

Department of Microbiology Program Review Response

The Department of Microbiology largely agrees with the assessments and recommendations outlined by the Program Review Team. The team identified the strengths of the Departmental mission, student training, coursework, and research opportunities. They also highlighted that the program is growing because of the large demand for students trained as microbiologists. They recognized that students leaving the program are well prepared for careers in industry and professional or graduate school. They noted as strengths “the growth of the program in recent years” and the “strong potential for continued growth.”

The team recognized and supported the Department’s position that we are in need of additional faculty to meet student demand, to decrease the SCH to FTE load of our current faculty, and to increase flexibility in course offerings. The team also identified several of the challenges faced by the department including the lack of sufficient lab support, budget, facilities, and research opportunities. Currently, we have higher demand for our upper level courses than we can accommodate with our laboratory space and faculty availability. They were laudatory about the quality of our program and the success of our students in spite of these challenges. Hopefully, some of these issues will be addressed with the construction of a new Science Lab building.

One area of disagreement with the evaluation was that the department is “resistant to” interdepartmental collaborations and that we have “poor interactions” with other departments. In fact, the department works closely with other departments, especially Botany, Zoology, and Chemistry. Our department requires Botany and/or Zoology courses as support courses and allows upper level Botany and Zoology courses to count as electives toward the Microbiology Major. In addition, all Microbiology majors can earn a Chemistry minor through the completion of their chemistry support courses. These elements of our program allow a student the flexibility to tailor their degree to their future goals. Microbiology offers service courses for the other College of Science majors (e.g. Principles of Microbiology, Immunology, Medical Microbiology) and an interdisciplinary, team-taught, course in Geomicrobiology. Also, our Microbiology faculty have a consistent record of research presentations and publications with faculty from other WSU department faculty and their students. The team recommended that a common core of biology courses or a team-taught Introductory Biology course would be beneficial for the College. This is an area we are interested in exploring with the other Life Science departments to determine if it would meet the needs of the majority of our students or help with recruitment and retention efforts.

The team made some specific recommendations that the department can address.

- *Advising:* The concern appears to be that students are taking more than four years to complete their degree. The department will review the courses and course sequence within the context of core skills and concepts to make sure that students are able to complete the degree in a reasonable amount of time. However, this is a

complicated issue because most students need advising tailored to their individual situation and background. This might require more faculty to be involved in the advising process.

- *New Building:* We are doing our best to lobby for the space and facilities the department will need in the new building.
- *Strategic plan:* To facilitate and plan for the expected growth in the department, the team recommended that we generate a departmental strategic plan within the context of the College. Such a document could help the department make decisions that will impact the department in the future, such as new hires, equipment purchases, and new courses. However, they did note that, “such a plan is only useful... if it is consistent with the strategic plan of the college and university.”
- *Outreach to alumni and industry:* An alumni and industry advising board for the department is being assembled.
- *Future programs:* The team recommended we explore the idea of offering a Master’s degree. There is industry demand for students with this level of training and graduate students would be helpful for facilitating more research and teaching opportunities.
- *Safety:* Safety issues (that do not involve major infrastructure) will be addressed by the start of Fall 2013. Improved signage and safety equipment will be purchased and installed.

Overall, the team was impressed with the accomplishments of our department. They were especially impressed with the quality and enthusiasm our students have for the program. We routinely have the highest number of graduates, with excellent post-graduation success. With the proper support and planning, our program will continue to have “significant and sustained growth.”

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