

DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSE TO:
The Program Review Evaluation Team Report (Undergraduate Program)
Department of Criminal Justice/ Weber State University
April 13, 2012

On February 15, 2012, a program review evaluation team visited the Department of Criminal Justice at Weber State University. The team consisted of two senior faculty members from the Department of Criminal Justice at Boise State University (Drs. Andrew Giacomazzi and Lisa Growette Bostaph) and two faculty from other departments at Weber State University (Drs. Sara Dant of History and Don Davies of Chemistry). The purpose of this visit was to assess the criminal justice undergraduate program, identify its strengths and weaknesses, and make recommendations. During the visit, visiting team members reviewed and discussed the department's self-study, and interviewed criminal justice faculty, students and the college dean. This document is a response to the visitation team's various findings.

The overall impression one gets in reading the report is that of a healthy and collegial department, with dedicated and competent faculty, which is nevertheless spread quite thin. The program is indeed far-flung: there is an Ogden day program, Ogden night program, Davis Campus program, a 2+2 program at SLCC, and a master's degree program. All of these programs are expected to be run by a department consisting of eight tenured or tenure-track faculty, three non-tenure track but full-time faculty, and adjuncts. All told, there are over 600 undergraduate majors at any one time, plus a couple of dozen graduate students.

The departmental faculty takes pride in the strengths identified by members of the visiting team: collegial faculty, supportive students, supportive college administration, a plan to improve outcomes' assessment, a highly functioning forensics program, and a plan to effect major changes to the required curriculum with a focus on quality, flexibility and modernity. It is felt that the existence of these strengths will help empower the department as it addresses challenges going forward, including many of the challenges identified by the visiting team. Challenges can be dealt with when a department's overall foundation is strong and when a spirit of vitality exists within the program, as is the case here. While generally complimentary in its report, the visiting team did indeed identify some short-comings which are discussed, sequentially, below.

A. Night Program– The visiting team correctly notes that the criminal justice faculty struggles to offer a full-compliment of courses necessary for the bachelor's degree at night, despite an expectation that it do so. The hope expressed by the visiting team that the increased flexibility obtained by the proposed revision of the curriculum next year (eliminating emphases or "majors within the major") will help lessen these difficulties. While some relief attributable to this curriculum reform seems likely, another problem will continue to exist (one not contemplated by the visiting team). This is an over-reliance (perhaps approaching 90 percent) of night courses being taught by adjunct faculty. It is possible (even probable) at night to

do the bulk of one's major without taking a single course from a tenured or tenure track faculty member. This situation can only be corrected by either hiring additional tenure track faculty or by eliminating the departmental commitment to try to provide a path to graduation to students able to attend only night school. Going forward and absent additional funding, the department will need to choose the lesser of two evils (night program reduction or near exclusive reliance on adjuncts). For now, it appears that the "as is" approach would constitute the lesser of two evils, since this night population would probably rather have an adjunct-based program than none at all. But, the real solution seems to be to work towards equalizing day/night quality by hiring additional, tenure-track faculty.

B. Distance Campuses– the visiting team did "catch on" to the problem of a near universal reliance on non-tenure track faculty at our program at the Davis Campus and at our 2+2 program at SLCC. Like the night program in Ogden, nearly all classes taught off the main campus are taught by faculty that are non-tenure track (full-time contract personnel and ad hoc adjuncts). Visiting team members in their report suggest that perhaps professional development training for coordinators (the full-time, non-tenure track personnel) and adjuncts might improve the quality of instruction. This suggestion would have more merit if the main problem had to do with quality of instruction. However, both coordinators of these programs and many of the adjuncts possess impressive teaching talent already. Indeed, in the cases of the coordinators at SLCC and at Davis, we are very lucky to have such people. We would be lost without them. But, it is felt that the real problem is not one of poor teaching but rather one of isolation from and lack of integration with the tenure track faculty in Ogden. The department feels uncomfortable having these "island" programs functioning with so little involvement on the part of the tenured and tenure track faculty from "home base." Are these programs our programs in name only? We do decide what classes need to be taught at these off-site campuses, but is that enough to make these programs truly our own? The department hopes to work with the administration to find ways to increase tenure-track participation at such sites, perhaps by creating incentives for tenure-track faculty to rotate through these campuses on a regular basis. Replacing the full-time coordinators as they retire with tenure track PhDs as site directors is also something that should be explored.

