

Office of the President

Administration Building, Suite 105

PO Box 443151

Moscow, ID 83844-3151

Phone: 208-885-6365

Fax: 208-885-6558

timwhite@uidaho.edu

December 10, 2007

Dear Colleagues:

Last year the University of Idaho commissioned Yardley Research Group, an experienced, national higher education consulting practice, to conduct a strategic assessment of graduate programs at the University of Idaho. We seek to share a preliminary draft of their report with you.

The University of Idaho's graduate programs are critical to the overall vitality of the institution as a land grant research university. Our programs are key to the University's aspirations to improve national competitiveness and, over time, meet the criteria for inclusion in the Association of American Universities. We commissioned an assessment that includes comparisons with our national peers in each program to evaluate our ability to function in a highly competitive national market.

The Yardley representative has been meeting with the Provost and Deans, in anticipation of delivering this first draft report for input from the faculty at large. The report has been in process for one year and is intended to create a snapshot of one distinctive part of what the University of Idaho does.

The challenge before us will be to give the entirety of the report our attention and consideration, and to do so openly and objectively. It offers a frank assessment of graduate programs at the University of Idaho and the structural and cultural factors that affect those programs. The University will utilize the report as part of the development of a comprehensive strategy to integrate the efforts of academic units, branch campuses and institutes into centers of excellence that can consistently compete for research support, and attract top students and post-docs in particular areas of research and creative activity.

We view the report as a *catalyst for discussion about and implementation of improvement in key areas*. It is not necessarily a blueprint for action, but rather provides a framework for discussing improvements to the institution. The University of Idaho is in a transformative state, as are many of our national peers who are reacting to and leading a rapidly changing environment. This study is part of an ongoing continuous improvement process, one which all healthy and strong institutions go through at critical times in their evolution and in the implementation of strategic plans. The assessment is comprehensive and incisive, and it comes at a time in the renewal of our institution when it is critically important to understand the strengths of, and opportunities for, the University of Idaho's graduate programs in relation to those of our national peers.

Thank you for your dedication to the University of Idaho during our continuing period of renewal.

Sincerely,



Timothy P. White
President



Doug Baker
Provost and Executive Vice President

Summary of Draft Yardley Report Findings

Overarching Conclusion

The Yardley Research Group's draft report concludes that graduate education programs at the University of Idaho face significant challenges in sustaining a competitive stature on a national level, and that to reverse current trends in program viability and quality, deliberate, strategic change must encompass the enrollment area, the research culture, and many other aspects of our work and our environment

Context: The Graduate Education Landscape

It is critical that the entire University community recognize the immense change in graduate education that occurred concurrent with our internal restructuring of the last five years. The arena is becoming more competitive, in-state, regionally, nationally and globally – and in fact, all universities are at this time in a state of transition due to the shifting landscape. This is true for funding, students, research staff and faculty. New research models and strategies designed to attract and sustain external funding are rapidly evolving at peer institutions. Simply rebuilding the structure that was in place at Idaho prior to the budget crisis has a poor prognosis for success in the competitive market.

Budget inadequacies in public higher education throughout the country will be real for the foreseeable future. Recent cuts in higher education nationally are permanent. If University of Idaho is to meet its stated mission in graduate education and research, it must become more competitive. Current financial realities in higher education nationwide dictate that the bulk of the revenue necessary to achieve these ends must come through external sources.

General Findings and Recommendations

The assessment recognizes that the University of Idaho is in a transitional state—we are emerging from a fiscal crisis, after which the university “community” made a collective decision, conscious or otherwise, to focus on undergraduate education. If the research mission is to be fulfilled, a comprehensive, integrated strategy for graduate research programs should be developed and implemented. There will be challenges, as several institutional, structural and cultural factors combine in opposition to effective strategy at the University. Obsession with long-standing conflicts among faculty, upper administration, departments, colleges, institutes, and branch campuses is a key factor. A culture of developing and promoting from within, seeking like-minded recruits, resisting diversification of faculty and leadership, and replacing rather than restructuring vacant positions further isolates and fragments the institution. Now, the University needs to regain its focus as a research university in order to establish competitive advantage on the in-state, regional and national landscape. The University of Idaho can and should become a research university with strengths in both selected undergraduate *and* graduate programs.

