



May 27, 1981

Memorandum

To: Dr. Daisy P. Flory
Acting Vice President for Academic Affairs

From: Russell H. Johnsen *RHJ*
Associate Dean
Graduate Studies and Research

RE: Interdisciplinary and Interdivisional Programs

At its meeting of May 18, 1981 the Graduate Policy Committee heard the report of its subcommittee studying the special needs and review procedures for interdisciplinary and interdivisional programs. A copy of the report is enclosed at the request of the Graduate Policy Committee making special note of the following excerpt of the report:

Our investigation suggests that many of the endemic problems of these programs might be alleviated if there were some clear signal of the university's commitment to these programs as an important part of its educational mission. One possible way to accomplish this would be to create a pattern of administrative oversight which recognizes the special problems and needs of these programs, by locating accountability at the level of the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

The Graduate Policy Committee unanimously adopted the report and asked that this letter be sent to you now and passed on to the new Vice President for Academic Affairs when he is named.

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Enclosure
cc: Dr. Jayne Alley, Chairperson, GPC

MEMORANDUM

GPC Item # 113

April 24, 1981

To: Jayne Alley, Chair
Graduate Policy Council

From: Graduate Policy Council Subcommittee

Subject: Special Needs and Review Procedures for Interdisciplinary
and Inter-Divisional Programs

Special Problems and Needs of Such Programs

Interdisciplinary/Inter-Divisional programs provide a valuable service to students, give increased visibility to the university, and benefit society through the leadership of their graduates and their flexibility in responding to the changing needs of society. Such programs differ from one another with respect to quality, organization, availability of funds and other resources, and the cooperation of participating departments. The success of such programs currently depends on the dedication of participating faculty, whose work frequently goes unrecognized and unrewarded in their respective departments. In the words of the previous subcommittee report, these programs typically "limp along from year to year . . . regarded as annoyances, chronically underfed, and periodically threatened with annihilation."

So long as this situation continues, participating departments must ask why there is any reason to offer courses related to these programs, especially in cases where there are not sufficient numbers of students to justify such course offerings; faculty must ask why they should compromise their career advancement by participating in marginal teaching and research activities, and students are not encouraged to apply for admission to graduate degree programs or to elect undergraduate majors and/or minors in programs which are clearly peripheral to the university's educational mission. In the absence of clear institutional commitment to the importance of offering these programs, there appears to be no good reason for their continuance. The university doesn't 'lose' anything when such programs languish except, possibly, the authorization of a major, minor, or graduate degree bearing the program designation. Participating faculty are housed within established departments; and courses which attract sufficient student interest continue to be offered.

Our investigation suggests that many of the endemic problems of these programs might be alleviated if there were some clear signal of the university's commitment to these programs as an important part of its educational mission. One possible way to accomplish this would be to create a pattern of administrative oversight which recognizes the special problems and needs of these programs, by locating accountability at the level of the Vice-President for Academic Affairs. This would be especially appropriate for interdivisional programs, which could then be

administered through a faculty committee with a revolving chair, eliminating the necessity for a permanent director, and providing necessary secretarial and administrative support by consolidating the needs of individual programs into fewer 'positions.' In the case of programs which are marginal in terms of resource generation -- few majors, minors, and/or graduate students -- consideration should be given to combining these programs with already existing programs to minimize the attrition of already limited resources. This strategy could benefit programs currently caught between the unattractive alternatives of either seeking outside funding or allowing already 'bare bones' budgets to be subject to cycles of student interest or disinterest.

Review Procedures for Such Programs

In addition to the standard indices of quality and support, special attention should be paid in reviewing interdisciplinary and/or interdivisional programs to:

- (1) administrative structure and support, including location of the program, governance, and potential for combining with other programs;
- (2) the procedure by which budgets for such programs are built and justified;
- (3) the level of cooperation by participating departments, including availability and scheduling of relevant courses, provisions for faculty recruitment and/or replacement, and assignment of and rewards for professional activities.

The above should be considered in the context of normal review procedures, while recognizing the unique contribution that interdisciplinary/interdivisional programs make to the total educational mission of the university.

Submitted by:

Dr. Carol Avery, Chair
Dr. Frederick Jenks
Dr. Charles Swain