Response to GFEC Review of Academic Programs (Spring 2019)
Department of Statistics, University of Wisconsin - Madison

Thank you for your recognition of many strengths of our academic programs, which included progress toward improvement department climate and TA training, along with the implementation of assessment procedures to guide departmental decision. We also appreciate the challenges highlighted in the GFEC report including collective long-term vision and diversity, as well as your constructive and helpful advice.

We attach below our response to the review committee from spring 2018. Since then, we have been continuing to make progress. Below are a few additional highlights.

- Starting fall 2018, the climate committee has been renamed the climate & diversity committee comprising faculty, staff, and graduate students, charged to promote a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background, organize social activities, and handle departmental climate and diversity issues. There has been a more concerted effort to host welcome, holiday, spring, and graduation gatherings to promote a stronger sense of community.
- The instruction/TA committee continues to improve the processes for TA recruitment, training, mentoring, evaluation, awards, and accountability. In fall 2018, the department discussed and voted in a written document about TA performance expectations, evaluations, and evaluation outcomes.
- For the MS-Statistics and PhD-Statistics programs, the director of graduate studies (DGS) role has been better defined and the new DGS has been leading the effort to build and improve processes for graduate admissions and mentoring. Some examples in 2018-19 are:
  - Since summer 2018, a new graduate advising committee has been formed to improve the process for mentoring and supporting new graduate students.
  - The graduate admissions process is now more transparent with initial screening by at least two people for all applications followed by comprehensive review by the full committee of the strongest applications.
  - The DGS and the graduate coordinator plan to visit with Assistant Dean LaRuth McAfee in the Graduate School in March 2019.
- For the MS-Statistics Data Science (MSDS) option, a new program manager has been successfully hired and is providing the much needed advising, coordination, and leadership for the program. The MSDS program has enrolled students beyond the visiting international student program (VISP), which is helping to promote diversity of students in MSDS.
- There has been an increasingly greater awareness and promotion for diversity and inclusivity in graduate admissions, faculty and staff hiring, and decision-making processes. Some examples in 2018-19 are:
  - A graduate representative has been selected whose role is to liaison between the faculty/staff and the graduate students.
  - We have resumed the practice of having the graduate representative participate in the monthly department meetings.
  - Faculty, staff, and graduate students are invited to participate in the search for an administrative department manager position.
  - The executive committee discussed and formalized a process that encourages the participation of assistant professors in faculty hiring decision-making. Efforts have also been made for open and timely communications among all faculty regarding hiring decisions.
  - Ad-hoc budget and space committees have been formed to build and improve the processes for making important fiscal and space decisions.
Response to Review of Academic Programs (Spring 2018)

The Department of Statistics greatly appreciates the committee’s thoughtful review, constructive report, and kind encouragement. The committee’s summary of program strengths, areas of concerns, and recommendations for improvement and continued success is extremely helpful and will play an essential role in the further development and expansion of our academic programs as the department continues to grow and excel.

Below are factual errors and possible misunderstandings that have been noted so far.

Section II Graduate Programs

- Page 1, section II, second paragraph under “Strengths”: The statistical consulting course is Stat 998, not Stat 698.
- Page 3, second paragraph: Graduate student representatives are expected to attend faculty meetings (which we call “statistics department meetings” to be more inclusive). Given that other students are not aware of graduate student representation at the department meetings, the role of representatives (or not) is duly noted. It is also our tradition to include graduate students in committees such as admissions and social, but there may have been lapses in oversight and communication in recent years due to turnover and shortage of staff.
- Page 4, recommendation #9 at top: Some recognition of student successes (e.g. ENAR student paper awards) is broadcast.

Section III Undergraduate Major

- Page 4, under overview: The department has engaged in assessment including the new campus initiative to assess learning goals of academic programs on an annual basis. The department also routinely conducts exit surveys of our majors (BS, MS, and PhD) in addition to the campus-level surveys. We note that assessment, while critical, is at a relatively early stage for this university. It is not always straightforward to design, implement, analyze, and interpret assessment and we welcome opportunities to collaborate with other units on campus (e.g. DoIT) to do this systematically and do it right.
- Page 5, recommendation #4 at top: Undergraduate class sizes have indeed increased, but this has to do with budget constraints, reduced number of faculty, and increased numbers of statistics majors. The attribution of larger undergraduate class sizes to VISP students seems to be a misunderstanding of some of our undergraduates. Quite the contrary, VISP has helped to ease budget constraints and allowed the department to offer more undergraduate electives each semester, addressing undergraduate majors’ past concerns that there was very limited choice of electives.

