Task Force on Graduate Education: Selective Excellence

Program Ratings and Rationale

Program: Biology M.S., PhD. Program
Rating: Good

The Biology graduate program strives to provide outstanding education and theoretical/laboratory research training to graduate students in the areas of Cell and Developmental Biology, Evolution, Genetics, and Neurobiology. Biology is a central science program in CLAS. For the student cohort who entered from 1996-2001, the PhD degree completion is low (33%) and the median TTD is somewhat long at 6.3 yrs, compared to other programs in the biological sciences disciplinary group. Typical initial placements are in postdoctoral positions in high profile research laboratories. The department is currently working toward sustainable financial support for first year students during lab rotations through a combination of SIF funds and CLAS funding. Efforts are being initiated to improve recruiting of high quality graduate students in order to improve the TTD and %completion. Curricular changes have also been implemented to address these issues. The program has recognized the importance of improving diversity in graduate students and is working on this area. The strategic assessment notes that the faculty size has decreased from 39 to 28 in recent years and future hiring of new faculty with active research programs is critical for the department. The Task Force felt that the Biology graduate program has made a number of positive changes and is on an upward trajectory, but also noted that there is considerable overlap with the interdisciplinary graduate degree programs in the biological sciences.