

Response to the Review of the University of Washington Institute for Public Health Genetics Graduate Programs

Summary

The Institute for Public Health Genetics (IPHG) is deeply appreciative of the thoughtful and comprehensive review conducted by the Graduate School, and it is gratified by the Reviewers' acknowledgment of the importance and timeliness of the discipline of Public Health Genetics and of the high quality of the UW IPHG programs. IPHG also appreciates the reviewers' acknowledgment of the challenges it faces, and endorses the recommendation of an Interim Report in four years, followed by a full 10-year review six years after that.

Responses to other recommendations are now listed.

Recommendation 1: Pursue a strategic planning process to plan a staged expansion of the program, hiring faculty (ideally those trained elsewhere) and include UW leadership in the process to inform future direction.

A strategic planning process for IPHG was initiated in the 2021-2022 Academic Year and is expected to conclude by December 2022. Dr. Alison Fohner, Associate Director of IPHG, is working with a consulting company to conduct this plan, which includes interviews with current students, alumni, UW leadership, faculty both highly engaged and unengaged in IPHG, and external stakeholders. The goal of the project is to develop an overall plan for growth that will emphasize current IPHG strengths, develop new opportunities, and overcome barriers to the program. In fact, this Review will be used in the strategic planning process to help establish effective action items for the strategic plan.

Recommendation 2: The magnitude of these upcoming changes and need for active management by the Dean's office, relevant Department Chairs and others are some of the reasons that we are asking for an Interim Report in Four Years.

We endorse this recommendation. IPHG expects to welcome several new members on its Leadership Committee in the next few years. We have identified attractive candidates from faculty across the UW, prioritizing a balance of expertise to cover the breadth of IPHG curriculum, and we look forward to incorporating new ideas into our programs. We agree that active engagement with the Dean's Office, Department Chairs, and others would be beneficial to our success in accomplishing other action items recommended in this Review. We will work with the Dean's Office to establish an engagement plan.

Recommendation 3: IPHG should work with the SPH Dean's office to establish an MOU for long term financial commitment to support core operations.

As recognized by the Review Committee, IPHG was originally established with protected funds from the UW Provost. Interdisciplinary Programs like IPHG have fewer opportunities for revenue compared to traditional departments. Yet, these Interdisciplinary Programs break down the silos that limit Departments, and pave the way for innovative, cross-disciplinary research and solutions. The occupations of our impressive graduates speak to the importance and impact of interdisciplinary programs like IPHG, despite their inability to generate high revenue. The original charter for IPHG acknowledged this limitation, and committed funds to maintaining IPHG excellence. Thus, we will work with the SPH Dean's Office to establish a long-term commitment such as was present in the original charter to sustain IPHG core operations.

Recommendation 4: In addition to the above commitment from SPH, we recommend that IPHG leadership meet regularly with leaders at other key schools (Law, Medicine) and private entities to evaluate potential financial support.

We agree with the need to engage leadership beyond the SPH in order to solicit financial and political support. Originally, IPHG was supported by several Schools across the UW, and this interdisciplinary engagement is key to its success, including supporting faculty involvement and class offerings. We are requesting the SPH Associate Dean for Education to re-convene the committee of Associate Deans of the Schools and Colleges whose faculty have membership in IPHG. In addition, we hope to engage local biotechnology, pharmaceutical, and other private entities who may be willing to provide support through direct financial contributions, internships for students, or teaching support.

Recommendation 5: IPHG leadership should explore training grants, interdisciplinary research and center grants, and other opportunities to provide support for faculty, staff, and students.

IPHG students are eligible for support on existing and pending training grants, which are currently housed in UW Departments. Given UW financial and grant structures, other grant applications orchestrated through IPHG partnerships will require an MOU concerning staff support and the distribution of indirect costs. We will work with SPH leadership to develop a pathway for these opportunities.

Recommendation 6: IPHG leadership should work more closely with SPH departments to identify existing instructors, value support for service within the program, and evaluate the need for new hires.

