

To: Dr. Jane Smith, Department Chair, Department of Psychology University of New Mexico
From: In alphabetical order: David P. MacKinnon, Gabriel R. Sanchez, and G. Terence. Wilson
Date: March 7, 2016
Re: External Review Committee Report of the Psychology Department

The following report summarizes the external review our committee conducted of the Psychology department at the University of New Mexico. Our committee was comprised of two non-UNM Psychology faculty and a UNM faculty member outside of the discipline. The review consisted of a two-day visit to the University of New Mexico and a comprehensive set of meetings with essentially all components of the department. More specifically, meetings were held with the chair of the psychology department, faculty from each area of concentration, the department policy and planning committee, graduate students, undergraduate students, departmental staff, and the Provost and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences respective staffs. Members of the review team toured the facilities in the psychology department, the psychology clinic, and the Psychology Clinical Neuroscience Center. The review committee was also given the report of psychology department several weeks before the meeting. In short, our committee felt as though we were provided with all of the information required to conduct our review, with immediate responses to our inquiries from appropriate faculty and staff. For example, after noting at our initial meeting to review the agenda for the visit that we did not have a meeting with undergraduate students on our schedule, the department chair moved behind the scenes to assemble a group of students for us to meet with the following day. There were also several instances when one of the members of the committee would raise a question regarding data or departmental policy during our discussions where the department would follow up quickly with appropriate background information.

Overall the psychology department is accomplishing its missions in an outstanding manner with a strong record of publications and external grant support. The department has excellent leadership by the chair, a dean that champions the work of the department, and highly productive, prominent faculty members. Graduate students are doing well in their studies and work in appropriate fields after graduation. The admittedly limited number of undergraduate students with whom we met were positive about their program and pleased with the advanced training available with faculty whom they rated as supportive and helpful. We were impressed with these training opportunities given that the department has the greatest number of majors in the college. The department has many internationally known scholars and institutes. For example, the CASA institute is well respected and has an international reputation. The Clinical Neuroscience center is poised to make critical basic discoveries in neuroscience. The facilities available for department faculty and students (this includes undergraduate students who are able to use this equipment) are very impressive and on par with what one would expect at top caliber institutions. This includes access to a super computer, several experimental labs, and other scientific equipment required for cutting edge research. This was stated well by one of the junior faculty we met with who commented that "the lab equipment available to me here at UNM is as good or better than what I would have at the ivy leagues, UC system, or other highly ranked institutions." This infrastructure has been supported by external grants obtained by the faculty and department leadership.

The committee was also highly impressed by some of the more intangible attributes of the department. Most importantly, a positive and highly collegial climate pervades the faculty, students, and staff. It was apparent that this culture of collegiality has had a major impact on the success of the department at a time when the larger institution is going through difficult economic times. This includes having a staff who work together to support the department's mission, faculty who are willing to look beyond self-interest to ensure all of their colleagues have adequate time to pursue their research, and departmental and university leadership who recognize the value of the department to the larger institution.¹ Many faculty specifically stated that they do not have major concerns about other more well-resourced institutions "poaching" their faculty due to everyone genuinely enjoying where they work.

Despite these notable positive aspects of the department there are several areas of concern outlined below. These overlapping concerns are outlined into six themes below: space/resources, student support, faculty vulnerability, interactions with other units in the university, the future of health and quantitative concentrations, and general recommendations.

(1) Space/Resources. The department consists of roughly 30 faculty members with new faculty arriving next year, approximately 20 staff members, and a large graduate program. Limitations regarding space was a recurring concern heard from all constituency groups. The staff reported fire marshal concerns about the number of persons in each office and also the space limits confidential discussion with students during advisement, an issue that may put the department in violation of university policies. Although staff noted that they are trying to "make it work" by being creative with their office space situation, this is clearly not sustainable. From the faculty perspective, it is not clear how the department could accommodate any more growth in faculty due to space concerns. This was summarized by multiple faculty members who noted that they worry that "if we are able to hire additional faculty members, where will they go?" For example, even now faculty have reported converting research space to office space for their graduate students. Although commendable that faculty have an altruistic approach, this must have an impact on research productivity for the department.

