

Labor Relations and Research Center

A program in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences offering the M.S. in Labor Studies.

■ The Review Process

This was a standard AQAD review. Reviewers were:

Elaine Bernard (Director, Harvard Trade Union Program)
Greg Mantsios (Director, Queens College Worker Education and Labor Resources Center)
Kent Wong (Director, Center for Labor Research and Education, UCLA)

■ Executive Summary

The review team strongly endorsed the recent growth and momentum of the Program, and reported being “impressed by the dramatic changes that the Center has undergone.” The team had special praise for the “generational change” reflected in the recruitment of “dynamic, young, highly qualified faculty,” and for the “inspiring” work of the Director in leading that transition. A major overhaul of the curriculum in recent years has strengthened the intellectual content of the program, and the Union Leadership and Administration (ULA) program — a limited residency mid-career program for union leaders — was cited as offering “an exciting model of lifelong learning. According to the team, the Center has “secured national prominence” and is “widely recognized to be in the top tier of labor research and education programs nationally.”

As a consequence of the team’s strong positive assessment of the Center’s progress to date, the visiting team report focused on the future development of the program. The most pressing concern expressed by the team was the need to provide appropriate faculty development opportunities for the recently recruited faculty. Three of the four program faculty will be evaluated for tenure in the next few years, and the team recommended that special efforts be made to support successful tenure outcomes through mentoring and release time.

While noting the Center’s success as an independent program, the team also observed that efforts should be made to strengthen collaborations with other programs — on campus and throughout the state — and to integrate the efforts of affiliated faculty whose appointments are in other departments. The team also called for greater interaction between the mid-career students and the students enrolled in the resident program.

One method suggested for strengthening ties with the rest of the campus was expansion of teaching at the undergraduate level. Although the Center offers no undergraduate degree, it does offer one general education course. Expansion of this effort could both increase the pool of potential graduate students and draw other members of the campus community into the Center’s activities. The team also suggested consideration of the eventual development of a Ph.D. program. In terms of curricular development, the team encouraged a greater international (especially comparative) focus, and a complementary focus on international internships.

The team noted that the Center currently organizes relatively little alumni activity, and suggested formation of an active alumni association.

The Center’s excellent success in promoting student diversity was praised, but it was urged to continue and strengthen those efforts.

Student Outcomes Assessment. The team's general assessment of teaching effectiveness in the program was quite positive: they reported that the students gave the faculty "rave reviews as teachers," and were very enthusiastic about the quality of the program. Students "readily conveyed their assessment that the Center had succeeded in building a strong, small community of learners." Nonetheless, there did not appear to be articulated learning outcomes for the program, although the team praised the extent to which the curriculum has been shaped through close interaction with state and national labor organizations, which seems appropriate for a professionally oriented master's level program.

Action Plan. The response of the Center and the Dean to the team's report was, understandably, positive. Virtually all of the team's recommendations were agreed to in principle, and the Center expressed willingness to move into such new directions as expanded undergraduate teaching and exploration of a Ph.D. program if necessary resources were provided. The Dean's action plan, noting the financial constraints within which the College and the campus are operating, was more modest in terms of the scope and timing of further development. The Dean suggested a number of alternatives that might allow the Center to move in the directions recommended by the team without requiring allocation of significant new resources, including use of affiliated faculty as mentors for tenure-track faculty (a practice already in place in the Center) and as instructors for expanded undergraduate offerings, and course reductions in the pre-tenure period that could be "paid back" after the tenure decision is made. The Dean supported the Center's commitment to expand alumni activities and fundraising. With respect to the prospect of a Ph.D. program, the Dean indicated that justification for such a program would "have to be extraordinarily powerful in this period of declining budgets."