

Précis

Program Performance Review

Liberal Studies, BA

College of Humanities and Social Sciences

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Background

The Department of Liberal Studies conducted a program performance review during the 2010-11 academic year. A self-study was completed. The Visiting Team which included Daniel J. O'Connor, Chair of the Department of Liberal Studies, CSU, Long Beach; Michael Neubauer, Director, Liberal Studies Program, CSU, Northridge; and Jochen Burgdorf, Chair Department of History, CSU Fullerton made a one-day onsite visit to the department. The Visiting Team reviewed the self-study and other documents and interviewed the college dean and other administrators as well as department faculty, staff and students. The Visiting Team report included commendations and recommendations. The chair of the department provided a response to the team's report. And the process included the Dean's Summary Report and Recommendations.

Key Data

The department has seen a decline in number of majors since the last program review. In 2004-05 the number of majors was 1,526 the most recent figure for spring 2011 shows the number of majors at 736. The decreased number of majors has resulted in lower enrollments in the Liberal Studies core courses required for graduation. To compensate for this decrease the department has increased the General Education course offerings. In 2005-06 8 General Education courses enrolled 236/47 FTES in 2010-11 the number of courses was 26 sections which enrolled 886/177 FTES. At the last program review the department had an allocation of 16.6 FTEF positions. With declining enrollments the department allocation is presently 11.0 FTEF positions, but there are 12 full time faculty in the department. The department's response to the reduction in faculty positions has been to "lend out" faculty to the Honors Programs and other departments. The department accounts for approximately 17% of the BAs awarded in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences and graduation rates for transfer student majors is slightly below the University rate.

Key Issues

Several issues have been identified as key to the department's progress. It has been documented that there has been a decline in student enrollments especially in the major. The department has started to devise ways to deal with enrollment patterns and trends. Related to enrollment is collaboration and outreach. Accordingly, the department has been encouraged to forge collaborations with other departments and reach out to the community college sector which accounts for the majority of transfer students. The department has proposed and is in the approval process for the establishment of a master's level program. How will the master's program fit into the mission and goals of the department? And though teacher preparation is a focus of the department it is not seen as paramount as the visiting team seemed to indicate.

Outcomes Assessment

It is apparent that the Department of Liberal Studies is committed to the assessment of student learning. On page one of the self-study following the department's mission statement are the learning goals and outcomes for students pursuing a B.A. degree in Liberal Studies. An assessment plan has been developed which includes a curriculum map and a four year timeline for the assessment of all learning goals and outcomes. Importantly, the department has factored in the "closing the loop" component as part of the assessment plan. An assessment committee has been established. The department is presently in the early stages of implementing the assessment plan and is now concentrating on the assessment of student writing and comprehension skills. For seniors, the Interdisciplinary Thematic Plan (ITP) has been revised to include two semesters rather than one for the culminating senior project.

In addition the department is using student survey data (an indirect measure) of alumni to inform department teaching, learning and related activities. This should be continued. Also, the department cites the pass rates of graduates on the California Subject Examination for Teachers (CSET) as a quality indicator. It is stated that the pass rate is typically 80%. As a quality indicator the department should establish its pass rate goal for each part of the exam, benchmark and then hold itself accountable for the results. Such accountability might include curriculum changes, revisions etc.

In summary, the Liberal Studies department is to be commended for its progress in assessment. An assessment plan has been developed and implemented, an assessment infrastructure in place and assessment is a focal point of teaching and learning. The department is aware that the next phase of the assessment plan, of most importance, is to begin to **use assessment findings for change and improvement**. There is evidence that these discussions have commenced among the faculty.

Outlook

The Department of Liberal Studies identifies itself as the "locus of interdisciplinary teaching and research on campus". This goal can be accomplished in part, they feel, by expanding General Education courses and adding a master's program. The department has seen a steady decline in majors over the last several years due mainly to the ebb and flow of the teaching market. The department, however, has maintained a stability and vitality despite the uncertainty of enrollment. This vitality was cited by the visiting team which commended the department for

the creation of a stimulating and collegial environment for students. The curriculum was also cited as strong in both the Elementary Education Plan (EEP) and the Interdisciplinary Thematic Plan (ITP). And the faculty was commended for providing students with a rigorous interdisciplinary education in the arts, sciences and humanities. The department has been encouraged to reach out more to community colleges and to establish more collaboration opportunities with departments across campus to enhance its profile and increase student enrollment.

Assessment of student learning is part of the department culture and the department should now move to use assessment findings for improvement and change.

Gerald W. Patton

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