Helping Your Department/Program Survive and Thrive in the Changing World of Higher Education

An AESS/NAGT InTeGrate Webinar

Thursday, April 18, 2019

Kathy Browne, PhD
Chairperson, Department of Geological, Environmental & Marine Sciences (GEMS)
Rider University

Rider University

• Private, non-sectarian, accredited, comprehensive; est’d 1865; compete with NJ publics
• Carnegie Classification:
  • M1-Master’s Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs w/ Professions plus arts & sciences, some grad programs
  • ~5400 students (~1000 graduate); 25 states, 30 countries; ~73% from NJ (www.collegefactual.com)
  • Avg costs: $59k+ before aid; $30k+ after aid; ~89% receive financial aid (nces.ed.gov)
• Recent outcomes:
  • 1st yr retention rate: 80% (nces.ed.gov)
  • Graduation rates: 55/62% (4/6 yr) (nces.ed.gov)
  • Grad employment/grad school rate: 93%
  • Independent program created and led by GEMS faculty
* Most recent version of programs for “rising teachers”

Department of Geological, Environmental & Marine Sciences (GEMS)

• Geosciences major est’d ~1968
• In response to student demand & job markets:
  o ~1992 Marine Sciences
  o 1998 Environmental Sciences
  o 2005 Integrated Mathematics & Sciences [Elementary Education majors]
  o 2011 Sustainability Studies minor *
  o 2018* Environmental Studies (B.A.)
  o 2019* Earth Sciences (B.A.) (HS Education majors)
• Recent outcomes:
  • Retention has fluctuated with 92% in 2018
  • >90% 4 yr graduation rates
  • High job and grad school placements

THE CHRONICLE of HIGHER EDUCATION

October 29, 2015 by Andy Thomason

Rider U. Will Cut 14 Faculty Members and 14 Programs to Save Money

Rider U. Faculty Accepts Pay Freeze to Forestall Layoffs and Program Cuts

The majors that are saved from elimination are art and art history, advertising, American studies, business education, French, geosciences, German, marine science, philosophy, piano and web design. The bachelor of arts program in economics and the graduate program in organizational leadership are also spared from being cut.

2016 Prioritization* Review:
3 Earth Science programs evaluated separately

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quintile 2</th>
<th>Reconfigure to Increase Curricular Efficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geosciences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Sciences</td>
<td>Reconfigure to Increase Curricular Efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine Science</td>
<td>Reconfigure to Increase Curricular Efficiency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Dickinson (2009), Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services: Realocating Resources to Achieve Strategic Balance

2015

---

Dickinson (2009), Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services: Realocating Resources to Achieve Strategic Balance
Students also complete:
• Cognate math and sciences
• Liberal Arts General Education Program recently revised

GEMS Actions Taken
What are the priorities for your program?
• Another internal review and strategizing
• NAGT Traveling Workshop
• Developed cla university mis:
  • Updated GEM
  • Clarified SLOs
  • Utilizing unive to investigate new possibilities

NAGT Traveling Workshop
• Core Sessions
• Envisioning Your Program
• Program Design
• Action Planning & Departmental Management
• Preparing Students for Careers Day One
• Building a Thriving and Valued Department

How can the program ensure the success of all students in the context of these profound changes?
• Alumni rallied to communicate importance of degree and success of programs
• Enhanced alumni network and “friends” to actively involve in more:
  • Student mentoring
  • Connections for internship and job opportunities
  • Fundraising (50th anniversary; internship “stipends”; GEMS scholarships)
• Attending more to needs and challenges/successes of our students, with help from university partners
• Promoting our student academic successes more & differently, with help from university partners
• Encouraging GEMS students to get involved in campus initiatives
• More interactions with prospective students

How can your program thrive among other programs competing for scarce resources?
• Pursued more robust & strategic partnerships with other units: e.g. Admissions, Dean’s Office, Student Support Services, Marketing, Development, Academic Affairs
• Pushed for more marketing support and implemented external options
• Participating in social media campaigns
• Utilizing university’s research firm to investigate improvements and new possibilities
How can your program thrive among other programs competing for scarce resources? (cont’d)

- Implemented internal “campaign” to clarify and review with administration the department’s:
  - Curricular efficiencies &
  - Adjustments to external demand implemented throughout our history
  - ...invited to help clarify criteria to evaluate programs in prioritization process
- Numerous courses in CLAS General Education program
- Increased Transfer Agreements with community colleges
- Improving our presence on campus
- Enhancing visibility of student engagement in projects
  - in particular in our use of campus as a “living lab”

At the same time, the University has been:

- Refining marketing messages & strategies
- Addressing financial challenges
- Adding new programs across the university
- Renovating parts of the Science & Technology (GEMS classrooms in summer 2018)
- Renovating dorms
- Improving food service options
- Elevating sustainability profile
- As a community, working to recover from 2015
  - Successfully settled most recent AAUP contract
  - Beginning to add back some cuts
  - “Rider Recognizes”

“How the GEMS department has emerged on campus as a shining example of how challenging circumstances can be used to revitalize a program. The level of engagement by the faculty, the innovative thinking about the curriculum, and the initiation of new partnerships all have been immediately impactful. While there remains much work to be done, the efforts of the Department have gone a long way toward ensuring a collaborative approach moving forward.”

Dr. Jonathan Millen
Dean, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

“...”

- Increase enrollments,
- hire new faculty,
- continue to explore curricular innovations and interdisciplinary partnerships

Newest applicants come from a greater range of states.

Data from University
"The feedback given to the University by the GEMS department was invaluable in helping us improve our internal processes. It forced us to not take the data in our Student Information System for granted but rather understand the nuances of our different program offerings when trying to evaluate them. More specifically, it helped us define an "academic program" not merely as a Banner code, but rather an inseparable unit of the academic enterprise (which, in the case of GEMS, includes multiple and what appeared to us initially, seemingly disparate academic programs)."

Boris Vilic
Dean, Continuing Studies
Co-Chair, Prioritization Task Force

- No one action is the solution.
- Be well understood, visible, active, proactive, innovative and unless told otherwise, assume other internal units are there to help.
- When/if you are told otherwise, find a way on your own.

browne@rider.edu