**Comments from the Assessment Committee (August, 2009)**

Biology Department Assessment

Primary Reviewer:   Mark Bollman, Mathematics and Computer Science

Additional Reviewers:  Vicki Baker, Economics and Management

                        Scott Hendrix, Writing Center

      A fine set of goals and a good strategy for assessing them.  There seem not to be identifiable numerical or qualitative targets for the assessment instruments, though.

Step 1:  We have no issues with the Mission.

Step 2: Learning Outcomes

While the learning outcomes are in line with the departmental mission, one concern is the sheer number of outcomes and corresponding information.  This is A LOT to assess; if they can do it, great.  But, something to think about, particularly as this observation links to the suggestions for Step 3 below.

We recognize and appreciate the trend in content goals from “fundamental” knowledge to “in-depth” knowledge (though I’m not certain what this means?) to “scientific investigation skills” that *Biologists* use: this seems to be the knowledge/theory into practice model that we hope to be promoting as a campus.

Step 3: Program Components

As it stands now, what is included in the report is just a listing/description of the required courses.  There is no meaningful connection communicated (in writing at least) between the learning outcomes, courses, and corresponding activities. I suggest having the department put a matrix together that lists the outcomes, the courses that most support or achieve that outcome and a sampling of activities, exams, labs, assignments that are aimed at achieving that outcome.  I can provide an example to the department if need be.  More work is needed here.

The proposed “grid of our goals and student outcomes in biology courses” would be a helpful addition, assuming that the grid would specify the relationship of individual courses (and other components, either as part of a course or independent, etc.) to specific student learning goals/outcomes listed in Step 2.

Step 4: Methods

The Biology department has a wonderful variety of direct measures of assessment.  However, I think the department would benefit by supplementing this information with indirect assessment measures (graduating senior survey/focus group, exit interviews, etc.).

SH—the suggested plan for “collecting data from alumni” (under discussion) would be a helpful indirect measure, as indicated just above.

In terms of the direct measures, does biology have common grading rubrics for labs, etc.  This might help as they move forward with assessment.  I also suggest focusing on one outcome at a time (especially if you decide to keep the number of outcomes you currently have listed) as you lay out an assessment plan for the upcoming academic year (and years to come).

**Next Steps:**

In coordination with your Assessment Committee reviewers and their feedback, please observe the following deadlines for your assessment cycle:

* September 15: Revisions to Steps 1-4 due (if necessary)
* October 1: Completion of Steps 5 & 6 using preliminary data
* November 2: Final Fall 2009 plans due