

Program Performance Review: Culmination Meeting Memo Physics, B.S., M.S. Programs

The 2014-2015 Program Performance Review (PPR) process for the B.S. and M.S. Programs in Physics concluded with a culmination meeting on February 26, 2016.

During the meeting, the program was commended for its significant accomplishments, which include:

1. Department has undergone tremendous growth since the last PPR.
2. Department is well balanced with a reasonable composition of research and teaching expertise to fulfill its current mission within the University.
3. Recent hires following a clear strategic plan have greatly strengthened existing research areas and show excellent promise for high quality research activity for long term.
4. Department is well formulated to prepare students for careers in both industry and academia.
5. Proposed BS in Astronomy represents a strong departmental commitment to supporting the expansion of this research emphasis within the college.
6. Department has provided strong leadership on key university and college curriculum efforts, including faculty leaders in assessment, general education, and WASC accreditation.

The major recommendations and concerns raised through the PPR process were discussed. Suggestions on how to address them were provided:

1. Additional technical staff:
 - The Chair stated that the increased enrollment in kinesiology and engineering has led to a huge expansion of labs per week. The current offering is 80 labs/wk, compared to 35/wk historically. However, the number of technical staff (n=2) remains the same. Therefore, additional technical staff to manage the lab courses is much needed.
 - The Dean indicated that the recent budget cuts reduced the amount of staff support in the college. The university needs to provide funding to hire the needed staff.
 - The Deputy Provost said that the PRBC is conducting staff analysis this semester, with the intention of adjusting staffing needs based on program size. The Dean and Associate Dean both cautioned the university to consider individual department's context when deciding what benchmarks or weighting factors to use on funding allocation. A uniform formula may not work for all departments.
2. Additional space for instruction and research:
 - The Chair stated that space is a big issue impacting negatively the growth of the department. There is a shortage of classroom space, and the sense of "ownership" of classrooms due to historical factors also prevents the department from using classrooms effectively. There is a need for a fair classroom scheduling system.
 - The Chair also stated that the shortage of lab space for new faculty is another issue. There needs to have a collegial and fair discussion within the college to discuss lab space allocation.
 - The Dean suggested that with the impending McCarthy Hall renovation, this is a good time to discuss space issues, and recommended that appropriate NSM representatives need to be actively involved in the renovation conversations.

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- The Deputy Provost acknowledged the concern, and indicated that such conversations will take place soon involving appropriate faculty.
3. Operational budget:
- The Chair stated that non-fixed resources such as UEE summer funding and gift funds (e.g. Dan Black) were not reflected in the budget the department received in the past few years. Instead, they were “folded into” the operational budget.
 - The Dean and Associated Dean stated that this is a college wide issue, where summer funding is used to offset baseline funding and/or budget cuts.
 - The Chair will be meeting with the Dean of UEE to discuss UEE summer course offerings and associated funding to examine ways to motivate faculty to teach summer courses.
 - The College will work with the Provost’s Office to examine this issue.
4. Machine shop access:
- The Chair indicated that the original MOU between NSM and ECS regarding machine shop access has not been implemented faithfully. While NSM is promised 30% of time access in the MOU, the machinist is overwhelmed with the ECS classes offered in the machine shop, and thus unable to repair NSM lab equipment in a timely manner. The Chair requested a set of dates reserved for NSM access.
 - The Dean suggested that this issue should be resolve when the new Dean arrives.
5. Addition of an astronomy major:
- The recent proposal of an astronomy major was rejected by the CO. The CO’s review indicated that there is too much overlap between Physics-B.S. and Astronomy-B.S. degrees. The Dean recommended the department to model after the Geology-B.S. and Earth Science-B.A. degrees in the Department of Geology. Specifically, the astronomy degree needs to have a more open structure and include more electives.
 - The Chair indicated that the Physics faculty are excited about the possibility, and are currently redesigning the degree as a pilot program. The faculty did not seem to like the idea of having an Astronomy minor.
 - The Director of Graduate Studies reminded the department of the CO’s review timeline, and will send details of resubmission steps to the department.
 - The AVPAP asked the department to work with the AP office early for feedback.

The Chair stated at the end of the meeting that the faculty are very energetic and work well together. The Dean’s office has provided strong leadership to support the department’s growth. The Dean and Associate Dean also commended the Chair for his excellent leadership.