

**PROGRAM REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION PLAN
PROGRESS REPORT
Department of Plant and Soil Sciences
2017 - 2018**

Recommendation 1.

Develop an overall vision and direction for the HPLS undergraduate degree considering future opportunities that will allow the department to compete successfully for potential students. Plan to engage stakeholders in this process.

Assessment method: As a faculty we discussed extensively how we thought it was best to proceed with HPLS.

Results: We decided at our January 2018 faculty meeting to officially withdraw from 'co-ownership' of the HPLS undergraduate degree program.

Analysis of results and reflection: Removing ourselves from HPLS has allowed us to put considerable effort into developing a new undergraduate degree program that we feel is a better reflection of our Department as a whole and which we believe will be more successful at attracting students. Further, our removal from HPLS has allowed Horticulture to make changes to the degree, which they believe will better serve the students in that program and their Department.

Ongoing improvement actions: We have plans to engage stakeholders to help us refine the new degree program. We are also working on marketing strategies and figuring out how best to get the new program in place.

Recommendation 2.

Explore ways to enhance scientific collaboration and transformative ideas by facilitating faculty interactions, particularly with extension faculty and new faculty hires.

Assessment method: The new Chair negotiated for funds to hold Departmental retreats and reinvigorate our Departmental seminar series and to enhance faculty scientific collaborations. We will attempt to track new scientific thrusts that appear to issue from these initiatives.

Results: A Departmental retreat was held at the end of July 2018, and all but three full-time faculty members attended – a remarkable turnout for our large, diverse group. Faculty reported enjoying the retreat, being able to meet new faculty that reside in off-campus locations, and having time to socially interact. One new, larger-scale potential collaboration (working group) has started – a phosphorus effort. And results from the reinvigoration of the Departmental series are not in yet. The Chair led one farm tour, with ~15 staff and faculty in attendance Spring 2018.

Analysis of results and reflection: The retreat, reinvigorated seminar series, and funds to support collaborative efforts appear to be helping us meet this

recommendation. Whether the collaborative efforts will be successful in getting off the ground remains to be seen.

Ongoing improvement actions: The Chair will continue to look for opportunities to stimulate and support scientific collaboration amongst the faculty.

Recommendation 3.

Construct a management plan and process for North Farm operations that will allow all faculty to have access to plots, equipment, and personnel.

Assessment method: The new Chair convened an 'ad-hoc' North Farm committee of relevant and diverse faculty and staff to figure out how best to move forward with this recommendation.

Results: This committee identified that many PSS standing committees, including several important ones associated with various aspects of North Farm management, had become inactive over the years. The Chair reconstituted the Land Use Management committee, and this group is working to develop a 'land use request' form that should streamline aspects of planning and process at the North Farm. The Chair has also supported acquisition of a shared use combine. The 'ad-hoc' North Farm committee is working with Matt Peake to improve communication between our Department and the Facilities Management folks at the farm.

Analysis of results and reflection: The process through which faculty gain access to land is improving. With the land use request form, faculty and staff will understand what information is needed, why it is needed, what is being done with it, and how it can help us improve communication and the workflow. The North Farm has many challenges, however - a single form will not solve everything.

Ongoing improvement actions: Our Department needs a 'point' person at the farm, preferably someone with an office in the Agronomy Barn. Finding the resources for this position remains for the future. Similarly, it is unclear whether shared use equipment is going to work for us. The combine is a test case that should inform us on this moving forward.

Recommendation 4.

Devise a departmental strategy for providing all staff with the opportunity for professional development, including participation in scientific meetings where appropriate.

Assessment method: Internally monitor the number of staff applying for the College-level staff professional development awards.

Results: In the first year of the College-level staff professional development program, our Department had only one application, which was granted, to attend and present at a scientific meeting. This year, we have three staff members applying for a diverse set of experiences: learning new techniques, better communication skills, and how to lead a state-wide water quality program.

Analysis of results and reflection: We have increased participation in the College-level staff development program by advertising to the staff and matching staff funding requests. Whether our success in this area continues remains to be seen.

Ongoing improvement actions: The Department will continue to support staff that apply for the College-level award as well as other opportunities that arise.

Recommendation 5.

Explore opportunities for developing online courses for Extension Agents interested in pursuing master's degrees.

