Review of the OSU Cascades Tourism and Outdoor Leadership Program: Commendations and Recommendations

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Introduction and Overview

After consulting with the Tourism and Outdoor Leadership (TOL) faculty at OSU-Cascades, Cascades campus administration, and representatives of the administration of the College of Forestry on the Corvallis campus, the committee charged with reviewing the TOL program at OSU-Cascades has a number of recommendations to make that might normally seem beyond the scope of a 10-year review of undergraduate academic programs. However, as all parties agree, the TOL program is unique. Not only is its degree specific to the Cascade campus alone, the faculty has, since their hiring, created their program with little or no input from the Corvallis campus. In our estimation, they feel isolated. They are confused about their relationship to the Corvallis campus, where their promotion and tenure reside—as well as curriculum decision-making, although the College of Forestry has paid scant attention to their curriculum—while at the same time they must deal with the administration at Cascades for all budgetary matters, including hiring, the budgetary impacts of prospective program growth, advertising, and so on. This situation is, of course, the product of two circumstances: the facts that, 1) in founding the campus it seemed imperative, for accreditation purposes if none other, to remain part of the Corvallis campus in terms of faculty and curriculum expectations and requirements; and 2) in order to protect the Corvallis campus from any liabilities arising from the risks of starting up a new campus, it seemed prudent to build a financial “firewall” between the main campus and Cascades—hence, the Cascade campus is funded separately from the main campus and administers its own funds. The question reaches far beyond the scope of this report, but the committee sees, in the example of TOL, reason to suspect that the “firewall” concept has, perhaps, outlived at least something of its usefulness.

As a result of its unique status as a program offered only at Cascades, TOL finds itself today in what might be called a crisis in positioning. Over the years, as a result of a series of changes in leadership in the College of Forestry, it has developed with almost total independence from the main campus, so largely forgotten that when program lead Michael Gassner was hired in 2008, very few people in the College understood who he was, let alone what he did—perhaps even where he did it. The fact is the “firewall” provided no incentive for the College of Forestry particularly even to care. Meanwhile, the TOL program enjoyed a certain freedom from oversight. And while they were free to develop programming as they deemed necessary (curriculum oversight at the College of Forestry level appears to have been of the “rubber-stamp” variety), they clearly, in the committee’s perspective, would have benefitted greatly from the insight and expertise of their colleagues on the main campus.
Furthermore, it is clear to the committee that the TOL faculty does not feel that they have been adequately supported by the Cascades administration, let alone by the College of Forestry on the main campus. As numerous new programs have been implemented since 2008 at Cascades, the TOL program has remained stagnant. TOL’s FTE has remained constant, with little or no growth; their faculty numbers have remained at two—one tenured associate professor and one instructor, who serves—rather oddly in our opinion—as program lead, and an adjunct here or there. The Cascades administration apparently bases new hires on actual (or perceived potential) program growth. Obviously, in this scenario, there can never be new hires in TOL at Cascades unless the two current faculty somehow manage—miraculously?—to grow a program that has not grown in 6 years. Via the various interviews, the review team was given the impression that advertising dollars at Cascades are largely dedicated to promoting new programs, however leadership has indicated otherwise. Without conducting an analysis of advertising expenditures and advertising approaches for TOL to confirm or deny this assertion, the review team simply notes that ongoing and specific/targeted promotion is necessary to inform people of the program and to attract interest. There is certainly room to argue the point, but the committee feels that a certain chicken or egg argument can be made over whether students should drive hires or, instead, new hires might draw new students. Certainly, it seems unsustainable to maintain a degree program with only two faculty. A third faculty member would, in our estimation, not only add whatever expertise that hire might bring to the program, but might well, in fact, energize the current staff. Certainly, a new hire would suggest that, with growth, a fourth might follow. Incentive and passion, it seems to us, are the ingredients that need to be restored to the TOL program.

