

Site Team Report

Program Performance Review | Department of Kinesiology
October 2016

We conducted a visit to the Department of Kinesiology on October 17, 2016, as part of California State University's Program Performance Review of academic units. The site visit team comprised of two external experts, Dr. Sandra Shultz, chair of the Department of Kinesiology at the University of North Carolina Greensboro, and Dr. Scott Sailor, chair of the Department of Kinesiology at California State University, Fresno, and one internal reviewer, Dr. Jason Shepard, chair of the Department of Communications at CSUF.

This review is based on a Department self study and our site visit, which included numerous (and brief) meetings with faculty, students and staff. We also met with Laurie Rhoades, dean of the College of Health and Human Development, and we spent considerable time with Department Chair Kavin Tsang. Our purpose is to outline the strengths and weaknesses of what we saw and provide feedback for the Department's faculty for potential program changes.

CSUF's Department of Kinesiology is a large academic unit with a strong reputation. It had 1,522 undergraduate majors in Fall 2015 with 27 tenured and tenure-track faculty and 76 full- and part-time lecturers. Kinesiology is a popular and growing field of study nationwide, a result, as the self study reports, of several factors, including national health priorities and initiatives as identified by government officials/offices, continued support of allied health professions as a viable area of employment, and the unyielding evidence attesting to the impact of physical activity and fitness in the prevention and development of chronic diseases such as diabetes and obesity. As such, Kinesiology is an important area for a state university committed to workforce preparation of its graduates.

We were impressed by many things that we saw and learned with regard to CSUF's Department of Kinesiology. It is clear the Department has expert and dedicated faculty; excellent facilities, programs and student support that produce high retention and graduation rates; and a strong reputation across campus. The Department has an engaged, collegial and hardworking chair who has the support of a new dean. We found a faculty that appears to work well together and possesses a deep sense of personal commitment to their programs and students. We also identified some questions, concerns and areas for further focus as the Department continues to evolve. We will discuss our impressions below by general topic areas.

Mission and Goals

The Department's mission and goals were last reviewed and updated in 2010. The Department's Mission Statement is: *"The Department of Kinesiology advances the understanding and practice of human movement across the lifespan within the context of a diverse and changing society."*

The Department adopted a Vision Statement in 2014 that reads:

“We aspire to be a premier kinesiology department recognized nationally and internationally for our creation, dissemination, and application of high quality knowledge related to human physical activity across the sub disciplines of kinesiology.

This entails:

- *The best well-rounded scientific and humanistic undergraduate and graduate kinesiology and athletic training curricula that delivers cutting edge knowledge through high impact practices.*
- *The production of nationally and internationally recognized basic and applied research that advances the understanding and practice of human movement across the lifespan.*
- *Leadership in the field of kinesiology and its sub disciplines through professional service and community outreach.*
- *A community that embraces diversity and inclusivity of students, faculty, and research interests related to human movement*
- *A department faculty that maintain the highest integrity and ethical principles in their teaching and research and foster those standards in students within the department and larger university.”*

The Vision Statement in particular is a strong distillation of the Department faculty’s aspirational values and priorities.

The University developed a four-point Strategic Plan that has guided the university’s direction under President Mildred Garcia. In addition, the College of Health and Human Development has a Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives for 2012-2018.

The Department’s Strategic Plan lists six goals, loosely linked to the four goals of University’s Strategic Plan. They address the following topics: Undergraduate program; graduate program; research, service, environment; and partnerships/engagement.

The Department’s plan appears to be have been created in 2004 and revised in 2010. Since 2010, the Department has seen three individuals serve five different terms as chair. The college has seen four different deans. A new president was appointed. At least three provosts led Academic Affairs. With such significant turnover and change, it would seem that a new strategic plan would be helpful to focus faculty and align the Department more directly with university and college goals.

