

EXTERNAL PANEL REVIEW

**THE GRADUATE PROGRAM IN
EXERCISE AND SPORT SCIENCE
OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY**

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OVERALL RECOMMENDATION

Maintain

INTRODUCTION

The external review committee organized its review and assessment by the evaluation criteria suggested by the Guidelines for the Review of Graduate Programs offered by the Graduate Council of Oregon State University. The Exercise and Sport Science (EXSS) Program organized a detailed and comprehensive self-study document that allowed the committee to prepare for the review and explore questions in detail. Interviews with Dean of the College of Health and Human Sciences, and graduate faculty and students in the EXSS program all revealed uniform support for the program while recognizing resource limitations. The external review committee shares that support, although notes some limitations presented by current methods for organizing the program. Our recommendation, therefore, is for the program to **maintain** its direction while experimenting with new ways for supporting graduate education and students.

DETAILED FINDINGS

1. The fit of the mission of the program and its relationship to the mission of the academic college(s), and the university mission.

The mission “to promote health through physical activity across the lifespan in all populations” is clear, and appropriate for the program now and as it moves into the new College structure. The program report summarizes the goals and challenges well. In particular, the challenges of balancing competing demands, cultivating revenue streams and aligning with the changing culture of the College, are indeed major challenges to be addressed.

The fact that the ESS program is not moving INTO a College of Public Health, but is involved in the process of forming a College of Public Health, along with other existing units, allows the program to take some control and work with other units as well as within the program to address the challenges. However, the faculty should reconcile how the Physical Education Teacher Education program and the non-thesis offering for the master’s program will fit within the confines of a College of Public Health.

2. Quality of Students and Admissions Selectivity

According to Table A in Appendix 2, admission to the EXSS program is selective, with approximately 30 percent of the applicants admitted to the program. However, in the past four years, only 60 percent of the admitted students actually matriculate into the program.

On average over the past five years, the GRE scores of the matriculated students are lower than those of the admitted students. This is especially true in the last year reported (2010-11) where the predominant matriculated students were Oregon residents. This is compared to the previous four years where only 37 percent of the matriculated students were Oregon residents.

There is some concern regarding the diversity of the student population. The EXSS program does provide a diversity action plan, but more effort may be needed within the College to support recruitment of a more diverse population of graduate students.

3. Level of financial support for students

Financial support is provided for almost all of the matriculated students.

4. Curriculum strength

Connection with MPH courses and programs are desirable but limited. It appears that several EXSS doctoral students are also getting a minor or MPH degree, and others take MPH courses. That's good on several counts – EXSS doctoral student education and career/research preparation, connections with public health for the programs and research, etc. However, it appears that students have difficulty getting the MPH courses. The EXSS and MPH programs might try to develop strategies to allow EXSS students access to courses and promote other collaborative program and research options.

Both the Student Handbook and web site were vague regarding required coursework for the programs.

5. Quality of personnel and adequacy to achieve mission and goals

Faculty. The faculty are active researchers and professionals with strong scholarly records. Those scholarly areas include behavioral and epidemiological approaches to physical activity and health, as well as biological, and that's good for connecting with public health. The *Movement Studies in Disability* area is a unique strength of the OSU EXSS graduate program, and one that fits well with public health. Moreover, the faculty appear to be collegial and collaborative which bodes well for making changes to advance within the new College of Public Health.

Large undergraduate enrollment (1000+) is a major source of competing demands and barrier to graduate excellence as well as faculty research productivity and revenue generation. The large UG enrollment reflects interest in allied health professions, and that's a plus within College of Public Health. However, some steps toward enrollment management (secondary admission, enrollment caps, etc.) are needed to avoid spreading faculty resources too widely, while maintaining quality in the UG program.

Several (six) graduate specializations leads to uneven resources and isolation. Physical Activity & Health has only one faculty, other areas have two or three. A different organization, perhaps without advertised specializations or with broader "themes" might be more appropriate and promote more collaboration in research and programs.

The PETE M.S. program is an oddity, but one that has a purpose and seems to be supported by the faculty. As a non-thesis, practice-oriented, MS-only program, and the only one in the state, it does serve a purpose. However, faculty and other resources for PETE must be balanced with other demands. For example, PETE might be staffed by non-tenure track, adjunct or part-time faculty.