Enrollment is a primary concern. In the last five years, graduate enrollments have decreased by 21%. Some of the decline is due to planned reductions in programs, response to the budget crisis, and the international student base nationwide. However, measurements reflecting recruitment, applications, enrollment, quality of admitted graduate students, degrees granted, faculty size, student-faculty ratios, stipends, and research awards, publications and citations per faculty member indicate that University of Idaho is falling behind peer institutions. We now find ourselves at a significant disadvantage in competing for sponsorship, research funding, and quality graduate students; in developing, retaining and recruiting productive faculty; and in undertaking and implementing innovative research programs. Many of these problems are related to the recent financial crisis. However, the compounding effect of existing cultural, structural, and institutional factors, both internal and external, combined with budget stress, loss of senior faculty, and several years of interim senior leadership have diminished the competitiveness of the University.

As to funding, University of Idaho needs to become more self-supporting as an institution. This does not require every individual to be self supporting; rather there is a need to identify and strengthen the research teams that can attract funding and enhance the status of the University in the marketplace. In general, Yardley recommends the development of a comprehensive strategy to integrate the efforts of academic units, branch campuses, and institutes into centers of excellence that can consistently compete for research support in particular research areas. For many departments, they recommend more professional master's programs to raise revenues; more on-line programs; more academic doctoral students to enhance research programs, and a reduction in academic master's programs.

Methodology and Specific Findings

This draft report contains specific assessments of each of the University of Idaho's graduate programs and the institutional climate and infrastructure that support them. The analysis uses strategic external comparisons of our peer and aspirant institutions to help give us context for strengthening the University. The comparative methodology is conducted in the context of Yardley's sense of the developmental directions of particular disciplines, and the firm's experience with similar programs in the fields.

The methodology includes: (1) Collection of program information and data (including strategic plans; external program reviews; interviews with administrators, faculty and students); (2) Selection of peer universities (both current and aspirational); (3) Selection of peer programs for benchmarking each program; and (4) Productivity comparisons such as: student-to-faculty ratios, degrees conferred (2001-06), admission requirements, GRE scores, GPAs, research awards, publications, citations, research space, stipends, fee and insurance remission, curricular thrust, licensing, and career placement.

Following is Yardley Group's own summary of the key conclusions contained in its draft report:

- Some current areas of research strength are reflected in good programs: MMBB; Biological Sciences; Biological and Agricultural Engineering; Natural Resources; Mathematics; Waters of the West. The interdisciplinary programs in the Graduate College are promising, as these reflect collaborative research models, though they are too new to have made an impact. The remaining blue ribbon initiatives have potential, though they require additional definition. All of the interdisciplinary programs are operating under pressure from administrators who are wary of scarce resources being used outside their units.
- The branch campuses are among the most vital but underutilized instructional and research assets of the University. It is important for these assets to be more integrated into the system, especially in terms of faculty.
- Graduate programs in general suffer from a lack of emphasis and lack of strategic direction.
- There are serious faculty cultural issues:
 - Excellent at building community but also exclusive and prefer similarity of values, even in newcomers
 - Provincial and regional—rather than national—perspective
 - Isolation in Moscow and lack of concern for the principal population centers in the state
 - Isolation also from their disciplines and from best practice in the field
 - Mistaken sense of national prominence related to individual faculty, despite low comparative performance indicators
 - Overly concerned with trivia and do not feel they have an obligation to help with larger issues—the fiscal crisis, for example, is the fault of administrators and needs to be fixed by administrators
 - Feel constantly under siege, since they have a sense of entitlement to state funds but feel alienated from apparent state values
 - Focus on the past rather than the future
 - Value independence of faculty intention and action and are resistant to strategy—on the grounds that it limits academic freedom
 - See their fundamental mission as preserving the core, but they define the core too narrowly—more or less as undergraduate teaching
- The aftermath of the fiscal crisis and this faculty culture have driven away some of the University's best research faculty.
- The faculty culture is strong enough to absorb leadership and we think this has happened to some extent with the Deans, who are to some degree subject to faculty tolerance.
- There are improvements needed in the University's research culture:

