EAP response to GFEC program review (March 2014).

December 2014

The EAP Certificate Program Committee has reviewed the recommendations from the GFEC’s 10-year review of the program. We are making progress toward addressing each of the 5 recommendations.

1 - Strategic plan.
EAP faculty put together a 1-page strategic plan in November 2013, just after the 10-year review process finished its interactions with the EAP program. Our regular faculty meetings always involve discussions of the program’s longer-term direction. This document includes a mission statement that addresses the GFEC’s specific recommendation to include a statement of program goals.

2 - Assessment plan.
We are working on developing an assessment plan that combines our existing measures, such as graduates and participating departments, with newly collected information such as exit interviews and other measures of learning outcomes.

3 - Exit interviews.
We are developing an interview protocol that we plan to begin using with graduating EAP students in May 2015.

4 - Cohort and community building for students.
Together with current students, EAP faculty members have planned a series of events with students and published a web page informing the community of coming events: http://faculty.nelson.wisc.edu/nemet/EAP_social_events.html
These events have typically been held in conjunction with energy related talks and have been well attended so far. We have more planned for the spring semester. In addition, we have been meeting with alumni, particularly to make them more accessible to current students.

5 - Student handbook.
The EAP are beginning work on a student handbook, including grievance procedures.
May 6, 2014

Paul Robbins
Director, Nelson Institute
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Dear Paul:

As you know, an important part of the university’s ongoing review process is the vetting of graduate programs by the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee (GFEC) of the Graduate School. When the Nelson Institute assembled a review committee to conduct its first review of the Energy and Policy Analysis (EAP) Certificate (created in 1980), a member of the GFEC, Michael Bell, was asked to join the committee and was given responsibility for attending to graduate training issues of particular interest to the Graduate School. Professor Bell led a discussion of the review at the GFEC meeting on April 11th. In this letter, I summarize the committee’s discussion.

The GFEC was impressed with many aspects of the certificate. The certificate is one of very few such offerings nationwide, and it plays an important role on campus. Furthermore, the review committee reported that the Energy and Policy Analysis Certificate has a strong national reputation, and students and faculty report a high level of satisfaction with, and commitment to, the certificate. Finally, while there is little direct funding support for certificate students, all participating students are currently supported.

While the GFEC sees the substantial value of the certificate and recognizes its reputation and student and faculty satisfaction, the review highlighted a number of concerns. First, students don’t experience much sense of being part of a shared program. They don’t get to know one another, there is no central physical space where they might gather, and they have little opportunity to network with alumni. In addition, the review committee expressed concern about the lack of faculty and student diversity in terms of gender and underrepresented minorities.

Third, the review committee reported that curricular continuity and stability is precarious. Many of the core courses are taught by a single faculty member, and Nelson has little leverage over departments to make sure the courses are taught during the leaves or departures of faculty committed to certificate courses. Furthermore, EAP students depend on courses outside of the Nelson Institute over which EAP has little curricular control and in which students face enrollment barriers.

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Finally, the program lacks some fundamental features that promote a positive student learning experience. For example, the certificate has no explicit program goals or learning objectives and does not have an assessment plan or annual internal program review system. In addition, the certificate lacks a student handbook or grievance procedure.

Some of these matters are nearly unavoidable in certificates, but all demand serious attention. The GFEC made the following recommendations:

- Certificate coordinators should develop a strategic plan including program goals, learning objectives, and a diversity plan. In addition, the strategic plan should consider how to be proactive in the administration of this program that relies heavily if not entirely on courses outside of the Nelson Institute and on faculty with competing commitments.
- Certificate coordinators should develop an assessment plan and institute annual assessments;
- Those leading the initiative should conduct exit interviews of all students graduating or leaving the program and see what can be done to respond to student concerns;
- Certificate coordinators should work with students to improve cohort experience and with alumnae to improve networking opportunities;
- The program should have a student handbook which includes a grievance procedure, program requirements, and other fundamental features of its program. This handbook should also be made available online. The program can refer to the handbook template available on the Graduate School KnowledgeBase for guidance: https://kb.wisc.edu/GSAdminKB/page.php?id=34123.

The concerns raised in the review notwithstanding, the GFEC believes the Energy and Policy Analysis Certificate is valuable. While the list of improvements is long, work in the areas outlined above will make this worthwhile program considerably stronger. We request that you report back to the GFEC in writing no later than the March 2015 meeting regarding the Nelson Institute’s efforts to address the above recommendations.

Sincerely yours,

Martin Cadwallader
Vice Chancellor for Research
and Dean of the Graduate School

xc: Daniel Kleinman, Graduate School
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