USDA-NIFA and OSU Internal Review Report – April 24, 2011

Graduate Programs in (1) Animal Sciences and (2) Rangeland Management and Ecology

Oregon State University, Corvallis OR

1. Overall Recommendation: Restructure by combining the programs.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations
   a. Key Issues
      i. Faculty FTE are below “critical mass” due to
         1. Lack of replacement faculty FTE over the last two decades
         2. Loss of early career faculty due to unanticipated departure from the institution without replacement
      ii. Current faculty demographics of both departments are such that reduction of faculty numbers means that fewer students are being trained
         1. The near-retirement stage of some faculty, the administrative and/or undergraduate teaching loads of others, coupled with fiscal considerations to cover the cost of supporting students have impacted the graduate education programs with an adverse impact on the morale of students and faculty alike
         a. Nonetheless, student consensus indicated that “things have improved”
         2. Interestingly, the faculty:student ratio (Animal Sciences) has not changed indicating a continued commitment of faculty to graduate education
      iii. E&G budgetary constraints of CAS and departments
         1. Campus administration needs to address the flow of financial resources to the department to support student enrollments
            a. Provision of funding for GTAs to support the undergraduate education mission of the units (ANS/RME courses) will assist funding for graduate education
      iv. Faculty Mentoring and Professional Development
         a. Enhance professional development of new hires which will promote retention of new hires
         b. Set expectations for instruction of graduate courses by faculty

   b. Findings – Recommendations
1. Campus administration must address and fulfill faculty FTE commitments for the new consolidated department: Hire tenure-track FTE (a cluster hire of assistant and associate levels would be most beneficial)
   a. A combined target of 18-20 faculty is recommended
      i. 5 FTE immediately as a cluster hire to enhance programmatic developments including graduate education opportunity
      ii. Replacement priority for future FTE due to resignations and retirements to develop and maintain the necessary preeminence for the consolidated unit
2. The consolidated department should merge the two graduate programs to create a modernized graduate education opportunity for MS and PhD degree conferrals
   a. Develop a modern and comprehensive name
e.g., Animal Systems and Range Ecology
e.g., Biology of Animals and Ecology of Range
   b. Develop a graduate education core plan that takes advantage of departmental strengths (upon the new FTE hires) and campus opportunities that gives students personalized disciplinary “options”
      i. Identify minimal core curriculum for MS and PhD programs – develop appropriate core courses for research area of interest / so students understand what is expected for degree completion and the courses are available for enrollment
         1. Consider if it is a possibility that graded course requirements for a research PhD are too high
         2. Consider a policy/ regulation course (perhaps covering both animal science and range issues)
      ii. Range program – connect and enhance collaboration with water resources and natural resources – research, undergraduate and graduate programs, extension
      iii. Campus administration should address issues related to advanced degree students being “locked out” of courses in other units
      iv. Campus administration and the department should develop an educational think-tank workshop to develop a consortia to consider novel opportunities for “missing” classes via long distance learning with western states or e-classes
         1. To make gains in this arena, financial resources to bring faculty from disparate sites together to develop are essential with campus IT/interaction modes to “make it happen”
2. Change admission strategy to develop an early (campus compatible) deadline (e.g., January 15) for application review and allowing for competition for fellowships and opportunity to gain the “best crop” of students (this doesn’t preclude continuing admissions beyond the early deadline)
   a. Consider the balance of OSU vs non-OSU applicants
   b. Consider opportunities for international students
   c. Consider opportunities to enhance the diversity of students (both gender and ethnicity)
3. Student Development and Communications
   a. Improve the mentoring and orientation for 1st yr students (regardless of term admitted)
      i. Teaching, safety issues, and research should be emphasized
   b. Convene a session involving students and a faculty committee to consider salary issues – and the equalization of salary base and workload
      i. Develop a greater faculty-student partnership within the department, which will be especially important for students as the consolidation unfolds
         1. Develop “a consolidated departmental plan” for funding of graduate students that is equitable and openly-communicated with students
         2. Work with administration to gain GTA funding from campus for ANS and RNG courses
         3. Investigate GTA opportunities for program students in other departments
   c. Communication and mentoring regarding workload balance
      i. Discussion of expectations with students and mentors
   d. Focus on communications with students regarding the departmental merger and any potential graduate program merger
   e. Investigate campus-wide teaching/TA-training programs – require participation if available; consider development of
a 1 unit grad level “teaching skills class” that all program
students must take in their first quarter
f. Develop student-to-stakeholder interactions
   i. Consider an annual event to provide interactions
      which could lead to student-funding development
      and career opportunities
      1. For example:
         a. Half day of student presentations
         b. Luncheon
         c. Half day of stakeholder
            presentations

