

CALS Academic Planning Council

6201 Microbial Sciences Building

March 21, 2023, 1:00-2:30 p.m.

Present: Bradley Bolling, Todd Courtenay, Noah Feinstein, Glenda Gillaspay, HuiChuan Lai, Mehdi Kabbage, Jamie Nack, Patrick Masson, Sean Schoville, John Shutske, Thea Whitman, Michael Xenos.

Not present: Jed Colquhoun, Jamie Nack, Francisco Peñagaricano,

Ex Officio: Mark Rickenbach, Karen Wassarman

Guest: Alfred Hartemink, Scott Rankin

Dean Gillaspay called the meeting to order at 1:00pm.

1. February 21, 2023 meeting minutes for approval

Thea Whitman moved to approve the minutes and John Shutske seconded. APC voted unanimously to approve the minutes.

2. Soil Science Department proposal to change their name to Soil and Environmental Sciences

Alfred Hartemink, Chair of the Soil Science Department, began the discussion by thanking the APC members for the opportunity to present this proposal. He noted that the proposal to change the name of the department is huge and something they have been thinking for seven or eight years and highlighted three lines of contributions:

- The name change reflects the way the department has evolved. We spearhead the Environmental Sciences major in CALS, although several other departments also contribute. The department also started a new master's program in Environmental Remediation and Management.
- Historically, before the 1960s Soil Science has had a strong agronomic focus (improving yields and increasing food production), and then the focus included other aspects as well, such as the environment. In the 1990's the discipline expanded to emerging toxins in soil.
- Several courses in environmental sciences have been developed to fill the need and niche in environmental science in the context of agriculture.

The department strongly believes that the new name better reflects its activities and identity.

Question: Thinking of campus collaborations and partnerships (e.g. Nelson Institute, Geography), are they aware and do they endorse the name change?

Answer: Yes, we have talked to Paul Robin from Nelson Institute, Bill Likos from Engineering, and Jack Williams and Joe Mason from Geography, and all have expressed their support. The formal letters to request support have not been sent yet.

Karen Wassarman clarified that the formal letters requesting support are sent after the CALS APC approves items.

Question: The department does a lot with soil and how it impacts the water quality, can you give examples of other elements of the environment the Department encompasses?

Answer: Some of the environmental aspects very important to our department are soil toxins and contaminants, which they consider environmental soil science. Other environmental aspects include also non-agriculture use of soil resources, including urban and microbiome work.

Question: How does the name change reflect possible long-term hiring plans? Do you envision in the future that the faculty might reflect the Environmental Science field more broadly or will the faculty continue to be strongly focused on Soil?

Answer: Futures hires are expected to continue to be from disciplines related to Soil. For example, we would not be hiring an atmospheric scientist, but I can imagine hiring in the interface with hydrology, and they have planning around hiring a carbon soil scientist.

Question: The vote reflected in the letter was from 2017 and some people have since left. What would the vote be now?

Answer: Now it would be unanimous.

Question: Can you describe the conversation around names? How was this one selected? Was there discussion with APIR to look at how the name, or the brand would attract students?

Answer: There were two or three name proposals such as Environmental Soil Science, which does not accurately reflect what we were doing, or Environmental Sciences which would be more controversial, and we do not cover all aspects this name implies. We did not have a discussion with APIR around recruiting.

Question: Are you concerned about various institutions (Nelson Institute for example) objecting to the proposal?

Answer: We are not concerned. We have received emails from all of them supporting the name change. We believe we have a strong case for it. We are not the only people on campus that work in environmental science, but we are also not the only people who work in soil science.

John Shutske made a motion to support the name change and Michael Thomas seconded. APC unanimously voted to approve the proposal to change the name from the Department of Soil Science to the Department of Soil and Environmental Sciences.

3. Robert G. F. and Hazel T. Spitze Land Grant Faculty Award for Excellence, subcommittee recommendation

A subcommittee of APC, comprising John Shutske, Mehdi Kabbage, and Larissa Duncan (from SoHE) met via zoom, reviewed the nominations, and felt both candidates were very strong, albeit in different stages of career. The subcommittee unanimously recommended to the Dean that William Tracy be this year's recipient.

Dean Gillaspay reminded APC members of the upcoming events, CALS Awards and CALS Global Day.

