Meeting Minutes

1. Approval of minutes from March 30, 2021
   ▪ Motion to approve the minutes of March 30, 2021, as distributed. Motion was seconded and approved (8-0-0).

2. Department of Biology Program Review
   ▪ Paula Kleintjes-Neff was in attendance to provide information and answer questions. A very strong department other than current demographic changes. Four tenure-track faculty retiring between May 2021-May 2022. Biggest concerns: updating assessment for next 5 years, reviewing core for retention from first fall to second semester/success in core (BIOL 221), and staffing. Requested two positions two years ago which were denied, requested one position last year which was also denied, will put forth requests again this year. With departure of faculty, will lose some undergraduate research and immersion opportunities. Department does well with HIPs and have more students who want to participate in them than faculty that can support them.
     ▪ Do you think the issue of time-to-degree for majors is directly related to upper-division course availability or are there other aspects impacting it?
       • Don’t think it’s due to course availability. Students have a lot of amazing opportunities to study abroad, internships, and faculty with research. Don’t think they’re in a rush to finish their degrees. Working with ARCC may improve this.
       • Sometimes if a faculty member is on sabbatical and a student can’t get a particular course, course availability can become an issue but it’s not a big concern.
   ▪ Recruitment used to end in hiring of individuals with focus in one area, considering hiring faculty with interdisciplinary specializations that can teach/research multiple things instead of focusing on one area?
     • Cultivating an interdisciplinary department is the number one goal of the department’s Strategic Plan. New searches will look to recruit interdisciplinary faculty who can teach a variety of courses and can collaborate with other faculty not only within department but across campus.
   ▪ What kinds of opportunities will be available for the department with the new science building? Any concerns about the building delay?
     • Looking forward to a new building but doing the best with what they have. New opportunities – having large, open, collaborative communal spaces to work and study together; spaces that will be flexible for different pedagogy/lectures/labs; collaborative spaces for research and teaching; access to big data computing
     • Building committee members have some concerns because the number of labs is based upon the number of current tenure-track faculty. If number of faculty grow, may end up short on lab space, whereas office space is more flexible. Need to account for interdisciplinary faculty who also use the space.
Appreciated reading the Strategic Plan and intrigued by Goal No. 2, specifically, strengthening the sense of community among faculty and students. It is a difficult goal, how is it progressing?

- Some of the goals of the Strategic Plan have been completed and some are on hold, all materials were written prior to the IRC and external reviewer’s responses. Covid didn’t help with building community. The department has a very active Biology Club and other social and award events. Before ARCC, faculty knew the students due to their advising. Some faculty are reinvesting in the effort. Do send individual emails and letters to students to let them know the department cares.
- Have a departmental lunchroom to eat together, also supportive of each other outside of the office.

How has covid affected large class sizes, how has it been working virtually/hybrids/labs?

- Most who were hybrid did lectures online, labs were at half-capacity and shortened, used split rooms and field trips, large lectures were split and automatically recorded

What has been done to address the continuous issues/concerns with Biol 221?

- Don’t think of it as a “weeder” class, it’s an intro to biology course with emphasis in cell and molecular biology; it’s a tough course. Have been experimenting: one faculty taught in fall with lecture online and labs in-person; it is being team taught by three faculty who have taught the course before this spring, integrated exams. Test scores have not increased. Because of covid split labs – shorter. It’s a tough year to gauge progress. Also have a proposal for a tutorial which was strongly urged by the reviewers. Dr. Bryant received an URCA release to develop and work on it. See a lot of promise with it, will help to ensure high schoolers are prepared to succeed.

Considering revisiting the course sequence of core so it is not so rigid. Feel retention from first to second semester there will be loss/attrition of student not just in biology (change majors, stresses of first semester of college). Need to work through all pieces, which will take time, but the department is reviewing them.

- Concern during review that only the strongest students get to take BIOL 221 the first semester but it is a non-issue and doesn’t create more time-to-degree.
- IRC felt students need more communication to let them know they are not falling behind if they can’t take the course first semester.

Department has a lot of responsibility to provide LE courses for other programs that need them for their requirements. How would it change the department if this wasn’t the case?

- Hardest to meet demand for Human A&P/BIOL 214 because it’s part of LE, but also BIOL 250 due to demand for scheduling and orchestration for those courses in collaboration with Chemistry to prepare students with passing grades to be able to apply to the College of Nursing is very challenging; courses provide a lot of student credit hours which are important to the department; have passionate faculty who want to teach the courses; would have more HIPs, more upper-level courses, more involvement with Honors, more research without.

All in favor of approving the Summative (Continue in present form) and Additional Recommendations (4, 14, 17, 18 leave blank) for the Biology Program Review Form. Approved (9-0-0).

Chair Marquell Johnson adjourned the meeting at 2:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Forcier
Secretary for the Meeting