

Dean's Response to Medical Laboratory Sciences WSU Program Review and Self Study Results 2013

Dean's response is in purple and in italics:

I would like to extend my gratitude to the review team Dr. Laine Berghout (Weber State University, Chemistry) Professor JoAnn Fenn (University of Utah, MLS) Professor Kraig Chugg (Weber State University, Health Sciences) for their time and expert advice to improve our programs. I also would like to thank the advisory committee, the program faculty, administrative support staff and the University administration for their ongoing support.

The MLS Department completed an academic assessment and self-study through WSU in February, 2013. The following is the report submitted by the evaluation team.

Overview and Summary

The committee's main impressions of the program can be summarized in three basic points:

- *The program is of exceptionally high quality, with a dedicated, well-qualified staff and faculty to deliver a diverse curriculum.*
- *The quality of education and laboratory experience is all the more remarkable due to under-staffing and increased student enrollment.*
- *Thus, the evaluation team's principal concern about the program is whether its current high standards and high enrollments can be maintained at current staffing levels.*

These are the three fundamental impressions the team derived from the site visit and review of available documents. The few weaknesses found in the program are minor in comparison to the strengths.

I agree with the review team outcomes.

Strengths: The Medical Laboratory Sciences department **concurs** with the team's identification of the **program's primary strengths:**

1. The MLS department utilizes a number of health care facilities as academic enrichment sites.
2. Each course in the MLS program has specific learning objectives that are the basis for student assignments, laboratory competencies, exams, and clinical experiences.

3. The MLS department maintains a number of community contacts to provide students with employment opportunities.

I also agree with the strengths pointed out by the team. In addition, the willingness of the faculty to modify and update the curriculum to meet the needs of ever-changing medical field and our healthcare needs is noteworthy. I commend their strong participation and student involvement in the Undergraduate Research activities for the program and at WSU.

Weaknesses:

1. The program has not met regularly with an external advisory board. “This is not a major area of concern. The MLS program met with their external advisory committee in 2012. With large-scale changes in the department faculty in 2012-2013, a follow-up meeting wasn’t held. The MLS program is planning an advisory committee meeting as soon as time allows.”

a. Program Response: **Agree**

i. Rationale: We agree that we need to hold regularly scheduled advisory board meetings. The department was in the process of hiring a new practicum coordinator and felt that holding a meeting with our board would be counterproductive until the position was filled and the practicum coordinator could be introduced to the board.

b. Action Plan and Timeline: We hired the practicum coordinator and held an advisory board meeting on April 19, 2013.

c. Assessment of Action Plan and Evidence of Results: Attending the advisory board meeting were 18 people including faculty, staff, student representatives, and laboratory managers from our clinical affiliates. Our new practicum coordinator was formally introduced and facilitated much of the dialogue. We successfully discussed issues concerning our department such as future employment needs, summer practicums, and we introduced an MLS employer survey designed to gather information about our graduates in the workplace. We also tentatively planned a follow-up meeting for late August to discuss our student’s summer practicum experiences. The role of the advisory board was also discussed and the consensus was that the focus of the board would be on summer practicums and employment needs, and that advisory board meetings would be held at least once, if not twice yearly.

I agree with the findings of the Review Team. Regularly scheduled Advisory Committee meetings are essential for the MLS programs and a requirement for NAACLS Accreditation. I praise the MLS department for their follow-through with the Advisory Committee meeting last April.

2. The program is understaffed and overworked. To lessen the burden, the evaluation team suggests that the clinical laboratory sessions be managed by adjuncts.

a. Program Response: **Agree** with the assessment, but **disagree** with the suggestion to utilize adjuncts to deliver laboratory content.

i. Rationale: The MLS department agrees that the staff and faculty are overworked. The loss of three faculty members in 2012 placed additional workload on the remaining faculty and staff.

