

Program Performance Review: Culmination Meeting Memo

Biological Science, BS, MS

The 2016-2017 Program Performance Review (PPR) process for Biological Science – BS and MS programs concluded with a culmination meeting on May 4, 2018.

The following people attended the meeting: Kari Knutson Miller (Provost), Pamella Oliver (AVPAP), Marie Johnson (Dean, NSM), Mark Filowitz (Associate Dean, NSM), Sean Walker (Department Chair), and Su Swarat (Asst. VP for Institutional Effectiveness).

The Provost commended the department for its success in student engagement, High Impact Practices (HIPs), and innovative approaches to student learning outcome assessment. The AVPAP also commended the department for a culture of collegiality, a clearly articulated vision and its alignment with the university mission, faculty engagement in active learning and student research, devoted and high-performing staff, and rigorous graduate education.

Major recommendations and concerns raised through the PPR process were discussed as follows:

1. Student success in BIOL 151:

- The AVPAP inquired about BIOL 151, a bottleneck course with high DFW rates.
- The Chair explained that recent changes in course sequencing made BIOL 151 the first course that students take. This transition requires faculty to make changes to its content and pedagogy to meet incoming students' needs. The student body taking BIOL 151 is quite mixed, which includes many students who are interested in medical school but lack science background. The faculty are making changes every semester to improve the course.
- The Chair emphasized that the faculty need to be engaged in making all the changes happen. Dr. Merri Lynn Casem is the lead on this course, and she anticipates more changes to take place soon.
- The Associate Dean indicated that the large class size presents challenges to student success. He also pointed out that the reluctance to reduce content coverage on the faculty's part is another issue commonly faced in introductory science courses. The Chair added that the issue of how to address jargon in introductory courses is yet one more problem to address.

2. Facilities:

- The Chair stated that the MH lab space is very outdated – there is an immediate need to refresh the lab benches. The condition of the facilities affects student perception of GE and the university in general. It also negatively affects faculty and student retention.
- The Associate Dean indicated that the department has been able to purchase equipment through grants, but the maintenance cost needs to be covered by the university.
- The Provost asked about lab safety. The Associate Dean stated that the college is in good shape, and the college's safety committee meets regularly to ensure lab safety.

Program Performance Review: Culmination Meeting Memo
Biological Science, BS, MS

3. Grants and philanthropy:

- The external reviewers encouraged the department to increase additional funds through grant IDC and philanthropy, as well as through increasing engagement with alumni and donors.
- The Chair commented that the department has been working to gain philanthropic support for students, but not yet for facilities.
- The Dean inquired about an alumni database for biology alumni. The AVPAP and the Provost stated that a university-wide alumni database is much needed, and the recently implemented Salesforce system may help with alumni tracking, outreach and marketing.

4. Graduate student support:

- The Chair discussed the importance of finding ways to offset the tuition for Graduate TAs, e.g. to offer tuition waivers. Currently, the pay received by graduate TAs goes right back to cover tuition. The lack of financial support results in the loss of high quality graduate students to other institutions. With tuition waivers, the quality of students would increase, and since the graduate students teach the labs, the undergraduates' lab experience would improve as well.
- The Provost suggested the inclusion of this issue in budget allocation discussions. She encouraged the department to build a "business case", i.e. to establish capacity and resource needs for the graduate program.

5. Advising:

- The external reviewers recommended the department to continue to pursue the appointment of a staff adviser and to streamline advising with more group advising and tailored advising. The Dean recommended the department to continue to share the task amongst its faculty.
- The Provost brought up the possibility of moving Fall 2019 registration to Spring 2019. The Chair encouraged the Provost to notify the Chairs as soon as possible so that appropriate planning can take place.

The Provost concluded the meeting by commending and thanking the department for its contribution to the students and the university.