

CALS Academic Planning Council

6201 Microbial Sciences Building

January 17, 2023, 1:00-2:30 p.m.

Attendees: Bradley Bolling, Todd Courtenay, Jed Colquhoun, Noah Feinstein, Glenda Gillaspy, Jamie Nack, Patrick Masson, Francisco Peñagaricano, Sean Schoville, Michael Xenos.

Absent: HuiChuan Lai, John Shutske, Michael Thomas, Thea Whitman

Ex Officio: Mark Rickenbach, Karen Wassarman

Guests: Parmesh Ramanathan

Meeting called to order by Glenda Gillaspy 1:00pm. Items 2 and 3 were discussed in reverse order to accommodate guest availability.

1. Dec 6, 2022 meeting minutes for approval

Minutes were approved and will be posted on the APC website.

3. Graduate School Initiatives and discussion

Dean Gillaspy introduced today's guest, Associate Dean Parmesh Ramanathan.

Parmesh explained that as a part of Graduate School they attend APC meetings and seek feedback from council members. He, then, introduced a few Graduate School initiatives in progress:

1. Strategic Planning –an email from the strategic planning/consulting office soliciting feedback from faculty and other stakeholders on drafts on mission vision and priorities. Input on the priorities and whether we are on the right track was encouraged.
2. Admission Software – the software used for handling all graduate applications is about 8 years old and not as robust as desired. A new software license has been acquired (SLATE by Technolutions) and a kickoff meeting is scheduled for the end of January or beginning of February. It is assumed that it will take about a year before it will be ready to go live – scheduled for January 2024 – Spring semester. Graduate school is seeking feedback on what needs to be changed, a key aspect being improved tracking system of communication.
3. Delta Teaching Program – an instructional professional development program aimed at graduate and post-doc trainees. This program recently moved its administrative home to the Graduate School; thus the Graduate School is seeking feedback regarding the strengths of the program.

Remaining 2022-23 Meetings: Feb 7, Feb 21, Mar 7, Mar 21, Apr 4, Apr 18, May 2, May 16 (*denotes joint meeting with L&S)

Chair: Glenda Gillaspy

Division 1: Francisco Peñagaricano ('23) Animal and Dairy Sciences | Bradley Bolling ('25) Food Science

Division 2: Thea Whitman ('24) Soil Science | Sean Schoville ('25) Entomology

Division 3: Michael Xenos ('23) LSC | Samer Alatout ('25) CES

Division 4: Jed Colquhoun ('23) Horticulture | Mehdi Kabbage ('24) Plant Pathology

Division 5: Michael Thomas ('23) Bacteriology | HuiChuan Lai ('24) Nutritional Sciences | Patrick Masson ('25) Genetics

Extension: John Shutske ('25)

Academic Staff: Jamie Nack ('23) | Todd Courtenay ('24)

Next, Parmesh asked the council members for general feedback related to Graduate School. The discussion followed with questions and comments including the following topics:

- The role of the Graduate School on the issue of stipend rates, segregated fees, and other compensation questions around graduate trainees.
 - The role of the Graduate School in advocacy and recommending minimum rates was discussed. Noted the increase of 10% for minimum grad assistantship rates for next year.
 - Discussion around data/information provided to the Provost's office to inform recommendations around minimum rates.
 - The purpose and limitations on who can pay seg fees was discussed.
 - Suggestions that Graduate School could take a larger role in coordinating such issues across schools/colleges and broad communication to students and others.
 - Making the full compensation package more visible in the admission letter (e.g. including health insurance, bus passes, and other included perks)
- Graduate School role in mentoring training
 - Learning mentoring is a high priority as noted strategic planning
 - There are multiple places on campus currently focusing on mentoring including CTLM (Center for Teaching, Learning and Mentoring) and School of Education.
 - Individual (department/program level) initiatives to develop mentoring programs encouraged; there will not be a one size fits all approach.
 - Associate Dean Karen Wassarman commented that her office would like to work with programs developing mentoring programs in CALS so we can be working together across the college.

