

UC DAVIS: ACADEMIC SENATE  
GRADUATE COUNCIL  
PROGRAM REVIEW COMMITTEE

April 25, 2008

TO: John Gunion, Chair  
Graduate Council

FROM: André Knoesen, Chair  
Program Review Committee



RE: Proposal to enhance the ability of UCD Graduate Groups to make multi-year funding offers to prospective students: 'safety nets' for funding support packages

The purpose of this memo is to describe a problem that the Program Review Committee has recognized to be a general handicap in the ability of Graduate Groups to recruit prospective students.<sup>1</sup>

The problem is this. One part of an effective recruiting effort for top-notch students is a competitive offer of financial support. And, a key part of creating a competitive offer of financial support is to be able to offer multiple years of funding, and hopefully funding that covers most or all of a student's anticipated tenure within a graduate program. To make multi-year funding offers, however, requires a funding base that is stable over time. Where is such stability to be found?

It often cannot be found within the funding resources available to individual faculty mentors. Even well-funded laboratories are typically faced with regular renewals of competitive grants. The total amount of funding available for graduate students can fluctuate significantly across years. Whereas extramural grants may be long enough to cover the full training period for many M.S. students, grants are rarely of sufficient duration to cover the full duration of a Ph.D. program. Thus, a rational, fiscally prudent faculty member who has to rely on his/her ability to secure grant funding will often be unwilling to make multi-year financial commitments to prospective students, even if that faculty member has an excellent track record of funding.

A funding base that is stable over time is found in many departmentally-based graduate programs. Such departmentally-based programs have two important sources of financial resources that can provide insurance against short-term funding shortfalls: (1) resources available directly to the graduate program (e.g., block-grant funds, carry-forwards), and (2) resources available to the department, but which can, in times of need, be used to subsidize the graduate program. Thus, many departmentally-based graduate programs can confidently make multi-year funding offers to prospective students. Such programs may still rely to a very large extent on support coming from individual faculty grants,

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<sup>1</sup> The issue emerged from discussions in PRC meetings. Professor Jay Rosenheim prepared a written response, which was then reviewed and commented on by PRC, and that resulted in this correspondence.

with the program and department providing limited funds to step in during temporary dips of faculty-generated funding.

Graduate Groups, which are by definition not departmentally based, lack the financial backing of any particular department, and thus must try to provide the safety net to participating faculty with the funds available to the group. Such funds are, however, often inadequate for this purpose. As a result, some Graduate Groups reluctantly make the prudent decision to not make multi-year funding offers, and their recruiting efforts are weakened.

The Program Review Committee suggests that the ability of Graduate Groups to contribute to graduate education at UC Davis will be enhanced by strengthening the ability of Graduate Groups to make multi-year funding offers through the provision of some sort of funding insurance. Such insurance could be achieved by linking a focal graduate group to any other body whose funding base is more stable.

PRC is proposing that Graduate Council require the development of formal multiyear-financial-support MOU's between (i) a Graduate Group and one or more departments that house the Graduate Group's participating faculty, or (ii) a Graduate Group and the associated Lead Dean, or (iii) a Graduate Group and the Graduate Division. Such multiyear-financial-support MOU's could establish a system whereby any debts incurred by the Graduate Group to an insuring body (a department or a Lead Dean) could be repaid over a period of years (e.g., from Block Grant allocations) such that the entire program could be run at zero cost long-term. The intent is that, as with any private insurance instrument, what would be provided is not a net addition of funds but rather a vehicle through which funds held collectively can be used to offset the variability in funding demands experienced by individual members within the collective.