

Vice Provost Response to Program Review: Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR)

After my reading of the OUR program review, I am in agreement with all of the recommendations made by the reviews as well as the responses from OUR. As such, rather than reiterate the recommendations, responses, and my agreement with them, I will focus below on three main threads that I see throughout the program review and my personal recommendations for OUR. Specifically, I am focused on two main “clusters” of recommendations: marketing, funding, and prioritizing.

Marketing:

Yes, making sure our programs and opportunities are widely advertised is critical. However, as noted throughout the program review, OUR’s staff is small when considering the breadth and scale of opportunities the office offers for our students. Furthermore, with recent budget cuts and consolidations of positions in the Provost’s Office, there will be unanticipated downstream effects on the workload of our people. In short, I hesitate to ask our hardworking staff to do more with less. However, I think there is an opportunity to leverage the partnerships we have in Marketing and Communication to support the development of marketing strategies and materials for OUR. More to the point, wherever possible, we should lean on the expertise of our colleagues in Marketing and Communication, rather than ask our OUR staff to stretch even more by engaging in additional work.

Funding:

The landscape of Utah Higher Education is such that, as mentioned in the program review, programs such as OUR may be incorrectly seen as “extras” that are not core to our mission. I want to be clear that nothing could be further from the truth. With that said, we must recognize this rapidly changing reality and be prepared to “stand on our own two feet.” As such, I want us to work in partnership with University Advancement and Office Sponsored Programs so OUR can be as close to self-sustaining as possible. I recognize that this will not be an easy feat. However, by creating the proper infrastructure (e.g., monthly funding strategy meetings with UA and OSP) to actively foster prospective donors and apply for relevant grants, we can gradually move towards this goal.

Prioritizing:

I think the review team states the most critical observation perfectly: “Assess all OUR activities for impact and be willing to re-allocate time and resources as necessary. This is extremely challenging to do on a regular basis especially as student needs, university priorities, staff interests and expertise change over time. However, it is important to stay on top of environmental changes and remain current with tools and resources that are useful to students and faculty.” Let me start by stating that I am okay with the response from OUR, i.e., that we will think through how to align our goals with Weber’s core principles. That said, there is also the need to think about the

very real resource realities all institutions of higher education are faced with today and what this means for OUR.

There are multiple scenarios that we have to potentially anticipate. For example, if we are able to become relatively self-sustaining (see Funding section above), then perhaps there is less of a need to think about what we will focus on and what we will stop doing. With that said, if we are less successful in becoming self-sustaining and there is reduced central support for OUR, the need to think carefully about what we will stop doing becomes even more critical. We can't predict the future, but any program/office/unit at a university must plan for the worst case scenario, even if that scenario does not come to fruition.