A challenge of IPHG is that it does not have financial resources to support faculty engagement. We are sensitive to any perception that SPH support for IPHG is at the expense of support to departments. This may best be accomplished by the IPHG Director being a member of appropriate SPH Committees that include Department Chairs. Identifying SPH tuition income from IPHG courses may help. We rely on reward structures within the SPH and other participating Schools to value service for IPHG and to hire faculty with relevant expertise and interests.

Recommendation 7: Staffing needs should be assessed to meet program goals and will need to increase with any future growth of students enrolled in the degree programs.

IPHG currently has one staff member who is already spread thin with her responsibilities. For IPHG to grow, and indeed for IPHG to succeed in addressing some of the other recommendations in this Review, more staff support is needed. This is an issue we will discuss with the SPH Associate Dean for Education.

Recommendation 8: IPHG Leadership should consider the following opportunities:

- Increase interactions through periodic check-ins with UW chairs/deans and consider more deep connections with the Departments of Global Health and Health Systems and Population Health.

See response to Recommendation 6. We will issue further invitations to faculty in the Department of Global Health and Department of Health Systems and Population Health for additional faculty to join IPHG. In addition, we will review their current course offerings to alignment with IPHG.

- Leverage IPHG synergies with SPH strategic plan around equity and anti-racism and consider opportunities within the UW Population Health Initiative.

IPHG offers several courses that train students in skills relevant for advancing equity and anti-racism. In addition, our students are actively engaged in anti-racist and equity research within the genetics fields. We will seek guidance from the SPH EDI Committee on how our strengths in this area can advance the SPH strategic plan.

- Improve relationships across disciplines (schools within UW), leverage alumni, and increase industry connections through networking, seminars, summer institute, and other activities.

Advancing and reviving these relationships is a goal for us. Dr. Fohner led an effort to connect with alumni this Spring, and surveyed their willingness to support the program. Most alumni were highly interested in ongoing participation, and we intend to leverage this interest moving forward. For example, we will invite all alumni to the student retreat we are planning for the fall. The PHG 580 student seminar already includes a mix of UW faculty, industry, and alumni, and we will continue to invite diverse speakers in order to expand the IPHG network and encourage more engagement. We will revive the annual Seattle Symposium in Public Health Genomics, paused by the Covid-19 pandemic. We will increase participation in the Summer Institutes programs hosted by the Department of Biostatistics.

- Re-implement the external review board.

This external review board was paused due to the pandemic, but we will re-convene this board. We agree that this outside perspective and partnership will help the IPHG provide the best training opportunities for our students, by keeping our curriculum cutting edge and tailored to the needs of the field.

Recommendation 9: Include a stronger presence of health services implementation and translation in the core curriculum or suggested electives.

We have identified HSPOP faculty to invite to apply to join IPHG. In addition, we will conduct a review of HSPOP courses to identify additional core or elective courses, especially in the area of implementation and translation.

Recommendation 10: Periodic review of curriculum content and the process for changing content (i.e., adding new courses, broadening or narrowing the scope of courses, etc.).

Dr. Fohner will undertake a review of the IPHG core courses, including what courses are no longer taught or inaccessible to our students. She will identify additional courses that would be valuable core courses for IPHG students, and will propose a new set of core courses that reflect these changes. We will review these proposed curricular changes with all IPHG faculty. In addition, we will add regular curriculum review to IPHG faculty meeting agendas.

Recommendation 11: Work with faculty leading the MPH core to evaluate options that may allow for more MPH electives. If this is not possible, evaluate whether the MPH degree is still highly compatible with the IPHG vision given the new MPH core requirements.

We have advocated for preserving space for electives for IPHG MPH student and will continue to do so. The MPH core continues to be in flux, and we are optimistic that the IPHG MPH will remain compatible. However, we will continue to evaluate the degree as the MPH program evolves.

Recommendation 12: Work closely with departments and instructors both inside and outside SPH to help ensure access to elective courses.

See responses to Recommendations 4 and 6.

