Degree proposal: PhD in Physical Rehabilitation Science
Proposing Department: UCSF Department of Physical Therapy and
Rehabilitation Science (DPTRS) in collaboration with SF State University (SFSU)
Department of Physical Therapy

UCSF Graduate Council (Academic Senate) Review
Lead reviewer: John L Ziegler MD, MSc
Date: February 24, 2014

Summary: This proposed doctoral program replaces the existing joint
UCSF/SFSU Doctor of Physical Therapy Science (DPTSc) program. The
proposed size of the new program will begin with two students admitted
every other year with anticipated growth to a maximum size of 2 students
admitted every year (8-10 students in the program at any given time),
commensurate in size with comparable programs elsewhere. Two
specialty tracks are proposed: musculoskeletal rehabilitation science and
neurological rehabilitation science. Both institutions possess depth of
expertise and scholarship in these fields.

Students would spend 5 years in the program. The first two would
comprise intensive core course and seminar-based instruction (year 1 core
courses and research methods; year 2 – more specialized coursework).
The remaining 3 years would engage students in closely mentored field or
lab research in their chosen track.

Currently, the Department of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Science
offers both a joint UCSF/SFSU Entry-level Doctor of Physical Therapy
(DPT) degree and a joint UCSF/SFSU Doctor of Physical Therapy Science
(DPTSc) degree. The Entry-level Doctor of Physical Therapy degree is a 3-
year accredited joint professional program between UCSF and San
Francisco State University, created in 1999. With increasing NIH funding
and faculty resources, the Department proposes an expanded, more
research-based academic doctorate degree and a more advanced
curriculum in rehabilitation science. This would be the first PhD degree in
rehabilitation science in a state-supported school and only one of five other
similar programs in the West.

“The primary difference between the proposed PhD degree and the current
DPTSc degree is the level of rigor expected of students. This rigor is
reflected in the increased required number of research units, the
lengthened time for completion of the program, and the expectation that
students will be performing independent, original research, rather than
joining a current research project at UCSF. …Additionally, the PhD
program would allow us to recruit students who are interested in a PhD
degree, but may possess a degree outside the field of physical therapy.” (Proposal, p 8). The transition to PhD is responsive to academic trends nationally.

**Overall critique:** This is a well-written proposal that covers all key elements of potential concern for a new graduate program. With over 12 years’ experience running the joint DPTSc, the Department has adequately justified the need and utility of a change in scholarly direction. The main strengths are 1) the expanded research and teaching portfolio of the faculty; 2) the demonstrated success of the 3-year joint program; 3) a demonstrated need for more rigorous scholarship in the field (with potential openings for research and teaching faculty); and 4) the clear need for academic leadership in the field (e.g. high global burden of injury from conflict and human disasters). Additional strengths are the caliber and commitment of the faculty (both UCSF and SFSU), a track record of research and academic excellence, and a comprehensive, cross-departmental offering of courses and seminars.

Specific categories appear below, based on CCGA review criteria. All concerns are minor and remediable.

**Academic rigor, workload, and dissertation:** The proposed program is well aligned with related PhD programs such as neuroscience, BMS, Epi & biostats, and bioengineering. Careful coordination between PhD candidates in these fields will enhance the “critical mass” of scholarship and synergize with other masters (e.g. MTM, MSBI, and possibly global health) and the related doctoral programs. The authors have also paid attention to related programs on other UC campuses where further synergies can be realized. The size of the program (2 every other year) may pose problems with small classes, but it is wise to pilot the program in its early phases.

**Admission requirements:** An admission committee will oversee applications. Criteria for admission are sufficiently rigorous, although taking on a new graduate without experience or an MS degree could be a risk (Proposal, p 21). Overall, the standards for admission are high and in line with Graduate Division guidelines.

**Curriculum:** Students take a total of 138-141 units, with most core courses taken in year 1. The curriculum shows breadth and intensity, and makes use of many existing campus offerings (e.g. TICR, BMS, EPI) at the Masters and doctorate levels.

**Professional accreditation and licensing:** Fully in line with professional
standards and recommendations. WASC approval is not required.

**State need and professional demand:** The proposal documents many professional and academic vacancies in the field nationally (153 current, 105 potential) with a clear supply-side deficiency. There is ample justification for both student demand and need for PhD rehabilitation scholars in the field.

**Faculty commitment and mentorship:** The Department has become more academically robust and a PhD program will benefit both faculty and candidates by focusing on research as well as professional training. Cross department collaboration and joint research grants (e.g. ortho, surgery, radiology, neuro) will provide academic synergy and trans disciplinary perspective. 12 Departmental faculty and 28 faculty from other departments are committed to teaching this program.

**Relationship with other programs:** The proposal has considered the potential synergy with other UC campuses. The research linkage with UC Davis and UCSD (and of course SFSU) is especially promising. For very small programs such as this, close association with like-minded doctoral candidates in related fields will have a salutary effect both on learning and on research collaboration. It might be prudent to explore whether PT activities at the VA Hospital (and Department of Defense) would contribute to the program, as DOD/VA rehab resources (possible fellowships, technology, prosthetics, expertise) could contribute to the program as it grows.

**Governance and program review:** It is unclear why the Program Director be elected by a Steering Committee rather than appointed by the Department Head. As a practical matter, the Steering Committee (SC) might consider a smaller, informal “working group” of 2-3 members that meets regularly (possibly every 2-4 weeks) to consider nuts and bolts of program governance, as administrative, policy, and academic concerns will arise that do not need the attention of the full SC. This working group could report to the SC on, say, a quarterly basis and would obviate frequent meetings of very busy, senior faculty.

It is efficient that the SC also serves as Admissions and Curriculum Committee. Perhaps at this early stage detailed Committee By-laws (e.g. membership selection, voting rights, terms of service, number of meetings; leadership; sub committees, etc.) will be unnecessarily cumbersome. As a baseline, quarterly meetings would probably suffice, with periodic reports from the Program Director (or the working group) to document problems and progress. As the program grows, it would be worth considering
membership of a student candidate or recent graduate on the Steering and Admissions Committees.

**Student evaluation:** The qualifying and comprehensive examination procedures are well detailed and comply with Graduate Division and Academic Senate guidelines. As a practical matter, because the Department is small, many of the same faculty members are likely to serve on multiple committees. It is not clear the extent of SFSU participation on the examination committees and the authority they may or may not have for passing or failing candidates. This aspect appears to be at the discretion of the Graduate Dean. Somewhere in the narrative it should be mentioned that students retain a 3.0 GPA for graded courses already completed in order to graduate.

**Finances:** The financial aspects of the program are well documented, with self-sustainability as the goal. A block allocation by the graduate division (23,500 per student) covers tuition. Department funds will support students for the first 2 years while a T32 training grant is sought. Faculty availability and departmental capacity is adequate for the proposed workload. Staff support at 0.6FTE is included in the budget. In addition an ample list of scholarships and ancillary funding is presented (p. 42), with credible assurances of self-support in the 3-year time projection.

**Summary:** This well-written proposal should be approved, with possibly minor changes as suggested above. The authors had exhibited due diligence in the justification, academic rigor, and University capacity to support this program. With an established track record of excellence (DPTSc) jointly with SFSU, the proposal is innovative and commensurate both with academic trends in the field and with the values and goals of UCSF in 2014.