6. Level and quality of infrastructure

The research "infrastructure" is not adequate to support current faculty and graduate student research, let alone to expand research and grant funding efforts. College-level support is needed in grant preparation/planning/processing stages and in support for ongoing funded projects. For example, budget support is needed in planning and also in administering the grant and monitoring budget. As a related issue, the indirect costs do not seem to be distributed in any way to provide incentive and reward to those faculty who receive funding. Some portion should be coming back to the PI and department/program.

7. Quality of Organizational support

The faculty appear to receive little reward for their overload efforts. One way to reward faculty is to pursue endowed chairs. These entitlements can provide a stipend and research dollars, which can be a way to show support for the faculty member in times of limited funding. This would take efforts from the central administration, but usually cost the college very little and provide a great reward. The funds are usually un-restricted so that faculty could use them for their own benefit (research, travel) or can use the funds for the graduate student's benefit. Travel funds for faculty are critical with the greater focus on research.

Overall, if faculty are to develop a solid research program which is typically required by a College of Public Health, then the University has to improve its infrastructure to obtain that funding. Thus help with finding, writing, and administration of grants needs to be improved. Also, the University or College should develop a mentorship program with new faculty; possibly assigning two mentors, one in faculty member's specialization and a secondary in another area of interest within the department.

8. Level and quality of student performance

Graduate students appear well-qualified, make good progress, are actively engaged in research and find positions, usually in academia, after graduation.

Most graduate students are funded. Many are funded through training grants, which is good and relevant for a land-grant university with a public service/engagement commitment, although more NIH and federal research grant support would be desirable.

9. Level and quality of faculty performance

Faculty workloads/roles need adjustment to increase funded research. Teaching loads are heavy for faculty expected to seek and obtain federal funding. On the plus side, the teaching loads for the newest faculty are appropriately reduced. It is not clear if those faculty have formal mentoring/support at the program or College level to help them establish their research programs as well as their overall faculty career – but that would certainly be desirable. Moreover, support (release time for grant writing, support services, etc.) should be available to all faculty with clear guidelines and criteria.

10. Viability of scholarly community within which students can interact

Current and potential connections and collaborations with other units within the College, across campus and with the community are a good match with physical activity and health. Current Centers for Healthy Aging and for Obesity and Chronic Disease are particularly good connections and sites for interdisciplinary research and programs for EXSS.

11. Ranks/rating:

The OSU EXSS doctoral program has a strong tradition, is ranked well (#11) among all kinesiology doctoral programs in the 2010 report of the National Academy of Kinesiology. OSU has the only doctoral program in kinesiology in the state, and indeed, on the west coast. *Physical Activity and Health* is a “hot” topic or emphasis in kinesiology program, with many shifting hires and resources in this direction. OSU's program is well-positioned for this trend, and the move to a College of Public Health could be a benefit if EXSS can maintain its unique identity within the College.

CONCLUSION

The review committee concluded the graduate program in EXSS should be maintained. The following recommendations are intended to strengthen the EXSS program and should be followed up with a response on how the program is going to address the issues raised:

- a. Develop a recruiting effort that targets diverse populations interested in EXSS. This may be done in conjunction with related programs (e.g., Nutrition, Public Health). One idea used successfully in other programs is a “recruitment weekend,” that brings together a group of excellent candidates to learn more about the opportunities available at OSU. Resources at OSU can help identify low-income, first generation, and other non-representative student populations.
- b. Related to recommendation a, increase efforts to broaden the applicant pool to non-resident and international student populations. The program should also follow-up with admitted students who declined to attend and develop strategies to retain the highly qualified applicants.
- c. Expand the Graduate Student Handbook to include sample coursework for each program track.
- d. Consider using broader themes to consolidate the six current specializations into a smaller set that promotes collaboration in research and course offerings.
- e. Provide professional development regarding mentoring relationships for both faculty and students.
- f. Develop strategies to improve receipt of external grants, including grant writing workshops, mentoring, and guidelines for release time to pursue and administer grants.
- g. The OSU Graduate School is in the process of offering a teaching certificate. Consider adding this teaching certificate to both M.S. and Ph.D. degree programs.