ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT
OF THE RECREATION, PARKS AND TOURISM
GRADUATE PROGRAMS

COMMITTEE PROCESS

This Academic Program Review Committee (APRC) Report is based on the following materials:

3. APRC Interview with Dean Don Taylor, College of Health and Human Services, and Chair and Professor Patrick Tierney on September 29, 2011.
4. Guidelines for the Sixth Cycle of Academic Program Review.
5. The APRC customary evaluation procedures.

These sources were employed to assess the sustainability of the RPT based on the department’s strengths, resources, capabilities, strategies, and future activities. This assessment provides an integrated view of the department with a particular focus on the planned increase in program size and the proposed enhancements to the students’ culminating experience.

REPORT

Background

Since its introduction in 1946, the Department of Recreation, Parks and Tourism (RPT) has attained several milestones: its first graduate program (1958); its formal departmental designation (1964); its inclusion as a part of the College of Human and Health Services (1992); its broadened scope from professional development to wellness recreation, non-profit organizations, and tourism (2003); and a major curricular revision (2010). Currently, the department offers a Master’s of Science in Recreation that is distinguished in its public and private sectoral park curriculum.

The External Reviewers note the department’s reputation as a “thoughtfully designed graduate program that is well positioned for moderate growth” (page 1). They add: “(the department) offers distinctive and contemporary
undergraduate and graduate programs to provide entry-level to executive
talent to many public, private, and non-profit organizations, agencies, and
firms that provide recreation and leisure experiences for million” (page 2).

The department’s strategy, as reflected in its newly formulated mission,
focuses on collaborative leadership, sustainable management, strategic
planning, social justice and community outreach. Its curriculum covers
both public and private sector parks and recreation that align well with the
sectoral park activities within the greater Bay Area, if not the entire nation.
Even so, the graduate program has remained relatively small in terms of
student-enrollments, and current plans project a moderate increase (15%,
or a target of 20 students) by 2012.

University Standards

The Department generally meets the University Standards, although two
areas – the size of the program and the students’ culminating experience –
have been noted for improvement in the Department’s Self-Study, the
External Reviewers’ Report, and corroborated in the APRC interview with
Professor Tierney and Dean Taylor (September 29, 2011). Specific
considerations relating to these two areas are treated in a separate section
of this report.

In terms of Admission Requirements, the University standard (3.1)
stipulates a 3.0 or higher GPA is required (prior to 2008, this standard was
2.75 or higher). The Departmental Self-Study reports that 89% of
applicants meet this standard. Students with a lower GPA file a petition,
and if accepted, the department has a program to monitor and assess their
academic standing. The APRC finds that these procedures appropriately
support low GPA students’ success.

In regard to the required minimum number of graduates (Standard 4.6),
the program falls a bit short (4.8 students versus a stipulated 5.0), but the
difference is not significant. Moreover, with the addition of admitted
graduate students in 2010, this standard is projected to be met by Fall
2012 (see Self-Study, p.9).

Other University standards have been met, if not exceeded. The department
offers sufficient number of course offerings on a consistent basis (Standard
4.1 and 4.2); a road map for graduation has been completed (Standard 4.3);
about 82% of graduate required courses are graduate level with one paired
graduate-undergraduate course (Standard 4.4); class sizes are acceptable
(Standard 4.4). In addition, the department exceeds the required minimum
number of faculty (Standards 5.1 and 5.2); the program planning process is
enhanced with established outcome-assessments (Standard 6.0); there is
active collaboration between program-faculty and the community (Standard
and the faculty experience is enriched with multiple collaborative scholarly activities and the willingness of the faculty to share the workload (Standard 9.0).

The Curriculum

The Master’s of Science in Recreation consists of 33 units, and the curriculum is organized along three areas: foundation (9 units), professional core (12 units); area of specialization (9 units); and an option of a thesis (academic and applied) or a comprehensive examination (3 units). An oral examination is required for those students selecting the thesis-option.

Compared to other programs that are relatively specialized, the RPT offers a broad professional education that includes the private and public realms of recreational and park activities. The External Reviewers commend the department for “crafting a leadership legacy to be celebrated, emulated, and sustained” (page 3). Moreover, these reviewers affirm other distinctive strengths that include a highly professional and collaborative scholarly culture, a significant community engagement, a solid record of research activity, and contributions to the SFSU’s vision for social justice, civic engagement, and internationalization. The reviewers note that this SFSU vision “permeate[s] the undergraduate and graduate curricula” (page 4). Community outreach is likewise extensive with strong attention to promoting recreational programs for persons with disabilities.

The external reviewers underscore the relevance of the current curriculum to developments and trends in the recreational field. During the APRC Sixth Cycle Review period, the core curriculum has been revised, and there is ongoing strategic planning to ensure that the curriculum is relevant and responsive to the priorities and the needs of its stakeholders. Indeed, the department now plans to offer hybrid (or HyFlex courses) to increase enrollments. For example, the department is pursuing a partnership with Chico State on an experimental basis to create more flexibility for students and efficiencies for both departments.

The APRC concurs with the external review assessments and commends the department for being innovative in developing new ways to deliver its curriculum. The APRC also commends the department for its diligence in maintaining a high standard for curriculum development, despite decreased financial resources.

The Faculty Experience

The External Reviewers’ report singles out faculty as among the distinctive strengths of the program. The six tenure/tenure-track faculty members are
evaluated as highly professional, diverse, complementary, team-oriented, and recognized for their research contributions. Collectively their reputations draw students into the program. It is also stated that these faculty members “overachieve,” or “generate positive outcomes comparable to a faculty twice their size” (page 3).