C. Outcomes' Assessment– The visiting team noted that current assessment procedures, resulting in an over-reliance on anecdotal data, could be improved. The department has a robust plan in the works to achieve this goal. The visiting team noted that the plan seems sound. In brief, it is our attention to develop a global, objective instrument reflecting nationally accepted content, to be administered to all seniors in the senior seminar course.

D. Forensic Science Emphasis– Though described as a "gem" of the department, the visiting team expressed concern that a lack of integration exists between the forensics program (based in the hard sciences) and the main program (based in the social sciences). This "major within the major" will continue to exist despite the planned abolishment next year of all the other emphases within the department (resulting in a more general degree for everyone except forensic science students). It is suggested that better integration might be achieved by having the two

forensic science instructors teach, on occasion, criminal justice core courses. This idea has merit and the feasibility of it will be discussed with Dr. Horn, the director of our forensic science program. It is further recommended that Dr. Horn be compensated for his “directorship,” similar to the way that the director of our graduate program receives additional compensation. The department certainly does not oppose this, but this would be a judgment call for the dean. It is further suggested that more effort be made at promoting the benefits of having the forensic science emphasis in the department. Another good suggestion that we shall endeavor to implement going forward.

E. High Teaching Loads– The visiting team noted that our high teaching load of 4/4, in some cases even 4/5 given our involvement in teaching master’s courses, is at odds with our department’s desire to nurture an appropriate research culture. Admitting that there is “no quick fix” to this problem, the team does suggest that faculty work with the dean to “provide some relief to faculty members in the department who would like to pursue active research agendas.” Some discussion along these lines with our new dean have already been undertaken– indeed he has initiated some discussion himself along these lines at dean’s council meetings. The department is committed to continuing such dialogue. In an effort to encourage research, the department chair has also tried to encourage faculty to stick with 4/4 teaching loads despite the lure of extra pay for teaching a 4/5 load (with the master’s course as overload rather than as in-load). This is a reversal of policy from the former chair whose concerns (perhaps legitimate?) were more along the lines of scheduling classes than encouraging more research (the current chair may have to adopt the former chair’s more practical approach should scheduling pressures force his hand).

F. Major Changes to the Undergraduate Curriculum– The visiting team applauded our proposed revisions to the curriculum next year, but expressed concern about there being too many credits (now and post-revision) required for the major. The team suggested we consider reducing the total number of required credits from 45 to 42 or even 39, in line with national trends. The department did have a robust discussion about this recommendation during a recent departmental faculty meeting and chose against reducing the credits. It was felt that fewer credits would dilute the degree in ways that are not constructive. Though we decided against implementing this reform, we can honestly say that we took the suggestion seriously and did explore it thoroughly.

G. Primary Focus– The team noted that despite the existence of a graduate program, the department’s “primary focus” is apparently the undergraduate program. Given this, the team suggests that revenues and efforts be directed more towards the undergraduate program than towards the graduate program. The department agrees that the undergraduate program is our “bread and butter” but it is felt that the graduate program needs “fixing.” We are committed to both programs and have a plan in store for improving the graduate program (see separate report of the graduate program).

CONCLUSION: The overall health of the department is sound. The department's morale is high and the commitment of the faculty to make improvements is encouraging. The department continues to be spread too thin however, and needs to find a way to accomplish its various commitments without continuing to unduly favor quantity at the expense of quality. The good news is that there is a strong, shared desire for reform within the department. The vitality of the department is almost that of a new department. We have work to do.

Respectfully submitted,

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