The team questioned how useful the 2010 revised Strategic Plan actually is, given how general and vague some of its elements are. Moreover, there was little evidence to support progress toward the Strategic Plan in the self study (with the exception of the undergraduate

curriculum), despite our findings that a lot of activity appears to be going on. There seems to be a lack of vision about what the strategic plan is for, and what the activities and desired outcomes of its elements are.

We would recommend that the Department prioritize collaboratively developing a new, action-oriented Strategic Plan that includes measurable goals with specific outcomes.

Undergraduate Curriculum

The Department offers a broad, comprehensive undergraduate curriculum requiring 69 units of coursework organized in categories of prerequisites, common core (with foundation and disciplinary core), concentration electives, upper division writing, and free electives. The Department offers eight concentrations of more focused areas of study in addition to a general track of study. The eight concentrations are: Clinical Movement Science, Exercise Science, Fitness and Health Promotion, Gerokinesiology, Special Studies, Sports Studies, Strength and Conditioning, and Teacher Education.

The size and breadth of the curriculum is a strength, as well as a weakness. With the breadth comes challenges in terms of meeting the needs of students across the breadth of disciplines. We found the curriculum to be complex and at times confusing (although it is apparent that KNES 202, Introduction to Kinesiology, seems to provide students with detailed information about the curriculum and concentrations). We found the role of concentrations to be nebulous, especially after learning that only 20 percent of students actually select a concentration. We learned that students shy away from concentrations for a fear of being “locked in” to a course of study they may want to change as they progress in the program. We wondered why students would want to choose a concentration and we didn’t get a good sense of how that answer is and how it is conveyed to students. We had questions and concerns about overlapping areas, burgeoning electives, multiple small class sizes, and lack of efficiencies that seem to complicate class scheduling. We wondered if a more structured core set of classes would help streamline things for both students and for scheduling and planning (and address workload concerns for research active faculty – see section on Faculty Expectations and Workload).

We should note that it appears student advising is excellent in terms of helping students navigate through these complexities.

We had lingering concerns in many of our discussions about the role of workforce preparation. It seems that while faculty are attuned to the need to maintain and improve retention and graduation rates, there seemed to be an inconsistency about the value of re-evaluating curriculum to adequately preparing students for jobs in Kinesiology-related fields.

Student Engagement/Experiential Learning

The Department seems to be heavily involved in student engagement and experiential learning, but these elements were not stressed or documented in the self study and needed to be pulled out by specific questioning and probing of faculty during our meetings.

While faculty stressed the importance of critical thinking and hands-on experiences, it is not clear the extent to which all students are being exposed to hands-on experiences. While it is apparent that students have tremendous opportunities to self select experiential learning across broad areas, it's not clear how many students are actually engaging in those activities. We wondered if these activities could be more intentional in the curriculum (i.e., lab sections for required courses).

One of our biggest complaints as a site team is that we didn't have the opportunity to talk with many students. The only undergraduate student who attended the student session was a biology major who has taken just one Kinesiology course. For a Department that seems to be very student-focused, this was a disappointment and made our job more difficult in terms of understanding the academic program from students' perspectives.

Graduate Curriculum

We met with two graduate students who praised the one-on-one attention and support from faculty members and the flexibility and breadth of the graduate program. One of the students came from another Department on campus and noted how much more engaging and generous Kinesiology faculty were with their time and support than his previous Department.

We were perplexed by the lack of information about the graduate program. Most notably, there doesn't even seem to be a clear understanding of how many students are in the graduate program. Estimates provided over the site visit day ranged from 50 to 200, suggesting that the Department does not track its students as well as it could. We don't know how well graduate students are overseen or advised. It appears that after a student is admitted, they identify a faculty adviser. The infrastructure of the graduate program seems to be lacking in professional development, learning cohorts, interdisciplinary seminars, curricular areas of focus, etc. We don't have a sense of what the graduate curriculum is. We aren't clear how faculty are compensated for their work in advising graduate student theses or projects. We wonder if the workload related to graduate advising is fair and equitable.

