HDFS faculty are an impressive group of dedicated scholars, who excel in the quality of their research and in their commitment to graduate education. All faculty members make substantial contributions to the department and hold productive publication records. Almost all faculty members have been awarded significant grants and support graduate students. On average, faculty members advise two doctoral students.
HDFS faculty clearly demonstrate excellence in instructing and mentoring graduate students. Doctoral students express clear appreciation for the quality of instruction and advising that they have received. In particular, it is evident that the faculty members who served as the Graduate Director during the time this review is focusing upon were very effective in recruiting and shepherding the graduate students through the program in a very helpful way. In fact, enrollments in the graduate program grew at a robust rate during the tenure of the last Graduate Director.

HDFS faculty are to be commended for their solid productivity in research, publications, grantsmanship, and graduate mentorship given the low number of faculty relative to the total student body served by the department. In addition, HDFS faculty members provide substantial service to their discipline, with many members taking on significant editorial responsibilities and leadership positions in professional societies. For example, the Department Head was the elected Program Coordinator of last fall’s annual conference of the National Council for Family Relations, the premier society for this discipline.

Faculty reported that they received satisfactory start-up packages when they joined the department. Junior faculty feel supported by senior faculty and the Department Head. The department has an excellent record of preparing faculty for tenure and promotion. However, faculty identified significant salary compression issues which should be addressed by campus.

To achieve status as a Research 1 Institution, it is essential to increase the number of tenure-track faculty in HDFS. I recommend the addition of 3 tenure track positions immediately. Such an addition would help resolve a number of critical needs:

1. Faculty teaching loads could be realigned and fewer adjuncts would be necessary.
2. Faculty members would have additional time to devote to grantwriting and research productivity.
3. The ratio of faculty to undergraduate students would be improved from an untenable 62:1 to a ratio that is closer to 53:1 (which is still far from optimal). Comparable HDFS programs have a 20:1 faculty: undergraduate student ratio.
4. Graduate students on a Teaching Assistantship could hold a more reasonable teaching load (optimally, preparation for 1 course per semester rather than 2, along with limited enrollments in each course).
5. Graduate students will have even easier access to faculty mentors, enriched opportunities for research and scholarship, as well as increased opportunities to present and publish their work. This will help strengthen Texas Tech’s emerging national prominence as a research institution.

Finally, faculty productivity would also be enhanced with provision of a staff person who could help prepare budgets for grant proposals and handle the submission process.
Quality and Quantity of Graduate Students and Graduates

Assessment: Good

HDFS doctoral students are an engaging, enthusiastic, bright group who reported during the group interview that they were very satisfied with their program. The number of Ph.D. students enrolled in the program is appropriate given the size of the faculty. The graduate program has been successful in attracting historically underserved students, and is largely female and ethnically diverse students.

A very attractive feature of the graduate program is that virtually all students are awarded a teaching or research assistantship, often at the 50% level. In addition, the time to complete the doctorate degree is excellent, averaging 4.5 years. Approximately two Ph.D. degrees are awarded annually, which is lower than comparison programs but appropriate given the size of the faculty.

Although entering doctoral students have impressive GPA’s, their GRE scores are lower than comparable programs. [It should be recognized that the GRE data provided by Institutional Research appear to be flawed as missing scores were treated as “zero’s” when averages were computed. For this reason, I examined data provided by the department which, although quite higher than the institutionally reported data, are still lower than aspirational peer programs.]

To the department’s credit, admission decisions are based on a holistic review of each candidate’s credentials, and no one factor is given undo weight. However, faculty report that some entering graduate students are not well prepared for doctoral study. The doctoral admissions process should be reviewed to ensure that admission is offered selectively to students who can contribute productively to graduate seminars and faculty research and who are likely to succeed and earn a doctorate.

Despite the relatively lower GRE scores of entering doctoral students (which is a limited indicator of quality), the HDFS graduate program is effective in educating and preparing their students for productive careers. Graduates of the program are securing good positions, with significant numbers entering academic careers at universities across the nation.

