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TO: Antonio Moreira, Vice Provost

FROM: Scott E. Casper, Dean, College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

RE: Academic Program Review, Gerontology Doctoral Program

I have carefully reviewed the Self-Study for the Academic Program Review of the UMB-UMBC Doctoral Program in Gerontology (GERO) and the report of the External Reviewers. The Self-Study highlights the Program's signature strengths, notably the role of inter-institutional collaboration in providing students with excellent academic grounding, as well as its major challenges. The External Reviewers' report provides useful analysis and a clear list of recommendations about how GERO can move forward, with appropriate assistance from administration on both campuses. Both are thoughtful, important documents about a program that exemplifies UMBC's graduate mission of preparing students to pursue careers and foster social and scientific progress, both within and outside the academy. (This response focuses primarily on issues specific to UMBC, or on the ways UMBC can help address the program-wide issues identified by the Self-Study and the Reviewers. It will be essential, as part of this APR process, to address jointly the areas that overlap between the two campuses, as well as the areas on one campus that affect program operations on both campuses.)

Context: To provide some context for the Reviewers' report, I offer some data on enrollment in the Department. (This is routinely part of the CAHSS Dean's report for APRs.) The data that I typically provide for undergraduate programs (numbers of majors and minors, student-faculty ratios) are less relevant for a doctoral-only program, particularly one in which students take courses at two universities. UMBC doctoral enrollment in GERO has ranged from eleven to fifteen students over the past four years, according to IRADS data for Fall semesters 2012-2015. But this counts only those students with primary enrollment at UMBC. According to the Self-Study (p. 18) "Enrollment in the program has remained largely consistent in the mid-20s, with approximately 4 students admitted each fall" (with the exception of Fall 2013, when insufficient funding sources led the

program to admit no new students). The Self-Study describes this number as “more or less ... a ‘steady state’ mode of operation based on current resources.”

Reviewers’ Evaluation:

The Reviewers offer strong and, I believe, well-founded praise for the GERO program in a number of respects:

- A rigorous, up-to-date curriculum, including an “innovative” two-semester theory course, “very strong” statistics training, and appropriate “substantive courses,” as well as “many professional development opportunities” for students outside the classroom.
- Outstanding collaboration and cooperation between UMB and UMBC faculty members involved in the program, and long-standing commitment by these faculty members to their students and to the program.
- A solid record of graduates “finding jobs in appropriate places—employment that puts students in position to impact policy and research that will influence the well-being of older adults, their families and the communities in which they live well into the future.”
- A “strong and impressive” publishing record by the faculty, many of whom offer GERO Ph.D. students opportunities for co-authorship.

At the same time, the Reviewers describe several key challenges facing the GERO program in the short term and beyond—challenges also discussed in the Self-Study (and known for some time). The greatest of these concerns faculty leadership and participation going forward, especially the need to formalize some level of faculty commitment for the program’s sustainability. Other issues include support (of various sorts) for students and funding/models of funding for the program. Because the Reviewers offer a clear list of recommendations, organized roughly by general topic, I will follow their order in providing response here.

(The Reviewers “recommend a two-stage approach to solidifying and growing” the program. Their more concrete recommendations appear in Stage 1, about short-term “solidification” over the next few years—though some of these suggestions may in fact require longer-term work. For Stage 2, they essentially recommend a strategic planning process with an eye to five questions of curriculum and/or additional programs. *I focus here on Stage 1, and endorse the general point of Stage 2 that long-term strategic planning would help the program move forward beyond the necessary stabilization.*)

1. Identify a successor to Leslie Morgan as UMBC co-director of the program: *Done. I’m pleased to report that Dr. John Schumacher, Associate Professor of Sociology and Anthropology (SOCY/ANTH), will become co-director in August 2016.*

2. “Identify a senior administrator at one of the campuses to be responsible for the Program.” *It is unclear to me how this would work in practice, given UMBC and UMB’s quite different institutional structures and cultures.* The unifying structure, to the extent that one exists, is the joint UMB-UMBC Graduate School, but the faculty participants at each institution have appointments in different colleges or schools (mostly but not exclusively CAHSS at UMBC; mostly but not exclusively the School of Medicine at UMB).

