**Department/Program Review Summary**

**2013-14**

**Department:** FST (Fire Science Technology)

**Date of Review:** April 3, 2013

**Review Team Members and Titles:**

Dave Collins, Provost

Hope Arthur, Director, Workforce Development & Corporate Services

Brian Cafarella, Professor, Developmental Math

Jared Cutler, Assistant Provost of Accreditation and Assessment

Mike Fiszlewicz, Manager, Server Based Computing

Karl Konsdorf, Assistant Director, Research, Analytics & Reporting

Terry Larson, Assistant Professor, Dental Health Sciences

Russ Marcks, Professor, [Heating, Ventilating, Air Conditioning & Refrigeration Engineering](https://our.sinclair.edu/index.cfm/directory/params/show/depts/departmentID/552/)

Technology

Tony Ponder, Dean, Science, Math and Engineering

Cole Rodesky, Academic Advisor, Academic Advising

Amanda Romero, Interim Chair, Visual Communication and Interior Design

Jack Royer, Fire Chief, Eaton, OH

**Department Members Present:**

Sue Merrell-Daley, Dean, Business and Public Services

Rob Chambers, Chair, Fire Science Technology

Faculty/Staff:

Geof Garrison

Laura Walker

Taylor Watkins

**Commendations**:

* The Review Team was impressed by the incredible sense of teamwork among the faculty in the Fire Science Technology (FST) department. There appeared to be a true sense of camaraderie not only among the faculty but also that extended through to the students in the department as well. The participation by all members in the discussions with the Review Team were indicative of the collaborative culture that exists in the department. It is also a department that benefits from an ideal blend of longevity and currency – while the faculty are experienced and in many cases have spent years working in the field at Sinclair, they are also on top of trends in the field and are keenly aware of the environment they are preparing their students for. This sense of unity and collaboration is especially important given the challenges of overseeing 50-60 adjunct instructors, which could very quickly become chaotic without the structure, organization, and spirit of collaboration that exists in the department.
* This is a department that recently experienced a transition in leadership as a long-serving and well-respected chairperson retired. The strong leadership of the new chairperson was clearly evident, and it appears that a forward-thinking and innovative approach is being encouraged in the department. The succession planning that occurred during the transition was superb, by all appearances the department did not miss a step as the departing chair passed the baton to the entering chair.
* The department deserves strong commendations for the connections it has built with the community. This is a department that holds a great respect among local fire departments - which it has earned by its hard work in serving the community. It has cultivated strong support from community partners.
* The department exhibited the true spirit of continuous improvement that the Program Review process is designed to foster – the faculty were extremely open to the feedback offered during the meeting with the Review Team. After the meeting the chairperson commented that “This has given me so many ideas of things I want to do “ – this is the perfect embodiment of the type of self-examination that is the intended result of the Program Review process.
* One illustration of the commitment of the faculty to their students that was shared in the Review Team meeting was a description of how the adjunct faculty find ways to help some students who struggle to meet the physical requirements that are part of work in the Fire Science field. Faculty find ways for students to be successful, even if initially it seems difficult. This example is only one of many that demonstrate that this department goes out of its way to help its students succeed.
* The Review Team was particularly impressed with the exit interviews with graduates that are conducted by volunteers from the Advisory Board. This can be such a valuable source of feedback, and utilizing Advisory Board members to conduct the interviews has a number of additional benefits. These exit interviews assess students directly against program outcomes, and are truly an example of a “best practice” in gathering information from students at the end of their programs of study.
* Another “best practice” the department is engaged in is its collaborative work with Workforce Development. The department has established the kind of connections with Workforce that we need more of, and apparently instigated the relationship by reaching out to them. Theirs is a perfect example of intra-institutional collaboration that could be followed by other departments. Collaborations like this with Workforce Development will be absolutely critical to meeting industry needs in the future, and the FST department is well ahead of the curve.
* The department also has a record of collaborative work with other departments - particularly the Emergency Medical Services and Automotive departments - that is also highly commendable.
* Recognizing the costs associated with the programs it offers, the department has been extremely mindful of keeping costs low, and can point to a number of strategies that have been implemented to cut costs. Instruction in this area will always have a negative contribution margin, but the department has still maintained its efforts to keep costs as low as possible. Sinclair recognizes that the benefits to the community more than justify the costs of the program, but the concerted efforts to keep those costs low are greatly appreciated by the institution.
* The department does an excellent job of identifying emerging issues and developing strategies to address them, as evidenced by the development of asynchronous course offerings to address low enrollment due to other institutions providing online courses.

