Recommendation of the UBC regarding sustainable funding for graduate interdisciplinary studies programs

The Provost charged the UBC to make a recommendation to achieve sustainable, adequate funding for graduate interdisciplinary programs. The UBC investigated the status of these programs and their funding.

We found that there are seven graduate interdisciplinary programs (MAIS, MCB, Environmental Science, Water Engineering, Water Science, Water Policy and Economics) housed in the Graduate School. In addition, there are other programs (Entomology, Genetics, Materials Science, etc) that operate independently from the Graduate School. (We are assuming the definition of “interdisciplinary” should be taken to be synonymous with “multi-college.”) Of the three most mature programs (MAIS, MCB, and Environmental Science), one program (MAIS) has had a decrease in enrollment from 2003 to 2007, while the other two programs have experienced significant increases in enrollment over the past three years, ranging from 10% (Economics) to 1100% (Water Policy). A detailed analysis of a typical program (Environmental Science) showed a healthy program with an apparent small positive value of the (income-expenses) metric (490K$−450K$).

Management of several of these programs is housed in the Graduate School. When OSU moved from the BAM to the rebasing model, the budget of the Graduate School was augmented to cover the costs of administering the three existing interdisciplinary programs (MAIS, MCB, and Environmental Science). Since then, these programs have grown, and oversight responsibilities for four new programs has been given to the Graduate School with no adjustment to the Graduate School re-basing budget, leading to a non-sustainable situation for these programs.

To remedy this situation, the UBC recommends the re-basing budget of the Graduate School be proportionally increased to cover its new oversight responsibilities for interdisciplinary programs. Incremental funding that is sufficient to support 25% of the cost of a 0.5 FTE director, a 0.5 FTE support staff, and associated benefits for each sustainable interdisciplinary program is recommended. Sustainable interdisciplinary programs are defined as those programs having enrollments of 10 or more doctoral students or 20 masters students after operating for at least five years.
The UBC recognizes that there are several non-interdisciplinary studies programs in the University whose scope and very existence is not appropriately compensated in the re-basing model. It is unlikely that sufficient incremental revenue will be available in the re-basing model to meet these “unfunded mandates.” However, because of the singular importance of interdisciplinary studies for the overall mission and strategic goals of the University, the UBC recommends corrective action be taken in this area.