Response to the Graduate Education Task Force Report: Informatics

The faculty members of the Informatics graduate program appreciate the comments and insight of the Task Force. The Executive Committee is committing its efforts to take the next step in the development of the program. The current part-time program assistant has provided the initial stability to the program and is an important link between the students and the broad group of faculty. Several steps are being taken to cautiously move forward in a difficult fiscal era.

First, steps are being taken to improve faculty participation in the program in order to strengthen the existing tracks. The Executive Committee has determined that dedicated leadership of the program is essential for long term success of this program. Originally the program considered recruitment of an external director; but, resources and the relative infancy of the program will likely impede this goal. The program is searching, however, for a qualified and dedicated internal person who could take on this task. This might come in the form of a current individual, or perhaps through a joint hire in a related unit. We are exploring these two options. The expectation would be for this individual to become the “face” of the program, and develop the collective vision for the next 3-5 year phase of the program.

Second, the IGPI program needs stable financial support. The first phase of the program relied on “start-up” funds from the Provost Office and the Graduate College. This 3-year period is winding down and dedicated long-term funds are needed. Using a model that is effective in other interdisciplinary degree programs, dedicated financial resources to support first and second year students in the degree tracks (health informatics and information science) is critical to the long term success of the program. Faculty members must then support students after the second year (usually post-comp status) on departmental and or research grants. Faculty members must become more proficient in supporting students through external funds. The T32 training grant in Bioinformatics and the proposed IGERT grant in Geoinformatics are good starts in this direction.

Third, IGPI needs to gain enhanced visibility on campus. Attempts to create a more dedicated and cohesive faculty group are important. The same is true for the students currently in the program. Seminars and colloquia are viewed as logical starting points to create this enhanced visibility, interaction and cohesion.

IGPI has been successful in its infant stages due to the dedication of the program staff and a number of senior faculty members. These individuals will continue to work with the Graduate College to chart a course that will foster continued development of the IGPI program at Iowa.