**Recommendations for Action**:

* The department is currently utilizing an excellent “best practice” with its exit interviews for students by Advisory Committee members – this could serve as an example for other departments at the college, and should be shared with them. The Review Team strongly recommends that the department find ways to let other departments know what they are doing. This may take the form of a workshop at Faculty Learning Day, or perhaps in the form of an article in the Faculty Forum. The department should find some way of sharing this excellent practice with other departments who would might from it.
* The department is strongly encouraged to renew all of the articulation agreements that were developed under quarters, particularly the articulation agreement with Wright State University. Would additional articulation agreements with new institutions also be beneficial to students?
* During the discussion with the Review Team it became clear that there were assessment activities that were being done in courses within the department, but that were not recognized as such. The department is encouraged to take assessment to the next level by capturing and formalizing some of the assessment data it is already collecting on general education and program outcomes. The department is encouraged to start small by identifying a few assignments or activities that it already offers that are tied to a general education or program outcome, and begin collecting, analyzing, and aggregating data from these few assignments. Start small and build from there. The exit interviews may be a source of data regarding student achievement of program outcomes. The department should not hesitate to contact its division Assessment Coordinator / Learning Liaison or the Provost’s Office in assistance in leveraging the data it is already collecting for assessment purposes. These results should be reported in the department’s Annual Update submissions, and in five years a considerable amount of discussion of assessment results should be shared in the next self-study.
* There appears to be a need for firefighters in the area to receive higher credentials in order to earn promotions. The department is encouraged to find ways to use Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) to award credit where appropriate for students with experience in their field of study. The department is encouraged to work with the Manager of Curriculum, Transfer, and Articulation in its work with Prior Learning Assessment. Once use of Prior Learning Assessment has been established, the department is also encouraged to find ways to market it to area fire departments.
* The department is strongly encouraged to begin outreach to area high school programs to establish partnerships that might smooth the transition from high school into the FST programs at Sinclair. Developing a relationship with the Miami Valley Career Technology Center’s fire program may be a possible start for meeting this recommendation. Would it be feasible to offer summer camps of some kind, or perhaps other activities that would engage students in middle school and high school? What more could be done to make students in grades 6-12 more aware of careers in Fire Science and more aware of what they would need to do to prepare for such a career? Different approaches for marketing to expose students to Fire Science prior to graduating from high school should be explored.
* The department is encouraged to continue its work with other departments, the connections with the Emergency Medical Services and Automotive Departments being two noteworthy examples of these intra-institutional relationships. Similarly, the department is strongly encouraged to maintain – and where appropriate, expand – its relationships with Workforce Development to meet the growing needs of the region.
* The Review Team was impressed by the department’s development of asynchronous offerings in response to competition from outside providers, and would like to encourage the department to continue its efforts in this regard. There may also be opportunities for development of online offerings, and it is recommended that the department begin working with Distance Learning to determine whether any of its courses could be offered in a completely online format.
* The FST department is a valuable resource to the community. Its role in educating the fire fighting forces of the surrounding community is inestimable, and it does so at a financial loss to the institution – which Sinclair is perfectly willing to bear as a service to the community. The community at large needs to be more aware of the excellent level of support it receives from the Sinclair Fire Science Technology program. There should be a greater level of awareness regarding the excellence of this program and its service to the community. There are stories from this department that need to be captured and shared. The department is encouraged to explore ways of making these things known to a greater extent in the general community, and should have on hand documentation that would allow these contributions to be used by Sinclair in its work with communities in the surrounding area.

**Overall Assessment of Department’s Progress and Goals**:

Perhaps the best summary of this department and its level of quality is captured by a comment that the chairperson of the department made at the conclusion of the meeting with the Review Team: “We want to have the best program, not a good program!”. The Review Team felt that this quote exemplifies what the Fire Science Technology department at Sinclair is all about. There was an incredible level of care and concern evidenced in the meeting with the Review Team – care and concern about their students, care and concern about meeting the needs of the surrounding communities, care and concern about their own department. It is a department that is plugged into the needs of the area – it has established and carefully cultivated strong relationships, and has earned the substantial amount of respect it receives from fire departments in the area.

It is a department that recently experienced a change in leadership with the departure of a long-serving and effective chairperson, and that managed a smooth and efficient transition to another effective (and hopefully long-serving) chairperson.

It is also a department that to some extent may underestimate itself. The desire to be the best you can often leads to difficulty in recognizing the good you are already doing. While without question aware of the respect that it holds in the community, there are many areas where the department excels – assessment data collection, relationships with Workforce Development, etc. – that it may not fully realize the excellence of the work it is doing. Recommendations for departments to increase their assessment efforts are common in Program Review – this department has the advantage of having data already being collected that could be used to demonstrate assessment of program outcomes.

This department is a true “plus point” for Sinclair, and its commitment to strive for ever higher levels of quality is truly impressive.

**Institutional or Resource Barriers to the Department’s Ability to accomplish its Goals, if any**:

The meeting with the Review Team raised a couple of issues that are not unique to the FST Department, and that may need to be explored at an institutional level:

* This is a department that relies heavily on adjunct instruction. Like others with a similar reliance on adjunct faculty, it has found adjusting to the new provisions of the Affordable Care Act a real challenge.
* Several departments doing Program Review this year have shown evidence of doing assessment work without realizing that is what they are doing. This may point to a need at an institutional level to better educate departments regarding how some of the activities they already engage in qualify as assessment, and that formalizing, analyzing, and reporting data from these activities and then using that data to make changes is at the heart of assessment. There appear to be a lot of departments who don’t realize how close they are to good assessment practice. Departments are required to report assessment results in Annual Updates – perhaps departments should be encouraged to summarize the assessment sections of their Annual Update submissions in their Program Review self-studies as a way of helping them recognize the work that they are already doing. This suggestion and other additional assessment guidance should be incorporated into the Program Review manual.
* Adjunct faculty are currently allowed to take courses free of charge during the term when they are teaching. During the meeting with the Review Team a suggestion was made that perhaps adjunct faculty should be allowed to “bank” those courses and take them in future terms if unable to take advantage of them during the term they are teaching.
* Fire Science Technology is one of several programs that Sinclair offers that are costly and have a negative contribution margin, but that are essential to support the surrounding communities. How can we help the community to be more aware of the services like this that Sinclair provides? How can this be used to increase community support for the institution?
* Sinclair is part of countless success stories for our graduates – how can we do a better job of capturing and sharing these success stories? What could we do to collect more of these stories from our graduates and their employers? How can they be shared in ways that increase community support of the institution?
* Communication with adjuncts is a challenge for many departments – some adjuncts have reported being so inundated with e-mail it is difficult to know which communications are crucial and which are not. How can we better manage our communications with adjuncts?