Section IV Gateway Courses

- Page 6, recommendation #4: The recent revision of the gateway courses was done with a great deal of stakeholder input via, for example, the campus adviser network and face-to-face interviews with key departments/programs requiring these courses. We recognize the need for continuing input, but note that the idea of gathering stakeholder input is something that has been in play for some time.

Section V Revenue Programs

- Page 7, concern #5: The annual mid-autumn festival party in the department is traditionally organized by the third-year graduate students for primarily graduate students, staff, and faculty and their family and friends. Therefore, in Fall 2017, the MSDS students were invited while the VISP students were not. We will communicate with the graduate student organizers in the future and explore the possibility of including VISP students (and undergraduate majors).

In addition, we have been making new progress that was not noted in our self-study and the review report. For example,
• Page 4, recommendation #1 in Section III: This is already done: several sections of “Intermediate R” and “Advanced R” courses have been offered every semester recently, and course pre-requisites require students to take the “Introduction to R” course early.

• Page 4, recommendation #2 in Section III: We are moving in that direction. In Fall 2017, we started to implement a new procedure for senior honors students to do their honors project as statistical consultants in a lab outside of statistics. We would like to extend this option further beyond honors in the major.

• Page 9, recommendation #1 in Section VII: The department has opened the process of faculty hiring to assistant professors in the faculty search that is currently underway.

Finally, many of the concerns and recommendations in the report have to do with budget and human resource constraints. In particular, our progress in hiring new faculty, teaching staff, academic advisers, and administrative staff has been outpaced by the growth in enrollment, majors, and new degree programs. The existing processes built over the last few decades were intended for a modestly sized department and need substantial revision to address the current, unprecedented growth. It will continue to take time, resources, and multiple iterations to experiment and learn in the development of sound policies, efficient processes, stewardship of resources, effective communications, and strong teams with diverse membership. We are grateful for the unwavering support by the L&S leadership to grow our academic programs, build an efficient infrastructure, and experiment with new ideas. We ask for their continued guidance and support, as well as patience as we move forward.
23 October 2018

Jun Zhu, PhD
Professor and Chair
Department of Statistics
College of Letters & Science
University of Wisconsin–Madison
Sent Electronically

Dear Professor Zhu,

When the College of Letters & Science assembled a review committee to conduct the ten-year program review of the Statistics MS/PhD/Doctoral Minor with Named Options in Biostatistics, Professor Monica Turner was asked to serve as the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee (GFEC) representative. Professor Turner led a discussion of the review at the GFEC meeting on October 5, 2018. In this letter, I summarize the committee’s discussion.

The GFEC learned of the strengths of this program, which included progress toward improving departmental climate and TA training, along with the implementation of assessment procedures to guide departmental decisions.

In addition to the many strengths, the GFEC discussed some of the challenges facing the program:

- **Collective, long term vision:** The GFEC recommends continued examination of program strategies, including reducing prerequisites and elective course requirements, formalizing peer mentoring, and broadening use of professional development opportunities. The GFEC also recommends involving more faculty and graduate students in departmental planning and decision making.

- **Diversity:** The GFEC recommends diversity initiatives take a higher priority in the department and to that end, should consult with LaRuth McAfee, Graduate School Assistant Dean for Diversity, Inclusion and Funding.
The GFEC recommends the department engage in efforts to address the recommendations of the review committee and provide a written response by **January 30, 2019**, which will be discussed at a subsequent GFEC meeting. Thank you for your commitment to graduate education.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

William J. Karpus  
Dean of the Graduate School  
Professor of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine

Cc: John Karl Scholz, College of Letters & Science  
    Eric Wilcots, College of Letters & Science  
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    Emily Reynolds, Graduate School