

Weber State University
Exercise and Sport Science Program Review
Review Date: January 27, 2023

Review Team:

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A. Mission Statement

Program strengths

The program mission statement flows from the departmental mission statement.

Program challenges

The restructuring which placed exercise science with the nutrition program is fairly recent. Adjustments will continue to be made as necessary to make the department and program more effective than it already is.

Program weaknesses

The program mission statement is vague and does not clearly define the expected outcomes.

Recommendation for change

The ENS statement has a section that says “enhances the mission of the university through . . . “. A short statement like this in the program mission statement would make things a little clearer.

Additional recommendations from the review team

None at this time.

B. Curriculum

Program strengths

The exercise and sports science program is viewed very highly within the department. It is seen as a valuable area of growth. During the pandemic, professors put courses online and have continued to offer online courses which has increased the number of students completing the program.

Students stated they felt Weber State’s ESS program was a better value than other universities. They cited the smaller class sizes which allows the students to get to

know their instructors on a deeper level. Students feel the professors are readily available either before or after class, as well as during office hours.

Program challenges

New faculty have been brought on board which has decreased the student to faculty ratio. This allows for more sections of bottleneck courses to be taught. Even with the increase in faculty, students stated they sometimes have difficulty getting into the courses they need and the sections they would like.

Program weaknesses

Students stated they did not hear about the opportunity to participate in research until senior year. They felt they would have wanted to, and benefited from participating earlier in their academic careers.

Having a part time lab coordinator limits the amount of time students have to practice skills. It is difficult to maintain equipment, and assist students with part time hours.

There is currently no formal method of tracking graduates. This information would be helpful in determining whether the program adequately prepares students for their futures.

While exercise testing and prescription are covered in several different courses, having a formal exercise testing and prescription course, as well as a special populations course would assist students in being prepared for certified exercise physiologist exam if they wish to work in the healthcare field.

Recommendations for change

Students have stated that having a more flexible curriculum would be advantageous. Adjusting the curriculum to have and/or options would help alleviate any bottlenecks in the curriculum.

Students have also requested the creation of a list of upper class complimentary courses. Several students noted they did not understand the curriculum as stated does not give them enough credits to graduate. Having a list of courses they could choose from would help guide them in the career choices.

Additional recommendations from the review team

None at this time.

C. Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

Program strengths

Student learning outcomes are clearly stated. The alignment of the curriculum is clearly based on national standard of the American College of Sports Medicine and the National Strength and Conditioning Association.

Methods of assessment are clearly stated for each learning outcome. Each method of assessment has specifically stated evaluation criteria.

Program challenges

The assessment criteria are ambitious, but reachable.

Program weaknesses

The learning outcomes and assessments are the best I have seen. No weaknesses noted at this time.

Recommendation for change

A slight adjustment of the learning outcomes to include examples of the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that students will achieve may be necessary. Example: LO 7: Perform duties related to fitness management, administration, and program supervision, “such as . . .” If someone does not understand fitness management they would not know what this particular learning outcome was about.

Additional recommendations from the review team

None at this time.

D. Academic Advising

Program strengths

The ESS program has a dedicated advisor which completes customized course sequencing for those students who cannot follow the traditional plan. He uses a holistic approach to advising and keeps the students’ needs front and center.

The community partners are very pleased with the students’ performance and willingness to learn. Both sites stated they keep slots open specifically for Weber State Exercise Science students.

Program challenges

While there is a list of internship sites, not all of the sites are routinely active. Keeping the list current is very time consuming.

When a student wishes to go to a new internship site, there is a legal form that is completed by Weber State and the site outlining responsibilities of the university and the internship site. There is no formal plan for updating these legal documents which may leave the university open to liability.

Program weaknesses

Having a dedicated advisor is a major strength for the program. Having that advisor responsible for 450 students is over burdening that person. While the current advisor is doing a wonderful job (as voiced by students) the concern would be burning this person out.

Recommendation for change

Recommend updating the legal agreements with the internship sites on a regular basis, such as every 3 years. This will keep the documents up to date and the university covered in case of the unlikely event any issues arise.

Additional recommendations from the review team

None at this time.

E. Faculty

Program strengths

The ESS program consists of four tenure-track faculty members who are diversified and experts in the fields of biomechanics, exercise physiology, nutrition, and medicine. The faculty are diverse in terms of sex (3:1 female:male) and ethnicity (1:1 Caucasian:Asian).

Program challenges

This is not the fault of the program or faculty, but the frequency of faculty turnover over the past few years can be seen as a potential weakness. The limited continuity and retention of faculty limits faculty collaboration (intra and interdepartmental) and stability for student learning.

Program weaknesses

Although the ESS program has been able to add faculty since their last review, the growing student:faculty ratio (>21:1) poses a challenge to the faculty. Specifically, this ratio poses a challenge to mentoring of students and individualized teaching.

