DATE: April 9, 2008

TO: PRC Committee

FROM: John Wesolek, Dean

SUBJECT: Dean’s, Department Chair’s, and Program Director’s Response to PRC Report on M.S. in Family Studies and Human Development

Dean’s response to PRC recommendations for M.S. in Family Studies & Human Development degree program

1. Pursue better methods for system recognition of continuing students and keeping them connected to program and to UW-Stout:

Response: This is a very insightful and necessary recommendation as a continuing and persistent complaint from students is their frustration with the rather inflexible enrollment policy that essentially removes them from the university after each session. A committee is being formed to investigate the feasibility of a continuous enrollment policy for the graduate school, and the dean supports Dr. Hawley’s participation on that committee. It is hoped this policy will enable students to keep their email address and library access all year, regardless of whether they are carrying a full credit load or not.

2. Continue level of support and encouragement for the Family Studies and Human Development Program. Be prepared to increase resources if needed to continue program.

Response: The M.S. in Family Studies and Human Development program has demonstrated a new format for delivery which has attracted many professionals currently employed. I see this strategy (offering courses in a short-term, compact timeframe with year-around advisement) as a forerunner to several other master’s degree programs we currently offer. The college will continue to support this unique approach and anticipate providing increased resources as this program expands.

3. Address the issue of poor faculty survey response rate for future program review.

Response: The Dean will join the program director/chair in encouraging stronger faculty participation on surveys intended to provide comprehensive program reviews.

Program Director/Chair Response to PRC Recommendations

1. Include a better representation of individuals who work with social services and family life education on the Family Studies and Human Development Program Advisory Board.

Response: The Program director will seek to add 3-4 additional members to the committee who represent groups that are in a position to hire FSHD grads and/or to help with recruiting existing professionals who are in the market for graduate education in the human development and family
disciplines. These will include representatives from educational settings (e.g., K-12, parent education, etc.) and social service agencies.

2. Consider alternate delivery in a less compressed format for required courses. Options include weekend, on-line, semester courses. This may require additional resources.

Response: It is acknowledged there are pieces of the current delivery format that are problematic for some students. The compressed session each summer during which two courses are taken by students in each cohort is intense. Several alternatives are offered and, while each has value, they also present significant problems.

- Semester courses: No doubt courses offered in a traditional semester format would place less time pressure on students and, for some, could enhance their learning. However, this would make courses inaccessible to a majority of our current students who are working full-time jobs outside of geographic proximity to Menomonie. This option is best suited for traditional, full-time graduate students – who are not the primary population we are seeking to attract.

- Weekend courses: These courses are also offered in an intensive format; more intensive, in some ways, than the current summer session format. Core courses could be offered one at a time with a weekend option instead of two courses simultaneously as we currently practice, but students would be in class for more hours over a 2-3 day period than they are in our current format.

- On-line courses: We encourage online coursework for elective courses, recognizing the flexibility that this delivery method allows. However, in our opinion one of the greatest strengths of the FSHD program is its hybrid nature. On campus classes during summer sessions allow face-to-face classroom interaction and aid in cohort development. Moreover, we believe this face-to-face interaction is extremely helpful in fields like human development and family studies where so much depends on personal relationships. Online electives increase flexibility for students who are coming from a distance. There are a number of online programs for students who wish to pursue only online education. We are unaware of other programs in our field which combine face-to-face interaction and distance education. This gives us a unique niche in our market.

Beyond these issues there are two other concerns. One is getting enough students. We target working professionals in our recruitment, many of whom are attracted to the program because of its current format. We would likely lose many of these students if we went to one of the alternatives offered above. Thus, to keep them we would need to offer multiple sections of core courses – adding semester, weekend, or online offerings to our current summer offerings. This would mean significantly increasing the number of students, enough to fill multiple sections of core courses. While the demand for this degree might grow to that point over time, it is not there currently.

The second issue has to do with human capital. We simply do not have enough instructors to offer the courses at current FTE levels. The recommendation indicates this may require additional resources; our response is that implementing this recommendation would definitely require significant additional human resources.

3. Improve introduction materials / processes for new students (especially returning to school after a time span) to library, technology, research methods, etc.
Response: We will continue to do what we have been doing to help integrate students to campus: sending materials related to logistics (housing, parking, campus maps, etc.) in advance of their arrival on campus and having a dinner meeting the first evening to introduce students to other students and to talk about graduate school policies. In addition, we will review/revise materials we are currently sending out and explore with current and incoming students the best way to provide orientations on library use and campus technology. This may be in the form of an orientation session prior to the start of the session, special sessions the first week, and/or some other option.

4. **Pursue better methods for system recognition of continuing students and keeping them connected to your program and to UW-Stout.**

Response: We will continue to pursue the addition of a continuous enrollment policy with the graduate school. Currently, a committee is being formed to investigate the feasibility of adding this as a policy and Dr. Hawley has volunteered to serve on the committee. A workable continuous enrollment policy should address the concerns raised in this report.

5. **Develop a comprehensive plan for recruiting quality students.**

Response: By January, 2009 we will develop a comprehensive, 3-5 year recruiting and marketing plan which will include identifying venues for reaching target audiences, best practices for disseminating information about the program to these audiences, development of marketing materials, and a timeline for implementing the recruitment plan.