In terms of student experiences, it seems that students yearn for more opportunities to be a part of a graduate community or culture. They also expressed concern about graduate funding. Graduate funding appears to be woefully inadequate in that funding for graduate teaching associate positions doesn't even cover the cost of tuition.

We came away believing that the graduate program could offer many more opportunities, including synergy with the undergraduate program in terms of experiential learning and community engagement.

Assessment

The Department's assessment effort appears to be driven more by meeting university mandates than meaningfully evaluating and reflecting on its curriculum and programs.

We suspect that more meaningful, engaged assessment efforts could help the faculty in a number of ways, including addressing workforce needs, streamlining curriculum, identifying and promoting its high impact practices, and perhaps better positioning itself for advocacy of resources.

The faculty struggled to identify any meaningful curriculum reform that occurred as a result of assessment efforts. The Department's assessment plan calls for an annual cycle in which a course is evaluated once every five years. This will move the needle very slowly. We had questions about the validity of approaches, including whether essays actually meaningfully evaluate applied competencies and knowledge. We wondered where future capstones and experiential learning fits into the assessment plan.

Facilities/Space

The Department's facilities are generally excellent and rival programs at large, better funded research intensive institutions. Having all of the Department's activities and programs in close proximity also creates a collaborative environment and "energy" and "buzz" among students and faculty.

Still, space remains perhaps the biggest concern and complaint among faculty.

We noted three areas in which facilities seemed inequitable and particularly run down. 1) Sports psychology currently has no dedicated laboratory space at all despite six faculty in this area, most of whom are research active. It's unclear how they are expected to support research and experiential learning without space. 2) The athletic training faculty has space the size of a closet for five faculty. 3) The Human Performance Lab, although highly productive, is antiquated, worn and outdated. It is not on par with the quality and state-of-the-art equipment as other laboratory spaces area. These inadequacies raise concerns about student recruitment, particularly at the graduate level.

We wondered about how the labs are used in terms of research versus instruction. Since labs seem to be funded initially by start-up money negotiated by new faculty, we were concerned about the lack of a long term plan and operational expenses for maintenance, support, upgrade and upkeep of the facilities and equipment.

Resources

Like so many CSU programs, the Department of Kinesiology seems to do amazing things with so little funding.

We visited the Department on Oct. 17 – three and a half months into the 2016-2017 fiscal year, and the Department had yet to receive a budget from the university. This suggests a problematic and flawed structural problem that significantly limits the Department's ability to effectively manage its budget.

The funding model for the Department is unclear. The Division of Academic Affairs provides colleges with allocations, and the dean then provides allocations to the Departments. While it is clear that allocations are made at least somewhat on full-time equivalent students (FTES), there was no clear explanation as to how this process works. The dean indicated that she is working on understanding the budgeting process herself. The Department's general approach to expenses seems to be to do basically what was done the previous year. There does not seem to be any process to prioritize medium and long term infrastructure needs. There does not seem to be a plan for maintenance and upkeep.

In terms of general budgeting categories, questions were raised about whether misc. course fee money is being used to cover regular, ongoing expenses rather than for its stated purpose of providing student services above and beyond what the state is expected to provide in its operating budget.

While the Department's faculty believe more resources are necessary, they have not made a clear and convincing case based on the lack of documentation and plans. Because of the lack of a budget, a clear budget forecasting model, expenditure priorities, etc., it is difficult to determine whether funding is adequate for the Department and its programs.

Enrollment Management

The Department's dramatic enrollment fluctuations in the past several years have made it difficult to effectively manage and plan the Department's programs.

There seems to be a lack of understanding at all levels about how and why the Department became "impacted" in the last several years. The Department saw a 60 percent increase in student enrollments over a four-year period, culminating with 2,200 majors in Fall 2012. "Unknowing to the faculty, the Department was labeled as an 'impacted program' and standards/criteria for admissions were elevated; total majors in Fall 2012 was approximately 2072 and 1522 in Fall of 2015. Subsequently, the Department was concerned the 'impaction' label/system implemented by the University would make it very difficult to meet FTES standards," according to the self study.

