January 21, 2021

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

RE: CBMS Response to GFEC Recommendations

Dear Dean Karpus,

We were very pleased to hear that GFEC recognized several strengths in the CBMS graduate program. These included solid leadership supported by a large number of faculty trainers, the flexible requirements of the program, the high quality of scholarship and productivity, very favorable time to degree and degree completion rates, and quality career outcomes.

Below are the responses to GFEC recommendations.

1. **Implement a rotation program for all students.** Many biological sciences programs on campus, including some that are closely related, offer rotation to all students. Faculty trainers in CBMS are also affiliated with other programs that offer rotations. Use their expertise to devise a rotation program compatible with CBMS goals.

Response: We agree with the committee that rotations will enhance recruitment of highly competitive students and provide flexibility for students in choosing a laboratory for their research. In 2020, we offered rotations to highly competitive students and underrepresented minorities to enhance our recruitment efforts. We intend to offer rotations to selected students in 2021 and beyond. However, the CBMS program is limited in the number of rotations that can be offered because we do not have funds (TAs, RAs, etc.) to support students that are unsuccessful in finding a lab following rotations. We are currently exploring mechanisms of expanding rotations to more students using Graduate School support and/or via reimbursement from trainers that admit students into their lab. Historically the CBMS program has been a direct admit program. This approach has served students and trainers well in reducing the time to degree and recruiting highly focused students into the laboratories of their choice.

2. **Develop a diversity plan to recruit more underrepresented students into the program.**
Response: To assist with increasing diversity and recruitment of underrepresented students into the CBMS program and the School of Veterinary Medicine (SVM), Dean Markel has set in motion several initiatives including the creation of a new position, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. We will work with SCIMED GRS and the newly appointed Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Mr. Richard Barajas to develop a diversity plan for the CBMS program. The following initiatives will be implemented as a part of the diversity plan: (1) establish a diversity, equity and inclusion committee, comprised of students and trainers; (2) schedule town hall meetings of the CBMS Director and Coordinator with students; (3) provide professional development opportunities on issues of diversity and equity to trainers and students via workshops, seminars, town halls, etc.; 4) resurrect student-led book clubs to discuss issues of diversity, equity and inclusion.

3. Provide better guidance to students on how they may switch advisors when necessary.

Response: We will include a section in the program student guide that will outline steps for switching advisors, and discuss this during the annual orientation session for incoming students.

4. Provide a funding guarantee in letter to applicants admitted to the program.

Response: We plan to provide a funding guarantee in the letter sent to students who are accepted into a laboratory.

5. Offer more opportunities for students to interact among faculty research groups and have a community experience that is difficult to achieve in a program with such a large, diverse, and geographically separated.

Response: We concur with the GFEC that providing a community experience to students is a challenge for the CBMS program. The CBMS program requires all graduate students to enroll in the 930 seminar class (MS: 2 semesters; PhD: 4 semesters). Attendance at 70% of seminars is mandatory and students are required to provide feedback to their fellow students. This class enhances the communication abilities of students, exposes students to the diversity of research topics in the program, promotes cross-fertilization across labs, and fosters cohesiveness among students. We offer all incoming students a list of highly recommended courses in research ethics, biostatistics, science communication and pathology for biomedical scientists. Additionally, CBMS and the SVM host periodic social events such as a Fall Cook-out, Holiday bowling and the Dean’s monthly get-togethers. Finally, the SVM hosts a research day in spring semester to integrate and showcase the research activities of graduate students, DVM students, residents and clinical fellows.

6. Consider reducing the number of trainers to only those who are regularly participating in the program.
Response: We are implementing review of trainers that will occur every three years. Active participation in CBMS activities will be part of the criteria for renewing trainership in the program.

Please let us know if you have questions about our responses.

Sincerely,

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