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Dear Dr. Elizabeth Watkins,

At the request of the Graduate Council, I am writing in response to the External Review of the Tetrad Graduate Program held April 13-14, 2009. First, I want to express my gratitude for all of the hard work put in by the external review committee, officials of the university, and the faculty, staff and graduate students who represented the Tetrad Program. We were delighted by the many positive comments on our program particularly those concerning the quality of our students and our teaching, as well as our innovations in graduate training.

The committee did make some recommendations for improvements, and these were listed in eleven numbered points in the report. The most serious issues raised (points 5, 6, 9, 10 and 11) require a response from the university at a level higher than a graduate program director, and I respectably request that the appropriate university officials respond, in writing, to these points. You are in the best position to identify these officials and to forward this request to them. I further ask that a copy of this response be sent to me, as all five of these points represent serious issues for our program. The external review process required an extensive amount of preparation time for our faculty, staff, and students, and I think it only fair that all the points raised by the external committee be addressed. The five points that require a response from the university are listed below:

5) The capacity of the Tetrad Program is currently limited by resources, not quality of applicants or faculty who have slots available in their labs. Raising funds to increase the size of the program by about ten slots should be an institutional priority in the future.
6) Insufficiency of health care benefits is an outstanding problem and cause of concern among the students in the Program. The plan to merge health benefits across the University of California campuses should be a high priority to give adequate and equitable coverage to Tetrad students.

9) Teaching effort in the Tetrad Program is not always adequately rewarded by departments, which control salaries, promotions and teaching awards. The UCSF administration should work out ways to match the incentives and accountability at the departmental level with the faculty efforts invested in the Tetrad Program.

10) The prohibitive cost of living in the Bay Area is an issue for young faculty who are starting families. Raising institutional funds to help defray the cost of childcare for young faculty should be a high priority directly coupled to other efforts associated with junior faculty recruitment and retention.

11) The students and young faculty raised concerns about the safety of commuting to and from the Mission Bay campus, especially late at night and on weekends. The University must respond to this basic quality of life issue.

As Director of the Tetrad Program, I can respond to the remaining points and will do in their order of presentation in the report.

1) The order of courses in the core first-year curriculum should be returned to the more logical arrangement in place two years ago with the two foundational courses Genetics and Development and Macromolecules (actually a graduate level biochemistry course) taught in the fall quarter.

Response: This recommendation was instated for the 2009-2010 academic year. Genetics and Macromolecules were taught together in Fall Quarter 2009, and Cell Biology and Biological Regulatory Mechanisms are now being taught together in the Winter Quarter. Frankly, we were surprised this suggestion made it into the report, because we had already made the decision to change the course organization and told the visiting committee of our new plans. I guess they wanted to make sure we would really do it!

2) The Macromolecules course stood out as holding the least interest for the first-year students. Interest in this key subject could be reinvigorated by changing the organization and management of Macromolecules to keep abreast of the entrepreneurial sprit and esprit de corps evident in the teams teaching in other first-year courses.

Response: On the recommendation of the committee, we made the following changes to Macromolecules, effective academic year 09-10:

   a. The course was expanded to an entire quarter. The number of lectures nearly doubled, so the material was covered in much more detail.
   b. We added a discussion section, which focuses on both classic and modern papers and has become the most popular part of the course.
   c. The new lectures include more material on single molecule studies, diffusion, systems biology, and data analysis.
   d. We added workshop sessions in which the students get a more concentrated, hands-on experience of the material. Topics include: kinetics, thermodynamics, and structural biology.
e. We have added several lectures from Yifan Cheng on state-of-the-art electron microscopy and image reconstruction.

3) A superb team of faculty is teaching *Genetics and Development*, but the organization of the course could be improved. Ideally, the course should be organized by concepts, not organisms. Moreover, since a separate course in Developmental Biology is no longer taught, a separate section of the course should be explicitly designated for developmental genetics.

**Response:** The course is now organized into concepts in which different organisms are used to illustrate distinct genetic principles. We also added a discussion section where students can explore these concepts through case studies with specific organisms. The subject of Developmental Genetics is now represented by both lectures and discussions.

4) The Developmental Biology group is the least well-integrated component of the Tetrad Program and the Developmental Biologists, along with their training grant, are considering splitting off as an entirely separate graduate program. The ramifications of such a move appear to be more or less neutral with respect to the Tetrad Program, and we urge the Developmental Biologists to decide what they want to do and take definitive action soon so that appropriate accommodations can be put into place.

**Response:** The Developmental Biologists have now made their decision: they will remain a part of Tetrad, but will offer students interested in Developmental Biology the choice of an alternative graduate program.

7) The Tetrad Program has made recent strides in increasing the diversity of the student population. This should remain a high priority and efforts along these lines should be broadened to include more of the Tetrad faculty and students.

**Response:** On September 29, 2009, an afternoon workshop was held at the Mission Bay campus in which 66 students and 20 faculty members participated in a variety of exercises designed to increase awareness of diversity issues. The Program Agenda and List of Participants are attached at the end of the letter. The program, which will now become a yearly event, was conceived of and organized by The Minority Graduate Student Organization. Although the workshop encompassed many graduate programs, the Tetrad faculty and students were major participants.

The results of the diversity program piqued the interest and concern of the Mission Bay campus, and many new ideas and strategies are now being actively developed and evaluated.

8) The mini-courses are an ideal way to engage young faculty in the teaching program. It would therefore be desirable to explore ways to introduce something like a mini-course option at the end of the fall quarter that would allow young faculty maximum opportunity to recruit students to their labs.

**Response:** The minicourses were designed so that graduate students from a variety of programs could “cross over” and take courses offered outside their home programs. Given the constraints of all the graduate programs, the spring quarter is the only realistic option for this activity. To address the concerns of the review committee, we re-instated the Tetrad Pizza Talks. Every Thursday the Tetrad students invite two faculty members for dinner and an informal discussion of their science. Junior faculty members are heavily represented in the program. In addition, we
added two 10-week discussion sections to the fall curriculum, and have urged junior faculty members to participate as discussion leaders. All of these activities have raised the visibility of new faculty members.

In summary, the external review has provided numerous opportunities to improve our graduate program, and we have taken their advice to heart and responded with tangible changes. I look forward to your responses and actions on Points 5, 6, 9, 10 and 11, as these important issues, if unaddressed, will continue to weaken our program.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Alexander Johnson, PhD
Tetrad Program Director