- Faculty (and administrative) recruiting, retention, and start-up are serious issues.
- Long-standing lack of a coherent research mission is apparently more acute now without permanent leadership.
- Faculty are over-burdened—frequently of their own volition—with activities other than research: teaching on an overload basis; departmental and other kinds of service; financially unproductive master's programs, etc. Research is frequently the lowest priority of faculty and some administrators, a priority which is codified in official job descriptions.
- “Preserving the core” is a mask for the notion that, as much as possible, resources should be allocated equally among the units and not strategically.
- Very low publication and citation rates, even in the best programs.
- Faculty persist in the belief that the “right sizes” of their departments were the sizes that they were prior to the fiscal crisis and use this as an excuse for lack of research activity. This is symbolic of perhaps the main point of the assessment: *The best response to the financial crisis would have been strategic reduction and elimination and corresponding marshalling of resources to build existing strength. Instead, the University continued to do everything it once did, with the consequence that most of what it is doing is not nationally competitive.*
- There is a need to reorganize how lower-division instruction is delivered so that tenure-system faculty are free to conduct research.
- There is an unusual degree of recruiting and promoting graduate students, faculty and administrators from within the University or locally, causing a narrowness of perspective that has little knowledge of external standards in the various disciplines and in research universities.
- Research centers and institutes are the University's best structural mechanism for bringing faculty from different units together for interdisciplinary research collaborations. Some of these centers and institutes, such as the Center for Ecohydraulics Research in Boise and the National Institute for Advanced Transportation Research, are highly productive and improve the quality of doctoral education in the programs with which participating faculty are affiliated. There are some centers and institutes, however, that serve as a means to remove their directors (and their funds) from the University's ordinary channels of oversight. It is possible that these are not well integrated into graduate education. None of them shares a commonality of mission or governance, and we think the University should both create new governance policies for such structures and conduct a review of existing structures against those policies.
- Requiring participation in the regional campuses would at least have the effect of broadening Moscow faculty perspective.
- Faculty hiring needs to happen strategically rather than on a replacement basis. As often as possible, faculty hiring should be a joint activity between units working on the same research objectives and not departmental.
- Many small, unviable programs
 - Small marginal programs are unable even to offer required courses on a regular basis.
 - In some cases, faculty are frankly uninterested in their graduate programs and would prefer that they be eliminated.
 - Enrollment in many departments is simply something that happens—versus something that can be managed and controlled. In a very important way, the decision not to recruit makes departments difficult to manage, since they cannot control the interests of their students and, therefore, cannot control the courses they offer and when they offer them. They also cannot control how students contribute to faculty research programs and what, therefore and ultimately, the reputation of the department will be in the field.
 - Unfortunately, the University's mission in the state precludes eliminating most of these programs, and we have been careful with recommendations to do so.
 - There are numerous undirected discussions of partnership with Washington State University—from cross-listing courses to offering joint programs. These should be stopped and confined to negotiations among senior executives. Such negotiations should be based on an environmental strategic plan that will help drive the regional economy.