b. Action Plan and Timeline: The MLS department has replaced the three faculty positions, hired a practicum coordinator, and hired a part-time staff member for the online department. In addition, the faculty has decided to utilize the College of Allied Health's advisement department in advising prospective MLS students. This decision will dramatically decrease the faculty's workload. The faculty feels with advisements being done by the college advisors, the need for adjuncts to teach labs will not be necessary. In addition, the MLS department has decided to reduce campus A.A.S. acceptance from 44 students to 32, while maintaining a strong online presence. This reduction goes into effect academic year 2013-2014. The concept of the reduction was discussed at the Advisory Board meeting in April and the advisors were in agreement, stating that there are fewer job openings for our graduates in their respective laboratories.

c. Assessment of Action Plan and Evidence of Results: The department feels that the utilization of the College of Health Profession's Admissions and Advisement has been a positive one. The decrease in advisements has allowed the faculty some much needed time to develop and enhance course materials. The addition of the practicum coordinator and the part-time online staff member has allowed the online staff to better meet the needs of the students they serve. The reduction of the campus A.A.S. applicants should be a positive one for both the students and the faculty and staff.

I also agree with the assessment and the MLS plan of action. However, in regard to the reduction of campus AAS students, I will ask that the department reconsider increasing the number of student admissions to closer to its previous. This request can be reassessed after the new faculty have had time to become familiar with their responsibilities, developed new teaching materials, curriculum changes and the college Admission and Advisement continues to assist the students. Since MLS graduates supply various arenas of the healthcare workforce, continue their studies in graduate schools, medical schools, PA schools and other pre-professional areas, we need to be cognizant of not only the immediate needs of the clinical laboratories but also anticipate the future needs of other areas we serve.

3. The evaluation team questioned the current departmental policy of making course evaluations available to all personnel. The team feels that this could have a negative effect on department morale.
 - a. Program Response: **Agree**
 - i. Rationale: The MLS department felt that the availability of course evaluations to the whole department would help new faculty feel less troubled by negative evaluations when compared to those of more seasoned faculty members, helping them to realize that all faculty get some negative comments by students and not to take them personally.
 - b. Action Plan and Timeline: The department discussed the evaluation team's comments concerning course evaluations and decided as a group to discontinue the practice of allowing evaluations to be available to all personnel on May 3, 2013. Evaluations will now only be available to the individual faculty and department chair.
 - c. Assessment of Action Plan and Evidence of Results: The decision to discontinue the practice requires no further assessment or evidence of results.

Agree – faculty evaluation by the department chair and regular faculty meeting with open and non- intimidating environment to discuss various areas either to improve or praise would be a better way to communicate and stay positive as a team.

Department Plans Beyond the Program Review Evaluation Team Recommendations:

The MLS department continues to move toward its goal of creating a program that delivers an exceptional education to our MLS students. The future plans for the department include but are not limited to:

- Improved curriculum changes that go into effect academic year 2013-2014.
- Creation of an upper-division MLS Clinical Immunology course that will increase the MLS students' knowledge in the area of clinical immunology and to help improve national certification exam (ASCP) scores. This course will be offered as a 3 credit hour course beginning spring 2014.
- The MLS department will undergo a departmental inspection of our MLT and MT programs by our accrediting agency, the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences (NAACLS) in 2014.
- Implementation of a new Laboratory Information System to meet the needs of our students.
- Creation of a new simulated STAT lab to be incorporated into MLS 4411 and MLS 4412 Simulated Laboratory I & II.

A great deal of program introspection has occurred since the Evaluation Team site visit. Faculty are excited about the implementation of a dynamic and employment-oriented curriculum and are looking forward to graduates that exemplify the best ideals of Weber State

University, the college and MLS department.

I would like to thank and applaud the MLS chair, faculty and staff for their hard-work, enthusiasm, expertise, dedication and teamwork. I wish them all the best on their upcoming site visit by NAACLS.

I agree with the MLS department plans. I would like to request adding strong data collection and assessment of students to their future plans. This will include exit interviews/surveys, graduate and employer surveys, placement rates and areas of employment. This will also assist with the college and WSU assessment processes.

*Respectfully,
Yasmen Simonian.
Dean*