3. Detailed Findings

a. Introduction:
   i. Objectives of the review. The graduate program review was commissioned as part of the 10 yr review process required by the institution. An unusual feature of this review is that it was organized in alignment with the USDA-NIFA external review of the departments of Animal Sciences and Rangeland Ecology and Management. These two departments are planning to merge as of July 1, 2011. The department heads (Jim Males and Mike Borman) have been working with stakeholders, faculty, staff and campus administration to create a strategic vision for the new department. A search for a new head is underway.

   ii. Participants. See iv below and Attachment 1: Participants
   iii. Order of events. See Attachment 2: Review Site Visit Agenda
   iv. Organization of the report. The report format was organized according to university guidelines. The overall content was defined by a one page sheet provided by the Graduate School entitled “Appendix II: Outline for the Review Panel Report”. Dr. Mary Delany (UC Davis), a member of the USDA-NIFA external review team was identified as the lead for the internal Graduate Program Review and asked to compile the introductory materials and the report as a whole. Dr. Twig Marston (University Nebraska), a member from the USDA-NIFA external review team and OSU-internal team members (Walter Loveland, Carolyn Aldwin, Martin Fiske) participated in the scheduled meetings. The other USDA-NIFA team members (see attachment 1) also provided input by discussion during the site visit. Drs. Delany, Marston, Loveland, and Aldwin held
b. Inputs:

i. **Mission fit and relationships to college, and university missions.** The strategic plan provided by the merged Department of Animal and Rangeland Sciences addresses teaching, research, and extension. This aligns the department with more than the general connotation of land grant universities; the new department has taken great care in aligning with particular components of both the Oregon State University and College of Agricultural Sciences mission statements. Highlights include the commitment to excellence in the classroom, research, and programming. The department is committed to contributing to Oregon’s overall economy. Also, the Animal and Rangeland Sciences strategic plan provides both a science track, which prepares students for veterinary school or graduate school, and an animal management track, which prepares students for careers oriented in animal/range management or related industries. The department is dedicated to using internal staff and external stakeholder inputs to craft its present and future endeavors. The department strategic plan is begins with ambiguously large concepts, but it ends with specific ideas and plans it expects of itself to achieve attainable, high-quality goals.

ii. **Quality of students/Admissions selectivity.** The rolling admissions format practiced by the department(s) may be an impediment to recruiting the level of scholarly students that would enhance the program. It may also be an impediment for gaining fellowship support for students. The GRE scores of rejected students were often higher than those accepted, and there evidence for declining GRE scores over time. The stated reason for this policy is that students were taken on as research projects were funded, which leads to selecting for convenience/familiarity rather than excellence. This is partially in response to lack of alternative stable support for graduate students such as GTAs. The department (ANS) has devised a new strategy to raise the credentials (40% percentile threshold for average GRE scores) of incoming students.

iii. **Level of financial support of students.** The department (ANS) has designed a strategy to provide 0.2 FTE which allows for fee remission in return for service activities (assistance with classes). However, there may be discrepancies between the stated FTE and the number of hours worked, which should be corrected. There is an apparent disparity and a lack of communication regarding salary support and opportunities for students to get GTAs. The departments need to spend time developing an improved plan for graduate funding, as does the campus administration. Also surprising was the lack of active participation in

...
the graduate student union which might provide support for improved job equity for the graduate students

iv. **Curriculum strength.** Graduate classes were evaluated on breadth and depth of class offerings. It appears that classes taught both within and outside the home departments are adequate to prepare graduate students for knowledge and research support. Graduate students expect a majority/large percentage of classes to be made available from within the Animal and Rangeland Sciences, which may not be feasible. Students should be realistic in understanding that the breadth of classes needed to provide individually-needed class work will have to encompass several different departments, colleges, and schools within the University. Graduate student surveys indicate student satisfaction in knowledge transfer and course quality. Complaints and concerns center on two areas. First is the number of graduate stand-alone courses as compared to “slash” classes. This is magnified because a vast majority of the graduate students come from OSU undergraduate degree programs, hence, “slash” programs have already been taken to complete B.S. degrees. Compounding this is the critically low number of graduate faculty and their graduate-level teaching loads/expectations. The second problem is the inability of Animal and Rangeland Science graduate students to gain timely admittance into graduate level classes being offered in other departments and colleges or schools. Those specifically mentioned frequently reside in the College of Veterinary Medicine. The inability to enroll in these classes has caused delays in degree completion and student frustration. The unit administration should negotiate with COVM to provide access to their classes, especially in light of the services provided to COVM in terms of access to animals, etc.

