

**REPORT OF THE WASC VISITING TEAM  
EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW**

**To  
Pardee RAND Graduate School**

**March 9, 2011**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
Reaffirmation of Accreditation**

**Team Roster  
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**The evaluation team in conducting its review was able to evaluate the institution under the WASC Commission Standards and the Core Commitments and therefore submits this Report to the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges for action and to the institution for consideration.**

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

	<b>Page numbers</b>
<b>SECTION I. OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT</b>	<b>3-6</b>
<b>SECTION II. EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS UNDER THE STANDARDS</b>	<b>6-16</b>
<b>SECTION III. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CAPACITY AND PREPARATORY REVIEW AND THE EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW</b>	<b>16-19</b>

**PARDEE RAND GRADUATE SCHOOL (PRGS)  
EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW  
TEAM REPORT**

**SECTION I - OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT**

The Frederick S. Pardee RAND Graduate School (PRGS) was established in 1970 as the educational arm of the RAND Corporation, a private, non-profit organization dedicated to objective policy research, analysis, and education. Since its inception, the primary educational offering of PRGS has been the Ph.D. in policy analysis (CFR 1.1). The distinguishing features of the program include an intensive, tools-based core curriculum, an on-the-job (OJT) program where students participate as paid staff in ongoing client-oriented RAND research projects and learn through multiple apprenticeship (research project) arrangements of at least 300 days of project work; and a formal dissertation or three paper option (CFR 1.1, 1.2). PRGS was first accredited by WASC in 1975 and earned reaccreditation in 1990 and 2000.

In 2010, PRGS celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In 1970, the campus officially opened and enrolled its first cohort of four students. In the 2010/2011 academic year, the total student enrollment increased to 102. Currently, 60% of the students have advanced degrees and the average age is 28 with women representing 43% of the class. The PRGS community comprises graduate students from 26 countries.

PRGS acknowledges the need to generate an applicant pool that reflects the ethnic diversity of the U.S. population. Although this issue is not unique to PRGS, the dean has taken proactive steps to broaden the program's outreach and attract a wider range of applicants through a program called the Next Generation Initiative (CFR 1.5). The Next Generation Initiative focuses on three priorities:

- Outreach to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI's), and regional colleges and universities with a diverse student body,
- Target faculty and administrators who attend The Next Generation of Policy Leaders National Conference which include registrants from the targeted institutions (mentioned above,) major public policy graduate programs, and foundations with a commitment to improving diversity in higher education; and,
- Develop summer workshops (at PRGS) for faculty from the targeted institutions that underscore professional development in prevailing analytic tools and methodologies and cultivate relationships between faculty and PRGS/RAND researchers.

PRGS inherits a rich heritage from RAND. Known as one of the premier policy research institutions in the United States with the reputation of producing objective high-quality policy oriented research and analysis, RAND has developed its own tenets of

rigor and comprehensive review that have strongly influenced the PRGS curriculum (CFR 1.3, 1.6).

In 2009, PRGS submitted The Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) report. Following a comprehensive and introspective review, the institution directly addressed the Standards for Accreditation and the Core Commitment to Institutional Capacity. The accreditation team spent three days on the PRGS campus interviewing (individually and/or in groups) a wide range of administrators, faculty, staff, and students. The team focused their attention on three themes outlined in the CPR report.

- 1) Learning through on-the-job training (OJT)
- 2) Classroom Instruction: Teaching Effectiveness
- 3) Dissertation Quality

PRGS submitted its Educational Effectiveness Review report December 23, 2010. The report aligned well with the institution's proposal and delivered a comprehensive response to issues raised in the team's Capacity and Preparatory Review report.

The vision of the institution, articulated by the Dean Marquis, is to become the premier public policy Ph.D. program in the nation. PRGS prioritized the following goals to accomplish the mentioned vision:

- 1) maintain the institution's core capabilities,
- 2) continue to improve the academic quality and breadth of the Ph.D. program with a particular emphasis on addressing gaps in the requirements and offerings,
- 3) provide adequate financial support to students allowing them to focus on their educational experience and training; and
- 4) support students as they prepare for careers beyond PRGS.