A major barrier towards recruiting excellent graduate students is the inability to offer tuition waivers, which all top tier HDFS graduate programs do. It is essential that resources be allocated (or re-allocated) to offer tuition waivers to all incoming doctoral students in HDFS. This will require action on the part of the Department, the College of Human Sciences, and the Graduate College. At the departmental level, faculty members are advised to submit research grants to federal agencies that include graduate tuition and assistantship funds as part of the budget. Because this will not be sufficient to address all graduate student needs, the College of Human Sciences and the Graduate College will also need to direct funds towards this essential and most critical need.
Curriculum and Programs of Study

*Assessment:* Very good

The HDFS curriculum for doctoral students is comprehensive and provides students with thorough knowledge of the major theoretical and methodological issues in the field. A particular strength of this curriculum is its 4-semester statistical sequence in which doctoral students are given exceptional training in newer methodological and statistical. This course sequence also serves graduate students from diverse units across the Texas Tech campus. Such training distinguishes Texas Tech HDFS doctoral students as being particularly well prepared for a research career, which enhances their competitiveness for securing tenure track academic positions.

Graduate students report being pleased with the courses that are offered in the doctoral program and with the quality of instruction and level of attention they receive from faculty members in the department.

Several graduate students expressed an interest in having an advanced course in applying human development and family studies theories added to their core curriculum, which they believe would expand their substantive knowledge base and would better prepare them for their qualifying examination. These students reported that such a course was offered by the Department Head as an overload teaching assignment 3 years ago, and they found that to be an excellent addition to their program.

Facilities and Resources

*Assessment:* Poor (computer labs) to Excellent (CDRC, Observational Suite)

Although HDFS offers innovative training in newer quantitative and qualitative methods, which are critical for the future of the field, this instruction has been hampered by an insufficient number of computers that are loaded with the required software packages. The lack of sufficient software severely limits students’ ability to complete required coursework and to make timely progress in their doctoral research. Funds are required to purchase sufficient site licenses; it is recommended that the appropriate central campus unit arrange for campus-wide site licenses at favorable prices.

The Child Development Research Center (CDRC), based in HDFS, is a jewel that serves the entire campus and the surrounding community as it provides excellent early childhood education and teacher training. Most importantly, its capacity for observational research makes it a premier academic facility—one that many campuses would envy. Faculty members from HDFS, as well as faculty from diverse corners of campus, are using the CDRC to perform research that has both practical and theoretical importance. Through the CDRC, HDFS has a stellar opportunity to expand the reach of their research, education and outreach, especially if a partial appointment could be provided to assign a Faculty Director who could take responsibility for coordinating collaborative research projects and facilitating extramural grant proposals.
The new observational suite that is being built also promises to be a premier research facility that will offer new opportunities for single- and multi-investigator externally funded projects.

Doctoral students are also advantaged through access to the department-affiliated Early Head Start Program, the Institute of Child and Family Studies, and the Neuroimaging, Cognition, and Engineering Lab.

Critical Issues Not Addressed Above

Teaching by Graduate Students: Graduate students are performing approximately 1/3 of the undergraduate instruction in HDFS. In many cases, doctoral students are teaching 2 different courses per semester, which is equivalent to a faculty teaching load. I recommend that this load be reduced so that graduate students have only 1 course to prepare for each semester (even though they may teach two sections of that course). In addition, I recommend that the total number of undergrads taught by each teaching assistant per course be capped, perhaps at 50 students. This measure, which will enhance quality teaching among graduate students, will be feasible with additional faculty members.

HDFS is to be commended for creating a Practicum in which graduate students are being trained to be good teachers. Because some graduate students may need even more preparation before instructing their own class, it may be valuable to add a specific course on College Teaching to the doctoral curriculum. Such a course can include both didactic and experiential learning modules.

Need for Transparency in Budgeting and Planning: In this climate of fiscal uncertainty, HDFS, the College of Human Sciences, and the Graduate College each have critical decisions to make about how to make best use of limited financial resources. As these inter-related decisions and plans are developed, it will be critical to develop and preserve open communication, transparency and predictability in policies, procedures, and decision-making processes. Financial models must be clearly articulated to departments so that they can make planful and strategic decisions regarding the prioritization and allocation of resources in ways that will promote activities that are clearly valued by campus and that are essential for achieving the campus’ strategic goals.

Summary

HDFS is a severely underfunded unit that bears responsibility for large numbers of undergraduate and graduate students. The number of undergraduate majors is significantly greater than comparable HDFS programs in the nation. The lack of tuition waivers has seriously hampered the department’s ability to attract top quality doctoral students. Nonetheless, research productivity, as measured through publications and grants, is impressive given the size of the faculty. A number of benefits will emerge at both the department and campus levels if additional tenure track faculty members are
hired, as urged. HDFS would be able to retain its large student base and active teaching program, while also gaining in productivity and national prominence. Furthermore, the provision of tuition waivers will enable the department to recruit talented doctoral students. Together, these steps would result in recognition that HDFS at Texas Tech is a program of excellence.

Submitted respectfully,

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