Georgia State University  
College of Health and Human Sciences  
School of Health Professions  
Division of Nutrition  
Division of Physical Therapy  
Division of Respiratory Therapy

Program Review  
External Reviewer Report  
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Executive Summary

The newly organized School of Health Professions at Georgia State University is nationally recognized for its strong academic programs in Nutrition, Physical Therapy and Respiratory Therapy. This external review of the School clearly documented the following strengths: 1) strong student applicant pools and enrollments; 2) unique graduate programs in nutrition and respiratory therapy for career changers; 3) revitalized physical therapy program meeting future practice requirements; 4) well-prepared faculty who are expert clinicians and teachers; 5) utilization of emerging technologies to enhance learning experiences for students; 6) faculty engagement in scholarly activities, research and publication activities are reasonable considering the teaching loads with large numbers of students and clinical responsibilities; 7) faculty involvement in university governance; 8) service to university committees and community; 9) support of alumni and the metropolitan community.

The challenges facing the School include: 1) staffing required to deal with increased enrollments and sponsored research activity; 2) budget constraints related to hiring needed faculty; 3) instructional laboratory space needs; 4) considerable use of part-time faculty; 5) university sponsored research infrastructure requirements.

In the context of the current economic environment, the School is making every effort to operate as efficiently as possible to achieve the desired student outcomes. A focused review of the needs of the School led to the following most urgent recommendations.

Recommendations:
1. The Division of Physical Therapy is faced with a significant need for additional faculty resources necessary to deliver a program of this nature. The quality of the program is the result of the sheer commitment of the current faculty to their profession and to the University. Teaching workloads for this faculty far exceed comparable workloads at peer institutions. They have assumed these teaching workloads over the past several years based on the expectation of phased faculty additions that have unfortunately been delayed. Not addressing this issue has the potential to compromise the quality of the program, retention of current faculty and future recruitment of new faculty.

2. Teaching and research space are critical needs for all of the divisions. The new science building will only relieve the need for additional instructional laboratories if all the promised space is allocated as planned. This move to new space is the ideal opportunity to furnish the teaching laboratories with state of the art equipment that will prepare graduates for contemporary practice. In addition, research space needs will require identification of appropriate areas (Self-Study names Kell Hall).

3. There is a need to assess the staff support requirements of the School given its increased enrollment and sponsored research activity. The proposed termination of a temporary staff member is the most urgent issue. Focus should also include realignment/reclassification/reallocation of positions to best meet the School’s staff support needs and relieve faculty of administrative responsibilities that can be more efficiently managed by staff. The fact that there is a high use of part-time instructors means their concomitant staff needs should be considered as well.
1. **Strengths and Weaknesses**
   - Evaluate the overall strengths and weaknesses of the program, referring specifically to each of the five areas in Section A.

**Quality of Instruction, Research and Service**

Three overarching strengths of the School of Health Professions are the clinical excellence and passion of the teaching faculty, the success and productivity of the research faculty, and the long-standing community and alumni commitment to the programs. The Divisions offer quality curricula that prepare graduates for success in contemporary practice and the ability to shape future advances within their professions.

The contributions of the faculty in the areas of research and scholarship are noteworthy and demonstrate their commitment to the mission of the University and to their individual professions. The faculty’s success in securing funding for research and publication of their scholarly works has increased dramatically over the past few years.

**Centrality of Programs to the University**

The faculty and students are engaged in numerous service ventures that epitomize the urban community commitment of the University. Furthermore, considering current and projected health care workforce shortages, these programs are positioned to have a major impact on access to health care for citizens of the state of Georgia.

**Viability of the Programs**

The current contributions of the programs and more importantly future untapped opportunities for continuing the curricular excellence, meeting workforce demands, translational research and for expanded collaborative community impact will not be fully realized without strategic investments in both human and physical resources.

**Strategic Focus**

There is adequate evidence that these three programs have made great strides since the reorganization of the College and establishment of the School of Health Professions. Each of the Divisions has strategic goals that are reasonable. However without new resources they are not likely to be achieved.