After ten years, the TOL program at the Cascades campus has come nowhere near to meeting enrollment figures that might be expected of an outdoor-based tourism degree in the outdoor-tourism-based cultural climate of Central Oregon. The committee’s real charge, it seems to us, is not simply to determine why, but to suggest ways in which the program’s apparent under-enrollment might be remedied. We suggest, below, some reasonable solutions. But these remedies are based on our own experiences, in our own individual programs. We suggest that a much closer relationship of TOL to the College of Forestry is fundamental to the future success of the program. We propose a much more entrepreneurial approach (where income is obtained via rentals and course fees) to funding Cascades Adventures, a program that benefits not only TOL but the entire Cascades student population. And we propose a number of smaller, but still important, structural and curricular changes that will, we think, benefit everyone.

**Primary Recommendation**

The Review Team recommends that the Tourism and Outdoor Leadership (TOL) program currently offered on the Cascades campus be integrated into the Recreation Resource Management (RRM) program currently offered on the Corvallis campus. The four options currently offered in the TOL program should be consolidated into two options, one focused on Sustainable Tourism and one focused on Adventure Leadership. These two options should be incorporated as options in the RRM program and delivered on the Cascades campus. Further, the review team recommends that the Recreation and Tourism option currently offered in the Natural Resources program be incorporated into the Sustainable Tourism option to be offered on the
Cascades Campus. Further, the review team recommends that faculty members from the RRM and TOL programs review and revise the core curriculum for the RRM program as part of the process of integrating the TOL program into the RRM program to ensure that the core curriculum provides a suitable academic basis for students pursuing the sustainable tourism and adventure leadership options.

There is a logical fit between the TOL and RRM programs. Both contain options focused on Recreation Resource Management, and both are currently housed within the Department of Forest Ecosystems and Society in the College of Forestry. Furthermore, there are examples of program structures such as this already in place on the Corvallis and Cascades campuses. The most salient of these is the Natural Resources program, also housed within the Department of Forest Ecosystems and Society, which currently offers options on both the Corvallis and the Cascades campuses.

There are a number of advantages to this integration of programs:

- It responds to a call for the development of greater involvement and collaboration between the TOL program and its home department on the Corvallis campus.
- It allows for the implementation of a four-year degree program on the Cascades campus that incorporates the signature elements of the current TOL program—sustainable tourism and adventure leadership.
- It accomplishes the objective of being able to immediately implement a four-year program on the Cascades while minimizing the need for additional programmatic resources.
- It allows for current faculty to focus their teaching and research on their specific areas of expertise, rather than being compelled to deliver a general curriculum.
- It may solve concerns about advising support by obtaining support from the COF advisors.
- It may increase enrollment of international students in the program.

Should the faculty accept the recommendation of the review team to integrate the curricula of these programs, the articulation agreement between OSU Cascades and Central Oregon Community College (C OCC) should be updated to allow for the continuation of the relationship between the Outdoor Leadership associates program at COCC and the TOL program.

**Facilities and Equipment**

One of the issues raised in the TOL program self-study concerned the availability of an adequate supply of equipment needed to conduct field-based courses as well as space to house this equipment on the new campus. Rather than acquiring and maintaining its own inventory of equipment, the review team recommends that the program rely on Cascade Adventures as its source for equipment. The program should consider adopting a model in which it rents needed equipment from Cascade Adventures. The cost of equipment rental can be recovered through the adoption of course fees for field-based courses in which the equipment is used. Cascade Adventures in turn should consider adopting an entrepreneurial model in which it funds its operations through rental fees, equipment sales, and fees for trips and clinics offered to the
university community. The university should provide Cascade Adventures with adequate resources (i.e., staffing, operational and equipment storage space, initial funds for program equipment, etc.) to fulfill its mission as part of the university community.