Recommendation for change

The faculty mentioned that adjunct faculty were not needed to teach ESS course sections at this time, and that their main reason was that they prefer instructors to be on-campus and regularly available to students. Although admirable, the growing student:faculty ratio and bottlenecks deserve attention. This problem could, in part, be solved by hiring adjunct faculty to teach additional course sections.

Additional recommendations from the review team

None at this time.

F. Support (Staff, Administration, Facilities, Equipment, and Library)

Program strengths

Although the ENS department is relatively small, consisting of 9 full-time faculty members, they have adequate program support for advising and administration. The

department has two academic advisors (one for ESS and one for Nutrition), and a full-time administrative specialist.

Program challenges

The added role of internship coordinator to the academic advisor, Matthew Smith, places extra demand on his time and responsibilities. Matthew has expressed that he enjoys serving both roles, but he also admitted that he works an average of 50-60 hours per week. Continuing at this pace is unreasonable and an antagonist to proper life-work balance.

Program weaknesses

The lab coordinator has moved from full-time to a part-time role. Although this change has contributed to the hiring of additional tenure-track faculty in the ESS program, it has limited the availability of the lab coordinator to both students and faculty outside of classes. Furthermore, with Dr. Butts leaving, the role of lab director seems to remain unfilled. This places extra demand on the faculty and lab coordinator to collectively fill this vacancy.

Recommendation for change

It is highly recommended that either the lab coordinator be moved to a full-time position, or that an additional part-time position be created for a lab director.

Additional recommendations from the review team

Boundaries/limits on hours and duties may need to be created by the department chair and program director to protect Matthew Smith from overworking and potential burnout. Marissela Lopez mentioned during her interview with us that she could take on more responsibilities within the department due to the comfortability and efficiency that she has reached in her role as administrative specialist.

G. Relationships with the External Communities

Program strengths

Through the internship courses (ESS 2890/4890 – Cooperative Work Experience) offered to ESS majors, both the program has been able to build connections with 50 internship sites in the Wasatch area. This established relationship has allowed community partners to become more familiar with the ESS program and made it more accessible for students to find internship sites.

Program challenges

As the list of internship sites continues to grow, it may place a greater burden on the internship coordinator to track and maintain these sites. It may be a matter of being selective about sites based on the quality of experience that they provide to students. This can be accomplished by review previous student evaluations of the internship site/supervisors.

Program weaknesses

There is no formal or established external advisory committee for the ESS program. In the self-study, this component was listed as “not applicable”. However, using the internship courses to gather feedback from external community members is insufficient. It is our understanding that an external advisory board will be required for programs seeking external accreditation (i.e., CAAHEP, CASCE, etc.).

Recommendation for change

Develop an external advisory committee for the ESS program that meets 1-2 times a year. This committee should consist of community members who work in career fields common for ESS graduates, and employers who typically hire ESS graduates.

Additional recommendations from the review team

Strategies should be developed to better track graduate success. This can be done by collecting contact information for current ESS majors and surveying them upon graduation (i.e., exit survey) and years afterward (i.e., alumni survey).

H. Results of Previous Program Reviews

Program strengths

The addition of two full-time, tenure-track faculty to the ESS program was much needed and has allowed the program to handle the SCH growth over the last two years. The current number of full-time, ESS faculty is double the number of faculty from the previous program review. This increase in faculty has also allowed the workload to be more evenly distributed.

The revision of learning outcomes, development of measures, and alignment to HIEEs have profoundly advanced student learning outcomes and assessment data. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness have commended the recent work done by the program director and faculty on the 2020 Biennial Report. The fruit of this labor has been apparent in the current self-study.

Program challenges

Although the addition of two full-time faculty members has made it possible to offer additional sections of bottleneck courses in the ESS program, the SCH growth and high student:faculty ratio poses a challenge to both students and faculty. If unresolved, it may continue to create bottleneck courses and/or larger class sizes.

Program weaknesses

An external advisory committee for the ESS program remains unfulfilled since the previous program review. As mentioned above, relying on feedback from internship courses is insufficient and limited to only students and the internships. Feedback from an external advisory committee is needed for quality assessment and improvement at

the program level. Furthermore, an external advisory committee may also be required to satisfy external accreditation standards.

Recommendation for change

Utilizing more adjunct faculty to accommodate for the growing student:faculty ratio, and to mitigate the incidence of bottleneck courses.

Assemble an external advisor committee that consists of community members who work in career fields common for ESS graduates, and employers who typically hire ESS graduates. The administrative specialist can help contact potential members and coordinate meetings. These meetings should take place annually or biannually.

Additional recommendations from the review team

Hire a full-time or part-time instructor to assist with teaching additional course sections. This person could also serve as the internship coordinator to relieve the academic advisor of this additional load.

Increase the lab coordinator position to full-time to fulfill the duties of lab director that was left vacant by the departure of Dr. Butts. If not feasible, have the administrative specialist assist the part-time lab coordinator with managing the lab.