- Programs have little to no sense of outside standards and no viable sense of actual and aspirational peers
 - We think the University should employ internal minimum viability tests—enrollments, degrees, income-expense ratios, etc. to spur faculty attention or to suspend or eliminate non-viable programs
 - Critical mass is an issue across virtually every program, but it is worse in some than in others.
 - Because of critical mass issues, there are a number of “teaching doctorates”—that is, degrees that are over-reliant on heavy course requirements with little opportunity for independent research
 - It is important for the sake of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary programs that the University take steps to break down the boundaries between colleges and departments, since given critical mass issues, multidisciplinary research groups represent the University’s best opportunities for advancing its international stature. Deans and Department Chairs need to be more focused on *institutional* strategic imperatives and less concerned with the ongoing struggle for greater *unit* resources.
- The faculty have an unproductive approach to master’s programs. Many of these are academic and hope to prepare students for doctoral programs either at Idaho or elsewhere, despite the fact that the majority of students in master’s programs are entering business, industry, and government. We think there are a number of negative effects resulting from this practice. These include higher than usual attrition rates, lower than normal completion rates, increased costs stemming from the need to support academic master’s students, the dedication of already thin faculty resources to supervising master’s theses, and—most of all—the loss of significant revenue streams that might result from more professionally oriented master’s programs.
- To be more specific on the question of academic master’s programs, we note that this is not simply a question of being responsive to market demand. It is a question of conserving existing resources and generating new ones. To begin with, the amount of time and faculty energy devoted to supervising master’s theses is significant, and this time could be spent writing grant proposals or increasing doctoral production. Second, academic master’s programs in the manner of the current ones are, from a financial point of view, cost centers, since students enrolled in them are absorbed into faculty research projects and therefore need to be supported through assistantship funds. Third, students expect to pay tuition and fees for professional master’s programs, and the revenue that can be generated from them is potentially significant—enough to underwrite the cost of more expensive research programs and other initiatives of the colleges and departments. Institutions that offer an array of professional master’s degree programs have found that they generate more discretionary income for the units involved.
- There is a need for a much stronger graduate school, which is currently understaffed and organizationally weak.
 - Return the allocation of assistantships to the graduate dean
 - Other roles: strategic direction; coordinating proposals for training grants; recruiting and admissions; establishing tighter minimum standards; performance tracking; defining the graduate faculty; program review; health insurance; minimizing attrition and time to degree and maximizing completion; leading a greater emphasis on the doctorate; and supervising student financial packages
- There is a deep need to improve the infrastructure for institutional research, since data are too hard to come by and sometimes of questionable quality. This is an organizational, not a personnel, issue.
- Need for centralized resources under the provost and president
- Decanal leadership needs improvement in key areas that relate to graduate education and research:
 - Necessity for national searches
 - Need for more strategic planning that makes strategic choices and selects strategic foci

- Need for strategic budgeting based on income-expense ratios and strategic choice
- Deans must have strategic visions beyond preserving the core or filling in perceived gaps
- The University needs to force strategic spending and not permit hoarding of resources to protect from future budget cuts
- Initiate joint strategic hiring of faculty
- There is a need for firm rules to which there are sometimes exceptions for legitimate cause. As of now there are exceptions and no rules.

Key recommendations include:

Critical Mass

- We can best achieve critical mass in key areas through interdisciplinary collaborations.
- We can better utilize our excellent individuals to develop collective strengths.
- If we try to achieve excellence in every discipline and sub-discipline with so few faculty, nothing will be resourced sufficiently to impact the discipline.
- We need to marshal our limited resources to build on existing areas of strength, not to bolster weaknesses.
- With some exceptions, critical mass is typically 7-8 faculty, who work closely in related research, not necessarily in the same units, and each supervise 2 doctoral students.

Productivity

- The University of Idaho has too many traditional academic master's degrees which slow the time-to-degree for PhDs and contribute to faculty overload and less research productivity. We should focus on more programs with professional master's degrees (with fee-paying students) and more direct Bachelor's to PhD admissions.
- We have untapped opportunities for distance education in professional masters programs.
- We should better integrate faculties between all Idaho campuses.

Student Selectivity

- Most programs could improve their recruitment activities.
- We should require the GRE in more programs and raise GPA requirement for graduate admissions to 3.0 (from 2.8).
- Departments should improve their recordkeeping from graduate student prospects to applicants to placement.
- The University of Idaho should reduce its reliance on its own undergraduates (except for multicultural students and except in some programs) as a primary pool for graduate students.
- University of Idaho graduate students' having to pay in-state fees and health insurance is a major non-competitive indicator.

Other

- Many research programs have major space needs.
- We should try to recruit more graduate students, faculty and administrators from outside of the region to broaden our national perspective.
- We should carefully select which collaborations to pursue with other institutions at a high administrative level to ensure success.