Response to TFGE Assessment of Graduate Programs in Health and Sport Studies

Health and Sport Studies is in the midst of fundamental organizational changes that directly address concerns raised by the TFGE. We urge the TF to read the following in the context of those changes. Effective fall 2010, HSS will dissolve and the two graduate-level sub-tracks, sport studies and psychology of sport and physical activity (PSPA), will be in American Studies and Integrative Physiology, respectively. This response focuses on the graduate program in sport studies.

We request that the sport studies program be placed in the “Too New to Assess” category until the full impact of our merger with American Studies can be assessed.

1) Diversity. HSS is strongly committed to diversity so we were dismayed that the TF dismissed this strength in a subordinate phrase. Of our 20 current PhDs, 5 are students of color (25%), 2 are international students (10%) and 15 are women (75%). Our MA cohort is almost as diverse: of 14 MA students, 2 are students of color (14%), 2 are international (14%), 1 is a veteran (7%) and 6 are women (43%). There cannot be many other graduate programs at the UI with such a diverse and historically under-represented student body and with a curriculum that focuses so fully on issues of diversity and equity. These are significant contributions to the UI community.

2) Interpretation of Data. We appreciate that the TF had a wide range of disciplines to assess and that relying on particular data made the task seem more feasible. However, the conclusions drawn seem to depend on weighting some criteria and data most heavily while slighting others.

A) For some GREs (V & Q), the credentials of HSS students are “modest” when compared to other social science units (SSU) and the university. But this is not the case when the comparison is between HSS and other sport studies programs nationally, and it is not true of the Analytic Writing GRE where HSS scores higher than both the UI as a whole and the nation. The GPA of students entering in 2001-4 is 3.38, surely not significantly lower than the GPA for SSU (3.47) or the UI (3.42). We will raise these scores by admitting more selectively in the future. However, we value the outcome performance of our graduates rather more highly than admissions statistics, which takes us to the next point.

B) The term “relatively weak” in the assessment of HSS’s completion rate begs the question “in relation to what?!” Our rate is 45%; the rate for all Business and Social Sciences (BSS) is 43% and the rate for SSU is 42%. HSS ranks 8/17 within BSS and 4/9 within SSU. Clearly HSS is slightly above average and cannot be characterized as “relatively weak.” The TTD of the 5 PhD students who graduated 1996-2001 is 5.3 years, which is the best in the social sciences for that period. For the 5 who graduated 2003-08, the TTD was 6.7, which is average in SSU where we rank 5/9. Our completion rate and TTD therefore indicate program success.

3) Placement. As is the case with most graduate programs at the UI, most of our graduates do not find initial positions at Research 1 institutions but we have an excellent placement record. We have prepared more of the young faculty in the field than any other university in the US. The field of sport studies is still relatively small on the national stage and Iowa is one of four top graduate programs at R1 institutions (we would rank ourselves second to the University of Maryland). HSS has a graduate in a tenure track or tenured position at each of the other top R1 institutions (Maryland, Illinois, and Ohio State). Defining success in student placement to placement at R1s seems unduly narrow and sets a standard few graduate programs at UI can meet.

4) Confusion with other programs. The voluntary closure of our PSPA graduate program should remove whatever doubts exist about our “clear intellectual center” and end any confusion with other programs or disciplines in Integrative Physiology and Leisure Studies. This distinction is underlined by CLAS’ decision not to include sport studies in the merger of programs from Leisure Studies, Integrative Physiology and HSS which is underway, but rather to house it within American Studies. Our curriculum has no commonality at all with education, as the TF suggests; we have not done teacher training at any level in over two decades. We do draw on sociological models in our work but our intellectual commitment is to interdisciplinary work which draws much more from history and the humanities. Thus American Studies is the suitable home for our interdisciplinary sport studies program; a synergy between these graduate programs would strengthen both.

We urge the committee to re-evaluate our status and to delay any negative decisions until after our program is re-situated in American Studies. Closure of this small program will have a major negative effect on our ability to deliver our very large undergraduate major. Moreover, this program requires very little support from CLAS since we are funded almost entirely by the Saturday and Evening Program. Finally, program closure will have a huge negative effect nationwide and remove Iowa from the forefront of this field.