

# GRADUATE GROUP REVIEW PROTOCOL FOR SCHOOLS

(Adopted 1.10.10)

## Overview of the Graduate Council of the Faculties

The Graduate Council of the Faculties is advisory to the Provost and Vice Provost for Education. Graduate Council's members are elected by the faculties of the nine Ph.D.-granting schools according to their by-laws with the following representation: seven members from the School of Arts and Sciences, two from Biomedical Graduate Studies and one member each from the Annenberg School for Communication, Graduate School of Education, School of Design, School of Nursing, School of Social Policy and Practice, the Wharton School, and School of Engineering and Applied Science. In addition, three Ph.D. candidates (including at least one from SAS) are selected by the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly to serve on the Graduate Council.

One of the most important responsibilities of the Graduate Council of the Faculties is to monitor the quality of the Ph.D. programs and to conduct periodic reviews. The Graduate Council also provides advice on University-wide admissions and degree requirements (for the Ph.D., A.M., and M.S. degrees) and on policy matters related to the well-being of graduate education generally. The Graduate Council of the Faculties has statutory responsibility for approving the awarding of degrees on behalf of the Trustees.

## Periodic Review of Ph.D. Programs

Graduate programs are to be reviewed every 5-6 years. Periodic review institutionalizes the process of analysis and planning for Ph.D. programs. The Deans and the Provost should ensure that these reviews are carried out.

Following a published protocol, the graduate group collects and reviews quantitative data (e.g., admissions data, attrition and time to degree) and qualitative input (e.g., placement data) and produces a self-study or "Resource Document." Additionally, the Provost's Office provides institutional data for comparison to other programs (e.g., student satisfaction surveys, mean time-to-degree). The Resource Document and supplementary materials should be provided to the Review Liaison at least two weeks prior to a site visit.

The Graduate Council of the Faculties' Graduate Group Review Protocol (Appendix A) specifies the issues to be addressed in the Resource Document, which provides the graduate group a framework for faculty reflection on successes, problems and opportunities. Are graduate group practices conducive to the desired outcomes? For example, are changes, such as improved student funding, producing the anticipated improved recruitment yields or shortened time to degree? The review provides a means of benchmarking both within the Penn context, and against peer programs outside the University.

The findings from the review can help a program “make its case” to School/University for additional support and defend its longer range plans. Conversely, the specter of a review has led graduate groups to dissolve or reorganize.

## **Review Process**

The review of a Ph.D. program in Arts and Sciences, Engineering, and Wharton typically is scheduled to take place in conjunction with a departmental review; external consultants generally participate. A representative of the Graduate Council is appointed to act as Review Liaison and participates along with the internal review committee (if there is one) and/or external consultants in the part of the review concerned specifically with Ph.D. education. The Review Liaison conducts additional interviews with the graduate program leadership, faculty, and graduate students as necessary to gain a full appreciation of the issues.

Biomedical Graduate Studies conducts reviews of its interdisciplinary graduate programs independently from the departmental reviews of the School of Medicine. External consultants generally participate in the review and a representative of the Graduate Council is appointed as Review Liaison. He or she may participate in all the meetings of the internal review committee, or may participate only at the time of the site visit by the external consultants.

In schools without an associated departmental review (Annenberg, Design, Education, Nursing and Social Policy and Practice), the review is initiated and conducted by the Graduate Council. One or two Graduate Council members are appointed to conduct the review.

If an external review is part of the school’s review protocol, the Vice Provost participates in the confidential debriefing of the external consultants at the conclusion of the site visit.

## **Role of the Graduate Council of the Faculties Review Liaison**

The Review Liaison is in a unique position to make recommendations based on what is learned from students and faculty. The Review Liaison works with the Graduate Group Coordinator (or other person designated by the School) to schedule appointments, organize meetings, and send emails to solicit comment from students and faculty (see Appendices B and C for sample correspondence). Typically Review Liaisons meet during the course of the review with some or all of the following:

- a) Dean (for small schools) and/or Department chair (of the department with primary responsibility for the group)
- b) Graduate Group Chair
- c) Meetings with the graduate faculty
- d) Meetings with students

- e) External Consultants, if there are any. The Review Liaison should request a 30-minute meeting without graduate group members present. The External Consultants' report (at least the sections pertaining to PhD education) is shared with the Review Liaison.

### **Report**

The Graduate Council Review Liaison prepares a written report (which may be an independent report or an addendum to an internal review committee report) and gives an oral brief to the Graduate Council.

The report includes objective markers on such items as:

- a) Quality of matriculating students
- b) Time to degree
- c) Placement
- d) National rankings
- e) Outside view of the quality of the Penn program
- f) Quality of faculty
- g) A description of the academic program
- h) General discussion of issues arising from the review.

The Review Liaison's report is submitted to the Vice Provost and is sent to the Graduate Group Chair in advance of presentation to Graduate Council. The graduate group chair is invited to attend the presentation.

Following discussion of the review by Graduate Council, the Vice Provost forwards the report and any comments to the Dean, Department Chair, and Graduate Group. A written response is requested of the Dean where significant concerns have been highlighted during the review.

The results of the review should be presented as a frank report to the Dean of the school responsible for the program, who then should present them, in appropriate versions, to the faculty and students in the Graduate Group.

## **Appendix A : THE RESOURCE DOCUMENT (Revised 1.10.10)**

The Resource Document should address the following:

### **I. Mission and Organization of Graduate Group**

What does the Graduate Group see as its greatest strengths and its greatest needs? How do they affect the graduate curriculum? How does the program differ substantively from those of other programs in major universities? Is it more or less comprehensive, more or less specialized? Has the graduate group reviewed the curriculum and the Ph.D. requirements? When was this last done? What is the impact of the graduate group on other programs?