The accreditation team drafted three questions that were asked of each group of interviewees as a basis of on-going reflection and articulation. The foci of these questions highlighted the program quality, student success factors, student-learning outcomes, and distinguishing program features. The team used these questions to guide and encourage discussion around the vision of the institution.

## **SECTION II – EVALUATION OF EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS UNDER THE STANDARDS**

Academic standards for the PRGS doctoral program in policy analysis are rigorous and admission standards are competitive. As mentioned earlier in the report, a majority of the students have advanced degrees (60%) and a proven record of work experience (CFR 2.1, 2.2). The average GRE scores are notable; 750 for quantitative and 627 for verbal. Only a select number of students are admitted each year (21-25). Once enrolled in the program, support for student success takes on a high level of importance for the faculty and staff. Mentors are provided, refresher courses are offered in

mathematics, microeconomics, and decision analysis, and tutoring for core courses and qualifying exams are made readily available (CFR 2.10, 2.12).

Expectations for achievement are clearly articulated and explicitly outlined in a variety of student documentation (CFR 2.2, 2.3). The five key educational objectives of the program are aligned with the course expectations, on-the-job training, and the dissertation process. These objectives are outlined as follows:

1. Understand the purpose of policy analysis and its place within the political process,
2. Master the basic methodologies used in policy research: economic analysis, quantitative methods, and social and behavioral science methods,
3. Acquire an in-depth knowledge in one of these three methodological fields,
4. Obtain a deep understanding of a specialized substantive field of public policy;  
and
5. Develop project and professional skills relevant to the selected field of policy analysis.

PRGS makes an interesting observation with reference to their goal for measuring student learning outcomes.

*Because we do not conduct initial placement or other baseline assessment tests, we have no way of measuring which students have incomplete proficiency in which aspects of the curriculum. [...] all of our tracking of outcomes is designed to assess not the amount of learning that is taking place, but rather whether or not students are achieving a level of proficiency sufficient to pass their classes and the qualifying exams, to perform at the expected level in OJT, and eventually to be*

*able to design, research and write a dissertation of sufficiently high quality to be worthy of the Ph.D. from PRGS. (p. 11, EER report)*

This qualifying statement is not at odds with assessment but it does make the case for developing more explicit metrics for measuring student learning outcomes.

PRGS collects data on several student-learning metrics. These data points (listed below) are designed to measure a student's mastery of core learning objectives (CFR 2.6).

- Pass rates for qualifying exams:

Qualifying exams are administered in the student's first year of the program.

Exam topics include quantitative analysis, policy and social and behavioral science methods, and economics. Pass rates reported for 2007, 2008, and 2009 (for the written exam) range from 82% to 91%. Oral exams are offered to those who fail any part of the written exam; the pass rates then improve (95% to 100%).

- Graduation rates:

Graduation rates are reported as trend data between 1995-2005 and 2000-2010, respectively. Data are disaggregated by each of the demographic groups (CFR 2.10) and graduation rates are compared over the two time periods. Every demographic category has shown improvement, some more than others.

Reported differences include the following:



68% of women graduate in ten years compared to 81% percent of men; 50% of African Americans, 33% of Hispanics, and 72% of Caucasian graduates.

This data (CFR 2.10) should be examined more carefully to formulate strategies that narrow the gap in graduation rates.

- Time to completion:

The overall graduation rate is 40%, over five years, and 75.7% over 10 years.

These rates compare favorably to a range of 11.8% in the humanities after five years to 34.5% in engineering as reported by the Council of Graduate Schools.

The Council of Graduate School also reports that (in a major study of twenty-nine U.S. and Canadian universities) only 57% of Ph.D. candidates completed their programs within a 10-year period.

- Publication rates:

Student publication rates are recorded and used as a measurement of scholarly competence (e.g., of the 20 students who entered the program in 2003, the average number of publications is 6.3, with a high of 27 and a low of 0.)

- Professional conference presentations:

Funding is made available for students who present their research at professional conferences. In the 2008/2009 and the 2009/2010 academic-year, 14 students made conference presentations.

- Job placement and career advancement:

Between 2008-2010, all but one student secured employment (in fields directly related to policy analysis) prior to graduation. As a point of comparison, MIT reported that only 70% of their 2008 Ph.D. graduates received job offers prior to graduation. In an effort to track career advancement and professional development among PRGS alumni, the institution is building a database to collect this information.

As the team reported in the Capacity and Preparatory Review report, PRGS benefits from its affiliation with RAND and its relationship with the researchers who serve as faculty for this world-renowned institution. PRGS faculty members are RAND researchers who have impressive research records (CFR 2.8) and volunteer or self-select to work with graduate students (CFR 3.2).

PRGS shares services and facilities with RAND. IT support, computing resources, and teleconferencing capacity are first rate (CFR 3.7). PRGS also has the support of the RAND finance and accounting departments, the office of external affairs and publications, and library resources (CFR 3.6). There is a full-time dean who serves as the institution's lead academic and administrative officer/CEO and she reports to a Board of Governors (CFR 3.9).

Three revenue sources support the operating expenses of PRGS: tuition and fees (60-65%), interest from the endowment fund (20-22%), and philanthropic gifts (CFR 3.5). Fiscal year 2010 ended with a positive cash balance and direct investments from RAND have allowed the institution to support new programs and initiatives, such as a career placement service office, an academic tracking/career advancement database, and an experiential learning opportunity (offered through the Washington, D.C. office).

PRGS chose teaching effectiveness as one of their report themes. The goal was to develop a more explicit and structured process for providing feedback to teaching faculty on the effectiveness of their instruction (CFR 3.3, 3.4), especially as it relates to student learning outcomes and curriculum improvement (CFR 2.4, 2.5, 2.6).

PRGS created a “checklist” for teaching effectiveness. This document is used as a guide for faculty in course development and teaching preparedness. Data collected over two years on three core courses reveal that students rate organization/planning, communication, faculty/student interaction, and assignments/grading from a low of 3.4 to a high of 4.5 for effectiveness (on a five point Likert scale). Students also assessed the course outcomes (how much they learned and how much their interest increased in the topic) on a scale of 1 (much less than other courses) to 5 (much more than other courses). The scores for this metric ranged from 3.4 to 4.2; although the result is positive, the item does not lend itself to easy interpretation.

Explicit student learning outcomes were required on course syllabi as of the winter quarter 2011 (CFR 2.3). Hence, data on student learning outcomes explicitly linked to those included on the syllabi, at the course level, is limited and incomplete. Without data specific to student learning outcomes, PRGS has examined the relationship between first year grades and performance on the qualifying exams (for classes starting in 2008 and 2009). Below average grades in quantitative and economics courses were correlated with failure rates on those exams. This methodology is described in the EER report as a “positive sign” but the team urges the faculty to go beyond the gross indicator of a “grade,” and the brief comments that faculty members typically make on each student when they submit their grades, in measuring student-learning outcomes. Although the comments that accompany the grades provide some opportunity to identify areas where students are struggling, if there were measures of student learning specific to the expected outcomes of the course, there would be much better data available to understand the outcomes on the qualifying exam and to directly target the additional academic support needed for the course (CFR 2.6).

These revised teaching evaluations were to be distributed to students for the first time in the 2011 winter quarter, which begins in January and ends in mid-March; thus, data was not available at the time of the EER visit. Classroom observations were mentioned as “in the planning stages” at the time of the CPR visit; however, these activities had not yet occurred and there did not appear to be an immediate plan for implementation at the time of the EER visit (CFR 3.3).

PRGS has not conducted a formal program review with external evaluators for more than decade. The team strongly encourages the administration and faculty to establish and schedule such a review.

Although PRGS is in the initial stage of collecting student outcome data, the administration and faculty do an admirable job of tracking the progress of their students on an individual basis. Student achievement is a top priority for the faculty and staff, and the five core expectations of the program are clearly and widely noted to the students, staff and administrators. PRGS measures individual student achievement throughout the program: course performance on the core courses, results of the qualifying examinations, individual first year reviews, OJT performance, and dissertation quality. The administration and faculty members were open to suggestions for improvement, and the team feels confident that they will continue to work through their Faculty Committee on Curriculum and Appointments (FCCA) to ensure that student learning outcomes are measured and used to enhance student achievement and program improvement (CFR 3.8, 3.11).

PRGS engages in a strategic and business planning process with RAND in an effort to align the PRGS and RAND corporate mission, priorities, and objectives. These exercises articulate and define the future direction for PRGS (CFR 4.1). PRGS also convenes strategic planning workshops offsite (for faculty, staff and administration) in an effort to enhance the program, introduce new objectives and priorities, and develop new curricula offerings (CFR 4.1. 4.2).

As mentioned throughout this report, PRGS' commitment to student learning and program and curriculum improvement is admirable and noteworthy. The faculty and staff are dedicated to improving its structures, processes, curriculum, and pedagogy for the benefit of the student (CFR 4.4, 4.6, 4.7).

PRGS established an Office of Career Services in direct response to the needs of the students. Students identified this as a need during the initial CPR visit. PRGS staff and an outside consultant (who has several decades of experience as a partner in a prominent international executive search firm) offer assistance and advice to students on resume development, interviewing skills, strategies for the job search and salary negotiations (CFR 4.8).

PRGS considers OJT to be a critical and distinguishing feature of their doctoral program. Since the CPR visit, the faculty has clearly articulated the learning objectives as core skills in three arenas: Project initiation & preparation, Project activities & management, and Professional skills. They have created a survey which establishes a baseline for each student, and then tracks student learning over their time in the program. The survey has been administered twice and be administered annually each fall.

In an effort to track and measure student learning outcomes, PRGS has refined its dissertation requirements and quality standards. They have identified the following five objectives as the essential components of their doctoral program:

1. Understand the purpose of policy analysis and its place within the political process,
2. Master the basic methodologies used in policy research: economic analysis, quantitative methods, and social and behavioral science methods,
3. Acquire an in-depth knowledge in one of these three methodological fields,
4. Obtain a deep understanding of a specialized substantive field of public policy; and
5. Develop project and professional skills relevant to the selected field of policy analysis.

Students are expected to demonstrate a mastery of these requirements/objectives as part of the dissertation process.

The dissertation process has evolved over the last decade in an effort to enhance student learning and improve the quality of the dissertation itself. These changes are also reflected in course content. Newly institutionalized dissertation workshops are individualized and focus on requirements in the student's own area of concentration rather than simply on generic requirements.

PRGS has also strengthened the quality standards for dissertations. RAND has a very explicit set of standards used for research and analysis. PRGS has adopted these standards; as applicable to the student dissertation process. A group of faculty and students developed a set of tools for use by the dissertation committee in an effort to

systematically assess dissertation quality. The dissertation committee now completes an evaluation sheet indicating progress at the dissertation proposal stage on each of seven quality standards. And, the second evaluation occurs near the end of the dissertation process and (although this is still undergoing review by faculty) involves assessment by the committee members relative to the seven quality standards. Once collected, this data will be analyzed to enhance and improve the dissertation process and quality of the dissertation (CFR 4.4, 4.6, 3.8, 2.2, 2.8, 2.9).

The accreditation team commends PRGS for their dedication in assessing student achievement throughout the dissertation process. However, the team is concerned that an external review of the program has not been addressed for over a decade. Program reviews are commonplace at most universities and are typically conducted by a team of academics from peer institutions. PRGS reports that the Office of Research Quality Assurance at RAND has been asked to conduct a program review this year. The faculty and staff are working on the objectives for the review. Their goal is to have this scheduled by the end of the year. The team's main concern is that this review may not be inclusive enough and will not compare the PRGS overall academic program with current practices at other notable policy programs. We strongly urge PRGS to include faculty from peer institutions on the review team and to perform a comprehensive academic program review. We believe this will move PRGS closer to their goal of being the preeminent national policy doctoral program (CFR 4.4, 4.3, 4.1, 2.7).



### **SECTION III – FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CAPACITY AND PREPARATORY REVIEW AND THE EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW**

Our team commends the PRGS leadership and faculty for their commitment to excellence, student learning, and program improvement. The faculty and staff were thoughtful, engaged, and responsive to the recommendations outlined in the CPR report.

Student achievement is a priority for PRGS. The five core expectations of the program are clearly articulated and widely published in a variety of student collateral material. In their assessment of student achievement, faculty members measure student performance on core courses, analyze results of the qualifying examinations and individual first year reviews, assess OJT performance, and review dissertation quality. A newly designed checklist makes clear the criteria by which the dissertation will be evaluated. The team commends the deans and the faculty for their commitment to the students.

The OJT experience is a key component of the program and provides students with valued research/project expertise. Since the CPR visit, faculty members have defined the expected student learning outcomes for OJT and shared them broadly with students and participating researchers/faculty. A measurement process has been established and institutionalized. The team commends PRGS on their progress in assessing the impact of OJT as a key element of their culture of inquiry.

The dean is in the early stages of launching a proactive strategy to address diversity through The Next Generation Initiative, in collaboration with a number of

HBCU's, HSI's, and other Gulf State and Southwestern institutions to create a pipeline for students from underrepresented groups. This initiative is a long-term strategy that will cultivate relationships with faculty from these institutions, build capacity in policy analysis, and ultimately recruit students. The leadership at PRGS is to be commended for their proactive and sustainable solution to a long-standing issue.

RAND and PRGS are experiencing the impact of the economic downturn but are managing within the fiscal constraints with effective and efficient leadership. PRGS is in the silent phase of a comprehensive campaign that is intended to build the institution's endowment. These funds will support initiatives, such as experiential learning opportunities for students (outside of RAND/PRGS), and increase scholarship and dissertation support.

The alumni with whom the team met are proud of their degrees from PRGS and grateful for their experience. Increasing alumni engagement should prove beneficial for the campaign as well as future fundraising efforts.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Program review has taken on more importance in the WASC standards as a mechanism for not only evaluating the quality of the program, but also for demonstrating the role of student learning and assessment in coursework and at the program level. PRGS has not conducted a formal program evaluation for over a decade. The team strongly recommends that such a review be planned (CFR 2.7, 4.4).

PRGS faculty identified student-learning outcomes for every course and clearly outlined these expectations to their students on course syllabi. The team encourages the faculty to take the “next step” and make the assessment of student learning outcomes at the course level a part of their overall assessment process. Examining student learning outcomes within and across course sequences would also allow faculty to identify redundancies and gaps in the curriculum (CFR 2.4, 2.7).

PRGS graduation rates and time to complete (the program) are notable. However, the team recommends that faculty conduct further analysis on the disaggregated data in order to identify and address disparities by gender and race/ethnicity (CFR 2.7).

Dean Susan L. Marquis, Associate Dean Rachel M. Swanger, Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs Jeffrey Wasserman, the faculty, the staff, and the students welcomed the accreditation team and were candid and forthcoming in their responses to our questions/inquiries. Kristina Wallace graciously accommodated all of our requests for materials and documents and swiftly and seamlessly made revisions to our schedule. The team extends their gratitude to Pardee RAND Graduate School for their hospitality. The visit was a thought-provoking and intellectually stimulating experience.