Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry
Program Review - 2009-2010

Memorandum of Understanding

Summary of Reviewers' Commendations

1. The University and College provide competitive startup packages for new faculty which include re-assigned time, seed funding and attractive salaries.
2. The University and College provide flexible funding so that the department can determine priorities in expenditures.
3. The program is recognized for expending funds in efficient ways and providing for student success.
4. The Department revised the graduate admission process, which improved its success in recruiting quality graduate students and resulted in an increase both in the numbers and quality of the students in the graduate program.
5. The University and College provide incentives to Department faculty for writing successful grant proposals.
6. The Department faculty members make extensive efforts to gain outside research grants.
7. The Department has made good use of committee structures for faculty governance.
8. The University, College and Department have aligned expectations for tenure and communicated these to the probationary faculty.
9. The Department faculty work well together.

Summary of Reviewers' Recommendations

The Department should:

1. engage in discussions with outside departments/programs for whom it provides service courses, changing the pre-requisite grades to higher levels so as to provide a greater probability of student success. The Department should also develop pre-requisite grades for courses in sequences in order to raise the probability that students will succeed.

Understanding: This has been an ongoing discussion and the Department will continue to consider how to best approach this situation.
2. continue to develop strategies for increasing the number of graduate students.

Understanding: A new committee, the Graduate Student Recruiting Committee, was formed to address this issue. The number of graduate students is at an all time high. Currently, the Department is close to capacity in biochemistry. However, there is a lack of graduate students in other sub-disciplines. The Department has been addressing the situation and is working in consultation with faculty in these subdisciplines toward increasing the number of graduate students in these areas.

3. consider the addition of an upper division writing requirement. This course should include discipline-related information literacy.

Understanding: The Department will address this recommendation in the future as the current budget situation improves.

4. consider the addition of a short safety course that addresses a wide range of needs.

Understanding: The number of times safety issues are addressed is high and there does not seem to be any added advantage to adding one more layer of instruction.

5. initiate an industrial advisory board providing career advising for students and utilizing the industrial contacts of faculty.

Understanding: This excellent recommendation has been discussed intermittently in the Department. Timing and success in pursuing an industrial advisory board setup is directly dependent on the availability of faculty.

6. develop a hiring plan in the context of a broad department level strategic plan that addresses the needs of the curriculum, the necessary number of mentors and classroom instruction.

Understanding: This is regularly addressed and repeated during each hire of new faculty and during curriculum modifications.

7. focus assessment on outcomes which may be useful in justifying the program’s needs and shape the strategic vision. The Department should design longitudinal assessment plans with assistance from the Assessment Liaison and Assessment Committee. The assessment effort should engage the entire Department.

Understanding: This has been ongoing and will continue. The Department’s liaison and assessment committee have developed assessment tools which have resulted in useful information.
8. should continue to actively seek outside grants to support research and students.

   Understanding: This has been an ongoing priority and we have reached a stage where about half of the faculty have major grants.

9. should consider how best to provide more opportunities for students to present research results at professional meetings.

   Understanding: Presentations by students at professional meetings have significantly and steadily increased. These efforts will continue.

10. assign a tenured or tenure-track faculty member to the position of library liaison.

    Understanding: Faculty have access to the library liaison for the College in the Library. A faculty liaison is not needed. As available, funds should be spent on additional subscriptions to journals.

11. provide the basics for classrooms: chalk and erasers for chalkboards and markers for “whiteboards.”

    Understanding: We have initiated this and responsibility seems to have been recently transferred to the Department from the campus Physical Plant Management.

   The Department Chair should:

12. have close consultations with the tenure-track and non-tenure track faculty, as well as the staff during the current budget crisis.

    Understanding: This has been ongoing.

13. continue to plan, with the Department, for the future after the current budget crisis ends.

    Understanding: This has been ongoing.

   The College/University should:

14. provide additional technical support as budget allows; one mechanism may be to provide technicians who can serve two or more departments (for example, biochemistry and molecular biology have similar instrumentation needs).

    Understanding: This has been discussed at the College level and more so now with the budget crises. Discussions are ongoing.
15. update classrooms to have “smart” technology.

Understanding: This has been an ongoing issue. There is a need to better communicate between the Department and Facilities Planning as to the definition of “smart” technology. The Department would like greater impact into “smart classroom” design in its area.

16. within the context of the current fiscal situation, remodel existing space to provide larger lecture rooms that can seat significantly more than 125 students.

Understanding: This has been an ongoing issue with disagreement as to the value of large classrooms but with an understanding of the reasons for such.

Not mentioned in the reviewers’ report:

17. The University and College should renovate and refresh outdated facilities and equipment in a more timely manner and support the laboratory needs of newly hired faculty and those that are needed to attract new faculty.