v. **Quality of personnel and adequacy to achieve mission and goals.** The quality of the faculty and the instructors are appropriate to meet the mission/goals of the programs, offering effective opportunities in the lab and field for advanced degrees in the areas outlined, however, the number of faculty are inadequate which has resulted in a low number of trainees (i.e., low faculty numbers and high administration loads, as well as faculty nearing retirement age not taking on students). More students could be accepted than faculty have resources to fund – so in some ways the faculty are appropriately not taking on too many students. However, the number of graduating students does not meet the current university-mandated criteria, which is why we recommend that the graduate programs be merged. Students in a survey expressed strong satisfaction with their mentors (ratings of 4 and 5 from 10 of 16 students that completed the
survey). Also, the low number of faculty means that the diversity of graduate courses offered is lower (students indicated a lack of graduate courses was a problem). As mentioned earlier, many of the classes are “slash” courses, and since many of the students graduated from OSU, they may have already taken these classes. Ultimately, expectations need to be established (perhaps at least a threshold of expectation for graduate education once tenure is achieved; at other institutions it can be an expectation that a faculty member upon advancement will offer a graduate level class in their area of scholarship).

vi. **Level and quality of infrastructure.** Students are trained at the OSU (Animal Science, campus based) site as well as the Agricultural Research Center (ARC, Eastern Oregon) (Rangeland Ecology Management). Withycomb Hall was mentioned by many administrators and faculty as being in need of renovation to make it a suitable laboratory environment. Problems include leaking roofs. A Nutrition Lab exists where students can run assays or have assays conducted with a sliding payment scale set by the institution. Access to a Reproductive Physiology lab also is an opportunity. A building or animal facilities tour was not part of the review, so the space/infrastructure was not directly assessed nor was discussion held on graduate student study space (cubicles/offices, etc.). The field opportunities and the access to Eastern Oregon labs (Union Station, Burns) seemed high quality (overview by slide presentations). The Burns unit is a partnership with USDA-ARS and apparently has many advantages for laboratory analyses. Students mentioned that access to a high quality molecular/cellular biology techniques (laboratory) course would be a welcome addition.

vii. **Quality of organizational support.** The Animal Sciences faculty discussed their Graduate Student Handbook as an information-laden resource for students. The students did not see this in the same light. Students entering “off cycle” seem especially at a disadvantage. Annual reviews/performance sheets were part of the mentoring process, although this seemed more like a “check off” then mentoring/professional development. The students appear to be very positive about the seminar course being run by a new faculty member, in which they give presentations (two quarters) and then are exposed to internal faculty presentations. Opportunities for GTA’s (an important form of organization support) are not apparent within the department (which seems odd, given the number of undergraduates being educated, about 430 in ANS and 30 in REM, and given the expected laboratory sessions). This seems to be an issue needing resolution by the campus administration. Communication of opportunities for GTAs in other units should be offered.

c. **Productivity:**
i. **Level and quality of student performance.** The review committee was concerned by the data (Appendix K of the self-study) on the number and quality of graduate students. For the Animal Science program the number of graduate students declined significantly from 2000 to 2010, mirroring the reduction in FTE and overall demographics of the faculty. In the period from 2002-2003 to 2010-2011 the total number of entering doctoral students was 8 and the total number of entering masters students was 43. Of these masters students it appears that 12 did not complete the program to receive a degree, a 28% attrition rate. For the doctoral students the attrition rate is not easily determined although the NRC data (see below) suggest it was not good. Neither the masters nor the PhD programs appear to meet the University’s guidelines for sustainability of graduating 2 PhD students per year and 5 master’s students per year. For the Rangeland program, a similar decline in student numbers was observed from 2001 to 2010. In the ten year period from 2001 to 2010, 8 students entered the doctoral program and 44 students entered the masters program. The graduation rate for the masters program was excellent with only 3 people leaving without completing a master’s degree. The same sustainability problem exists with the Rangeland program as exists in the Animal Science program. The review committee suggests the two graduate programs be combined to create a more sustainable overall program with areas of concentration in Animal Science and Rangeland. The choice of a program name for the combined program/degree should be carefully chosen with full all stakeholders and the graduate students being involved.

