DePaul University Academic Program Review

Cycle 5: Spring 2002—Spring 2003

Memorandum of Agreement -- November 2003

Department of Biological Sciences

As a result of the fifth cycle of DePaul University's Academic Program Review Process (Cycle 5), the participants in the process enter into the following agreements. The participants understand that this document will be available to be made public once all the signatures are in place.

University Commitments to Cycle Five Units:

1. Academic and Career Advising:
   
   a. The University will look into providing institutional assistance for graduate/professional school preparation in terms of publicizing and making certain that standardized test preparation programs are available.
   
   b. The University will look into implementing advising alerts through Campus Connect that encourage students to contact their advisors prior to enrolling in courses.

2. Diversity:

   Consistent with the University’s mission, DePaul University remains strongly committed to promoting the diversity of faculty, students, and staff. Academic Affairs will support a variety of strategies developed by departments and programs to enhance such diversity.

Common actions agreed upon for the sciences at DePaul:

1. Graduate Stipends.

   The Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences acknowledges that current graduate stipends in the sciences are less than what is offered at comparable institutions and has made a commitment to make progress toward equity in this matter. Hence, an increase for stipends has been included in the budget for the coming academic year. However, for the long term, departments should consider alternatives to handling graduate assistant responsibilities such as lab staffing. Both sides agreed to continue discussions regarding alternative strategies in this matter within the larger context of the roles of the MA science programs at DePaul.

2. Science Facilities

   The Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the EVP for Academic Affairs commit to being advocates for the sciences and science facilities at DePaul. Furthermore, they ask to be kept aware of the changing and upcoming needs of the science departments as they become apparent including: changes in curriculum, concentrations, and technology. Knowledge of emerging developments in the field will then allow the institution to better situate itself for the future.

3. Transitional Masters Program Initiative
Academic Affairs and the Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences agree to continue support of the transitional Masters program being piloted with Xavier University—New Orleans. The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Academic Affairs, and the science units agree to search for funding to support students brought in through this initiative without decreasing funds to existing graduate students.

4. Freshman Sequencing Flexibility

The Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the EVP for Academic Affairs strongly support efforts by the sciences to create flexible entry points into their programs. Actions including the reorganization of courses, the staggering of introductory sequences, and scheduling cooperation within the sciences and mathematics departments are all endorsed as ways to encourage student enrollment.

5. Formal Evaluation of Terminal Masters Programs

The Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the EVP for Academic Affairs encourage the science departments that offer terminal graduate degrees to evaluate these programs in terms of the quality of educational experience provided, satisfaction with student applicants, roles the program currently fulfills, future expectations of the programs and ways to achieve these goals. The Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the sciences agree to continue discussions regarding future directions for these programs where applicable.

Note concerning the Department of Biological Sciences’ position on the above common actions

1. Concerning graduate stipends: In addition to the increases noted above, the Department of Biological Sciences would also like to continue discussion over the coming years on the issue of eventual additional stipend increases to achieve graduate stipend levels that are competitive with other comparable institutions.

2. Concerning traditional masters program initiative: In seeking out funds for this program, the DBS would prefer to work with the College and Academic Affairs in efforts initiated by these latter two entities, rather than initiating their own search for funding.

3. Concerning freshman sequencing flexibility, the department notes that it has no current plans to modify the introductory General Biology sequence, but will work in cooperation with the other science departments to minimize scheduling conflicts, and achieve an overall science curriculum that maximizes the ability of students to complete the science majors in a timely manner.

College actions agreed upon for the coming year:

1. Advising Workload

   a. As the faculty of the Department of Biological Sciences has a particularly heavy advising workload, the Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences agreed to work with the department to develop alternative strategies for distributing the load possibly including:

      i. Course release for advising pre-med, graduate, professional school, education, or other large groups of students with specific advising needs, with part-time faculty being funded to handle teaching responsibilities. The department would need to present a fully developed plan for administrative release and
replacement with part-time faculty.

ii. One-year appointments with specified advising responsibilities, with the intention to retain for a specified number of years.

iii. Additional course release time for biology faculty to help coordinate the assignment of advisors and evaluation of transcript questions for the large number of incoming freshman and transfer students each year.

