External Reviewer Narrative
UT-Chattanooga Psychology Graduate Program
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The Graduate Psychology masters program at University Tennessee-Chattanooga (UTC) consists of two separate tracks or concentrations: One in Industrial-Organizational (I-O) Psychology and the other in Experimental Psychology (RM). Both are well-designed, rigorous programs that prepare students for employment or for further study in doctoral programs. The programs are vibrant, healthy, and have good prospects for continued success.

I. Learning Outcomes

The Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) provides program rankings for Masters' programs. UTC's I-O program was ranked sixth overall and was especially noted for its curriculum and for its applied experience dimension. Evidence for the quality of the program also is shown in the consistently high number of applications to the program each year. Similar rankings do not exist for research-based Masters programs. However, the quantity and quality of the applicants are on par with similar programs around the country.

Neither I-O or experimental programs are accredited by the APA or other organizations. However SIOP provides guidelines for graduate education in the form of competencies that the program should address. The learning out comes of the courses in the I-O program track these competencies such that all competencies are identified and are addressed across the curriculum. In addition to tracking performance in classes and comprehensive exams, students assess their confidence in their ability to meet the competencies which is an important professional development tool for students. These competencies are well-aligned with the departmental and program mission. Systematic evaluation information is obtained from practicum placements. It is clear from student placement outcomes and employer satisfaction that students are achieving the competencies and learning objectives established by the program.

The I-O program has increased its faculty numbers recently. Faculty are well-qualified and faculty-student ratios are acceptable for a program of this size. However, to the extent that faculty members also have responsibilities in the undergraduate program, workloads are still too heavy for best achievement of student and faculty research involvement which could be a detriment to students wanting to pursue doctoral level I-O training.

By the nature of the program, competencies and learning outcomes are less clearly specified in the Research Masters (RM) program. Competencies are tied to skills in research activities rather than discipline-specific knowledge. These skills are critical for placement in doctoral programs and will also serve graduates well in seeking employment. Nonetheless it may be useful to identify a core of discipline-specific knowledge goals that all students are expected to achieve.

RM students have had success in placement in Ph.D programs and with job placement. Given the changing nature of the academy (decreasing enrollment, limited state funding) students may have decreasing success in gaining academic positions. It might be worthwhile to consider ways that learning outcomes could also address employability for students who do not apply, or who are not accepted into doctoral programs.

II. Curriculum

As is typical, the I-O program curriculum is highly structured, given the need to address the SIOP competencies. The emphasis on occupational health is a strength of the program as this is an area which is likely to see job growth in the future. LIkewise, a rigorous statistics sequence gives students highly marketable analytic skills. The program coordinator has clearly kept abreast of curricular changes and expectations in the field.

Students are required to participate in practical experiences via internships and have the option to develop more extensive research skills by completing a thesis. These experiences provide students with appropriate skills for employment or, optionally, for doctoral level study in the field.

The RM concentration has a much less structured curriculum. Core courses are largely focused on development of research and methodological skills. Discipline-specific content courses are mainly taught in the form of topical seminars. Given the loose structure, care may need to be taken to ensure that appropriate depth and breadth of knowledge is ensured across the curriculum and over time. Currently, the curriculum is heavily influenced by student interests. While this provides a great deal of flexibility, there are several potential drawbacks: 1) It may be difficult to meet the needs of a broad group of students without offering a large number of seminars. 2) This student-centered flexibility may make it more difficult to plan and maintain consistent faculty workload over time and 3) it may be difficult to assess SLO1, "Core knowledge of psychological discipline" because the core knowledge could vary over cohorts.

The program is mainly offered face to face with some online coursework. Faculty are well-qualified to teach and mentor students. Students engage in research with faculty members in thesis work as well as independent study projects that may be separate from their thesis topic.

However, faculty members have a relatively high teaching load and much of the mentorship of graduate students is not fully recognized within their workload. This lack of recognition of the time commitment associated with mentoring student research may inhibit full use of faculty members' research expertise.