A second issue is the quality of the graduate students in Animal Science. The average GRE verbal scores of the applicants declined from 582 in 2004-2005 to 430 in 2009-2010. The latter score for a cohort that is primarily native speakers of English is abysmal. A similar decline in GRE quantitative scores from 592 to 450 was noted also. What is paradoxical about these scores is that the average quantitative GRE score of rejected applicants in 2009-2010 was 710. This may be the product of what the department refers to as “rolling admissions” in which students are admitted continuously rather than grouping the applicants and making decisions on an entire group of students. The review committee suggests graduate applicants be admitted on fixed dates, January and the usual April 15th, so as to make sure that the best students are selected for admission. Limited current data is available for admissions of Rangeland students but these data suggest a much better set of average GRE scores (650 and 510) but a similar problem with rejected applicants (680 and 560). The review committee suggests that GRE scores be required for admission to either program.
ii. **Level and quality of faculty performance.** The level and quality of faculty performance is best summarized by the NRC metrics discussed below. However the review committee is concerned with another aspect of the faculty situation, the apparent decline in the number of faculty, which certainly affects the number of students in the graduate programs. In Fall 2000, the Animal Science program had 33 non-emeritus tenure-track faculty. By Fall 2010, the number of non-emeritus tenure-track faculty was 24. Approximately 11 faculty had retired or resigned in the intervening years which means there was little replacement of these faculty. Of the current faculty 12 are primarily extension faculty. We understand there is a plan to add five new faculty members to these departments which will help.

**Rankings/ratings.** The Animal Science program was evaluated in the recent NRC evaluation of quality in graduate education. Oregon State University, as part of its decennial accreditation by the NWCCU, used eight of the NRC metrics to rate its graduate programs. The metrics used were the number of publications per faculty member, the number of citations per publication, the percent of faculty with grant support, the average completion rate of PhD students, the average time to degree of PhD students, the number of PhD students graduated per year, the percent of interdisciplinary faculty and the GRE scores of the entering PhD students. For each metric the score of each graduate program was compared to the mean score of our peer institutions (Auburn, Arizona State, Clemson, Colorado State, Iowa State, Kansas State, Oregon, North Carolina State, Purdue and Washington State). If the score of the OSU program was within two standard deviations of the mean, it was said “to meet expectations”. If the OSU score was more than two standard deviations above the mean, it was said “to exceed expectations”. If the OSU score was less than two standard deviations below the mean, it was said “not to meet expectations”. The Animal Science program did not meet expectations for two metrics (number of publications per faculty member and the percent of faculty with grants), exceeded expectations on one metric (completion rate) and met expectations for all the other metrics. Animal Science calls attention to the issue with the NRC study of how the number of faculty were calculated for each program which was a problem for land grant institutions where graduate faculty are routinely drawn from industry, national laboratories and federal agencies. Overall the Animal Science program is said to “meet expectations.”

iii. **Viability of scholarly community within which students can interact.** The review team met with 13 students. On an individual basis, it is clear students are
interacting with their research mentors, and they are also interacting amongst themselves (a positive and supportive cohort was interviewed who reported a number of positive efforts, such as a journal club, research presentations, etc.). They clearly would enjoy more opportunities to attend meetings, discuss career options, etc. They were concerned about the departmental merger although they seemed accepting of it; however, there were clear concerns regarding any consolidation of the graduate programs. This means that some “leg work” is necessary to assure them, listen to and evaluate concerns, and promote faculty-based scholarly interactions that they can be a part of – to see the value of the interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary scholarship to their education. It was not clear that the students are interacting with other faculty outside the department, but since the majority of students are M.S., this is not unusual.

d. Outcomes:

i. **Professional viability of graduates.** There is a clear career path for the range degree students; the animal sciences students seemed less clear as to their opportunities. That is not unusual for ANS students throughout the country as they often start out committed to veterinary school. A key recommendation is to develop an alumni base which these departments should have, given their long history, to help educate the students as to career opportunities (which in fact are very positive opportunities ranging from further professional and research advanced degrees, laboratory research, positions in state and national regulatory agencies and government, positions in agribusiness and allied industries, etc.).