**Actions agreed upon for the coming academic year:**

1. **Teacher Preparation**

   The Department of Biological Sciences agrees to continue its effort with the School of Education to appoint a new joint hire in the Biological Sciences and School of Education. It is hoped that this position, when filled, will enhance the interaction among the Department of Biological Sciences, the School of Education, and the other sciences in fostering communication and improving each division’s role in educating future K-12 science teachers. It is expected that the new hire will be housed in the School of Education, but have limited teaching responsibilities in the Department of Biological Sciences. The Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences continues to prefer hiring a biologist with a strong educational background but housing the new hire within the Department of Biological Sciences, but agrees to the current direction of the search. Both the University and the Department will remain committed to enhancing the diversity of faculty throughout the hiring process (See 6a below).

2. **Advising**

   The department has begun implementing plans to address student dissatisfaction with academic and career advising. The DBS will annually evaluate student satisfaction with advising with data collected from OIPR/survey or other data collected within the department in order to track progress and determine if procedures need to be revised.

   a. **Academic Advising:** The Department of Biological Sciences will seek to connect with students early and maintain that connection throughout students’ academic careers.

      i. **Early Advising:** In Biology 101 faculty will provide students with advising and declaration of major information and resources. A plan to encourage students to visit their academic advisors will be implemented.

      ii. **Regular Contact:** Faculty will regularly contact their advisees with the assistance of the department administration, which will provide faculty with updated contact lists of their advisees.

      iii. **Website:** The Web Committee of the department will update and maintain the department’s website to include an advising link and links to forms and course offerings.

      iv. **Dates/Deadlines:** Faculty as a whole will take responsibility for making students aware of important dates/deadlines.

      v. **Math Advising:** Faculty will advise students with math deficiencies (students who placed in Math 101) about the potential difficulties of beginning the
vi. Summer Advising: The Department of Biological Sciences will work with the other sciences and the Mathematics Department to improve summer advisors’ knowledge of the requirements and difficulties in the sciences and math curriculum. Also an improved manual for advising incoming students who are interested in or, given their backgrounds, are appropriate candidates for a science/math degree will be created.

b. Career Advising: Faculty in the Department of Biological Sciences will begin career advising early within the students’ academic careers and integrate career advising throughout the major.

i. Beginning Sequence: The handout “50 Things to do with your Bio Degree” will be distributed and discussed in BIO 101 included in the discussion will be opportunities in allied health and non-medical careers. A representative from the Career Center will give students an overview of the Center’s services in BIO 102. In BIO 103 there will be a career day in which there will be speakers and research into students’ career interests.

ii. Experiential Learning: Provide majors with information delineating how the experiential learning requirement can assist in making career choices.

iii. Faculty Awareness: Department of Biological Sciences administration will inform faculty of events sponsored by the Career Center and faculty will announce these events in class.

iv. Life Sciences Club: Speakers will be brought in to discuss their careers and experiences.

v. Website: The Web Committee will provide a career link that will make available to students resources regarding careers, graduate/professional education sites, etc.

vi. Course Integration: Faculty will be encouraged to integrate career information into courses.

vii. The Department of Biological Sciences will continue to evaluate and develop additional curriculum or program offerings (such as a concentration in Biotechnology and coordinated 3-1 programs in Allied Health Technology) based on students’ interests and career opportunities.

3. Retention Studies

The department will expand its in-house retention studies. Studies will be conducted beyond the freshman year, beginning with the Fall quarter of the freshman year to investigate attrition during Biology 101. Also, over the coming year special interest will be paid to the effect of inquiry-based learning models and smaller sections of the introductory courses on retention.

4. Student Writing

The Department of Biological Sciences will continue its assessment of student writing and its new
requirements in the beginning sequence of writing multiple versions of lab reports and possibly having students assess each other’s work. This assessment will examine actual student work and take place in conjunction with the annual assessment conducted for the Office of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment.

5. Graduate Program

   a. The department will increase the number of upper level undergraduate courses cross-listed in the graduate program in order to improve the number and variety of options available to graduate students.

   b. The department will implement a more defined schedule for monitoring graduate progress. Expectations of students and milestones will be better articulated in order to increase the transparency of the process. This is expected to improve faculty and student monitoring of student progress and increase on-time graduations.

6. Diversity

   a. The University’s mission of increasing diversity will continue to be a goal of the Department of Biological...
b. The DBS has embarked, with Academic Affairs and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, on a program to transition post-baccalaureate students from Xavier University—New Orleans (a historically black college) to the Masters program in the department and also to work with these students to develop contacts for Ph.D. work after DePaul.

Signed:

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Chair of Unit Review Committee    Department Chair/Program Director

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APRC Subcommittee

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Chair of APRC

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Dean of the College

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Associate V.P. for Academic Affairs   Executive V.P. for Academic Affairs