Focusing (or “packaging”) each Division’s teaching research, clinical practice and community service activities around an identifiable expertise or practice area (e.g. urban health) has the potential to further enhance and define the uniqueness of the programs among comparable peer institutions.
Financial Resource Analysis

In the context of the current economic environment, the School is making every effort to operate as efficiently as possible to achieve the desired student outcomes. Nonetheless, it is our conclusion that the programs do not have adequate resources to sustain this effort. We have identified three areas of fiscal vulnerability that will require attention.

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Teaching and research space are critical needs for all of the divisions. The new science building will only relieve the need for additional instructional laboratories if all the promised space is allocated as planned. This move to new space is the ideal opportunity to furnish the teaching laboratories with state of the art equipment that will prepare graduates for contemporary practice. In addition, research space needs will require identification of appropriate areas (Self-Study names Kell Hall).

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2. Historical and Current Context

- Given the historical and current context of the department as outlined in Section B, are the programs offered and program enrollments appropriate from a disciplinary perspective?

All programs in the School of Health Professions offer appropriate curricula, with several notable innovations and strengths. Enrollments have recently increased, exceeding College expectations.

- Current Nutrition students interviewed indicated they were attracted by the program offerings, faculty diversity and urban setting. The Nutrition faculty members are a who’s who in dietetic professional service in local, state and national associations which provides strong disciplinary connections.
- **The Physical Therapy** program at Georgia State is anchored in a rich history of excellence and leadership within the professional community. An unfortunate period of decline in the perceived quality of the program has been completely reversed by the effort and commitment of the current faculty over the past four years. It has regained the respect of the physical therapy education community, local practitioners and the target student market.

- **Respiratory Therapy** has enjoyed national ranking as a top program in the field. The Master of Science program will also be sought after for future instructors to meet faculty shortages nation-wide.

- **Are the faculty number, composition, and research productivity sufficient to support the programs offered by the department?**

- The critical need for more faculty in **Physical Therapy** has been detailed in the previous section. The Division of Physical Therapy has successfully recruited a pediatric specialist to complement the other areas of practice, but continues to need additional clinical and tenure track faculty to meet the required demands.

- Full time faculty numbers could be increased in **Respiratory Therapy** and **Nutrition**, however this is a national issue related to the shortage of individuals with appropriate credentials and education. The use of part-time faculty may limit the productivity of the full-time faculty in the areas of research and scholarship since they are called on for teaching and service duty.

- With recent and pending retirements in **Nutrition**, recruitment of faculty with appropriate expertise is critical to maintain program strengths. Recent hires present diverse, broad experiences to students. Protection of tenure-earning faculty is needed for them to establish credible research programs.

- The makeup of the **Respiratory Therapy** faculty is culturally diverse and appropriately credentialed in professional areas required for the degree program offered: generalist, adult, pediatric, and neonatal specialists; and pulmonary diagnostic specialists.

  The programs are all at maximum enrollment. Future expansion of these programs will require additional faculty to maintain appropriate faculty productivity.

- **Comment on the relevance of the programs, and the degree to which the department’s programs serve various needs (community, student, professional).**

The programs in physical and respiratory therapy are high demand areas in healthcare with nutrition maintaining continued demand. Given key shortage areas in healthcare workforce for the state of Georgia and nationally, the School of Health Professions is poised to address the changing demographics of the US (retirement of the baby boom generation). These programs will be an important source of health care workers for the state and national needs in the coming years.
• Evaluate the appropriateness of the peer institutions selected by the department for comparison.

The peer institutions selected by each Division for comparison are clearly appropriate for benchmark assessments.

3. **Progress Toward Goals and Objectives**

• Taking a disciplinary perspective, evaluate the ways in which the unit has succeeded in meeting its goals and objectives since its last academic program review (Section C).
• Is its progress toward meeting its goals and objectives satisfactory?
• What are the factors that have helped or hindered the unit in its effort to meet its goals and objectives?

