MEMORANDUM

April 15, 2013

TO: Rebecca Warner
    Senior Vice Provost, Academic Affairs

    Brenda McComb
    Dean, Graduate School

FROM: James R. Coakley
    Chair, Graduate Council

SUBJECT: Graduate Council Recommendations for the Math GPR

The Graduate Council accepts the Graduate Program Review (GPR) of the Department of Mathematics with the following addendums:

The Graduate Council supports the recommendation of the review committee report to “build a nationally prominent research and graduate education” and suggests the following strategies to achieve such a goal:

1. The Mathematics Department should identify and develop specific sub-disciplines as centers of excellence. The identification and marketing of areas for which they are nationally and internationally well-known would strengthen the department, provide opportunities for more strategic and targeted hiring of tenure-track faculty, and, in turn, lead to a stronger pool of highly qualified graduate students seeking to work in these areas.

2. Despite the best efforts of the department’s chair, Professor Tom Dick, the Mathematics Department appears to suffer from a lack of inclusivity with instructors and students. For example, instructors and students appear to have little input into department affairs and activities. The Graduate Council suggests strategic representation of these groups in its committee structure as well as the consideration of more informal mechanism to build community within the department. It was noted that this hierarchical structure is replicated among graduate students whereby the Ph.D. students have more influence and a higher status than the Masters students. In conversation with the graduate students, the review team noted that such hierarchies promote divisiveness rather than collegiality. This, coupled with the high failure rate among students taking the preliminary exams, leads to anxiety and stress among graduate students that impairs positive student growth and development.

3. Although the self-study did not focus on collaboration between the Mathematics Department and other units on campus, it was clear from conversations with faculty that many are engaged to some extent with colleagues in other departments. Alongside the need for better collaboration with the College of Education, as noted in the report, the Graduate Council suggests that collaboration with other departments and units on campus (such as Statistics, Business, and Engineering) be formally structured. This would improve opportunities for
graduate student involvement in applied mathematics through, for example, participation in grants, joint research, cross-listed courses, and faculty mentoring. Collaborations with off-campus agencies such as private industry and federal/state agencies would also provide important opportunities for graduate students.

4. The Graduate Council supports the report’s recommendation “to enhance recruiting initiatives, particularly among underrepresented groups” and suggests the department work on a structured strategic plan for targeted recruitment of women students and students of color. This plan should include strategies for retention as well as recruitment of a more diverse student body. In addition, it is suggested that the department’s plan for more tenure-track positions needs to be more strategic in hiring and the retention of women faculty and faculty of color. A diverse faculty is the first step in attracting a diverse graduate student population. We suggest working with the Office of Equity and Inclusion, the Graduate School, and the Difference, Power, and Discrimination program for assistance with this plan.

5. The department also needs to be more actively involved in recruiting accomplished graduate students worldwide through generating, for example, INTO pathways. The Graduate School can assist in a cost-share arrangement to increase the pool of highly-qualified graduate applications.

6. Graduate Council supports the recommendation to reconsider graduate curricula offerings, especially in terms of meeting the needs of both Masters and Ph.D. students (including the problem with the qualifying exam). We suggest the department develop their own program-specific measures of direct assessment of learning outcomes, in addition to university-wide assessment metrics.

7. Finally, the self-study included a question about appointing GTAs to a .49 FTE position rather than a .40 FTE. This would increase a student’s stipend, and, while it would reduce the total number of students funded, such a change might attract higher qualified students to choose OSU for their graduate work. The latter might also reduce the failure rate on the qualifying exams.