**Prestage Department of Poultry Science Plans for Diversity in Doctoral Programs**

**Background**

The Prestage Department of Poultry Science at NC State University is a fairly smaller department compared to some other department within the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. However, the department serves to support the much larger (statewide and nationwide) poultry industry with research, education, and extension. At any given year, 10-15 graduate

students with good standing are working towards their doctoral program. Even though, students in our department are from diverse cultural background, currently we only have 1 African-American graduate student in the doctoral program. A climate survey conducted last year by the AGEP-NC research program in the department had identified few bottlenecks that impeded the graduate students towards the successful completion of their degree. Among others, under-preparation in professional skills such as writing and public speaking was one such challenge. Of the 7 faculties that participated in the survey, 2 of them felt diversity was high priority while the same number responded that diversity was not a priority at all. Also, more than 40% responded moderately regarding their confidence in mentoring graduate students. Based on these results and discussions with in the department, we have identified 3 main obstacles for doctoral students (URM) in the program as follows:

1. Lack of professional skills required for scientific writing, public speaking, and effective mentor-mentee collaboration.
2. Difficulty in coping with BCH 451 and STT 511 in the first semester of graduate school and preliminary examinations.
3. Faculty confidence in recruiting and mentoring URM students

**Actions to remedy the obstacles and promote success of underrepresented minority doctoral students in completing the PhD**

1. To help graduate students develop their professional skills, annual workshop targeted at public-speaking and networking or scientific writing will be incorporated into the Graduate Seminar Class which is offered in Spring of every year and is mandatory for the graduate students in the department. Workshop speakers or facilitators will comprise of internal and/or external expert in the area mentioned above. Before each term, a survey among graduate students in the department will be conducted about their preference of graduate students on the type of workshop offered in that particular year.
2. Based on internal discussions, we’ve identified that the students are either under prepared or reluctant to take BCH 451 and STT 511 in the first semester of their graduate school often resulting in failure or bad performance. To mitigate this scenario, the department will advise the faculties/mentors to be flexible and allow graduate students to undertake those courses after at least the first semester. In addition, a peer-mentoring group as well as other resources such as tutoring and targeted workshops could be arranged to make students successful in the two courses.
3. The department will work to prepare Doctoral Program Graduate Handbook which will include the criteria on the preliminary examinations. These criteria will instruct the graduate committee members to test the students on tangible questions focused in the student’s proposed area of research. The department will also allow the student one extra grace examination if he or she fails in the first round of examinations.
4. At least once annually, a workshop or seminar related to URM mentoring, diversity and inclusivity, and culturally responsive mentoring will be organized for faculties in the department.

**Plans for evaluation and sustainability of the proposed changes**

The policy changes mentioned above will be incorporated as written guidelines for the graduate program as well as departmental policy within the Prestage Department of Poultry Science. The Department Head and the Graduate Coordinator will be responsible for the enforcement of the policies. At the end of each academic year, Departmental Graduate Coordinator will track the performance of the graduate students using survey and exit interviews and suggest revisions to update the graduate handbook accordingly. Furthermore, the Department Head will put together plans to expose the faculties within the department to trainings and seminars focused on culturally responsive mentoring.