OVERVIEW

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 REVIEWS OF GRADUATE GROUPS

Graduate programs are to be reviewed every 5-6 years. The objectives of the Ph.D. program review are (1) to determine whether the PhD program is of sufficient quality and (2) to identify ways in which the program might be improved.

The review of a Ph.D. program in Arts and Sciences, Engineering, and Wharton typically takes place in conjunction with a departmental review; external consultants generally participate. A representative of the Graduate Council is appointed to act as Liaison to the review and participates along with the internal review committee and/or external consultants in the part of the review concerned 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 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 to act 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 by the Graduate Council. One or two Graduate Council members are appointed to conduct the review.

The Review Liaison is in a unique position to make recommendations based on what is learned from students and faculty. The Liaison should make it clear to faculty, students, and administrators that these are among the primary objectives.

REVIEW PROCESS

The department or graduate group prepares a Resource Document that contains information on:
- a) Organization
- b) Admissions and Recruitment
- c) Student financial aid
- d) Academic program and monitoring
- e) Facilities (non-academic support)
- f) Placement

See Appendix A for a detailed list of items that should be included in a Resource Document. The Resource Document and supplementary materials should be provided to the Review Liaison at least two weeks prior to a site visit.

In addition, statistical summaries on applicants and matriculating students, diversity, time to degree, and attrition is supplied by the Provost’s Office. Summary data from the Ph.D. Exit Survey is also provided. The Review Liaison examines these documents to identify issues that should be addressed in the review and to identify trends. Evaluation of this data, along with findings from interviews, should be included in the final report.

The Review Liaison works with the Graduate Group Coordinator 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) General meeting with students
- e) External Consultants, if there are any.

Meetings with Dean or Department Chair and Graduate Group Chair

Below are some of the points to explore:
- What is the role of the group in the academic life of the school/department?
• Do you get the quality of students that you expect given the quality of the faculty?
• Are you satisfied with student placement?
• What other universities do you compete with for students?
• How is the program ranked with respect to other universities? How would you rank your program?
• What are the financial and space resource issues?
• What is the breadth of participation in the program by faculty? How do you interface with other departments/schools in faculty for the group and courses?
• What previous reviews that include the graduate program have been done? When? What were the conclusions?
• Where could you improve?

The Review Liaison can call on his/her experience to probe specific practices that seem unusual or problematic. Sometimes you will learn new ways of doing things or be confronted with problems that arise because of group size. You can suggest solutions and observe reactions.

Meetings with Students
Depending on program size, it is desirable to meet separately with first/second year students, and with the more advanced students. Ideally, the Review Liaison will meet with at least 10% of the student body. Ask the Graduate Group Coordinator to forward an email to the students from you (either to all students, or to a randomly selected group) (see sample in the Appendix B).

Food is a good incentive for students to participate. These meetings are usually free-flowing. Ask such things as:
• How is student morale? How do students feel about the program?
• Are there specific issues or things they would like to change?
• What opportunities do they have to present their research? Attend national meetings? Attend seminars with outside speakers? Interact with outside speakers?
• Are there regular seminars?
• What are their interactions with faculty in the group not including their thesis mentor?
• Do they have sufficient interactions with other students in the group on an academic level?
• Do they get sufficient and timely feedback on their progress? On their research? On their teaching?
• How often do they meet with their advisor? With their committee?

It is important to get a feel for the students. Do they have specific needs? (e.g., Some groups have older students with families and hence special financial and personal issues.)

Meetings with Faculty
Depending on program size, it is recommended that the Review Liaison hold separate meetings with the senior and more junior faculty, and with members not in the primary department to provide a range of perspectives.

The Review Liaison wants to find out:

- Are the faculty happy with the function of the graduate group?
- What determines the distribution of students?
- Is the quality of the students up to standard? What could be done better?
- What do faculty think are their obligations (e.g., mentoring, funding)
- What more should be done to improve the group’s ranking?

**Meeting with Outside Reviewers**

The Review Liaison should request a 30-minute meeting without graduate group members present. Ask:

- Would they advise superior perspective students to join this graduate program?
  Would this apply generally to the program, or to limited areas or faculty within the program? (Why or why not?)
- How does this graduate program compare with others in this field? How would they rank the program?
- Are there deficiencies that need to be addressed?

The External Consultants’ report (at least the sections pertaining to PhD education) is shared with the Review Liaison.

**REVIEW LIAISON’S REPORT**

The Review Liaison’s assignment concludes with a written report and an oral brief to the Graduate Council. As a courtesy, the Review Liaison generally shares the written report in advance with the graduate group chair to allow for “corrections of fact.” (The draft report can be shared even earlier with the Provost’s Office, for general guidance.) When it is finalized, the report is submitted to the Vice Provost and is circulated to members in advance of its oral presentation at the Graduate Council. The graduate group chair is invited to attend the presentation.

The report should include 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

2. A description of the academic program
3. General discussion of issues arising from the review.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of questions, but is designed to get at the general working of the group and more importantly how the different constituencies feel about the process. Inherent in the process there is the challenge to improve. Even if the
program is ranked in the top 5 in the nationally, why not go for #1? Many graduate programs have instituted changes as a result of the review and have been appreciative of the process.

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?)
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 __________________.
APPENDIX D: SAMPLE REPORT OUTLINE

Graduate Council of the Faculties Review Report on 
Graduate Group in ________________
By __________________
Date ____________________

I. Introduction

II. Information Basis for the Report

III. Program Structure and Components
   1. Faculty
   2. Governance
   3. Administrative Structure
   4. Facilities

IV. Components of Graduate Program:
   1. Current Student Body
   2. Applicant Pool
   3. Admissions Criteria and Acceptance Rates
   4. Curriculum/Teaching and Research requirements
   5. Financial support
   6. Academic Goals, Formal Structure and Milestones
   7. Retention and graduation/Time to Degree
   8. Advising, Mentoring and Professional Socialization
   9. Extracurricular Research and Educational Opportunities

V. Indicators of Success

   Graduate Student Progress and Completion Rates
   Graduate Student Accomplishments

   Graduate Student Placement and Career Trajectories

   Current Student and Alumni Surveys

   Rankings

VI. Issues

VII. Conclusion