### **II. Students**

- What is the quality of students admitted? How do undergraduate records and GRE scores compare to other University graduate groups? how do they relate to other Ph.D. programs in the same field elsewhere? (What are the peer programs? Where do we lose student to?)
- How is the number of students to admit decided? What is the evidence as to whether this is a reasonable number? How is the capacity of the Graduate Group to support students financially considered in admissions decisions?
- Is appropriate care being taken to assure that students who are admitted are capable of completing the program? How are transfer courses evaluated? Is there sufficient care to assure that the courses transferred are appropriate for Ph.D. credit?
- Is part time study allowed? Is the part time study policy in the interest of the program and of the students?
- How is English proficiency assured for international students?
- How are students trained in the responsible conduct of research?
- How are students supported financially? Are stipends competitive with peer programs? For what length of time are students supported? How does this compare to the time to degree in this program? Are students with no support a problem for the program?
- What are the exam policies and review procedures for students? Are the exam policies and review procedures consistent with University requirements? Are they effective, in terms of providing timely information to students who cannot complete and of encouraging the progress of those who can complete? How are students informed of Graduate Group policies? Is this communication effective? How are students informed of their individual status in the program? Is this communication effective? How are members of examination and dissertation committees selected?
- Are students trained in teaching skills? What pedagogical support is given to TAs? What does the Graduate Group do to assist students to find jobs?
- Are there any student concerns that warrant more attention?

- What is the placement record of graduates?

### **III. Graduate Group**

- Does this Graduate Group understand the Ph.D. to be exclusively a research degree? How is faculty membership determined? How active are the faculty in the group in supervising graduate students? How frequently do the faculty meet? Is this Graduate Group too large or too small? If either, what evidence supports this conclusion? How does the Graduate Group include faculty from outside the School or the foundational department? Are there any faculty concerns that warrant more attention?

The following materials are included in the Resource Document which is provided to the Review Liaison.

1. Placement information: A list of Ph.D.'s awarded in the last five years and their most recent professional appointment. (Attach Career Tracker report.)
2. Students: A list of current students in order of matriculation and information on financial support over the duration of their studies. The list should include the adviser for each student on dissertation.
3. Attrition: A list of all students to drop out of the program who were admitted in the last five years.
4. The current rules of the Graduate Group or copy of the student handbook.
5. Admissions: For the last five years, the numbers of applications, admission offers, and matriculations. Data on GREs, TOEFL. (Attach template report)
6. Faculty: A list of members and faculty titles of the members of the Graduate Group. (or attach FIS report)
7. Samples of correspondence that the group sends to students confirming their admission, their financial support, and their progress through the program.
8. Recruitment: A description of recruitment activities, including efforts to increase the enrollment of students from underrepresented minorities.
9. A description of placement efforts for Ph.D.'s. (what types of assistance is provided?)
10. List of graduate courses and when they were last offered.

**APPENDIX B: SAMPLE LETTER TO STUDENTS**

TO: PhD Students in \_\_\_\_\_  
FROM: \_\_\_\_\_, Professor of \_\_\_\_\_  
RE: Review of the PhD Program in \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Overall responsibility for the quality of Penn’s PhD programs is vested in a university-wide body, the Graduate Council of the Faculties. I serve on that body along with faculty from each of the schools and three graduate student representatives. The Graduate Council conducts periodic reviews of the PhD programs (generally every 4-6 years) and I have been asked to be the reviewer for the program in \_\_\_\_\_. As such, I have reviewed the information prepared by the graduate group, and I will meet with the external consultants.

I am writing to request that the PhD students in \_\_\_\_\_ meet with me as a group so that I can hear from you directly, and on a confidential basis, about your experience in the program. I would like to meet with first and second year students on (DATE/HOUR), and with the more advanced students at (DATE/HOUR).

I will be interested to know your opinions regarding such matters as financial support, course offerings, advising, mentoring, research and teaching opportunities, help with job hunting, and about any concerns you may have. The information will be used to help me make an accurate assessment of the program and to make any recommendations for improvements that should be considered. Input from current students is a very important part of this review process.

**If you prefer to communicate with me privately, you may call me at \_\_\_\_\_ or email me at \_\_\_\_\_.** Thank you, in advance, for your assistance. I hope to meet many of you on \_\_\_\_\_.

## APPENDIX C: SAMPLE LETTER TO FACULTY

TO: Graduate Group Faculty in \_\_\_\_\_  
FROM: \_\_\_\_\_, Professor of \_\_\_\_\_  
RE: Review of the PhD Program in \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Overall responsibility for the quality of Penn's PhD programs is vested in a university-wide body, the Graduate Council of the Faculties. I serve on that body along with faculty from each of the schools and three graduate student representatives. The Graduate Council conducts periodic reviews of the PhD programs (generally every 4-6 years) and I have been asked to be the reviewer for the program in \_\_\_\_\_. As such, I have reviewed the information prepared by the graduate group, and I will meet with the external consultants.

I am writing to request that the graduate group faculty in \_\_\_\_\_ meet with me as a group so that I can hear from you directly, and on a confidential basis, about your experience in the program. I would like to meet separately with the junior faculty on (DATE/HOUR), and with the senior faculty on (DATE/HOUR).

I will be interested to know your opinions regarding such matters as advising, mentoring, the quality of students in the program, financial support, course offerings, research and teaching opportunities for students, assistance provided to students with job hunting, and about any concerns you may have. The information will be used to help me make an accurate assessment of the program and to make any recommendations for improvements that should be considered. Input from the faculty is a very important part of this review process.

**If you prefer to communicate with me privately, you may call me at \_\_\_\_\_ or email me at \_\_\_\_\_.** Thank you, in advance, for your assistance. I hope to meet many of you on \_\_\_\_\_.