It was also reported that many stellar prospective students are turned down for admission because of the lack of adequate space and resources to accommodate them. The Psychology Department Annual report also documents the many requests for space improvements have been denied by the institution. The inability to respond to space needs in a time of budget constraints is understood by the review committee, as well as the faculty and department leadership who have a very realistic approach to their space needs within the context of the larger institution's needs. The review committee wondered, however, if some selective changes were possible that would help alleviate the space limitations that now exist. In particular, it may be helpful to establish a committee to plan

¹ An example of this was the faculty commenting that while they are technically supposed to receive course releases when they exceed clinical supervision hours, nobody does this given their recognition that this would lead to problems in course offerings for students.

space/resource needs for the next 5 – 10 years for the department to help the institution better plan for the future needs of the department.

(2) Student Support. Arguably the most critical issue we observed was the surprisingly low level of financial support for graduate students. Stipends for graduate students are simply not competitive with other institutions with which the department competes for students. Although the department does a good job in recruitment of graduate students, it is clear that this limited funding is having an impact on recruitment of stellar graduate students across all sub-fields, and this may be contributing to the somewhat lengthy time to obtaining the PhD degree in the department. From meetings with graduate students it appeared that there may appear to be some unevenness in how much students were paid even for similar research assistantships but with different grant or other funding. There were also some questions about how much graduate students can work during the semester and also during the summer. Graduate students were unclear, for example, about whether they could work full time during the summer and the contexts in which this was or was not possible. One recent option to improve stipends was to increase pay but reduce the number of teaching assistantships available. An unfortunate byproduct of this reduction in teaching assistants was that some faculty did not have a teaching assistant for their classes which is leading to shifts in the pedagogy for instruction. The natural result of this is a reduction of writing course requirements and greater use of less grading intensive multiple choice examinations. The use of multiple choice tests is not in itself problematic but writing skill is critical for the success of students in and outside academics. We would recommend that the department look at increasing transparency in graduate support, as well as exploring opportunities to increase the stipend amount they can provide to students in the future.

(3) Faculty Vulnerability. As stated earlier, faculty clearly enjoy the positive climate of the department and are succeeding both individually and collectively as a department. However, the national and international visibility of many faculty members will continue to make them sought out by other universities. It will be wise for the department to have some strategic planning discussions to retain faculty sought by other universities, particularly the junior faculty. This issue was reflected well by one faculty member who noted that “although increasing our faculty numbers is important, I wish we would spend more time focusing on the folks who are already here to ensure that we do not lose valuable members of the faculty.” The combination of recruitment by other universities and expected retirements of faculty will require an ongoing plan of recruitment of new faculty members and methods to retain faculty. For example, although commonly practiced, counteroffers that are made only after an offer has been made by another university may not be the best way to retain faculty. A common theme is indicated by the following quote, “Let’s stop building and focus on people already here”. One way to keep morale high and retain faculty is to reward performance with raises, allow productive faculty members some latitude in selection of buyouts from teaching, teaching load, load etc. Although the department has a strong national reputation, the committee wants to point out that several departments across the country have seen things change rapidly with the departure of just a few prominent faculty-members.

(4) Interactions with other Units. Department faculty are already successfully collaborating with other university units, including other academic departments (Biology, Anthropology), research centers (RWJF Center) etc.. The review committee was especially impressed with the extensive and meaningful collaborations with clinical units in Albuquerque and other places in the state which are clearly

addressing the universities community engagement mission. In several meetings, however, it was mentioned that there were many unrealized possible opportunities for collaboration with the University of New Mexico Medical School/Health Sciences Center. In fact, this issue was the most commonly cited across all meetings with faculty. One potential problem identified was that there were not clear rules regarding sharing of resources from grant activity and that it was not clear to many if agreed on rules were actually followed when funding arrived. The review committee viewed this lack of ideal collaboration as unfortunate as it seemed that there is much possible mutually beneficial collaboration with the UNM medical school. While many faculty noted that at the faculty-to-faculty or center-to-center level relationships are strong and collaborations positive, there are many institutional obstacles to greater and more robust collaborations. A university wide policy that would encourage fair collaboration of all university units would be a way to deal with these issues. Faculty also noted that with the change in Vice President of Research at UNM's main campus, this might be a good time to revisit grant resource policies and analysis of whether existing policies are working and are being followed. We agree with this suggestion.

