

California State University, Fullerton
Program Performance Review: Department of Liberal Studies
External Review Report (Spring 2019)

Review Team Members

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The Review Process

This report is based on the review team's study of the Liberal Studies Program Performance Review self-report and supplemental materials, followed up with a site visit that took place on February 21, 2019. During the on-campus visit, the review team met with Dr. Sheryl Fontaine, Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Dr. Jessica Stern, Associate Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and Dr. Mark Fischer, Chair of Liberal Studies. In addition, the reviewers had opportunities to meet with the department office staff, full-time and part-time faculty, as well as Liberal Studies students. The review team also visited a LBST 401 class, which offered opportunities to observe teaching and faculty and student interaction.

The report that follows is divided into three sections. The first provides an overview of the successes and accomplishments found by the review team. Challenges and opportunities are then discussed. Recommendations then address these challenges.

Commendations

The Department of Liberal Studies is truly a model of excellence, both within the College of H&SS and the CSU system. During the period under review, the department has had many significant accomplishments, including the following:

1. LBST offers an exemplary liberal arts education curriculum, closely integrating Arts and Humanities, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences in their core curriculum and courses. The department offers an impressive array of courses taught by faculty experts in a variety of disciplines. The review team had the pleasure of observing a LBST 401 class ("Knowledge in the Arts and Sciences"), in which the students were immersed in a deep and meaningful discussion of the assigned literary work. The faculty member did an exemplary job of engaging the students in both the book and the discussion.
2. The Liberal Studies curriculum adequately prepares students to pass the CSET: Multiple Subjects exam with an 85% pass-rate on all three sections on their first attempt. The writing skills they acquire contribute to their preparedness for the CSET.
3. LBST enjoys an impressively high graduation rate. The first-time freshmen 4-year graduation rate is significantly high at 37% compared to the university average of 20%, and the transfer students' 2-year graduation rate is 38% as compared to the university average of 29%. The Department attributes this to the well-integrated structure of its curriculum and the high quality of student advising.
4. The department has offered several successful Study Abroad programs which have allowed students to experience the cultures of different countries. It has also sponsored a series of very impressive interdisciplinary conferences on topics of major significance.
5. Collegiality and collaboration were a common theme in all meetings with faculty, staff and students.
6. Plans to move from a 4/4 to a 3/3 teaching load (starting next fall) have been extremely well received. When asked about what makes faculty happy, this was the first topic broached in meetings with both groups of faculty.
7. The department is fortunate to have a professional, supportive and satisfied staff. When questioned about their work load and duties all staff members highlighted the joy they felt in working with students and faculty. Staff morale is very high.
8. Liberal Studies students feel a deep connection to both the faculty and the subjects they teach. They commend the expertise and depth of knowledge that faculty members share with the students. In turn, the faculty praise their students for their commitment to their subject matter and academic success.
9. The department is fortunate to have a space for students who gather daily in an area called the Liberal Studies Commons, located in the center of the department with faculty

offices surrounding it. Students enjoy having clear access to faculty on an informal basis and described a very strong sense of community.

Challenges and Opportunities

These admirable achievements during this 7-year review period are accompanied by the following challenges and opportunities which deserve close attention.

1. The number of LBST majors declined markedly from 701 in 2011 to a low of 439 in Spring 2015; it then began to rise, reaching 518 by 2018 (largely due to new G.E. classes). The decline was largely linked to three causes: a) teacher layoffs due to budget cuts by the state of California (since about 90% of LBST majors plan to be teachers); b) California's termination of CSET waiver programs (including one previously offered by LBST), which had attracted students; and c) competition from the very different program offered by CHAD (Child and Adolescent Development), which also prepares teachers. This decline had significant implications for meeting FTES targets. Although these numbers are now trending upward, the decreasing school-age population in Orange County will still present a challenge. On a positive note, the recent revival of CSET waiver programs may once again attract more majors. (LBST, working collegially with CHAD, has submitted its proposal and is awaiting state CTC approval.)

2. The department's Interdisciplinary Thematic Emphasis does not seem to be attracting many students (since only 10% of majors choose it) even though one of the key strengths of LBST is offering a well-rounded education to students pursuing diverse careers. Currently, LBST offers several promising Advising Tracks under the Thematic Emphasis, including but not limited to Pre-Law, Global Studies, Culture Heritage Studies, and Sustainability Studies. In addition, faculty are engaged in Study Abroad programs, have created a new minor in Food Studies, and possess special expertise, particularly in studies linking science, medicine, technology, and society. However, these Advising Tracks are not well-publicized nor are they clearly credited on B.A. diplomas. These specializations need to be made more attractive, publicized more widely, and officially recognized in students' final records.

3. LBST's SFR (range 20.9 - 24.1, average 22.6) and FTES (range 197.0 - 359.5, average 237.2) are relatively low. Although LBST has usually met or come close to meeting its targets during the review period, this was primarily achieved by the College lowering the target (except for 2011-2012, when it achieved an admirable 135.7% of target). LBST has made persistent efforts to increase its FTES, including by developing new GE courses, but its decreased number of majors continues to be a challenge.

4. The number of full-time faculty has declined during this review period from 11.0 (2011-2017), to 8.0 (2017-2018), due to 2 retirements (Dr. James Hofmann, and Dr. Joe Gonzalez), and 1 moving to an administrative position (Dr. Emily Bonney, with retreat rights to LBST). This resulted in a noticeable drop in the proportion of LBST course sections taught by full-time faculty from the prior 80% range to 58% in Fall 2018.