The review team recommends that Cascades Adventures align itself administratively with the Adventure Leadership Institute (ALI) in the Department of Recreational Sports on the Corvallis Campus. In addition, the review team recommends that Cascades Adventures adopt the name Adventure Leadership Institute Cascades to reflect this alignment. There are a number of advantages to this realignment:

- The realignment would establish a clear line of administrative oversight for Cascade Adventures within the OSU Department of Recreational Sports, the proper administrative home for the program.
- It would allow for the greater collaboration and the development of programmatic synergies between ALI-Corvallis and ALI-Cascades.
- It would position both ALI-Corvallis and ALI-Cascades as learning laboratories for students pursuing the Adventure Leadership option in the Recreation Resource Management program.

The Cascades Adventures advisory board might serve as a resource in developing funding for program facilities and equipment.

**Undergraduate Program**

*Teaching*

The TOL program at OSU-Cascades offers a Bachelor of Science in Tourism and Outdoor Leadership and a TOL minor. Although a relatively small undergraduate program with approximately 50 students and two full-time faculty, the program was developed as a signature program at OSU-Cascades, reflecting the natural laboratory setting that Bend provides (The committee notes that some still perceive TOL as a Cascades “signature program” and others have indicated that the term “signature program” is no longer used, but it is a program unique to Cascades). The program is currently a 2+2 program where students complete the lower division courses at Central Oregon Community College (COCC) during the first two years of their program and complete the upper division courses at OSU-Cascades. To earn the TOL degree, students must complete 180 college credits across four sections: Baccalaureate core, TOL Skills, TOL Core, TOL option. Students can choose one of the following TOL options: International Ecotourism (IE), Eco and Adventure Tourism (EAT), Adventure Leadership and Education (ALE) and Recreation Management (RM). The EAT and IE options rely on courses outside of TOL. Students that pursue the EAT option are recommended to take coursework in Business and/or Natural Resources. The IE option requires students to complete a third year of foreign language. The ALE option includes additional TOL coursework including a set of expedition courses that allow students to take advantage of the natural laboratory that Bend provides. The RM option relies on online courses that are offered through the COF.

*Advising*
Academic advising at OSU-Cascades transitioned from a faculty-advising model to a professional advising model in 2009. The full-time professional advisor assigned to the TOL program, Dianna McGinnis, has been the primary advisor for the TOL program since that time. Faculty members in the TOL program are primarily responsible for assisting students in developing internship and practicum experiences. Ms. McGinnis is also responsible for advising students from six other majors offered at OSU-Cascades. These majors are housed in multiple colleges and are within multiple divisions within the OSU-Cascades organizational structure. Within the TOL program, Ms. McGinnis advises 50-75 students; across all her responsibilities she is currently assigned to advise 395 students. This includes advising students at Central Oregon Community College (COCC) as the first two years of TOL coursework is completed at the COCC Outdoor Leadership Program. In our conversation with Ms. McGinnis, she indicated that having to advise close to 400 students restricts her accessibility and availability resulting in a sub-optimal advising experience for students. Part-time advisors have been hired over the past few years at OSU-Cascades, but the increase in advisors has not kept pace with the increasing student population. From the OSU-Cascades annual reports, student to advisor ratios have increased from 366:1 in 2009-10 to 400:1 in 2012-13. The faculty that we spoke with during our visit indicated that Ms. McGinnis did an excellent job in advising students despite the high number of advisees.

Consistent with national best practices and based on median advisor to student ratios nationally, OSU-Corvallis has advocated a student to advisor ratio of 300:1. However, given that the advisors at OSU-Cascades work across multiple majors/colleges, a student to advisor ratio that is below 300:1 would allow the TOL program to provide advising services in which accessibility of advisors is not an issue and the student experience related to advising is positive. Ms. McGinnis suggests that this ratio should be closer to 250:1. Given the complexities of the advisor role at OSU-Cascades, and the research that shows that student experience with academic advising is correlated with student retention, the review team concurs with this recommendation and urges OSU-Cascades to devote the resources necessary.

Additional advising support could be provided by the COF, should the integration with RRM occur and the partnership between TOL and the COF strengthen.

