

**Academic Program Review
Central Washington University
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The Geography Department at Central Washington University is a strong department with an impressive record of scholarship, teaching excellence, and service to the university and community. The administration, i.e., Provost and Dean indicate it is one of the strongest departments on campus. It is understandable that the department is viewed from the outside as a healthy contributor to the campus and its mission. The Provost called it a signature department and is poised to support the geospatial work of the department. The Dean is a remarkably impressive supporter of the department, understanding its challenges and strengths. He provides a leadership at the Dean's level that has helped this department build on its strengths.

The Department is a healthy size for the number of majors and minors they have. The breadth of their curriculum is appropriate for their size and mission. Their participation in the Resource Management (REM) Master program is a strength for the department, providing them with the opportunity to work with graduate students and teach graduate courses. Some concern was raised about workload balance with respect to the REM, but I assume that will be addressed in the program review for that program.

Staffing is excellent for the department. Their senior secretary is praised for her contributions to the students and department. She clearly is a positive resource for the department. The other staff support is an appropriate level for a department of this size. No real complaints were identified with staffing issues.

I will focus my comments on a few areas where I can add some external eyes and thoughts for the department to consider.

Curriculum

The curriculum was addressed in a variety of meetings with students, faculty, and administrators. It sounds like most are ready to make the move to streamline the curriculum by eliminating the small plan. I agree with this approach. The need for the small plan no longer exists and it can drain the resources of the department to try to continue to sustain it. Focusing on the large plan and the REM is where the department can sustain itself. Otherwise their program is well balanced with the appropriate subfields represented. The program has obvious rigor and challenges for students, preparing them well for their careers.

Their faculty member who shepherded the internship programs has retired. This is a huge hole that will need to be dealt with in some way. It is also essential that the internships have an academic purpose and are integrated into the program. The department states they need to tighten this up and I agree. Service learning is not about volunteering. It is about an integrated plan with academics at the core.

Student Learning Outcomes

The department is weak in its Student Learning Outcomes Plan. They could easily implement a plan that could help them see where their program is strong and where it could use some tweaking. Their geography capstone course could be at the core of it. It appears that they are doing some things already, but they never close the loop with evaluating the data. I would suggest the upper administration fund some training for the faculty to build a strong Student Learning Outcomes Plan. They could send some faculty to a national workshop or a workshop by your regional accrediting body. It could really help them see where their students shine and how they can continue to help their students and strengthen their program. This is something that is really at the forefront of higher education in the country, and it would serve them well to get a strong program in place.

Students

I spoke with two classes of students. In each case I heard how they felt engaged with the department through their internships, research opportunities, and end of the year awards pancake breakfast, which is a very nice tradition that I am envious of...I wish my department had such a sense of community! The students spoke of how most faculty were extremely dedicated to their work and the students. They had some that were great teachers and so they followed them, taking more courses with them just because they loved the professor.

Students also commented that some senior faculty are to be avoided. They intentionally do not take courses from some because of the harassing nature and arrogant style they are forced to endure. I understand that students will say these things. I have conducted approximately 10 academic program reviews in the past 10 years and served in administrative posts on my campus for 17 years so I have a perspective that is measured when I hear these comments. However, these were strong enough that I couldn't ignore them. In academic program reviews I will hear a couple of complainers and usually the other students offset those comments. But, no one offset these comments. It was a majority voice. I don't know what the campus process for post-tenure review is, but a regularized review of senior faculty with respect to teaching seems necessary.

There were also comments that revealed some issues in the department. There is confusion about what are appropriate course substitutions. I am perplexed why each of the faculty has the authority to waive any course they choose. This creates a situation where students will shop

around to get the right answer. There's no consistency in established course substitution practices. It also sets up situations of unequal power relationships for junior faculty if they choose to make a course substitution that a senior faculty would not make. They will look like the softies that let anything by them while the senior faculty will look like hard-nosed people. I recommend that this authority rest in the hands of the chair who knows the implications for these substitutions and can maintain consistent application of standards. The department should have a discussion about what they feel are appropriate substitutions and then the chair is the one who consistently approves them.

