

Program Coordinator's Response to Program Performance Review Site Visit
Recommendations
Environmental Studies Program
April 6, 2017

In this response I would like to focus on the recommendations made by the review committee after their site visit.

I agree that more release time for the program coordinator and graduate advisor would be helpful. A great deal of the work of the program relies upon the personal and professional initiative of the coordinator and advisor. A few areas touched upon in the recommendations section of the PPR review stand out.

1. As the report noted, the day-to-day maintenance of the program requires more than enough work to justify the current 6 WTU/year of release time each for the coordinator and advisor. For example, in the spring semester the graduate advisor has a heavier load of completion memos to process and advising for students moving into the second year of the program and preparing their individual study plans. The program coordinator processes applications—a cumbersome paper-based process at the moment—and admits new students for the fall cohort. Both coordinator and advisor correspond with and meet with prospective students during the late fall, intersession, and spring semesters.

2. In order to increase the institutional memory of the program, and lessen the effects of changes in program leadership, a variety of new systems should be created or old ones updated. A few examples may help clarify the types and scope of this work.

- Create and maintain a shared electronic database of student study plans
- Create and maintain a shared electronic database of independent study/project/thesis/internships in progress*
- Create an electronic admissions system. Persuade a committee of faculty to review applications
- Create a new student handbook/advising materials*
- Update website*
- Create and maintain an alumni list*
- Create and maintain a system for inviting speakers/career nights
- Create and maintain a list of potential internship sites—work out difficulties with CICE and internship site host communication
- Create a multi year plan of course offerings—this should meet the needs of students in the two advising tracks while also offering faculty a stable schedule of opportunities for teaching in the program
- Create and maintain a list of potential advisors for projects and theses*
- Update existing but outdated list of completed projects and theses
- Create programs in coordination with the Desert Studies Center at Zzyzx.

** items we are already working on...*

3. The recommendation that staff take on additional responsibility for completing advising-related tasks is intriguing. We will certainly work to figure out what the staff can do to increase the efficiency of the academic advisor and program coordinator. Some of this is difficult because of the nature of the program, the highly individual advising and the labyrinthine nature of Graduate Studies at CSUF are both issues here.

Recommendations #4-6 are all excellent, but without additional release time to work on them they are unlikely to get done in the next couple of years.

There are, however, places where the college could provide support that would help address some of these points. Specifically, it would be helpful to know more about what levels of support can be given to faculty who work with ENST students on projects and theses, and how we might better support student research using program funds. The program currently has trouble spending its budget not because there is no need, but rather because I don't know what I can and cannot spend and how. This is another place where targeted release time for projects would be helpful. It would be great to have a kind of faculty handbook, as the reviewers suggested, that could outline types of support available, as well as procedures for teaching and planned course offerings.

On this note, getting a better sense of how the program's budget can be spent would be helpful. For example, is money to fund occasional project-related release time already present in our existing budget?

Building a stronger alumni network—perhaps with an eye towards developing a board of alumni who can help with various aspects of the program—is certainly one of our goals and a recommendation of the reviewers. This, too, takes time. We may be able to find ways to incrementally increase alumni contact without funding, but I suspect that it will take longer as a result.

7. We have been working on a plan for more faculty/student/program connections. Like everything else, this takes time to plan and implement. We do already host gatherings when students present their research once or twice a year. We have been working to make this a more enticing event. Last year we provided a light buffet and this year we have put together an attractive invitation that will be sent to alumni as well as faculty and students in the program. We certainly welcome the reviewers' ideas for making this community more robust.

The overall tone and recommendations for the program are fairly clear in the PPR self study and the review—this is a vibrant program with many strengths. However, as it is currently configured and supported, burn out on the part of program coordinators and advisors is a real concern. That said, the program has continued not only to exist, but to thrive in spite of these challenges over nearly four decades.

A bit of strategic investment in the near future can help to make the next decade easier and more successful for the program.