The stated goals of the **Nutrition Division** included:

1) Enhance teaching and clinical training to achieve student outcomes,
2) Increase awareness of nutrition major to increase enrollment,
3) Provide faculty and staff development,
4) Expand research and service outcomes.

The achievements of the goals are noteworthy in teaching, research and service. The in workforce of school support staff has been especially difficult for nutrition given their physical distance from the other two divisions. However, new faculty hired have brought new perspectives and research interests. The achievements of senior faculty are noteworthy. Increased enrollment has led to more sections of lab courses offered. New laboratory facilities are needed to assist in scheduling efficiencies. The division has maintained its presence with campus-based nutrition clinics for students.

The stated Goals of the **Physical Therapy Division** included:

1) Improving Student Outcomes,
2) Increasing Research,
3) Enhancing Service to the Community.

The faculty has succeeded in delivering on all three of their stated goals in spite of not having received the resources identified as essential to meet these goals. Graduate pass rates on the licensure exam have returned to a standard above 90 percent (100% this past year), research funding has increased considerably and in addition to providing quality physical therapy practitioners for the metropolitan area they have initiated a number of valuable pro bono services (Good Samaritan Clinics, etc).

The stated Goals of the **Respiratory Therapy Division** included:

1) Continue excellence in teaching,
2) Develop scholarly inquiry,
3) Maintain service.
There is adequate evidence that the program has made great strides in the reorganization of the college. Through an innovative curriculum, the Division is meeting the needs of a variety of student backgrounds. The program has done a good job of maintaining the applicant pools and quality of students accepted into the program. The efficiency of the program has increased as evidence of the increase in credit hours by the Division. Faculty have accomplished several milestones in scholarship. Through students and faculty efforts, service to the community has been achieved.

- **Evaluate the ways in which these goals have contributed to the College and University Strategic Plans.**

The merger of these three departments into one school appears to follow the strategic plan of the College and the University to maximize resource allocation and has succeeded in accomplishing this efficiency while also maintaining or improving the quality of these programs.

The University Strategic Plan includes several components which are mirrored in the School of Health Professions. The urban health focus is clearly accomplished through these health care programs. The curriculum and training sites reinforce the convergence of the urban setting and health care outcomes. Faculty scholarship often ties urban health to innovative practice.

The University goal of increased retention and graduation of students is embedded in the teaching philosophy and student advising within the School of Health Professions. The personal interest of the school’s faculty were noted by all students interviewed. The retention literature points to positive faculty-student connections as key to retaining diverse students.

4. **Quality of the Curriculum**

- **Evaluate the quality of the curriculum from a disciplinary perspective for each of the department’s programs (Section D).**
- **Evaluate the appropriateness of the learning outcomes and learning outcomes assessments for each of the programs.**
- **How have learning outcomes assessments influenced curricular modifications.**
- **Have these modifications been effective in improving student learning outcomes?**

Without exception, each program’s curriculum is well designed, comprehensive and appropriate for the preparation of competent generalist practitioners. Clearly the specific strategies adopted by the faculty to improve graduation rates, overall student performance in the clinic and national licensure examination outcomes (especially in Physical Therapy and Respiratory Therapy) have been successful. Faculty are also responsive to feedback from students and clinical instructors regarding modification necessary to continually update and adapt the curriculum to the demands of contemporary practice.

Specialized accreditation of these programs attests to their meeting disciplinary requirements. Student learning outcomes are well utilized for assessment and improvement of instruction.
Incorporation of evidence-based practice, emerging technologies, intensive writing courses, and critical thinking are apparent in the programs.

5. **Quality of the Students**
   - Evaluate the quality of students, both incoming and graduated students, in the department’s programs (Section E) relative to discipline-specific norms.
   - Are the quality standards appropriate?

