

1/16/08

To: Dr. Claudia Pinter-Lucke
Associate Vice President, Undergraduate Studies

RE: Response to the External Review of the Assessment Plans of the Department of Biological Sciences, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona - June 6, 2007

From: Frank Ewers
Chair of Biological Sciences

Below I briefly summarize the main points made by the review, followed by our response for both the undergraduate and graduate program. Note that we are much further along with our graduate program assessment plan than with the undergraduate plan. This is because our undergraduate program included six majors which we are in the process of collapsing into three.

Undergraduate program

[Note: for purposes of posting to the Graduate Program web site, portions of this document dealing with the Undergraduate Program have been deleted. David J. Moriarty , 11 April 2008.]

Graduate Program:

Positive points mentioned in the report:

- The assessment plan was viewed as admirable in that it was faculty generated, with faculty ownership, and it was seen as manageable and sustainable.
- A good number of faculty in the biology department have grants and research contracts with specific expectations from granting agencies, thus providing built-in structure for graduate research and training.
- The graduate degree program requires a written Masters Thesis and oral defense, which was seen as a good vehicle for assessment of most of the SLO's.
- It was noted that faculty members in the Biological Sciences Department appear to be exceptional mentors to their graduate students.

Suggestions in the report for improvement of the graduate assessment plan:

The major weakness that was cited was the lack of well-structured interim checks of progress towards student learning outcomes. Other comments include:

1. Assessment should not be limited to the final thesis defense; it needs to be done earlier in the program as well.
2. There needs to be more consistent graduate course offerings, with some common experiences for all graduate students. A retreat and/or a first year orientation course might be considered. Assessment should be embedded in those activities/courses.

3. Although there is a requirement for a thesis proposal, it was suggested that a written proposal also be required, and that the oral and written proposals be used for assessment.
4. Graduate students should be trained in assessment techniques since they would likely contribute to collecting data as Teaching Assistants for the undergraduate assessment program. Also, training in assessment theory and practice is important for their professional development.

RESPONSE

We agree with all of the conclusions made by the reviewers. We have already implemented our original plan; assessment has begun, but we need to build and improve upon it. With due consideration of the suggestions by the review committee, we are planning on having faculty retreats in February to improve both our graduate program and the assessment plan. In particular, we will make sure there are **interim checks of progress** towards student learning outcomes, starting very early in the graduate experience.