



Office of the Chair and Graduate Chair

## DPES 2010-25 Departmental Review Update

From: William Gough, Chair, DPES

Date: September 24, 2010

As you may recall the Department was reviewed last spring. This is part of a normal cycle of review. Historically reviews take place in the final year of a chair's term. This review did indeed follow this pattern, although future reviews will not be tethered to a chair's term but will be part of a well defined cycle of reviews, roughly every seven years. The intention of the review is to examine the academic programs of a unit, although often it becomes considerably more than this. Our review was completed in the spring. The review was circulated to the department shortly after it was submitted to the Dean. The Dean and his Vice-Deans met with the department in May to discuss the review with DPES. As required the Dean issued a response. This was submitted to the Provost on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2010. I circulated this response in mid September after receiving approval from the Dean.

This past Tuesday, September 22, the review and the response went to Academic Programs and Policy (AP&P) a subcommittee of the Academic Board of the University of Toronto's Governing Council. I attended this meeting with the Dean and Assistant Dean. In the past, the AP&P review took place about a year after the review and the Dean was expected to report how the review was responded to by the reviewed academic unit. Now the review goes to AP&P much earlier (within six months) and AP&P exercises the option of asking the academic unit for a further report in a year hence. The Dean spoke eloquently on our behalf stressing the critical importance of our department to UTSC and his confidence that departmental issues raised in the review could and would be resolved. We pre-emptively requested that we be given the opportunity to report back in a year's time. Although the Dean is pleased with the progress of the new administrative team in DPES, he wants the opportunity to fully report on positive change next year. I concurred with this request and it was accepted by AP&P.

So we now have a year to further address the issues raised by the review. I will be meeting with my Executive Committee (the Associate Chairs and Business Officer) to

map out a plan. A review of a department is a snapshot viewed through the lens of the three individuals who do the review. As such there is a possibility of distortion possibly based on biases of the reviewers or selective use of information provided to the reviewers. Thus we do not necessarily need to follow all recommendations of the reviewers, although we are obligated to consider them carefully and justify a choice not to follow a specific recommendation.

I would like to cite a couple of examples. In the report alarming safety issues were vaguely alluded to. After the review, a Health and Safety audit was immediately done of the department (May 31, 2010). The main issues in this audit were light bulbs that needed replacing and fire extinguishers that needed recharging. One eye wash station needed re-location. Nothing in the audit caused me alarm. (The audit is available upon request). Health and Safety will continue to be considered carefully and I have recently become co-chair of the UTSC Health and Safety Committee. However for the sake of the review I feel this issue has been resolved.

Another more distorted example was the recommendation that the Major program in Environmental Science have a stronger foundation in the basic sciences. Changes to our curriculum to do just that had gone through UTSC governance a year and half before the review, although due to the admissions cycle the changes could only take place this fall. In spite of having this fact pointed out (repeatedly) to the review committee, this "recommendation" remained in their report. There were other such examples.

However, this is not to gloss over substantive issues raised in the review nor is the next year entailing an exercise in denial and self-defense. The reviewers exposed real problems with the department and as painful as these are they must be faced and resolved. All of them may not be resolved in a year (and AP&P has no illusions to this) but processes must be put in place within the year to address them.

I believe we have made good progress already in a new administrative structure that distributes the administrative workload and provides some autonomy for the Physics and Astrophysics group to flourish. The Chemists have rallied around the central desire for accreditation of their undergraduate programs, revising their complement plan and prioritizing further teaching laboratory renovations. We are in the process of approving a Constitution to insure a clear process for departmental engagement and the clear distinction between governance and administration. These are a great start but more needs to be done. As the Executive Committee develops a plan for this, we will bring this forward at a future departmental meeting.