

BA and BSc Undergraduate Biology Programs 2014 Annual Implementation Report

Submitted by: Scott M. Ramsay
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Implementation Plan from 2011-2012 Final Assessment Report

Recommendation: Raise entry level requirements	
Responsibility: Department Chair, Associate Dean: Student Services, Registrar	Implementation Date: 2013
Additional Notes: First steps were taken in 2012.	
<p>2012-2013 Actions:</p> <p>Program Response on Recommendation: The first steps to increase the entry requirements were implemented for students applying for admission in Fall 2012. The minimum entering average was raised from 74% to 76%. We will be able to evaluate the effect (overall entry grades, number of applications, offers and acceptances, etc) of the first stage of the implementation in the next month or so as we receive more acceptances.</p> <p>Decanal Response on Recommendation: The modest increase in the minimum entry average did not result in any significant decrease in 2012 admissions to Biology. We are projecting a slight decrease in 2013 admissions, so we will probably delay further increases in the minimum entry average until we are confident that enrolment numbers are stable.</p> <p>PRS Comments: Progress Noted. Please report on any updates in next year's report</p>	
<p>2013-2014 Progress (check one):</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Completed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> In Progress</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain): On hold</p>	
<p>Unit Actions: The first year intake for Fall 2013 was down compared to the previous two years, but only seven short of our actual target. The proportion of enrollments in the Honours BSc program increased to 71.6% compared to 55.6% in 2012. The average entry grade for BSc students was 80.1%, and 77.6% for BA students. We take these data as evidence that we were able to attract a stronger pool of applicants in 2013. We will follow up with retention data to see if the increase in admission requirements has a carry-on effect on student success. Because of the decline in enrollments in 2013 we have held off on further increases in the admission requirements for 2014.</p>	
<p>Decanal Comments: The minimum entering average was held at 76% for 2014. Unfortunately there has been a drop in 2014 in the number of new first year students entering both the BA and BSc Biology programs. The drop cannot be blamed on having raised the entry requirement slightly; it is due to many factors, including demographics. However, it means there will be no further increase in the entry requirement for 2015. In fact we will have to consider a possible decrease.</p>	
<p>PRS Comments: The committee acknowledges that the Department is aware of the spirit of this recommendation and will continue to monitor its admission requirements. There is no need to report on this recommendation further.</p>	

Recommendation: Clarify graduate TA expectations	
Responsibility: Biology Department Graduate Advisor	Implementation Date: September 2012
Recommendation completed.	

Recommendation: Upgrade teaching lab equipment.	
Responsibility: Department Chair, Associate Dean: Priorities & Planning	Implementation Date: Ongoing
Additional Notes: STERF budget is primary funding source.	
2012-2013 Actions:	
<p>Program Response on Recommendation: We received over \$25,000 in STERF funding to replace equipment in the teaching labs during the fall and winter of 2012-13. Over the summer we will repeat the evaluation of equipment that needs to be repaired or replaced and apply for funds as they become available.</p> <p>Decanal Response on Recommendation: The establishment of the Science Teaching Equipment Renewal Fund (STERF) has enabled better planning for equipment upgrade and renewal.</p> <p>PRS Comments: Progress noted. Please report on any updates in next year's report.</p>	
2013-2014 Progress (check one):	
<input type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain): ongoing	
Unit Actions: We were able to purchase new equipment this year through STERF. We also used STERF funds to increase our number of slide sets for Developmental Biology and Embryology, increasing the number of students we can accommodate in those courses.	
Decanal Comments: Upgrading of Biology teaching lab equipment is proceeding adequately. As noted above, the availability of the STERF fund allows for more systematic planning of equipment renewal.	
PRS Comments: The committee recognizes the ongoing nature of this recommendation and considers it completed for reporting purposes.	

Recommendation: Find more storage space.	
Responsibility: Department Chair, FoS Admin Manager	Implementation Date: 2012-13 academic year
2012-2013 Actions:	
<p>Program Response on Recommendation: During the winter, some additional storage space was procured through the Faculty of Science. The teaching support staff in Biology have also been diligent in discarding unused items that were taking up valuable space in within the Department. However, space is still an issue on all fronts (research, teaching, storage) and will only be fully resolved with newly dedicated space for the Department.</p>	

Decanal Response on Recommendation: Storage space issues were partially addressed in the short term by freeing up space that was used to store unused items. We anticipate that more space will be made available to the Faculty of Science when the opening of the Global Innovation Exchange triggers a shuffling of other space on campus. Long term planning for a new Science Building began in 2013.
PRS Comments: Progress noted. Please report on any updates in next year's report.
2013-2014 Progress (check one): <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain):
Unit Actions: The teaching support staff have continued their efforts to discard unused items, and we have been able to make use of off-site storage space acquired by the Dean of Science. Short and long term space usage plans (Physical Resources' Integrated Space Management proposal, and proposed new building for Science) have identified some opportunities to increase storage space but those will be 3 years or more coming to light.
Decanal Comments: This is a minor issue that is under control. Shortage of space is a general problem within Science and across the entire university. For Science, things will improve substantially by 2016 as new space is acquired following the opening of the Global Innovation Exchange building.
PRS Comments: The committee recognizes the ongoing nature of this recommendation and considers it completed for reporting purposes.

