

## Department of Plant and Soil Sciences

### 2013-2014 Implementation Plan Report

**Recommendation 1 – The department should develop a strategic planning process that would foster engagement with larger, longer-term issues in order to have guidelines for making the more immediate decisions on where to invest their resources.**

**Assessment method:** Determine whether planning has begun

**Results:** Planning has begun; the advisory committee has suggested metrics to use for measuring department progress and has suggested potential targets for the next strategic plan.

**Analysis of results and reflection:** The metrics plan has been discussed by the faculty and has returned to the advisory committee for re-evaluation.

**Ongoing improvement actions:** The potential targets in a strategic plan will be discussed at the January 2015 faculty meeting.

**Recommendation 2 – The entire Department needs to discuss and resolve several major issues facing the Department. The College of Agriculture and the Department of PSS are getting smaller – what areas and/or responsibilities will be given up? Examples of the long-range type of issues that need to be discussed include the undergraduate HPLS curriculum, research foci within the Department given reduced number of faculty, and extension foci – given reduction in Extension FTEs. The review committee suggests that the new IPSS graduate program might serve as a mechanism to integrate the various sub-disciplines (crops, soils, and plant biology) within the Department.**

**Assessment method:** Create the next five-year strategic plan

**Results:** The potential targets in a strategic plan have been proposed by the advisory committee. We have engaged in much discussion of the HPLS program. A Modern Agronomic Crop Production individualized curriculum has been established.

**Analysis of results and reflection:** Discussions of undergraduate programs have proceeded most quickly because the metrics for tuition division seem the most stable in the budget model proposals.

**Ongoing improvement actions:** Tie department discussions to the progress in creating the metrics for the budget model.

**Recommendation 3 – As part of the above process and discussions (1 and 2 above), the department should develop interdisciplinary research clusters encompassing both research and extension faculty focused on strengths, and informally or formally designate these clusters as areas of research foci that can be used to recruit graduate students.**

**Assessment method:** Count research clusters which recruit graduate students. Analyze GRE scores of students accepted for assistantships.

**Results:** A forage interest group and a rhizosphere interest group meet monthly. Two graduate students are being co-advised by an extension specialist at Princeton and a soil science researcher at Lexington. One of these is funded by an external grant. GRE scores of students in the IPSS program have not increased yet.

**Analysis of results and reflection:** We are trying to enhance graduate student quality by providing departmental funding for assistantships to those applicants with the highest GRE scores. The scores of our applicants have not changed; so as we maintain the same number of graduate students on research assistantships, their overall quality measured by GRE scores has not changed.

**Ongoing improvement actions:** The department is now trying to encourage the specific recruiting of graduate students by promising assistantships to a program one year ahead of enrollment and charging the faculty member with recruiting a high quality student.

**Recommendation 4 – The department should establish a committee to examine combining all seminar series into one Departmental seminar series to enhance integration within the Department.**

**Assessment method:** Count the activities established to enhance the graduate program.

**Results:** The seminar committee was established, one departmental seminar series was established, a graduate student symposium has been held three times each year, \$5000 was allocated to fund external seminar speakers. Funding for the Graduate Program Outstanding Alumnus award and program was continued.

**Analysis of results and reflection:** Attendance at departmental seminars has increased, particularly among graduate students. Graduate student participation in the Graduate Student Symposia is strong. The symposia have promoted camaraderie among graduate students with different research interests. Graduate students have assumed responsibility for identifying, inviting and hosting seminar speakers during 2013-2014.

**Ongoing improvement actions:** Continue promoting and improving the graduate student symposia.

**Recommendation 5 – The faculty and staff should discuss and develop departmental guidelines to facilitate professional development for staff, and to recognize contributions of technical staff to patents and publications.**

**Assessment method:** Note the number of times staff development in on the agenda for our semi-annual staff meetings.

**Results:** Staff development was discussed once in 2013, and was not discussed in 2014.

**Analysis of results and reflection:** This improvement action has been forgotten and needs to be moved back to active consideration.

**Ongoing improvement actions:** The chair will reinitiate discussions with faculty and staff to increase professional development and recognize technical staff contributions to patents and publications.

**Recommendation 6 – The review committee strongly recommends that the graduate students re-establish the graduate student organization and include faculty advisors in this organization.**

**Assessment method:** Note leadership of the graduate student organization

**Results:** David Van Sanford was appointed faculty advisor for the group. The group was active in 2013-2014 under the leadership of PhD student John Orlovsky.

**Analysis of results and reflection:** Participation depends on the interests of the graduate students. The department has provided resources for student activities and promotes graduate student activities on the department's Facebook page.

**Ongoing improvement actions:** The department will continue to support and encourage the participation of graduate students in the graduate student organization.