3. “Consider a structural change such as moving the Program to a department or giving the Program departmental status,” or “create an inter-university gerontological center or institute.” *I am loath to place GERO (at least UMBC’s portion of the program) within a single department*—the likeliest would be SOCY/ANTH, which provides most of the UMBC faculty participation—because that might imply a lesser or adjunct status for participating faculty in other departments (such as Psychology, Public Policy, and/or Social Work). *I do not support departmental status at this time*, given (a) the lack of tenure-track faculty members with appointments specifically in GERO and (b) the small number of Ph.D. students enrolled in the program at UMBC. An inter-university institute may be worth considering, but it is unclear how such an entity would be responsible for a doctoral program. (The Reviewers do not discuss the two entities already existing at UMBC: the Center for Aging Studies, a research center housed in SOCY/ANTH; and the Erickson School.)

4. “Commit dedicated faculty resources to the Program,” to address the challenge that most faculty contribution currently is of a “volunteer” nature, not necessarily sustainable as the current long-time faculty retire and/or reach “burnout.” *I agree with this recommendation, and have already authorized a search to occur in 2016-17 for an Associate or advanced Assistant Professor in SOCY/ANTH with dedicated portion of commitment to GERO.* This position, like several other recent synergistic hires in CAHSS, will involve a search by a committee composed of both SOCY/ANTH and GERO (non-SOCY/ANTH) faculty members; and there will be an MOU to record the expected commitment of the person hired to both the home department and the GERO program. It is possible that other such hires may be authorized in subsequent years, through the College’s regular prioritization process—and I encourage the leadership of the GERO program to work with relevant departments on designing and proposing requests, ideally in connection with our emerging cluster in health equity.

5. “Devise a strategy and find the resources to compensate faculty for instruction.” *This is a reasonable suggestion, well within the current means of the GERO program at UMBC.* GERO has among the largest operating budgets in CAHSS, larger than many academic departments with significant numbers of majors, minors, and full-time faculty. Devoting a portion of that budget to “course release units” seems appropriate, and feasible on our campus presuming other programs’ willingness to release faculty from home-unit teaching. (The case may be different at UMB.)

6. Guarantee 6-8 Graduate Research Assistantships “to form a foundation for overall student support and to help increase enrollments.” UMBC currently provides funding for three GA positions in GERO (one of these created in 2014 by reallocating regular funds from the operating budget). *I do not foresee allocating additional College funds for this purpose in the near future*, given funding constraints and considerable competition from graduate programs with larger enrollment. However, there may be other opportunities—for example, in collaboration with MIPAR, whose contracts with the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and other agencies often fund GA positions. (As an aside, I note also the Reviewers’ earlier suggestion, not in their list of recommendations, of “Student professional development aimed at preparing them for teaching opportunities.” It may be worth considering devoting at least one of the existing GA positions to teaching rather than research assistance, possibly in conjunction with SOCY/ANTH. GERO students could also be encouraged to participate in the Graduate School’s Professors-in-Training program. The Graduate School is also launching the Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning [CIRTL], another avenue for professional development for future faculty.)

7. “Improve and increase attention to internal and external communication,” both “up through the administration hierarchy” and beyond the two universities, to highlight GERO as an example of

inter-institutional collaboration and to help recruit students. *It is not clear to me that GERO enjoys any less communication of needs and opportunities “up the administration hierarchy” than other programs at UMBC (e.g., the GERO co-director sits on the CAHSS Chairs and Directors and meets independently with the Dean). However, more “innovative or cutting edge” communication for student recruitment may well be worth pursuing—and I encourage the Program to work with the Graduate School on this.*

8. “Increase the amount of staff support.” *At UMBC, the current half-time Program Management Specialist position is consonant with the size and responsibilities of the program.* The larger issue here, as the Reviewers imply, is that more “centralized” support for the GERO program across the two campuses might be better—but it isn’t clear how such support would work given the very different “large, complicated bureaucracies.”