The Department is still dealing with the effects of impaction and fluctuations in enrollment. The Department's faculty seem to have settled on a goal of 1,800 majors as reasonable "sweet spot." We are unclear as to how and why this number of was chosen.

Because CSUF funding is enrollment driven, clarity about the appropriate number of majors and the overall FTES is crucial to aligning resources with programmatic needs. There doesn't seem to be a formula for knowing FTES targets and how that drives course scheduling and potential curriculum changes.

In comparison to other programs and departments we are familiar with, class sizes for Kinesiology classes seem to be small yet workloads in terms of number of courses per semester is perceived to be among the highest in the university. Additionally, we were told faculty earn overload assigned time for courses with 60 students – far less than the 120 standard set by the CSU and far less than the norm across campus. This suggests that while class size and faculty workload is undoubtedly strained across the CSU, it appears that Kinesiology is fairing better than others on these metrics.

Effective enrollment management is also crucial to course scheduling, which is even more challenging for a large department. It seems that multiple class sections are not at capacity. Could the Department consider ways to make more space available to faculty by strategically identifying courses to merge or increase caps to offer fewer sections? That could perhaps still meet FTES demands while creating space for the other expectations of faculty that may be more in line with other departments.

Enrollment fluctuations also make it difficult to project how many seats are necessary in particular classes and sections. There does not appear to be a clear roadmap or sequencing of classes that aid in schedule planning. While this may be predictable based on prerequisites and past patterns, it is made more difficult by large enrollment fluctuations.

Academic Advising/Student Support

Faculty seem to care deeply about their students, and they believe they are make significant differences in the lives of students. We only wish these experiences were more formalized and documented for us to tout.

Despite not having the opportunity to talk with Kinesiology undergraduates, it appears that the Department's advising efforts are excellent, with envious space and assigned time for faculty advisers. The Department has prioritized this assigned time for faculty to be dedicated student advisers and thus remove routine academic advising burdens from the rest of the faculty.

Faculty Expectations and Workload

Department faculty appear to be productive researchers and excellent teachers while also highly engaged in service at all levels. They also appear to be satisfied, given the context of the

CSU as a teaching heavy institution. There is a sense that Department faculty have among the highest teaching loads in the university and only limited opportunities for assigned time.

We had concerns about how faculty workload is assigned given the increasing demands for research of tenure-track faculty. There does not appear to be a commitment to differential workloads to best maximize individual faculty strengths.

The Department has identified a future priority is to retain new faculty, and retention efforts should give consideration to course load, professional development travel funds, start-up packages, internal awards and graduate student support, among others.

Research

Although there is an expectation for research, and faculty are encouraged to seek external funding, efforts to provide resources to support faculty success have not kept pace with the change in institutional profile as a doctoral institution.

We received mixed messages about the importance and value the institution places on research. The university seems to indicate teaching is the top priority and research is less important, but the college plan indicates research is of growing importance. Faculty are now considered teacher-scholars, where in years past CSU faculty identified as primary teachers based on workload. If research is a requirement of promotion and tenure, and if it is valued by the institution, it needs to be more prominent in the workload.

Several individuals, including the Dean, noted the faculty is known for being research productive. A number of faculty are nationally and internationally recognized for their scholarship. Moreover there appears to be multiple areas of excellence in community-engaged scholarship. We wish the self study emphasized productivity data and faculty awards to demonstrate this area of excellence. It is clear that research-active faculty who are known in the field produce research largely out of passion and sometimes in spite of, and not because of, university workload decisions (i.e. many faculty cited that grant writing and research occurs after hours and out of contract periods). Such demonstration of productivity is useful to advocate for why resources for research are important.

