We would like to thank the members of the Task Force and others who have taken the time to evaluate graduate programs throughout the University. We share your interest in Excellence.

The Task Force ranked our program as “Good”, an assessment we believe is inaccurately low. From our self assessment, we find that our program does exceptionally well. For example, two of our students have won the University of Iowa D.C. Spriestersbach Dissertation Prize, one went on to win the national competition and the other was runner-up. The vast majority of our graduates go on to highly competitive postdoctoral positions and scientific careers with institutions such as Harvard, The Mayo Clinic, The University of Pennsylvania, and Genentech. The strength of our graduate program is also reflected in the external funding success of our faculty (FY09 = $7.8 million in awarded dollars). These examples are not indices of “Good”, they are snap shots of the Excellence our program regularly achieves.

Our self assessment includes two concerns, 1) maintaining graduate student financial support through external funding and 2) increasing the recruitment of URM students. In addressing funding, we have been successful at promoting grant writing skills among our students. In addressing diversity, our plan includes increasing our numbers of URM faculty. We have recently been successful at augmenting our faculty diversity through the hiring of a new Assistant Professor (Dr. Michael Wright). The strength of our graduate program was in fact very important in Dr. Wright’s recruitment.

Two areas of relative weakness mentioned by the Task Force are addressed individually below:

**Issue 1: Doctoral completion rate**

*Comment:* “The doctoral completion rate is 43% which is viewed as too low by the TF. This low completion possibly reflects earlier problems in department prior to the switch to Biosciences admissions.”

*Response:* The low rate cited above indeed includes quite old data and was based on a particularly small cohort (n=14 students). In more recent years, our program has been positively influenced by both our switch to Biosciences recruitment and an overall re-invigoration which has included a new DEO and several new faculty hires. In the more recent 5 year period from 2003-2008, our Ph.D. program had 25 students enter. Of these, 10 have earned the Ph.D., 3 have Ph.D. Defense’s already scheduled for this spring, 5 opted for Masters degrees, 1 transferred into the University of Iowa Interdisciplinary Molecular Biology Program, and 6 continue to work in good standing toward their Ph.D. We have had no one leave without a degree from the University of Iowa. I would also like to add that in the past five years six of our graduate students have secured their own funding through individual fellowship awards.

*Plans for improving:* Our representatives to the Biosciences Admissions Committee will continue to vigorously screen applicants to make sure our incoming students have the proper training and realistic expectations for the rigors of graduate school. Through mentoring from Graduate Advisors, our DGS and DEO, and our faculty; we will continue to empower students for successful careers in the health sciences.

**Issue 2: Small size and potential overlap**

*Comment:* “It is a relatively small doctoral program admitting through the Biosciences portal (1-5 students per year over the past 5 years)….The TF felt that there is overlap of this program with other biomedical science programs and it might make sense to merge the program with other similar graduate programs.”

*Response:* The small number of students in our program is not a problem. We are already functionally merged with admissions and overlapping curriculum requirements of several similar programs. Within Biosciences, our students take the common first year curriculum and then have flexible requirements within modular course offerings for their second year. Our small size creates better opportunities for mentoring and promotes community.

*Plans for improving:* To encourage institutional efficiency, we will continue to support development of modular course offerings that serve the greatest need for all graduate students in the health sciences.