

CEE Ten-Year Review Response to Review Report

General Comments:

The review committee's report presents a detailed set of issues that the committee recommends be given attention, and this list will serve as a helpful framework for discussion over the coming year. Preliminary feedback from faculty concerning the report indicates strong interest in addressing the points raised, but also some disagreement with many of the conclusions and observations. Given the large number of ongoing changes and complex issues being addressed by CEE at present, it was difficult to communicate a full picture to the review committee in the self-study and site visit. As a result, it is not surprising that the report does not provide a complete picture of current and future needs. We nonetheless appreciate the committee's work in reporting back what they saw and heard, and the summary of recommendations will be particularly useful as we enter our next 10-year period.

Response to Summary Recommendations

The summary recommendations from the report are listed below with our responses:

- Improving facilities
 - This was the one observation about which there was no internal dispute, and it is one of the key drivers of the strategic vision we laid out in the latter section of the Self Study. The solution to this problem will require major investment and partnering extending well beyond departmental capabilities. Until such large-scale commitments are obtained, we are pursuing shorter-term solutions, looking for opportunities to improve and optimize our use of existing space with modest investment of resources.
- Improved mentoring of junior faculty and development of future leaders
 - We agree this is imperative given the age demographics of our department. It is also challenging, since the number of mentees has often exceeded the number of mentors in recent years. This year, we overhauled our formal mentoring procedures and renewed our committee assignments. In addition, we are engaged in an ongoing departmental conversation to explore ways to facilitate and improve informal mentoring and leadership development.
- Optimal balance between PhD and MS graduate students.
 - This has been a long-discussed issue in the department. The primary sticking point boils down to how TA and RA funds are balanced between MS and PhD students, and different perceptions of the utility and prestige of the MS and PhD degrees in different fields. As in any situation involving trade-offs, consensus on this topic is elusive; nevertheless, the level of contention within the department is less than it used to be.
- Improving engagement of external partners and alumni
 - This has been a key activity over the past two years, including the establishment of an external Visiting Committee, the introduction of a series of new alumni events, and an ongoing search for an additional advancement officer focusing on increasing the number and value of small and medium gifts to the Department. This is one area of activity that apparently we did not communicate well to the review committee.

- Impact of admitting majors before the junior year
 - We continue to move up the learning curve of handling different populations of students as we increase the number of early admissions. We have made a large increase in our number of direct freshman admit offers this year, and we plan to begin end-of-freshman-year admissions in the coming year. The impacts of these changes are being watched carefully. This change will increase the advising and instructional load (both on an absolute basis and when normalized to the number of BS degrees awarded), so we will need to work out mechanisms to accommodate the expanded workload.
- Future hiring plan including role of joint hires
 - Between upcoming retirements and intended growth, there will be a great deal of hiring in the coming decade. We have been quite successful in our recent hiring practices (including joint hires), and we will continue to proceed in similar fashion. We do not plan to follow a rigid multiyear hiring plan.
- Impact of proposed growth plan
 - The impact of failing to grow is more worrisome than the alternative. We will continue to increase the level of detail in our growth plan, but the fundamental strategies outlined in the Self Study will be our primary means of addressing the full suite of growth-related needs and opportunities.
- Strategy for funding growth
 - This has been laid out in the Self Study in general terms. Further details will be worked out as our overall budgeting picture stabilizes.
- Increasing departmental support of graduate students
 - Other than TA positions and recruiting fellowships, the department supports graduate students largely through start-up packages to new faculty. There are no resources available currently to provide additional funding, and externally funded research remains the primary source of graduate student support. With the establishment of a more balanced age demographic over time, reduced start-up demand could free up resources for recruiting pools and backstop funds.
- Impact of curriculum restructuring on students, faculty and staff
 - We have been working on this for more than two years, with numerous opportunities for discussion and input, but this was not communicated well in the review process. The timing of the review resulted in overlap with various time critical aspects of the curriculum revision process itself, and this was not conducive to laying out the story—we were in effect in midstream.
- Improving career counseling for non-academic positions and practical issues (resume writing, etc.)
 - There is more of this going on than was apparently conveyed by the small sample of students participating in the review process. We are required to track program outcomes as a major component of our accreditation procedures, and this includes various kinds of surveys of alums, employers, and graduating students. The transition

of our students from academic to professional contexts generally functions quite well from all parties' perspectives. We will continue to monitor this and of course keep an eye out for opportunities for improvement.

- Improving faculty and student interactions between discipline groups
 - This is actually more of a facilities issue than might be apparent. Being spread among multiple, widely-spaced buildings with no common area for contact creates significant barriers to broader community building. That having been said, we will continue to explore mechanisms to increase opportunities for interaction and collaboration across traditional boundaries.
- Detailed budget plan
 - We have been doing detailed budget planning at various time scales since bringing on our new administrator in June of 2010. This has been critically important during the recent era of deep budget cuts, especially in the context of aiming for growth. There was no opportunity to discuss this with the Review Committee, but we will continue to keep budgetary planning as one of the key components of our strategic operations.