ii. **Satisfaction of students and graduates.** Student interviews indicated a mix of satisfaction with mentors (despite the scenarios where faculty left the institution) but concern about graduate level classes (perceived lack), lack of training to be a good instructor, negative views of orientation during their first year of the program, and lack of access to techniques-base courses. The students were fierce in their view that the programs (animal and range) were stronger in their “separateness”. They expressed concerns about the job opportunities given the current economic climate. The self study analysis indicated 10 of 16 student responses expressed strong satisfaction (4 and 5) in evaluating their mentoring experiences. The students were “out of the loop” in regard to the departmental merger and we recommend rectifying that by increased communication. Students were happy with the journal club format of one seminar series.

e. Conclusion:

i. We affirm the value of these advanced degree graduate programs for their contribution(s) to the mission of the land grant institution and in public service to the state of Oregon in educating students. We believe that consolidation of
the two programs along with a concerted effort by faculty (which must include new hires) to enhance aspects of the opportunities for students will result in a unique (there are only three advanced degree programs of this type in the nation), high quality and well-known program with national visibility and many opportunities to engage in international education in the future. Specifically, this consolidated and updated program at OSU has the potential to be the lead and premier unit in promoting science-based knowledge and educated experts (working in the field or voting at the polls) regarding livestock and animal systems and range sciences of the Great Basin, this will bring further visibility to the institution. The current and future (as committed by campus administration) disciplinary-based graduate faculty offer will provide expertise for training in the molecular, cellular, organismal and systems level analysis of animals and the environment – and how the important interactions between these units.
Attachment 1. Participants

Animal Sciences and Rangeland Ecology and Management
NIFA, Graduate and Undergraduate Program Reviews
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Attachment 2. Review Site Visit Agenda

Animal and Rangeland Sciences

Departmental Review

March 14-17, 2011

Sunday March 13

Afternoon: Convene Boise Airport. Jim Males and Mike Borman will meet and drive to LaGrande, OR

Monday March 14

7:00 am. Breakfast with Males, Borman, Tim DelCurto (Superintendent EOARC), and Larry Larson (EOU Ag Program Leader)

8:30 am. Convene with EOU, EOARC Faculty

8:45 – 9:15 am. Overview of EOARC Burns and Union and EOU facilities

9:15 am Break

9:30 – 10:30 am. EOARC Animal and Range Research overview

10:30 – 11:00 am. EOU Undergraduate Program (Range Major and Animal Sciences Minor)

11:00 – 12:00 pm. Team and EOARC/EOU Faculty (with box lunches)

12:15 pm. Leave for Corvallis

7:00 pm. Dinner for Team and OSU Graduate Program Review Team – Corvallis

Tuesday March 15

8:00 am. College of Agricultural Sciences and Extension Administration

9:30-10:15 am. Overviews, Departmental (Males and Borman); Undergraduate Program (Jim Hermes); and Graduate Programs (Fred Menino).

10:30-10:45 am. Break

10:45 – 12:00 pm. NIFA and Undergraduate Program Review Team meet with Undergraduate Students

NIFA and Graduate Program Review Team meet with Graduate Faculty

Eastern Oregon Faculty available Polycom.
12:00-1:00 pm. Working lunch for NIFA, Graduate Program and Undergraduate Program Review Teams

1:00 – 2:00 pm. Meet with Stakeholders

2:00 – 3:15 pm. NIFA and Undergraduate Program Review Team meet with Undergraduate Teaching Faculty

NIFA and Graduate Program Review Team meet with Graduate Students

3:15 – 3:30 pm Break

3:30 – 4:00 pm OSU Review Teams meet with Males and Borman

4:00 – 5:00 pm NIFA and OSU Review Teams in Executive Session (if NIFA team is not included in this they will be taken on a tour of farm facilities)

7:30 – 9:00 pm Reception for Review Team, Faculty, Administrators – Males Home

**Wednesday March 16**

8:00 – 9:00 am University Administration

9:30 – 11:00 am Research Overviews Faculty (Break will be worked in as needed)

11:00 – 12:00 pm Extension Overview (Jim Thompson)

12:00 – 1:00 pm Lunch with CAS Unit Leaders

1:15 -2:00 pm Animal Unit Managers & Laboratory Support Personnel

2:00 NIFA Review Team Open for Discussion and work on report

**Thursday March 17**

8:30 – 9:30 am Exit Interview – College of Agricultural Sciences and Extension Administrative Team

10:00 am Exit Interview – Animal and Rangeland Sciences Faculty