Curriculum Focused Recommendations

During the review process, all parties acknowledged the status of TOL’s progress around program assessment. At this point, TOL has developed basic learning outcomes but has not taken the important steps of developing an assessment process, collecting assessment data, and acting on results to effect programmatic change and growth.

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The review team recommends that TOL hold off on developing a comprehensive assessment system until firm decisions are made around the primary recommendations resulting from this review. However, there are strategies to consider immediately that will strengthen aspects of the curriculum.

- Continue developing rubrics for major courses central to its mission of developing professional outdoor leaders. Maintain current results for future assessment use. If a new program is designed, place assessment at the forefront when developing the curriculum.
- Seriously look at the expedition courses from an assessment perspective. Consider assessment best practices in the areas of: formulating a peer evaluation process, rubric skills check lists, journal and reflection exercises, and a holistic leadership assessment based on specified learning outcomes in the form of a midterm and final assessment.
- If TOL is going to continue using the Wilderness Education Association accreditation standards as foundational learning outcomes, TOL should seriously consider accreditation with WEA. This would provide accountability and outside support from a national organization. If TOL decides not to take the WEA accreditation route, the review team suggests that TOL only use the WEA standards as guidelines. One of the strengths of the WEA system is the student portfolio as an assessment tool. TOL could use this as a model for assessment. Using student portfolios as the foundation for assessment is rapidly becoming the norm in other outdoor recreation based programs in the country.
- Contemporary outdoor leadership is certification dependent. We recommend that TOL to integrate recognized skill based certifications into their curriculum.

In addition to the assessment process, the review team would like to make some general comments regarding the existing curriculum.

- The current number of program options is overwhelming on a number of levels. The committee recommends focusing on two options that play on the strengths of the two existing faculty members – outdoor leadership and tourism. Emphasis should be placed on the upper division classes.
- The internship is a key component of the curriculum and student professional development. It is a capstone experience and a gateway to employment. Under the current system, the TOL Program Lead, spends significant time advising, preparing, overseeing, and evaluating students. At this time, actual site visits are not made. The committee recommends that a pre-internship class be developed to systematically deal with these issues as a class. This addition would be feasible under the recommended curricular changes.
- The committee recommends TOL continue working with programs such as the school of business to pair logical minors or certificate programs (Sustainability for example) to strengthen TOL student knowledge and skills.
- TOL has developed outstanding aspects to their curriculum. The development of the expedition classes are outstanding additions and parallel best practices around the country. However there are inherent issues around requiring all students to spend significant amounts of time in the field. Some students, because of life circumstances, cannot participate. TOL faculty should consider alternative paths for students to take to meet the intended learning outcomes.
• The review team recommends that TOL faculty look specifically at the tourism classes and map out a clear progression. Depending on larger decisions recommended in this study around the entire curriculum, mapping out a clear progression will be feasible and manageable by the TOL faculty. This will significantly strengthen the tourism portion of the curriculum.

Tourism Curriculum Comments

• Progression of course development in tourism, working with COCC and the core program developed in collaboration with OSU Corvallis.
• EAT
  o Consider research methods and evaluation being taught through another department;
  o Consider adding a social media marketing course (potentially offered through from business)
  o Suggest combining EAT and IE into sustainable tourism management focus

TOL Faculty

OSU-Cascades faculty in the TOL program delivers coursework in some of the upper division TOL Core section as well as some of the TOL option section. In total, OSU-Cascades faculty teaches fifteen different courses including internship supervision. Because there are only two full-time teaching faculty in the TOL program, some of the courses are offered every other year.

Kreg Lindberg (tenured) teaches six sections of courses across the year, including five different preparations. Michael Gassner (instructor, program lead) teaches six sections across the year, also with five different preparations (he has taught up to 9 courses in a year). Kreg’s teaching load is considerably higher than that of his peers in the Department of Forest and Ecosystems and Society (FES) in the College of Forestry (COF) where the TOL program is housed. Although faculty can buy out courses to provide time to do research, this comes at the expense of course offerings as bought out courses tend not to be offered.