9. Increase and guarantee the operational budget of the program. *The UMBC operating budget is more than sufficient, and indeed has built a substantial rollover in the past several years.*

10. “Involve the Program in the development activities of both campuses.” This recommendation comes at an opportune moment, as UMBC is moving into its next comprehensive (capital) campaign. *I encourage GERO to use the mechanism provided for departments and programs to recommend campaign priorities, to identify one or more specific objectives that could be achieved through external fund-raising.*

11. “Consider focusing on the development of a diverse portfolio of external support,” rather than relying on “an NIH model.” It is unclear how this recommendation is directly related to GERO (or the UMBC portion of GERO); faculty in SOCY/ANTH and other participating departments routinely seek grants from a variety of agencies and institutions. The Deans and the Vice President for Research certainly encourage such an approach, especially given the current climate for NIH funding.

12. “Explore mechanisms to send a fraction of indirect cost recovery ... generated by Program faculty back to the Program.” *This seems less than workable, given that faculty do not have lines in GERO (or currently even dedicated proportions of commitment in teaching, much less research).*

13. Consider a model of funding some faculty salaries partly on state funds and partly through external funding that they generate. *UMBC is trying to move away from precisely this approach, and has been working for several years to move faculty members formerly or currently funded in this manner onto 100% state lines. I am not inclined to move in the other direction.*

14. “Consider the development of an employment placement strategy that includes faculty professional networks.” *An excellent idea—and rather a surprise that this does not already occur, if it does not.*

15. “Explore whether future T32 grant proposals and the Pepper Center could be utilized to add to the educational experience of students and research activities of faculty.” The current T32 proposal does not formally include GERO, although it does fund some GERO students in the Epidemiology track. However, since the Reviewers’ visit, GERO has submitted its own T-32 proposal to fund three predoctoral students; this proposal will be under review at NIA in coming months. Further such efforts would be most welcome.

16. Encourage junior faculty to apply for K awards. This already occurs at UMBC, with success (e.g., Danielle Beatty Moody in PSYC); although the recommendation seems beyond the scope of the GERO APR, I certainly endorse it.

As stated above, the Stage 2 recommendations primarily involve “a strategic planning process, ... including internal and external stakeholders,” that would include a scan of related programs in the area and of “governmental and non-governmental organizations that could become partners for training and research.” As part of this process, the Reviewers recommend considering various other program opportunities (master’s, graduate or undergraduate certificates, dual Ph.D. degree options, translational components, online delivery of some GERO content). Such a process is well worth conducting, and I am happy to talk with the co-directors about its timing (possibly once we have hired a new faculty member to start in Fall 2017). The internal stakeholders at UMBC should include academic programs with some focus on aging or the life course, including the Erickson School, as well as the Hilltop Institute, among others.

The Stage 2 suggestions, indeed, could help accomplish another desirable objective: *to increase and/or broaden recruitment, in order to increase the applicant pool and potentially the number of students in the Program (and any new programs or tracks that may result from the planning process)*. I appreciate that the current level of resources makes it challenging to increase the overall number of students. At the same time, as we create a faculty position with dedicated commitment to GERO and work to stabilize the program as the Self-Study and the Reviewers suggest, further growth of resources will depend upon a commitment to build enrollment, even if modestly.

Conclusion

Over its first fifteen years, the UMB-UMBC Doctoral Program in Gerontology has enjoyed significant success thanks to remarkable, deep commitment from faculty members at both institutions. One of very few Ph.D. programs in its field, and one of even fewer programs to draw from the resources of two research universities to offer a fully biopsychosocial approach, GERO has built a clear niche in our region and nationally and provides its students with strong theoretical and methodological skills for careers in research and policy. The program is a point of pride for UMBC, for it exemplifies our vision of graduate education in the service of knowledge and social improvement. It is also a signature example of our university’s close collaboration with UMB.

At the same time, GERO faces challenges that the Self-Study and the Reviewers’ Report make abundantly clear, particularly regarding its sustainability as longtime faculty leaders and participants near retirement or assume other responsibilities. Both documents rightly describe the need for structures and commitments at each institution and between the two universities, to ensure dedicated faculty commitment going forward. We have begun that process at UMBC, with the appointment of an incoming co-director and the commitment to a search in the coming academic year. I look forward to working with the Program and with colleagues at UMB as we develop GERO further over the years ahead.

Cc: Leslie Morgan, UMBC Co-Director, Gerontology Ph.D. Program
John Schumacher, Incoming UMBC Co-Director, Gerontology Ph.D. Program
Janet Rutledge, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School