

Program Performance Review: Culmination Meeting Memo Liberal Studies, BA

The 2018-2019 Program Performance Review (PPR) process for Liberal Studies, BA program concluded with a culmination meeting on December 13, 2019.

The following people attended the meeting: Pamella Oliver (Provost), Brent Foster (Asst. VP for Undergraduate Studies and General Education), Sheryl Fontaine (Dean, HSS), Jessica Stern (Associate Dean, HSS), Mark Fischer (Chair), April Bullock (Faculty), Joe Gonzalez (Faculty), Craig McConnell (Faculty), Kevin Lambert (Faculty), Angeles Sancho-Velazquez (Faculty), Saul Tobias (Faculty), and Su Swarat (Asst. VP for Institutional Effectiveness).

The Provost commended the program for its excellent performance and contribution to the university. She specifically highlighted the following accomplishments:

- Serves as powerhouse for training future elementary school teachers:
 - The Provost commended the program for preparing not only outstanding teachers but also scholars who have a broad range of knowledge and who knows “how to think”.
- Best poised to work “across the quad” with departments from STEM fields:
 - The Provost commended the program for its new minor proposal that focuses on the intersection of history and science.
- Prepares students to pass the CSET with excellent pass rate.
- Achieved graduation rates (both first-time freshmen 4-year and transfer students 2-year graduation rates) significantly higher than university average. For example, the latest 4-year graduation rate is 41.9%, compared to the university overall rate of 29%.
- Provides students with a very strong sense of community through the Liberal Studies Commons:
 - The Chair commented on the intentionality behind the physical space arrangement in the common space, which allows faculty to see student presence, and encourages students to connect to faculty.
- Excellent leadership of the current Chair:
 - The Asst. VP for Undergraduate Studies and GE commended the Chair for strategizing ahead of deadlines to plan for or avoid course retirement, for reviewing and updating curriculum in a timely manner, and for planning ahead. One example of the excellent effort is the new minor program proposal “Science, Culture and Society” – a 12-unit minor program that has reasonable degree requirement, and thus has great potential of attracting students. With this new proposal, the department will have three minor degree programs that offer a diverse range of choices to students.

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

1. CSET waiver proposal:
 - The Provost inquired about the progress of the CSET waiver proposal. The Chair reported that the proposal is delayed at the state level due to lack of reviewers. While he has volunteered to serve as reviewer, more departments need to step up to provide sufficient number of reviewers.

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- The Provost has agreed to speak with the relevant departments/colleges (e.g. Education, CAS) about this issue.
2. Program enrollment and curriculum:
- The Asst. VP for Undergraduate Studies and GE inquired about the fluctuating enrollment in the program, and commented on potential on-campus competition for the “pool” of students that could major in Liberal Studies. Potential competitors include the new HUSR concentration “Elementary Education”, and the proposed undergraduate degree program in the College of Education that focuses on K-6 STEM education.
 - The Provost and the Associate Dean encouraged the program to better highlight what the current courses have to offer in course titles, descriptions, website, and advising sessions.
 - The Provost recommended the department to work with relevant departments (just as how it did with CAS in the past) to ensure coordination, and most importantly, to clarify for the students what the different programs are. The Chair stated that the clarification takes place during advising sessions. Additionally, a couple of faculty members serve as liaisons to community colleges, which allows them to provide information to potential students.
3. Course offerings by tenure and tenure-track faculty:
- The External Reviewers recommended the department to increase courses offered by tenure and tenure-track faculty.
 - The faculty stated that the full-time faculty do teach many of the core courses, and they have pulled back from teaching in other programs (e.g. Honors) since the program enrollment right now can sustain full-time faculty teaching load.
 - The Chair commented that the department has a small part-time faculty pool, with long-term, excellent part-time faculty who enjoy entitlement to teach. In order to increase courses taught by full-time faculty, the department would need to design new courses, which would be challenging and unnecessary.
 - The faculty reported that the department enjoys a good integration between full-time and part-time faculty. Their offices are integrated, and students do not distinguish between full or part-time status.
4. Online course offerings:
- The External Reviewers recommended the program to add online or hybrid courses to increase enrollment, and suggested growth in online modality beyond CourseMatch.
 - The Chair stated that growing online or hybrid courses requires interested faculty, and currently there is only one faculty member who likes teaching online. The Chair acknowledged the potential of offering more online courses, particularly at the 100-level, to boost enrollment.
 - The faculty who have taught online commented that students seem to be switching from preferring online or hybrid modality to preferring face-to-face courses. The “intensity” of how students prefer online courses seems to be changing.
 - The Provost recommended the program to find out from the students what they prefer, and to examine how online or hybrid enrollment affects student success. The Associate

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Dean reported that the college has done studies along this line, and the preliminary findings seem to suggest that under-represented students perform better in online courses.

- The faculty also voiced the challenge of making online courses ATI compliant. Faculty need staff and training support on how to do so. The Provost acknowledged this need, and stated that she is reinstating the online taskforce to look into issues relevant to online instruction.

5. Faculty hiring in the area of arts and humanities:

- The External Reviewers recommended the department to diversify its curriculum by hiring a faculty member specializing in “Ethnicity in the Arts and Humanities”.
- The faculty added that faculty hiring affects the long-term vulnerability of the department. With nearly all full professors, and only one person in the area of arts and humanities, the department configuration is imbalanced, and the long-term faculty continuity is unhealthy. The program could benefit from having a more diverse faculty group as well.
- The Provost acknowledged the need, and explained that faculty hiring depends on funding, which is related to enrollment. Boosting enrollment would help bring the additional funds for new faculty positions.

The Provost concluded the meeting by thanking the program for its excellent performance, and thanking the faculty for their hard work.