Recommendation: Hire additional lab technician.	
Responsibility: Dean	Implementation Date: Summer 2012
Recommendation completed.	

Recommendation: Hire additional administrative asst.	
Responsibility: Dean	Implementation Date: Summer 2012
Recommendation completed.	

Recommendation: Increase IA support.	
Responsibility: Department Chair, Dean	Implementation Date: 2012-13 academic year
Additional Notes: As required to mount courses.	
2012-2013 Actions:	
<p>Program Response on Recommendation: We were able to meet our needs for IAs this year. The University pay schedule for IAs was revised, and the funds to cover the pay increase were added to the Departmental budget. Our IA needs for the 2013-14 academic year are likely to increase as we anticipate increased enrollments in all courses, leading to a need to offer additional lab and tutorial sections.</p>	

<p>Decanal Response on Recommendation: Even if the number of Biology majors stabilizes, the enrolment in Biology courses continues to rise due to demand from students in Health Sciences and other programs. The Faculty of Science is committed to supplying the instructional resources (both CAS stipends and IA support) that are required to meet these needs.</p> <p>PRS Comments: Noted. Please report on any updates in next year's report.</p>
<p>2013-2014 Progress (check one):</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Completed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> In Progress</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain):</p>
<p>Unit Actions: We have hired IAs where they were needed. Most of our IAs are undergraduate students, however in a few cases we hired term-7 or term-8 as IAs where we were short of TAs for particular courses. Compared to 2012-13, we offered 7 more lab sections over the fall and winter terms to meet student demand. The number of lab sections for 2014-15 is forecast to be the same as this year, so our IA needs should be similar.</p>
<p>Decanal Comments: The requirements for IA support will be met in 2014-15. IA budgets will likely be reduced in 2015-16 as a result of overall budget cuts, which may require some modifications to the way some courses are delivered.</p>
<p>PRS Comments: The committee encourages the Department to continue to monitor this issue but recognizes the ongoing nature of this recommendation and considers it completed for reporting purposes.</p>

Recommendation: Reinstate first year labs.	
Responsibility: Department Chair, Dean	Implementation Date: Uncertain
Additional Notes: Feasibility must be carefully considered in the context of available space and funding.	
<p>2012-2013 Actions:</p> <p>Program Response on Recommendation: At the moment we have no way of re-launching the first-year labs. However it is our intention to argue in favour of their re-introduction in the IPRM exercise.</p> <p>Decanal Response on Recommendation: The difficulties that forced a discontinuation of first year labs in 2010 (shortage of space and money) have not gone away. We expect that additional undergrad lab space will become available in 2016 as part of university-wide space adjustments following the opening of the Global Innovation Exchange Building. Budget projections for 2014-15 are not encouraging, but a revised budget model that links income to enrolments more directly might improve the situation in the longer term. We will not reinstate first year labs until we are confident that they can be supported on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>PRS Comments: Noted. Please report on any updates in next year's report.</p>	

2013-2014 Progress (check one): <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain): Planning
Unit Actions: Over the last year we contributed to two planning initiatives that would increase the space available for first-year labs. The first was the development of architectural plans for a new Science building that would incorporate new teaching labs. The second was a proposal for Physical Resources' Integrated Space Management Plan, which envisioned renovations to the third floor of the Science Building. The latter plan is more likely to be completed in the short term (~3 yrs) and incorporates space that initially could be used for first year tutorials, and later for dry labs as funds become available. In our IPRM submission we stressed the importance of first year labs to the future success of our undergraduate programs. Budget projections from the VP: Finance out through 2017 do not leave us optimistic that there will be funds to launch first-year labs before then.
Decanal Comments: I agree with the departmental comments that the space shortage for undergraduate labs will probably be corrected in the next few years. However the larger problem is the personnel costs associated with laboratory coordinators/technicians. With budget cuts likely for 2015-16 this problem will get worse. We will not reinstate first year labs until we are confident that they can be supported on an ongoing basis.
PRS Comments: The committee recognizes the ongoing nature of this recommendation but considers it completed for reporting purposes.

Additional Recommendation from the Program Review Sub-Committee: At its November 11th, 2013 meeting, Senate Academic Planning approved the following motion: "that the Senate Academic Planning Committee, on the recommendation of the Program Review Sub-Committee, approve the inclusion of a university-wide recommendation on each Annual Implementation Report that, prior to the next cyclical review, the program develop a means for assessing program learning outcomes." A full explanation of the rationale behind the motion can be found here:
http://legacy.wlu.ca/documents/56385/PRS_Recommendation_for_Annual_Implementation_Reports_SAPC_Nov_11_2013.pdf

The committee recommends that the Department begin having conversations about program learning outcomes assessment and put together a strategy for collecting and presenting evidence of this assessment in its next cyclical review.

Additional Comments (PRS): The committee appreciates the diligence of the Department in responding to the recommendations made by the external reviewers in this cyclical. Many of the recommendations outstanding this report are ongoing issues, but the committee can see that they are being attended to by the Department and the Dean and considers them complete as far as reporting purposes go. The Department will not be required to complete any further implementation reports prior to its next cyclical review.