The small size of the faculty in the TOL program has allowed for flexibility in program offerings. For example, prior to 2008, there were no expedition courses within the ALE option. Given the need for these experiences for students in this option, three courses were developed that now constitute the bulk of the option. Kreg and Michael spend a significant portion of their time in continuous improvement of the curriculum.

Faculty Recommendations

The TOL program is housed within the COF FES Department. As such, the review team supports a closer connection and strategic alignment with the FES academic unit. TOL has two
full time faculty members, one at the rank of Associate and one at the rank of Instructor. At the Cascades Campus there are different teaching load expectations for Associate Professors (6 courses) and Instructors (8 courses). Each faculty member is on a nine-month contract at 1.0 FTE. The Instructor serves as the Lead for the TOL program, which results in one course release (thus the instructor is teaching 7 different courses each with a separate prep). The course load requirement for the Cascades campus (and, by default, TOL) currently differs from the FES faculty requirements.

Consistent with other departments and programs in parks, recreation and tourism, we recommend faculty have salaries, promotion and tenure privileges, university services, sabbatical leaves, leaves of absence, workload assignment, and financial support that are fair and equitable compared to those of other faculty in the institution, especially congruent with those in COF and FES.

Promotion and tenure for tenure-track faculty is a process administrated by FES. Therefore, the recommendation by the review committee is to align all processes concerning faculty with FES. Therefore, the method used to determine academic unit faculty workloads should be consistent with that applied to FES.

Promotion for Instructors is administered by the Cascades Campus. The review team recommends a system for professional development and progression for those working full-time in a non-tenure track position, like Dr. Gassner. For example, at Ohio University and University of Utah, faculty can progress within a system of promotion in non-tenure track lines, which is rewarded with lengthier contracts, after the first promotion. Instead of 1-year contracts, 5-year contracts are awarded. This helps to confirm a faculty person’s value to the department as well as strengthens experience and rewards excellent teaching and scholarship. It also helps morale and expresses value for these types of critical positions within the program.

**Diversity**

The background of the academic unit faculty serving the curriculum should be diverse with respect to gender and ethnic background of its students. The recommendation is to pursue ethnic and gender diversity as the faculty expanded in the future. In addition, the Review Team recommends trying to increase diversity within the student body, even though we all acknowledge the lack of diversity in the field as a whole.

**Students**

Students that apply to the TOL program are evaluated based on criteria applicable to all OSU-Cascades students. These criteria include a minimum GPA of 3.0, completion of coursework beyond the minimum required high school courses, etc.

Applications to the TOL program increased from 9 in 2003 to 35 in 2009. Since 2009, the number of applicants has remained steady within the 30-35 student range. During that period,
then number of students admitted (enrolled) has plateaued at 26 (20) in 2009 and has remained in the 19-25 (10-18) range since then.

We believe that there is increased potential for students by working closer with OSU Corvallis campus. In addition to COCC, students drawn to OSU would have an easier time of “finding” the various aspects of the major. Student streams are thereby enhanced through the OSU connection, and strengthening the COCC relationship.

**Administration**

As required, the team reviewed the administrative issues surrounding the TOL program under the current system. Several issues came to light that are noteworthy of discussion. The team learned there was general confusion around the title of Program Lead. It should be stated that OSU Cascades purposefully designates instructor level faculty as Program Leads. The rationale is to place all program administrative duties on an instructor so not to burden tenure track faculty with administrative responsibilities. This then allows tenure track faculty to fully engage in research, teaching, and service. The Program Lead position at Cascades would be similar to a program coordinator at other institutions. Duties, responsibilities, and compensation for Program Leads at Cascades are equal to other institutions such as Ohio University.

