

University of Victoria, Faculty of Science, Department of Biochemistry and Microbiology

2017 Academic Program Review Summary

The reviewers noted that “the overwhelming impression was of a well-integrated, cohesive department with a thoughtful strategic plan that had been developed with input from all department members and had virtually unanimous support from the faculty.” They emphasized the strong publication record of faculty members, comparatively high citations indices, and that the department is one of, if not the best at UVic, for bringing in external funding. They were impressed with the undergraduate and co-op program combination, which is unique in Canada. In particular, they highlighted the focus on experimental approaches. They stated that “Graduates are well prepared to enter the work force in academic or industry labs and several co-op students and graduates are employed in the proteomics centre” and that “students enjoy a national reputation for being particularly well-prepared for experimental science.”

The reviewers praised the department on recruiting excellent new PIs, being supported by a highly skilled team of teaching instructors, introducing programs such as faculty mentorships, internal grant review processes and annual committee meetings for graduate students. They also complimented the department on its proteomics centre and its relationship with the BC Cancer Agency.

Key Recommendations

Improve the quality of experience for graduate students and the proteomics centre, in particular ensuring consistency in experience from lab to lab.

While recognizing fiscal realities, reviewers suggested that relocating the proteomics centre to the UVic campus would be of significant benefit to both students and the university.

Consider the relevance and importance of observed decline in graduate student enrolments within the unit.

The department has examined this issue and notes that previous enrolments were artificially inflated prior to a change in the way that research is conducted.

Review how TAs are used, and the associated graduate student experience.

The committee suggested that the Department facilitate a workshop to discuss ways to promote opportunities for interaction between the teaching lab instructors, the graduate students and faculty members to discuss how each can better serve the undergraduate programs.

Consider strategies to streamline lab offerings and capping undergraduate enrolments as the program is “becoming a victim of its own success”.

The reviewers felt it was important to limit growth and further engage graduate student TAs and Central Services Staff, in order to make time for program development so that the department can continue to offer instruction in techniques at the cutting edge of science.

Reconsider the possibility of using external faculty as supervisors for honours research projects.

The reviewers suggested that flexibility for Honours students could be expanded by enlisting co-supervisors from related departments like Chemistry or Biology.