**Responses to the 5th Cycle Academic Program Review**

The department has responded well to recommendations provided in the 5th Year Cycle for Academic Program Review conducted in 2003. Specifically, the department initiated a strategic planning process, reformulated its mission statement to reflect a focus on collaborative leadership, restructured the core curriculum that aligned courses with its new mission, initiated a graduate cohort program, instituted a two-year core course rotation, solidified plans for a culminating professional project (RPT 895-Applied Research Project), formed an Advisory Council, and met both programmatic needs and diversity-goals in its recent hires of tenured-track faculty. The two areas that were not implemented were due to budgetary constraints. The External Reviewers do, in fact, note that the department “exceeded” all but one of the requirements stipulated in the 5th Cycle Review (page 7).

The APRC highly commends the department for its responsiveness to the 5th Cycle Report and the activities that were subsequently implemented. Taken collectively, these activities have brought focus and urgency to the department’s mission and strategies, and have provided the foundation for current plans to increase the program size and to improve the students’ culminating experience.

**Considerations Relating to Planned Increase in Program Size**

The overarching issue relating to Program Requirements (University Standards 4) is increasing the size of the program (University Standard 4.5 and 4.6). This decision was based on program resources and capabilities, faculty interests, comparisons with peer programs, and ongoing consultations with Dean Don Taylor. While not stated explicitly, a larger pool of cohort students can stabilize class sizes and generate networking among students. The department has proposed a new recruiting strategy predicated on direct interviews with targeted students in conferences, more intensive use of referrals, and general marketing and advertising -- activities that can increase the visibility and distinctiveness of the department as well.

In its Self-Study, the department has noted that a 15% increase can be accommodated within its current resources and capabilities. This is substantiated in the report with an analysis of anticipated program quality
SFRs for graduate are quite low, about 4.0 to 5.8, indicating slack resources, see Table 2.1, page 20) and a projected marginal impact on the applicant pool and the yield (“show-up” statistics) rates for accepted and enrolled students (see Table 2.2, page 22). Specifically, to accommodate a 15% increase, the number of applicants needs to increase from an average 15.67 to 18 students; the number of accepted students from an average 9.17 to 10.5 students; and the number of enrolled students from an average 6.5 to 7.5 students.* Based on historical figures, the APRC agrees with the departmental assessment that these are achievable goals.

While this planned increase in program size was reinforced by Professor Tierney and Dean Taylor in an interview with APRC, the committee has noted additional considerations for matching the increased program size with the distribution of faculty workload and responsibilities. Both the Self-Report and the External Reviewers Report acknowledge a problem arising from coordinating graduate activities. Previously these were a part of the Graduate Coordinator’s responsibilities, and currently a part of the Departmental Head’s overall duties. While this load was supported with a 0.2 release time in the past, this has since been rescinded due to budgetary constraints. But with more students and the additional coordination arising from the culminating student experience and “mock” comprehensive examinations, the workload of the Graduate Coordinator is likely to increase in the future. Unless there is renewed financial support for the activities of the Graduate Coordinator, coordination can become an organizational problem (it was already reported that graduate coordination will not be a part of departmental head responsibilities, but that the workload will be shared by all faculty). Dean Taylor and Professor Tierney have indicated that the 15% increase in program size can be accommodated within the department, even with a hypothetical 20% reduction in the departmental budget.

All in all, the APRC finds the planned increase in program size to be modest and manageable. Even so, the APRC suggests that the department monitor the incremental additions to faculty advising and support for preparing students for the thesis/comprehensive examination that can result in greater coordination between the department and its students.

* The data are based on averages from Table 2.2, page 22, Self-Report, and adjusted by the projected 15% growth.

**Considerations Relating to Student Culminating Experience**

In response to a recommendation from the 5th Year Cycle of Academic Program Review, the department has added an Applied Research Thesis as a third option for enhancing students’ culminating experience (University Standard 7.0). This proposal was favorably evaluated by the External
Reviewers. In an interview with APRC, Professor Tierney and Dean Taylor argued that the third option would potentially shorten the program duration for some students who are able to directly apply any work experience or internship with the requirements of the Applied Research Thesis.

Both Tierney and Taylor emphasized, however, that the bulk of students (more than 50%) will still opt for the Comprehensive Examination, because it is more structured than a theoretical or an applied thesis. Compared to the thesis-option, the comprehensive examination, which can be planned and scheduled in advance, still offers a shorter time towards graduation.

In both the thesis and comprehensive examination, departmental faculty are reported to be willing to work more closely with students in preparing for the examination specifically, or by integrating elements of the thesis/field into the core classes. In response to APRC’s request, Professor Tierney provided an example of a comprehensive examination question. The committee found the example to be challenging, comprehensive and rigorous.

Another timely project is the development of E-portfolios as a total and encompassing experience for students. When implemented, E-portfolios provide the following benefits: a record of student accomplishments; an accessible platform for student self-reflection and critique; a sampling of the breadth and depth of student projects for recruiters and post-graduation activities; and a forum for collaboration with other students and faculty. The only caveat forwarded by the External reviewers is the possible risk of “overcomplication” (page 8). The APRC assumes that the department will monitor and track the evolution of this new deliverable and make changes if so required.

**Conclusion**

The RPT Graduate is distinctive in that it is poised for growth and program-differentiation at a time when most other University programs are seriously underfunded. As indicated, the APRC considers the planned increase in program size to be modest and manageable, but with significantly high incremental benefits. While some monitoring is called for in various parts of this report, the APRC is confident that this will be accommodated within the strategic planning initiated by the department and the historical collaborative departmental culture among faculty.