2. Forest and Wildlife Ecology Academic Program Review (1st discussion).

Jed Colquhoun, the Chair of the review committee for Forest and Wildlife Ecology Academic Programs, thanked the members of the committee (Sean Schoville, Guilherme Rosa, and Chris Choi) and highlighted some of the key points of the report:

1. The review process
 - a. Due to Covid, the self-study report was written long time ago and a lot has happened in the interim including course changes and new hires. As a result of this period the review relied on individual meetings with faculty, staff, undergraduate and graduate programs separately.
2. Strength and Weaknesses
 - Wildlife Ecology BS –**
 - a. Strengths: enrollment has increased and is considered a healthy level by the department. Students felt professors and staff were readily available to them. Students also appreciate the hands-on experiences they get in the major, and the focus of the major as critical to their career aspirations.
 - b. Weaknesses: There are a few bottleneck courses, some of required courses have been taught at the same time making them unavailable to students, and students also noted the lack of visibility of the major to incoming students.

Forest Science BS

- a. Strengths: Current students report a positive academic experience and retention of the students in the major appears strong. Staff and students indicate a demand in the work force for these majors (more jobs available than majors trained).
- b. Weaknesses: There has been a rapid decline in enrollment numbers. Access to required courses has been an issue requiring a lot of exceptions to get students completed, at least in part due to significant programmatic disruption with retirement, failed retention, and faculty teaching buyouts. There is a fair level of student concern about degree completion with normal course loads. Visibility of this major was also discussed.

Graduate programs in Forestry and Wildlife Ecology were reported to be strong and students reported very positive academic experiences. They enjoy the pace of the program and don't feel rushed. Diversity of the student body increased recently due to new hires and the concerted efforts of JEDI committee, as well as in-house assistantship.

3. Recommendations

- Work towards better program visibility, particularly in the undergraduate majors. Some ideas mentioned include
 - A short video to attract new and diverse students
 - An introductory, feeder course to attract students early in their career
- Update the curriculum and course availability to avoid graduation delays, the large number of exceptions, and student concerns in these areas.
 - For example, make a long-term teaching plan with contingencies for changes in staffing.
- Explore the possibility of offering bottleneck courses more often (and maybe in the summer) or with higher enrollment.
- Consider if there is a path forward to merge the two undergraduate majors into an umbrella program (although it was noted potential complication with accreditation of the Forest Science BS)

4. APC Questions:

Question: Is declining of Forest Sciences BS a national trend?

Answer: Forest Science is a major that has continually struggled to attract students due to it being associated with a rural, white male (although it is becoming more diverse). It was also noted the competition of other programs in Wisconsin and across the UW-Madison campus.

Question: Is the new staff and faculty hiring sufficient to cover the instructional needs to avoid bottlenecks and exceptions?

Answer: Yes, the report and the responses indicate that recovery is anticipated. There was also discussion around what would be the higher limit of the Forest Science major in particular – some thought retaining 40ish from previous years, other commented 60-80 would be a better goal to fully invest in this major.

Question: Was the admission process for Graduate Students discussed?

Answer: Conversation with students indicated that direct admit favored students with strong

knowledge of how graduate school works, and thus was a disadvantage for bringing in a more diverse student population

Questions developed to ask the Department Chair at the next meeting:

1. Will you expand on the process around admissions to the graduate programs? In particular there was interest in how the direct admit process was working and if there are different entry points for students who understand the system versus those who apply to a general pool. In addition to understanding the process, the APC members would like to hear/discuss the potential impact of these practices on the diversity of graduate students.

2. It sounds like there have been challenges, especially in the Forest Science BS program, including low enrollment, difficulty getting courses taught on a regular basis, and lack of incoming students knowing about the major as an option. Is the department all-in for growing this major to a robust 60-80 students enrolled with course offerings to support them or is it time to consider discontinuation so that department efforts can focus on the Wildlife Ecology BS program (or perhaps an umbrella program instead of both the Forest Science and Wildlife Ecology programs)?

If the answer is to continue the Forest Science BS, how will the department work to increase visibility of the program to prospective students and also address the perceptions that students who don't wish to go to graduate school should go elsewhere?

5. Robert G. F. and Hazel T. Spitze Land Grant Faculty Award for Excellence

The call for nominations for this award has gone out. APC members are asked to help identify candidates for this award, which is an important and a prestigious award for CALS. The deadline for nominations is Feb 10, 2023.

A subcommittee of the APC will be needed to review the applications; if you are willing to serve on the subcommittee reach out to Assoc Dean Wassarman.

Meeting adjourned at 2:27pm.