(5) Health and Quantitative Concentrations. There was discussion about the future of the health and quantitative concentrations. The general notion was the Health should be dropped as a major concentration and moved to a minor concentration unless some new approaches were developed. One option would be to consider a new focus on behavioral health at least within clinical psychology and look to build partnerships on and off campus for health related research and training. Regarding the quantitative concentration, with a new hire arriving the fall along existing faculty, there is a possibility of a quantitative major concentration in the future. The extent to which there is a critical mass of faculty interested in the quantitative area should be assessed yearly to consider a move to a quantitative major. Right now, the notion of a quantitative minor is a reasonable option. The quantitative faculty may seek to collaborate with existing departments with a quantitative focus such as math, statistics, and educational measurement.

(6) General/Miscellaneous Recommendations. It is time for a study of the time to complete the M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in the different psychology concentrations. This issue was raised in the earlier departmental self-study and continues to be somewhat of an issue. From the reviewers' perspective, the time to complete the Ph.D. is long and does not reflect the average time to complete the Ph.D. degree at comparable universities. The department is aware of this issue and has taken steps to streamline the curriculum to allow students to move through the program more quickly and address outliers who have been in the program too long. These are great steps but we suggest that the department continue to investigate other changes that can be made to address this concern.

It is also time to revisit the balance of supervision, mentoring, research, and teaching to reflect the modern demands on faculty at a major university. It is reasonable to consider clinical supervision and mentoring in addition to teaching as important pedagogical tasks of a faculty member. It is clear that the department has initiated some self-study of this issue and we encourage them to continue this effort. Ensuring that faculty are given credit for the time consuming and critically important supervision of students in clinical settings could go a long way toward retention. We also recommend that the department record and report the amount of "free" clinical hours they provide to the wider New Mexico

community to show policy-makers and other potential collaboration partners the value the department has beyond UNM.

The visibility of the psychology department could be significantly enhanced both internally and externally. The psychology department is outstanding but this may not be known nationally. The review committee discovered the excellence of the department in the course of our review and we feel that others should know about the department too. It was noted by many that they communicate good news (grants awarded, significant publications, strong placements of students etc.) to the universities marketing folks, but that this is rarely advanced by that unit on campus. Others noted that they are not viewed as experts in mental health by the media and other units on campus. It would be worth considering approaches to increase the visibility of the psychology department such as having special invited talks by outside visitors, and potentially using any available funds to enhance the department's presence nationally.

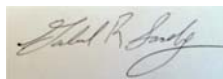
Finally, the UNM and wider community has many natural and important resources regarding diversity that could be enhanced to the benefit of the department. It was clear to the review committee that the department is conscious of the need to continue to work toward greater racial/ethnic and gender diversity in their faculty and graduate program, noting that the lack of bilingual faculty and clinical supervisors limits the amount of work they can do in the growing need areas of the Spanish speaking community. The faculty also has two Native American faculty in their ranks, a rather impressive resource given the relatively low levels of Native American faculty in the discipline overall. It seemed to the review committee that the natural diversity of the local area would be a way to improve the department's reputation. This was apparent in meeting with undergraduate students who were incredibly diverse and outstanding. Drawing more from this natural pool of potential graduate applicants is a low-cost investment that should be considered. Finally, building on the Native American and Latino expertise in the department and better marketing this expertise could lead to greater recognition of the department's competitive advantage over other institutions. This is something other institutions are spending considerable resources to pursue, so UNM would be wise to keep ahead of these other places.

In summary, the department is doing very well despite some substantial challenges. In fact, by all important measures, the department is improving each year. We have outlined several ways that the department can maintain its success and steps that will further increase its growth.

Sincerely,



In alphabetical order
David P. Mackinnon
Arizona State University

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Gabriel R. Sanchez", written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Gabriel R. Sanchez
University of New Mexico

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "G. Terence Wilson", written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

G. Terence Wilson
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey