

September 13, 2007

Sherry F. Queener, PhD  
Director of the Graduate Office, IUPUI  
Associate Dean, IUGS

Dear Dr. Queener:

I have reviewed the proposal for a new PhD Program in Biostatistics at IUPUI. The proposal presents a strong rationale for establishing such a program at IUPUI. The proposed partnership between the Department of Mathematical Sciences in the School of Science and the Division of Biostatistics in the School of Medicine is just the type of academic partnership that is needed to support the life sciences initiative at IUPUI. I don't know how unique this type of partnership is among leading universities, but it seems like a logical development to support the progression of life sciences research in Indiana.

Some of the strong points of the proposed PhD Program in Biostatistics are:

- Clear admissions criteria
- An interdisciplinary curriculum
- Strong foundation in both theory and methods
- An option for students who do not pass the qualifying exam to pursue a Master's degree
- An applied aspect to the curriculum (BIOS 515)
- Strong faculty resources
- An existing academic infrastructure
- A documented and growing demand for biostatisticians
- Broad-based support across campus as evidenced by several strong letters of support
- A plan for an advisory board
- A careful planning process leading to the proposal (initial planning started in 2004)
- A plan for student financial support
- A modest and realistic estimate of student enrollment

Some areas that I think might need further consideration:

- Should the external minor be raised from a minimum of 9 credits up to a minimum of 12 to be in line with Graduate School policies on external minors?
- Should the curriculum contain courses or opportunities for coverage of topics such as epistemology, research ethics, writing scientific reports and proposals, and preparation for teaching? The proposed 27-33 credit hours for the dissertation seem like a lot. Could some of these credits be used for courses in these other areas? Perhaps an advanced seminar could be added that covered content such as research ethics, scientific writing, and preparation for academia.
- Could students earn credits for teaching assistantships? Will there be any formal mentoring in teaching? Will students with academic aspirations be encouraged to participate in PFF?
- Could the Biostatistics Practicum (BIOS 515) be taken for more than 3 credits?
- Will there be an opportunity for students in other departments to pursue an external minor in Biostatistics? If so, which courses would be part of such a minor?

- In consideration of IUPUI's emphasis on civic engagement, will there be opportunities for students to work on projects for health-related community organizations (e.g. Marion County Health Dept) either through course assignments or practicum work?

While I would like to see these areas considered, in general, I am very supportive of the proposed program and would like to see a new PhD Program in Biostatistics launched at IUPUI.