

29 April 2025

TO: Su Swarat
Senior AVP for Institutional Effectiveness and Planning, Accreditation Liaison Officer

FROM: Marie Johnson *mcj*
Dan Black Dean, College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics

SUBJECT: Dean's Evaluation: Department of Biological Science Program Performance Review

The Department of Biological Science conducted a Program Performance Review (PPR) in AY 2024-2025; the department's self-study, the external PPR committee report, and the Chair's response to the external review are attached to this document.

The PPR included a comprehensive review of the department's current standing with respect to programs, faculty, student support, and resources as well as an outline of long-term plans. The external review committee was comprised of three highly qualified individuals representing diverse viewpoints relevant to the Department's mission and goals. The review committee included one member from another department in the College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics (Martin Bonsangue, Emeriti Professor and former Chair, Mathematics, CSU Fullerton), one biology faculty member from a sister CSU (Bianca Mothe, Professor, Biological Science, CSU San Marcos), and one biology faculty member from a university outside the CSU (Muriel Poston, Professor Emerita, Environmental Analysis, Pitzer College).

Program Strengths

1. **Vision and goals.** The department has a clearly articulated vision of itself and its role in the college, university, and larger society. The department goals are appropriate and aligned with the University Strategic Plan, *Fullerton Forward*.
2. **Curricular reform.** Department members have engaged in extensive and thoughtful curricular reform with a focus on facilitating student progress towards degree, responding to student interests, and staying abreast of advances in the field. The review committee commended this substantial effort at the course, concentration, and program level. The department's commitment to infusing Course-based Undergraduate Research Experiences into the lower division curriculum is especially noteworthy.
3. **Faculty engagement.** The review team celebrated biology faculty for their robust commitment to both teaching and research. They noted that biology combines strong student-centered teaching with original scholarship and tireless efforts to secure extramural funding. The department is commended for its student-faculty research culture and high research productivity of its faculty members.

4. **Excellent staff.** The increase in FTES that has occurred since the last PPR has caused a concomitant increase in workload for staff members, both those in the department front office and those who facilitate lab and research activities. Much of this increased work is done outside of traditional 9-5 hours. Staff members are commended for their exceptional commitment and regularly going above and beyond in performing their duties.

Recommendations

Several areas of opportunity for strengthening the Department of Biology and positioning the department for success in the years ahead were identified. These recommendations include:

1. **Long term needs assessment.** The department is encouraged to consider anticipated personnel needs in the next 5-7 years for both tenure track faculty and staff members. Drafting a 5-year hiring plan that positions the department to manage faculty and staff retirements is a wise next step.
2. **Advising processes.** Biology is encouraged to continue to develop their advising processes. The department has worked very hard to advise all of their majors effectively and efficiently but still faces challenges based on sheer number of majors, advising holds that are not satisfied for a variety of reasons, and course availability issues once students try to register for classes.
3. **Curricular assessment.** The review team encouraged the department to assess its newly implemented curricular revisions, to rewrite student learning outcomes as appropriate, and to determine the place of online learning within the department's offerings. This recommendation dovetails with recommendation 2 above, which is ensuring the department can offer the seats needed by students to move through the curriculum efficiently.
4. **Alumni engagement.** The department should consider how it engages with its alumni. Alumni can be powerful supporters; they can provide internships for current students, jobs for graduates, and philanthropic support both in dollars and in-kind donations. Individual faculty members often track their own students post-graduation but there may be opportunity for synergy at the department level.
5. **Staff concerns.** The review committee highlighted the increased demand on staff members as course enrollments have grown in time. Ways to recognize staff contributions should be explored at the department, college, and university level.
6. **Graduate program.** Biology wishes to expand its graduate program to 75 students. When considering this expansion, Biology should take into account the number of tenure and tenure track faculty, lab and office space, and graduate student roles in mentoring undergraduate research. As noted by the external review committee, a university sanctioned expansion of the TA tuition waiver program would help fuel this growth.
7. **Resources and facilities.** Biology is an experimental lab-based science. A flat department OEE hinders the future success of the department as the cost of consumables and equipment maintenance contracts has increased. Of immediate concern is funding to restore the marine aquaria room (DBH 246) which was damaged in a fire in May 2024 and has been offline ever since.

The Chair provided a written response to the review committee and thanked them for their observations. He agreed with and accepted the committee's recommendations.

Summary. The Department of Biological Science is a collegial, committed group of faculty and staff who prioritize student success and work together to meet their teaching and research mission. The department has invested tremendous energy in curricular reform and serving their growing number of majors. Their thoughtful self-study combined with the recommendations of the external review committee will keep Biology moving forward as a highly successful, modern program. This success will be further facilitated by long term personnel planning and increased department resources as possible.