Service and Community Engagement

It appears that faculty are engaged in the profession, and in the community, but the self study does not provide sufficient evidence and we did not have sufficient time to glean this information. While we expected to find that these are clear strengths of the Department, it isn't readily apparent and these are probably areas of significant strength that need to be documented and recognized. Additional attention could be paid to documenting the extent to which community engagement is recognized in research and service, and the extent to which students benefit from this engagement.

Office Staff

The Department's faculty and programs are supported by four office staff who are shared between two Departments, Kinesiology and Health Sciences. The staff feel supported and are generally happy despite a crushing workload complicated by serving two different faculties and chairs. Sharing an office staff between two large departments seems to be a major limitation to a Department's ability to focus and prioritize. A Department Chair benefits significantly from having a highly qualified, competent and dedicated staff to manage and prioritize the myriad of issues that need addressing. Sharing a staff seems to be a major limitation.

Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths

- Large, broad program in a growing professional field.
- One of few remaining undergraduate programs that have retained the breadth across all subdisciplines (a distinction that is celebrated by the faculty).
- A strong reputation as a Department among students and in the broader university.
- A "feel" and "buzz" of student and faculty energy and community within a common space and relatively new building.
- Excellent facilities that rival research intensive institutions.
- Graduation and retention rates at or above the university's averages.
- Potential for multiple opportunities for students to engage in high impact practices and connect with faculty.
- Faculty and staff feel supported, engaged and empowered.
- Laboratory spaces seem accessible to students, interdisciplinary and encouraging of cross collaborations.
- Strong academic advising by faculty, professional advising staff and student advisers in a Kinesiology-dedicated Student Success Center.

Weaknesses

- A vague and outdated Department strategic plan that lacks specific activities and measurable outcomes.
- Lack of evidence to show that data drive decisions or are used to position the Department to advocate for college and university resources.
- Space that while envious to other programs remains in shortage from the perspective of Department faculty.
- Lack of clarity about budget models and priorities.
- Unclear plan for managing large enrollment fluctuations.
- A staff that is shared by two Departments that is overwhelming to staff and problematic for meaningful, dedicated support for the Department.

- Curriculum, both undergraduate and graduate, appears complicated, inefficient and overlapping – unclear if the goal is to produce generalists or specialists, and unclear what the purpose of concentrations is if only 20% of students select them.
- Assessment efforts appear weak and aimed to only fulfill university mandates; meaningful data are not being collected frequently or used to create meaningful and timely change to curriculum and programs.
- Unclear if professional and employer needs and trends are assessed and used to inform curriculum, especially in areas of significant job growth for graduates.
- Does not appear to be a clear vision or plan for how to produce quality research through internal and external support.
- Lack of documentation of community engagement despite our observation that it likely occurs in many different areas in the Department.
- Lack a formal meaningful mentoring program for tenure-track faculty, despite desire to retain high quality faculty who engage in research while also meeting high teaching demands.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen the identity of the Department.
2. Collectively develop a new strategic plan with measurable objectives.
3. Consider increasing class sizes to create more efficiencies in faculty time and instructional space.
4. Conduct student surveys and use that to inform curriculum decisions.
5. Create separate support staffs for the Departments of Kinesiology and Health Sciences.
6. Streamline curriculum to help facilitate better class scheduling and enrollment planning.
7. Build a Department proposed operating budget (separate from the Academic Affairs provided baseline budget) that accounts for all of the instruction, equipment and other expenses to better meet needs and advocate for needs.
8. Critical evaluation of faculty workloads relative to teaching and research priorities and tenure and promotion expectations.
9. If external funding is a priority, better position faculty workload and resources to ensure success and retention of research active faculty.
10. Re-evaluate of space needs and equity.
11. Consider developing some systems (e.g., advisory board, alumni surveys, employer surveys) to obtain regular feedback from the community to better assess alignment between community need and graduates of this program.