4. APC meeting format (discussion)

Dean Gillaspy noted that it has been suggested for the APC to meet virtually. She added that she feels that at the beginning of the year face-to-face interactions are important to develop a comfort level with the college leadership, and later segue into virtual meetings to increase attendance.

Many felt that there will be less engagement in a virtual meeting. Hybrid mode was also mentioned as an option, but it was generally agreed upon that this meeting room is not optimal for hybrid attendance.

Until the end of the 2022-2023 academic year, it was decided to allow hybrid meetings with the use of the owl technology for improved audio (even if visuals are suboptimal).

When discussing next year, one idea was to allow hybrid attendance but with a strong preference for in person; another option suggested was to do one virtual and one in-person meeting per month.

5. Food Science academic programs review, 2nd discussion

Scott Rankin, Chair of Food Science Department, began by thanking the council and the review committee. He, then, emphasized that the review process was smooth and that there were no surprises, with student enrollment and communication identified as areas to work on.

Next, Scott addressed the question APC members asked during the first discussion:

1. Does the department have other data sources to learn how graduate students feel about the program? For example, it was suggested they might have climate survey data to help address the low turn-out for the meeting with the review committee.

During the first round of meetings, there was a low turnout of graduate students (only two students). The second round we had fifteen students and after discussion no edits to the report were necessary. We believe we have built a very good community of graduate students with seminar series, lunches, and various programs with speakers coming in.

2. The APC members noted an apparent tension between the inflexibility of the Food Science BS curriculum and the desire to grow the program. Please comment on this apparent conflict and discuss what actions are being taken to regrow the Food Science BS enrollment.

Historically the number of students in the program has fluctuated; when I first arrived in campus our enrollment was in the 40s. It started to grow, with the peak being the 2013-14 academic year and since then it is decaying. In response to this concern, we have hosted strategic planning session to identify the problem and find ways to implement departmental resources against this predicament. Some things in motion worth noting include:

- Food Science Ambassadors (senior students) to help recruit undergraduate students.
- Actively engaging and looking at developing a flexible curriculum that maintains the technical standards.
- A motion to omit the second semester Organic Chemistry and Organic Chemistry lab was presented and tabled to allow the department more time to think about how students learn the fundamental language of chemistry and organic chemistry as needed.

The conversation continued around the type of courses, curriculum design, and other opportunities that could potentially contribute to the increase of enrollment in Food Science BS.

Question: Is this the pattern (of enrollment attrition) you see in other Food Science departments in comparable institutions?

Answer: I sit in in the Council of Food Science Administrators, and everyone is experiencing a dip in enrollment.

Question: Does data show whether the students can't find the program or are they leaving the program? Is there a combination of both?

Answer: We don't have a worrisome attrition. It is more the case of 'hiccups' here and there, and it is mostly students who struggle performing or do not see a clear path forward. We are working to improve our visibility)

Questions: Through what mechanism does your department reach out to these students?

Answer: One mechanism is through student ambassadors, and they reach out to high school teachers.

Question: Have you compared your curriculum to other Food Science Department? In relation to the Organic Chemistry course, is there something unusual about our program or not?

Answer: No. The course resides in our program because of convention, and we have three flavors of food scientists: those who work in biology, chemistry, and engineering and the Organic Chemistry fits in all those categories. Compared to other institutions, I do not think we are an anomaly but perhaps conservative about the curriculum.

It was also discussed whether it would be beneficial for an external review team to come in and make recommendations.

3. Graduate recruitment was described as "limited and driven by funding". Please comment on the recruitment process and how these practices may be contributing to difficulty with recruiting a diverse pool of students.

I feel we have a diverse group of students in the department. The graduate program to a great degree operates on the stewardship of the advisor who keeps students on track and manages any issues. There was a dip of international students in the graduate program otherwise the metrics show a diverse pool of students. We do not have anything designed specifically geared towards recruiting underrepresented and minority groups of students. Diversity is not something that has come up as an issue, but we are willing to work on it.

Clarification: The question is related to the department essentially having a direct admit process, which is a known barrier for some populations of students. These students do not have family or a relationship with a faculty who could help and guide them through the application process.

Answer: We have not focused on that, so I am not prepared to give a thoughtful answer.

Noah Feinstein made a motion to consider the Food Science academic programs review complete and Mehdi Kabbage seconded. APC unanimously voted the Food Science academic programs review complete.

Meeting adjourned at 2:32pm.