Recommendation 13: Consider expanding PHG course offerings in the undergraduate space to help financially support the IPHG graduate programs (through more SCH funds coming to SPH).

The undergraduate program is highly subscribed and successful, and this is an important recommendation for supporting our overall operations. We will work with the SPH Associate Dean for Education to establish an infrastructure and growth plan for our undergraduate program.

Recommendation 14: Create a more robust model for hiring instructors or a better mechanism for incentivizing PHG teaching to ensure needed student courses are taught.

We will work with the SPH Associate Dean for Education to develop consistent support for instructors, both inside and outside the SPH. IPHG courses are often housed outside of IPHG, and we will continue to seek creative solutions to ensure that required courses are available to our students.

Recommendation 15: Consider expanding the number and diversity of faculty advisors for incoming students, ensuring a faculty-to-student ratio that enables faculty to assist students in coursework and research placements.

We currently only have four faculty members who receive compensation for their efforts in IPHG. We will need Departmental and School support to be able to expand our faculty advisors beyond this core group. As described in Recommendation 6, we will pursue this support.

Recommendation 16: Consider ways to remove/streamline administrative procedures for getting faculty recognized as PhD/Graduate faculty so that mentorship relationships can be established more quickly.

IPHG has no role in securing PhD/Graduate Faculty status for a faculty member. That role is restricted to Academic Departments. However, we can offer support for faculty who are seeking Graduate faculty status in departments with existing IPHG faculty by connecting them to relevant faculty who can act as sponsors for their appointments.

Recommendation 17: Additional research, networking, and social events that promote community building and bring students and faculty across degree programs together. Consider a yearly retreat to promote fellowship.

Planning is already underway for our first annual IPHG student retreat to take place this fall prior to the start of the Academic Year. This event will provide opportunities for new students to meet current students and for students to network with IPHG faculty. In addition, we will invite a keynote speaker, and have several workshops for students on topics important for their success as students, researchers, and professionals. This year, the workshops include an Introduction to R Programming, Overview to Applying for NIH Grants, and Academic Writing.

Our goals for the IPHG Retreat are to build community among students, increase engagement with faculty and provide career development opportunities for students.

Recommendation 18: Increase access to career development resources, especially outside of academia.

We will continue to have speakers from outside Academia take part in the PHG 512 course and PHG 580 Seminar. In fact, a recent survey of IPHG alumni found that over 50 alumni with quite diverse careers were interested in connecting with current students through on-campus events and informational interviews. We

will pursue additional career development training opportunities, including through workshops in PHG 580 and the annual retreat, to prepare our students to be successful in securing jobs and entering the workplace.

Recommendation 19: Up-to-date documentation about program expectations, coursework, exams, career development resources including potential mentors/thesis advisors, and course electives in the form of a student handbook and/or on a program website.

We agree that updating our IPHG website is extremely important. It requires financial and time resources. We have indicated the website as a top priority item for this coming year, and have allocated a Research Assistantship position to help with updating the content. We expect a complete revision of the IPHG website in the next year.

Recommendation 20: Adequate staff to ensure consistent timely communication with faculty and students.

See response to Recommendation 13. We agree that IPHG needs more staff and administrative support. We will advocate for the resources to support this work.

Recommendation 21: Increase availability of EDI programming and consider diversity when hiring staff and faculty.

We value the EDI mission and values, and plan to advance related efforts where we can. For example, last year our students conducted an audit of all PHG-owned courses to ensure that they adhere to ‘best practices’ concerning EDI principles. We will continue to conduct these audits and to encourage our instructors to consider incorporating more EDI-related concepts in their curriculum. IPHG is limited in its ability to consider EDI through hiring faculty, as all faculty hires occur through Departments, and we simply invite and encourage participation of faculty recruited across the University. However, advancing EDI efforts is a priority across the University and we anticipate that our new faculty recruits will reflect increasing diversity. We currently have one staff member, but will keep EDI at the forefront of our programming and growth agenda.