

Liberal Studies Department – California State University Fullerton
Program Performance Review 2011 – 2012
Response to the Fall 2011 Report of the External Review Committee
10 February 2012

The Liberal Studies Department appreciates the efficient and thorough manner in which the external review was accomplished. All three members of the review committee were well-informed and made pointed inquiries into the status of the department. We also appreciate their positive comments on our mission statement, curriculum, student associations, and our goals for the future. The committee report includes recommendations for quality improvement in six specific areas.

1. Curriculum

The committee recommends that “LBST faculty make a greater effort to incorporate the California Subject Matter Standards for K-8 into the content of the courses.” While we are sympathetic to how this recommendation may be applicable to those Liberal Studies programs that are exclusively dedicated to the preparation of students planning to enter multiple subject matter credential programs, this is not the nature of Liberal Studies at CSUF. In this respect it is worth citing our own mission statement:

The mission of the Department of Liberal Studies is to provide its students with an educational experience that promotes interdisciplinary knowledge of major ideas in the humanities, arts, natural sciences, and social sciences, and advances critical reasoning and effective writing skills.

While the vast majority of our majors do at least begin their experience in Liberal Studies with plans to be teachers, our mission does not include the pedagogical aspects of teacher preparation, a topic more appropriately addressed by courses in credential programs. Many of our students change their minds about their career goals while at CSUF; many others foresee careers in other areas altogether. We feel quite strongly that the Liberal Studies curriculum should retain its present orientation, one that is designed to promote interdisciplinary knowledge and communication skills that will serve our graduates well regardless of the career path they follow. We suspect that the committee’s recommendation was prompted by the fact that the two members of the committee from off-campus direct Liberal Studies programs that are exclusively devoted to teacher preparation. While we appreciate the spirit in which their recommendation was made, we feel that it should not result in the introduction of a pedagogical component in our core courses. On the other hand, we certainly do intend to continue our close collaboration with the Center for Careers in Teaching and other advising units for teacher preparation to make sure that those of our students who do plan to pursue teaching careers are well informed about the resources available to them. We also expect that changes we plan to implement in the Elementary Education Plan will improve the preparation of these students.

2. Outreach & Collaboration

We agree with the committee that collaboration with other departments and colleges is vital for our interdisciplinary department. With respect to the College of Education, we feel that the best venue for collaboration is the Center for Careers in Teaching. We will continue to closely monitor the services provided by the Center so as to participate in any way possible to make that student transition from undergraduate study to credential programs is as smooth as possible. The website renovations that were planned for this year have been delayed and this has postponed the revisions we have wanted to make to streamline the flow of information about our major and the various credential programs. We will continue to prepare for these changes so that we can contribute when they become possible.

The Center also serves as our primary access to outreach to community colleges. We will continue to attend the meetings scheduled with community college advisors each semester and we will explore ways to make the Thematic Plan version of our major more widely known among community college students.

3. Advising

We already do advise new CSUF students about the thematic plan, but we can do more to extend this advising to community colleges.

4. Assessment

We appreciate the committee's concern that we follow up on our newly constructed assessment plan so as to "close the loop" and implement changes in light of any weaknesses that come to light. Since the plan was only put in place in spring of 2011, we are not yet in a position to do this. As we complete the collection of data for the 2011-2012 academic year, we will have an opportunity to consider possible adjustments. The committee also notes that our graduation rates may be affected by students transferring to majors other than Liberal Studies prior to graduation. This was to be expected during the period under review because of the sharp decline in opportunities in the teaching profession that took place in those years. We have started to monitor changes in the major so as to factor that information into our plans to diversify the student population within the Liberal Studies major.

5. Resources

We agree that the hiring of an ASC to fill the position that has been vacant for almost four years should be a priority when budget levels make this possible.

6. Faculty and Personnel Issues

a. Worries about a “tremendous void” resulting from the eventual “departure” of the present department chair appear to be offset by the department having several faculty members with experience in the Academic Senate and various important University committees.

b. Liberal Studies faculty are becoming increasingly adept at taking advantage of opportunities to reduce teaching loads in favor of time for research. There is no single solution to this problem but it is one that the Department is committed to grappling with on a year-to-year basis.