PRAC minutes
April 2, 2015


Guests: Dr. Karen Cummings and Dr. Matthew Enjalran of the Physics Department

Meeting convened 9:40 a.m.

The Committee voted electronically to recommend continuing approval for Sociology.
S. Clerc met the week with the external reviewer for Physics. His report should reach us before the next PRAC meeting when we vote on our recommendation for Physics.

The majority of the meeting was spent discussing the self-study from the Physics department.

We suggest other departments use this self-study as a model. It’s one of the best we’ve seen; it’s by far the best we’ve seen using the new standards.

Dr. Cummings did an outstanding job writing this report. It is clear, concise, direct, and a pleasure to read.

The report illustrates how to balance the requirements of PRAC and those of the university by clearly and coherently describing the assessment plan, direct and indirect measures, and how data has informed curricular changes. It includes discussion/analysis of graduation rates and employment rates, and the interdependency of their department courses and courses from other departments. In addition, the report also positions the program in a national context.

The references to the appendix were appropriate but the report was understandable without having to consult the appendix. The report also kept within the page limits, although we have agreed the department can exceed the page limit in order to include information from the appendix that the Committee thought would be more helpful in the body of the report. The committee is not requiring a revision but the department would like the opportunity to correct some typos and include this additional data.

The analysis of why Physics majors don’t always become Physics graduates is a good model. There are two issues here. One is that the data provided by the OIR wasn’t meaningful for the department so they gathered their own. It would be helpful to know if that’s true for other departments so we can discuss possible changes with OIR.

The second issue is that analysis of the data pinpointed the moment student success turned to student failure—difficulty in a prerequisite math course. Having found the source of the problem, the department and administration are now challenged to find a solution.

The report is also a good example of how the assessment process can identify gaps in curriculum. Physics has noted the missing content areas and developed a Physics III course to cover them. However, university’s current low-enrollment policy has made it impossible to implement this solution.
This leads to another aspect of the report other departments should seek to emulate: its cohesiveness. The analysis of assessment data discussed in question 2 is directly linked to the strengths, challenges, and needs discussed in question 3. For example, the inability to get Physics III underway and the need to more efficiently identify students struggling in the prerequisite math course leads to two of the needs listed in question 3.

The needs have proposed solutions. The department suggests a negotiated policy for course cancellations, and also that mid-term grades for all courses be able to advisors via Banner.

One of the first comments many of the committee made was about the level of participation within department. All faculty participated in the assessment process to varying degrees, which are spelled out in the introduction. We also note that the primary author is a tenured professor and that assessment has been ongoing for several years. During our talk with Drs. Cummings and Enjalran, we heard that faculty shared information and ensured smooth transitions from one coordinator to another. As indicated by the quality of this self-study, the Physics Department should be commended for developing a comprehensive, effective, and ongoing assessment plan.

Meeting adjourned 10:50 a.m.

Submitted by,

S. Clerc (Chair)