The quality of the students and program graduates is continually improving. Applicant pools are strong (in both quantity and quality) and the academic credentials of the enrolled students are consistent with those of peer institutions. The students interviewed were passionate about the quality of the education they were receiving. They feel well prepared for the challenges they have been presented during clinical internships and are clearly committed to being nothing short of excellent therapists and nutritionists throughout the course of their careers.

6. **Quality of the Faculty**
   - Evaluate the quality of the department’s faculty (Section F). Include in your discussion an evaluation of the faculty with respect to peer program faculties.

The current faculty and the leadership provided by the Division Heads represent significant assets to the programs.

A larger number of faculty is essential and a larger portion of tenure track, PhD/research prepared faculty would be desirable in order to compare more favorably with the identified peer institutions. However, talented non-tenure-track faculty with specialized clinical expertise and experience are also critical to these programs in order to prepare graduates as clinical practitioners.

7. **Resource Adequacy**
   - Considering each of the seven areas discussed in Section G, evaluate the adequacy of departmental resources.

The most salient concern that needs to be addressed is the need for more faculty, especially in Physical Therapy (See Section 1 Financial Resource Analysis).

The Division of Physical Therapy faces challenges to recruiting new faculty given the current workload expectations, salaries that are not competitive with peer institutions and clinical environments, and especially given the nationwide faculty shortage within the profession. The Division needs both non-tenure-track clinical faculty and tenure-track research faculty. The needed tenure tack faculty are going to expect even more modest workloads and administrative support for research and funding initiatives.

Nonetheless, the urban location, the quality of the program and its students, the potential for new space, the Division leadership and the enthusiasm and commitment of current faculty will all serve as attractors for new faculty. It will be important to make tangible progress
towards addressing the need for additional faculty before the next self-study in 2011 and Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education site visit in 2012.

Teaching and research space are critical needs for all the Divisions. (See Section 1 Financial Resource Analysis)

The University infrastructure to support grantsmanship does not appear to be meeting the faculty’s needs. There has been a delay in providing adequate research lab set-up and support for new tenure-earning faculty. Infrastructure for grant processing/management and research lab space are critical for the School to meet the University’s research mission expectations.

Reassessment of the staff support needs of the School could be useful (See Section 1 Financial Resource Analysis). Improved access and use of technology may also improve staff and faculty efficiency and relieve the pressures of some administrative tasks.

Finally the proposal to establish a faculty practice clinic for the School that has been identified by the faculty as a goal will require careful consideration. It is an appropriate objective. An urban faculty practice fits nicely with the urban mission of the University and could offer many excellent opportunities for visible community contribution, translational research and interdisciplinary collaboration. The faculty will need administrative support and expertise (perhaps from the University’s School of Business) to assess the numerous business models for such a venture and to develop a viable business plan.

8. Goals and Objectives
- Evaluate the goals and objectives that the department has outlined in Section H for the next review cycle.
- Are the goals and objectives appropriate for the unit?
- Are they in accord with disciplinary trends?
- Are the priorities reasonable?
- Are any changes warranted?

The School’s goals are all reasonable, but will require additional resources. The current teaching loads challenge faculty and limit their ability to contribute to the accomplishment of Georgia State’s scholarship aims.

> Nutrition sees its continued presence in the Core curriculum and service courses as an avenue to healthier student lives. Through collaboration both on and off campus, the research agendas of new faculty can be realized. With continued involvement in the nutrition profession, faculty members will be role models for their students.

> Physical Therapy has a vision of what it can achieve over the coming decades via the DPT degree program and with the addition of post-professional residency programs and targeted faculty clinical practice that can serve the program and the surrounding urban community.
Respiratory Therapy continues to strengthen its clinical and scholarly accomplishments. The students provide support for each other to achieve positive student outcomes.

Given the history of threatened program closure, the current environment of significantly stretched resources and budget cuts, and the new integration of the programs within the School and College, there is a need for open dialogue between faculty and administration about the University’s plan for financial stability and the critical roles these programs can play in the University’s future.