Assessment method: We are working with Dr. Grabau's office to help support the College-level effort to create an online MS in Agriculture.

Results: We have several extension faculty that are interested in developing courses that would support the online MS in Agriculture program.

Analysis of results and reflection: By having a faculty member involved in the College-level committee, we are keeping apprised of the online program development and stand poised to make useful online course contributions when the time comes.

Ongoing improvement actions: We will stay involved in the College-wide discussion and hopefully courses will start to be generated soon.

Recommendation 6.

Evaluate departmental committee structure and improve procedural transparency.

Assessment method: The Chair reviewed the existing Departmental committee structure, checked with various committees to see whether they were still functioning or not, and made appropriate revisions. The Chair has also modified and created several new policies, with input from faculty and staff, to improve procedural transparency.

Results: We now have fewer Departmental committees (only those that are active and serving a real purpose), and faculty appear pleased with improved communication and procedural transparency.

Analysis of results and reflection: We are making progress on this recommendation, though the Chair regularly finds additional items that could be improved upon.

Ongoing improvement actions: The Chair will continue to flag problematic committees and issues with procedural transparency and see if she can make improvements.

Recommendation 7.

Continue to evaluate space and equipment needs for the program and develop a long-term strategy for improving these aspects of the program.

Assessment method: The Chair is working with various faculty-led efforts to improve space utilization and access to equipment. This includes holding spring calls for internal equipment proposals, when the budget allows.

Results: We acquired two large pieces of new equipment purchased via a VPR grant and other sources, which faculty initiated. These have moved into S-104 of Ag Science North and are part of the overhaul in capacity, structure, and organization of that unit. The Chair is continuing to support that Departmental shared-use lab by re-filling the Crutchfield position (lab manager for the space). The Chair supported acquisition of several other large pieces of equipment in PSB and elsewhere through a spring internal grant process. The Chair also supported the renovation and uniting of all soils faculty into the N-122 space and remote teleconferencing capabilities in N-224, both at faculty requests.

Analysis of results and reflection: Bringing the soils faculty into one space in Ag Science North and investing in S-104 is likely to improve the collaboration and research capacity of this group within our Department and with others. Time will tell.

Ongoing improvement actions: The Chair will continue to help the faculty achieve their goals with regard to equipment acquisition and space utilization.

Recommendation 8.

Work with the Office of Philanthropy and Alumni to develop specific goals and objectives for future philanthropic efforts.

Assessment method: Track gifts to the Department.

Results: The Corn Grower Association has established an endowed faculty position within the Department, though we believe it is in early stages. The Chair has had several conversations with various Philanthropy people and some retired faculty regarding potential gifts and goals.

Analysis of results and reflection: While there has been some effort at increasing Philanthropy at the Department-level, more could be done here.

Ongoing improvement actions: Continue discussions with Philanthropy and Alumni and watch for opportunities.

Recommendation 9.

Consult with current and past graduate students on ways to improve the overall graduate student experience in the program.

Assessment method: Conduct a satisfaction survey of current IPSS graduate students and create an exit survey to extract similar information from students moving forward. Engage in in-depth conversations with IPSS faculty regarding strengths and weaknesses of the degree program and potential changes.

Results: An extensive satisfaction survey of the graduate students was completed in May 2018 and provided substantial ideas for change and food for thought. This was followed by the Chair meeting with the IPSS Graduate Student Organization and hearing more about the current student concerns. This information was synthesized and shared with the IPSS DGS. These conversations generated additional ideas for improvement. The IPSS program was a major focus of discussion (one of three) at the PSS Departmental retreat in July, where more ideas emerged. The Chair shared all of this information with the Chair of Horticulture, who then took it to his faculty.

Analysis of results and reflection: Given the extensive nature of this data collection and idea generation process, we decided that a more traditional review of the program was not needed. We had already done the review teams work (i.e., generated a list of potential improvements to the program). The idea of forming a steering committee for the degree program was born sometime in June 2018. This group will be charged with moving forward in implementing some items on the idea list. Two current IPSS graduate students will be on the committee. We are hopeful this new committee will be quite successful in helping us address this recommendation.

Ongoing improvement actions: Currently, a proposal for the steering committee is with the Deans for approval, and we hope it will be official and in place by the end of October 2018. The Chair will continue to support the efforts of this group moving forward.