5. Expertise within the full-time faculty shows a noticeable imbalance across the 3 major areas vital to this interdisciplinary program: Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and Arts and Humanities. Currently, there are four full-time faculty teaching Natural Sciences, three teaching Social Sciences, and only one in Arts and Humanities.

6. The current rank-structure of the regular faculty lacks tiered succession. All eight LBST faculty are tenured (4 full professors, and 4 associate professors), with no tenure-track faculty. This is due to a lack of new hires since 2008. While this is understandable considering lowered enrollments, this may still result in a serious issue of discontinuity when senior faculty retire. In addition, new hires infuse new ideas, energy, drive, and inspiration into a program and are vitally needed.

7. Support for international travel and research by tenured faculty can be improved. The faculty is very appreciative of the strong encouragement and support by the College and the Department for faculty research. However, the support leans towards junior faculty in terms of release time and research/travel grants. For senior faculty who typically have more university service obligations, finding research time is a challenge. For faculty who depend on support for international travel to obtain data or attend conferences, more discretionary funding is needed. Research support is particularly essential to Associate Professors to facilitate their next level of promotion.

Recommendations

Our recommendations are designed to address each of the challenges and opportunities numbered above. Specifically:

1. In addressing reduced enrollments, we recognize the need to adapt to changing statewide and national requirements regarding teacher preparation as well as economic trends affecting teaching careers in Orange County. With these concerns in mind, we congratulate the department for submitting its CSET waiver proposal for state approval. We also strongly support its proposal to encourage CHAD students to minor in LBST with LBST students minoring in CHAD, thus offering the best preparation for teaching

while increasing enrollments in both programs. We also support LBST's efforts to develop an Integrated Teacher Education Program (ITEP), a four-year B.A. plus Teaching Credential program, to make it competitive with programs offered elsewhere. Since the College of Education seems to have some reservations about ITEP, we recommend that this be left to the Deans of the two colleges to negotiate jointly.

2. To provide some buffer against the changing market for teachers, we recommend strengthening the Interdisciplinary Thematic Emphasis by promoting this department's strengths more explicitly. Towards this end, we recommend that instead of the phrase "Thematic Emphasis" (largely meaningless to potential employers), more specific themes be cited. One seems especially appropriate—an "Emphasis in Science, Medicine, and Society"—which would take advantage of this program's outstanding faculty. This may also help the department become more recognized as the HSS equivalent to what other campuses call "History and Philosophy of Science" or "Science, Technology, and Society" programs. A second emphasis might be "Global Liberal Studies," taking advantage of the international backgrounds of the majority of this faculty (Sancho-Velasquez, Tobias, Patterson, Fischer, and Lambert), its Study Abroad opportunities, and work linking Eastern and Western cultures by Fischer and Tobias. We leave it to the department to develop other emphases but recommend that these be named (even if broadly) on diplomas.

3. To increase enrollments, we recommend some curricular additions. One, already being developed, would involve offering multiple sections of a new course in G.E. Category B 5 (Implications and Explorations in the Natural Sciences). We also recommend offering some GE classes online or as hybrid classes. Fortunately, several faculty members—both full-time (April Bullock) and part-time (Lisa Iyer and Jawad Ali)—have expressed an interest in teaching them. By limiting this to GE courses, the program's tightly structured core sequence would not be affected. We believe these courses are likely to increase enrollments.

4, 5, and 6. These are interrelated items, since they involve a markedly reduced faculty assuming many tasks it did when larger; a lack of any untenured faculty which seriously jeopardizes long-term stability; and a reduction of its Arts and Humanities faculty to one. In addition, since this department has not hired a new faculty member in a decade, it lacks the diversity it should have to meet the needs of CSUF's highly diverse student population. In response to these concerns, we recommend that notwithstanding its ongoing efforts to increase FTES, the department request one new position to be dedicated explicitly to "Ethnicity in the Arts and Humanities." Such a position would serve several purposes. It would add important new expertise (in areas such as African-American and/or Chicano movements in the Arts and Humanities) while

doubling the faculty in Arts and Humanities. Equally important, it would further diversify this faculty and its curriculum while inspiring even more African-American and Chicano students to enter Orange County's teaching profession.

7. As the faculty are eagerly anticipating, the 3-3 teaching load should increase time for research. While gaining additional release time (other than through on- or off-campus grants) is difficult, we see possibilities for increased travel funding, which is desperately needed for international research. We recommend that the department offer one or more online courses which could be added to the CourseMatch program. These should appeal to potential teachers and G.E. students across the state. If successful, they will generate funds which the department could dedicate to faculty research and travel.

Summary

The Liberal Studies Department at California State University, Fullerton is outstanding. Excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service define the faculty, which provides exemplary instruction, support, guidance, and a strong sense of community to a dedicated and very appreciative group of students. All members of the faculty and staff demonstrate a high degree of collegiality, care, and respect. To grow and improve, the program would benefit from closer collaboration with CHAD in sharing minors and developing an ITEP program. It could be further strengthened by developing and promoting its Interdisciplinary Thematic Emphases in more defined ways, especially by emphasizing its strengths in the history and philosophy of science and global studies. Offering online G.E. courses should increase enrollments while participating in the CourseMatch program should add funds for research and travel. To support the department, maintain its exemplary liberal arts education, and confront its challenges, we strongly recommend hiring one new faculty member with a specialization in "Ethnicity in the Arts and Humanities." This would advance the goals of diversifying the faculty, the curriculum, and the program that HSS offers Orange County's future teachers. Finally, we commend the Liberal Studies department for weathering changes beyond its control while still offering CSUF students a liberal studies education that is broad, deep, and of exceptional quality.