

Internal Academic Review 2009-2010

Department of Biology Internal Academic Review Committee Report to Senate

The Internal Academic Review (IAR) of the Department of Biology is now complete. The Internal Academic Review Committee (IARC) has taken into consideration all of the submissions related to the IAR of the Department of Biology and respectfully submits the following report. The IARC Report to Senate is intended to supplement the findings of the attached Review Team Report and to provide a mechanism for the Head of the Department of Biology and the Associate Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science to jointly report on the progress in addressing the Review Team recommendations (please see the “Outcomes” section of this report).

Summary of the Internal Academic Review of the Department of Biology

The Department of Biology is recognized as a very strong Unit that exhibits excellence in teaching, research and service. The IARC congratulates the Department for having one of the best undergraduate curricula in Canada and for its exceptionally strong and vibrant graduate program.

The IARC agrees wholeheartedly with the External Consultants’ and the Review Team’s recommendation that the Department needs to develop a long-term plan to maintain the Queen’s University Biological Station (QUBS). The Station is widely recognized as a unique research and teaching laboratory used by students and scientists from around the world, and the IARC encourages and supports efforts of the Faculty and the University to investigate funding models and to develop educational programs that will place the QUBS in a self-sustaining position.

The IARC shares the concern raised in the Review Team report that a reduction in support staff will profoundly affect the ability of the Department of Biology to maintain high quality teaching and research programs. The Department and Faculty are encouraged to identify strategies that will support departmental staff even though the IARC acknowledges the difficulties of doing so during this time of fiscal constraints.

The IARC also supports and encourages the efforts of the Department of Biology to preserve critical laboratory experiences for both non-concentrators and concentrators to ensure a rich educational experience for all students. In addition to providing students

with valuable hands-on practical experience, the knowledge gained in general scientific methods and writing are essential and transferable skills.

The IARC recognizes that although the Department of Biology has made a number of faculty hires recently, these have not kept pace with faculty attrition through retirements and resignations. This tenuous situation is further complicated by the potential of an additional ten faculty members who will reach normal retirement age by 2020. To maintain the very high quality research and teaching programs that presently exist in Biology, the IARC encourages the Department to create a succession plan to address this imminent challenge.

The IARC recognizes the Department of Biology as an outstanding Unit and anticipates its continued success. The IARC fully supports the Department in its efforts to combine exceptional teaching with innovative research while addressing the recommendations of the IARC Reports in a concerted effort to maintain a high level of widely recognized performance and success.

Outcomes of the Internal Academic Review of the Department of Biology

*Joint response submitted by the
Dean of Arts & Science and the Head of the Department of Biology*

The Department of Biology and the Faculty of Arts and Science are delighted to see the Department lauded for its excellence in teaching, research and service. Both the Department and the Faculty are committed to exploring mechanisms that will allow for continued excellence in these areas under the current constrained budget conditions.

The Faculty of Arts and Science recognizes the importance of working with the Department to ensure it can fulfill its obligations to provide teaching to its graduate students, undergraduate concentrators, and students in its undergraduate service courses. In terms of capacity, the Department has made several faculty appointments over the last decade but combined with resignations and retirements, its faculty complement is presently stretched. We also acknowledge the vulnerability of the Department in terms of its upcoming retirement profile. We are pleased that the Department has a teaching plan that reaches out over the next number of years to maximize short term predictability around teaching. The Department will carefully examine externally funded hiring opportunities that might provide additional teaching capacity. The Faculty commits to supporting the Department in its efforts to increase its

core faculty complement by facilitating applications for external salary support or, when the university budget situation eventually becomes more favourable, by considering additional hiring.

In the meantime, the Department of Biology is exploring creative ways of managing the overall teaching load. Curriculum is being revised to deploy teaching capacity into the most highly demanded undergraduate programs. The Department is actively engaged in experimenting with blended learning models. The Department is mindful of the need to balance the need for laboratory experiences with its capacity for assigning lab demonstrators and staff to support such learning opportunities. The Faculty and the Department continue to explore solutions that will ensure that the Department has an adequate number of staff members in the Department. The Queen's University Biological Station, along with the agreement negotiated with Nature Conservancy Canada to access its nearby property, will be reviewed to ensure the models underlying its budget and governance have long term sustainability.

Finally, it is most encouraging to note that both the external IAR consultants and the Internal IAR Review Team recognize a number of the unique strengths of the Department, including many aspects of its undergraduate and graduate programs, its impressive research productivity, and its longstanding program of field based research and teaching. The Faculty of Arts and Science and the Department are committed to working together to ensure that the Department's excellent national and international reputation continues.