III. Student Experience

For the most part the student experience seems to be excellent, as evidenced by the self study as well as student report. Enrollment is high, especially in the I-O track. Students in both programs have good access to faculty mentorship. Both programs have a strong cohort model: Commonalities in coursework, "brown bag" seminars and professional development organizations provide opportunities to develop a shared identity. Students are highly enthusiastic about the program, the faculty mentorship and their own employment and/or academic prospects. Travel funding for professional development opportunities (e.g. conference presentations) appears to be adequate.

The two main limitations of the student experience would be 1) the lack of a focused effort to encourage enrollment of under-represented minority students and 2) sufficient graduate assistantship funding. The latter is particularly problematic if students feel it is necessary to obtain outside employment (which some students reported).

Both limitations will require a commitment of funds for additional funding, some of which could be targeted to minority students.

IV. Faculty

All faculty members have degrees and credentials that ensure they are qualified for the programs with which they are associated. With the possibility of future retirements, the RM program should consider the strategy to be adopted for future hires. For example, one strategy is to try to cover a broad range of subdisciplines and maintain a generalist approach to the program. The other would be to try to hire faculty with overlapping interests and thus provide a focus area that could encourage future collaborations. Each approach has advantages and disadvantages and these should be thoroughly considered before the time which such hiring commences. In addition, hiring faculty members with expertise in clinical science (broadly construed) might be beneficial to students with aspirations for clinical doctoral programs. However, this potential benefit should be weighed against the difficulty in making such hires.

As noted above, faculty workloads are heavy, especially considering the demands of a research focused masters program. Nonetheless, faculty members have maintained highly active research profiles and have pursued and received external funding awards. Faculty members have the credentials and expertise to be more research productive and to pursue

additional external funding sources. However, this productivity is unlikely to be fully realized under the current workload mode. A reduced workload, especially for the most research active faculty members, combined with realistic, strategic assistance in developing grantsmanship skills would likely produce significant returns. Goals for external funding must recognize that the grant mechanisms that support R1 institutions are not appropriate for primarily masters level institutions. In addition, faculty must be granted the time and the institutional support to implement the long and often arduous process of seeking external funding.

V. Learning Resources

Learning resources for the program are adequate and typical of programs at this level and size. IT resources are regularly updated. Students have the opportunity to seek funding via internal funding sources and have shown consistent success in securing these funds.

VI. Support

Current departmental staff support is, by all accounts, excellent. However, some of the work that is done centrally by the Graduate School at other institutions (e.g., lifting advising holds, processing graduate assistantship applications) is decentralized to the department level. This division of labor may not be the most efficient. A comprehensive assessment of the costs and benefits of greater centralization of these functions may be necessary.

The history and trajectory of enrollments in the graduate program suggest a strong and healthy future for the program, with the I-O program having somewhat greater demand, as is typical. Both programs are highly responsive to the needs of employers in the region and prepare students for high level employment. Growth in the health care field and the need for analytics related to health care suggests employment prospects will be excellent in the coming years. Thus, demand for both the RM track and the I-O track is likely to be maintained. However, possibilities for growth are limited by the assistantship budget. High quality programming is difficult if students are working full, or even part-time outside of their academic life. New revenue streams, in the form of grants and contracts are plausible, but will almost certainly require "seed" funding from the university to be realized.

VII. Major Recommendations

- Develop a long term staffing plan for the RM masters that is aligned with program goals.

- For the RM program, identify a core of discipline-specific knowledge goals that all students are expected to achieve. At the same time develop learning outcomes that

address skills for students who do not apply, or who are not accepted into doctoral programs

- For the I-O program, continue to develop strengths in occupational health and strengthen connections with health care partners within and outside the university

- Consider the development of a workload model that rewards research active faculty members by giving credit for independent study and thesis commitments. Encourage external funding applications by matching dollars for assistantships provided by external sources.

- Although it is tempting to consider new revenue generating graduate programs, this should only be done after serious analysis. New programs may not bring in enough money to offset costs and certainly adding new grad programs without increasing GA support would do nothing to improve the current situation.