Alumni

It appears the department has no regularized way of maintaining contact with alumni. They clearly have lots of alumni out there to could bring back for talks in classes, provide panel discussions on the job market, and integrate them on field trips, etc. I believe some are doing this informally, but if they could use the models of what they do with the highly successful SOURCE and the annual pancake breakfast I am very confident they could come up with ways to integrate alumni into the department. Some departments have annual research symposia that integrate alumni or annual field trips hosted/organized by alumni. I would encourage them to think about how to draw on the resources they have in their alumni.

Facilities

The Department has the luxury of new facilities which are excellent, providing great research and teaching space. The challenge will be to maintain them, e.g., computer refreshments, equipment updating. So, while there are certainly no complaints about space at this time, the ongoing costs will need to continue to be addressed.

Budget

The department has concerns that the recent cuts to Graduate Studies will impact the department and its programs. Each administrator I spoke with agreed. I have no suggestions for filling this void, but agree that it needs to be addressed.

Faculty

The Faculty have an impressive research record that includes applied research where they include students in the research. Most faculty have secured grant funding in recent years. They work on significant projects for the community and region, educating the future employees who are hired by local employers. They are very active in the impressive SOURCE program that CWU organizes. This sounds like a superb program that showcases the student research and the department has been an active participant in it.

An issue regarding review of faculty seems apparent. As in all universities, junior faculty are in a vulnerable position with respect to senior faculty. Class assignments and workload decisions

appear to be totally within the power of the senior faculty. I suggest the department consider exploring a more fair way to assign classes. Perhaps a curriculum committee to set the assignments so that senior faculty are not the only ones teaching specific classes without any opportunity for junior faculty to teach a course. This will help with retaining the junior faculty. If they never get to teach in their subfield, then they will not stay. A rotation of teaching the course could be developed.

One faculty member is a university leader in faculty affairs and is their regular go-to guy towards keeping the department in the know. However, I did hear that they need to take advantage of the summer stipend undergraduate student grant of \$500. No one from the department has ever applied for this. It seemed to be the odd example of something the department had not taken advantage of at the university, with the norm being that the department was engaged and informed within the university.

Faculty Retention

They have had issues of retaining some faculty, especially women faculty. Currently they have some strong, early career women faculty who bring a better sense of balance for the program directions and for their students. Retaining their male and female early career faculty should be a major focus. Mentoring of junior faculty is one of the most important contributions a senior faculty member can make to a department. They mention future hires and a desire to make sure they have a diverse pool of candidates. Obtaining a diverse pool begins with the job description. Some departments nationwide have found themselves with all male pools because they ask for a narrow set of specialties that are predominantly male. Broadening the pool is achieved by broadening the list of specialties the department is seeking or by making the job description general, thus yielding a large pool.

Leadership Succession

The current chair is an excellent university citizen who cares so much about the program that he agreed to this term as chair. He has provided wise guidance during his tenure. Now the department will need to deal with the transition to a new chair.

The new chair will have to take a strong approach to balancing the needs of all faculty. It needs to be someone who can protect junior faculty from the inferior power structure they are in. Some of the governance of the department needs some rethinking, e.g., signing of course substitutions, course loads, teaching schedules. The future chair will need to be a strong leader to be able to govern in a fair and respectful manner.

The Process

The Academic Program Review Process is meant to be a department wide review. It is meant to be a time for the department to reflect and then become a voice of the department as a whole. As

in many reviews that I have seen, usually it comes down to assigning one person to just do it. And oftentimes it is the chair. I have the sense that this was certainly the case for this department. I urge them to take this post review time to meet and reflect over what they've learned from the process and come up with an action plan for their short term and long term future. Departments rarely take the time to reflect because they are so busy dealing with their work, but I urge them to do so.

It was a pleasure to visit this department and university. The department is doing many things very well and should be proud of the programs they have built and sustained. They are a strong department, developing excellent graduates who walk away with hands on experience in research. They care about their students and the program and it shows. As an administrator I would be glad to brag about this department if I were on this campus.