The review team did detect a difference in perceptions around the amount of time required to carry out the Program Lead responsibilities within in TOL. For example, the Cascades administration has conceptually tried to reduce administrative burdens by creating a professional advising program, minimizing budget responsibilities, and personnel issues. However, after interviewing the professional advisor for TOL, adjunct faculty, the COCC outdoor faculty, CA staff, and other factions on campus, the review team clearly sees that the TOL Program Lead spends a significant amount of time on administrative duties – far beyond the perception articulated by Cascade administrators.

The team wants to make clear that the compensation and expected duties of the Program Lead are in line with other institutions that use more traditional titles such as program coordinator. However, the review team would like to encourage more open communication to ensure an empathetic understanding of the realities faced by both Cascade administrators and Program Leads. The team recognizes that the Cascades campus uses a model that the program lead is either a tenured professor or an instructor (and avoids using tenure-track faculty for this role) however, based upon the realities of this role, we recommend that Program Leadership is assigned to tenured faculty, with time allocated for this responsibility.

Should TOL and the College of Forestry forge a new relationship, then open and consistent communication will be the key for success. This includes a fluid process that involves all stakeholders. College of Forestry administrators, Cascade campus leadership, and TOL faculty must create a process that transcends the challenges of a branch campus relationship. While this clearly happens within other programs on the Cascades campus and their Corvallis counterparts, TOL and the COF must be intentional from the beginning to ensure success.
Marketing

The Review Team suggests greater articulation of the uniqueness of the Cascades TOL program and campus. What we heard was there is a unique sense of place, whereby programs situated here can take advantage, including using the place as opportunity for experiential education that utilizes the location, community, and culture of the Cascades campus.

Currently marketing TOL is through the website, with some marketing opportunities occurring at the campus level. The website provides some marketing opportunities, however there are several venues including social media that are currently not being tapped into. This appears to be due to lack of dedicated resources to this task. We recommend developing a marketing plan that is integrated into the COF and FES, and includes dedicated resources to keeping the website and social media venues current. This includes increased exposure to field programs, and student and faculty accomplishments. We feel with a dedicated and integrated marketing plan, several opportunities currently missed could be addressed.

Summary

The review team completes this review with optimism that the TOL program can maintain its status as a signature program with a curricular niche unique to the region. For TOL to flourish, establishing a functional relationship with the OSU College of Forestry is paramount. The realities and unique challenges OSU Cascades faces as a branch campus are reflected in TOL’s history, current operations, and future directions. The review team witnessed a genuine desire within the TOL faculty and COF administrative leadership to create a more synergistic relationship. The COF realizes the value added by including tourism and outdoor leadership into a more contemporary natural resource curriculum. TOL acknowledges the benefits of a closer, more operational relationship to ensure its survival and growth potential.

The review team clearly heard, while all parties are optimistic, the realities of designing core curricula, revenue sharing, personnel management, and other programmatic issues will be complicated challenges. These tasks should not be perceived as barriers to success. TOL and the COF possess the opportunity to creatively problem-solve and exercise leadership that will benefit the larger process of branch campus growth. The review team cannot emphasize enough the importance of functional communication between TOL and the COF to actualize the shared vision proposed in this review. Functional communication will go a long way in shortening the physical and interpersonal distance posed by branch campus circumstances.

For TOL to truly take the reigns as the premier professional outdoor leader preparation program in the state, comprehensive support from multiple main campus factions is imperative. Student services must be brought into the conversation to ensure the development of critical infrastructure. Outdoor equipment, storage space, student leadership development, and other support services offered through campus recreation (OSU Adventure Leadership Institute and Cascade Adventures) are essential to success. Curricular revision with a concentrated focus on outdoor leadership and tourism coupled with a sound assessment process will move TOL soundly into its second decade of existence. The team acknowledges this review happened
during a critical stage in TOL history. We encourage all stakeholders who engaged in the review process to move forward with the shared vision detected and flushed out by the team. The result will be a signature program with practical benefit to both campuses and most importantly to future OSU students.

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