

Seoul National University
Department of Physical Education
Program Review

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I. Program Review Executive Summary

On November 18-20, 2019, the External Review Committee (ERC) visited the Department of Physical Education in the College of Education of Seoul National University (SNU) in order to assess the program. The following conclusions were drawn from the visit, which consisted of a review of several pertinent documents; interviews of faculty, administrators, and students at both undergraduate and graduate levels; and a tour of the facilities.

The Department of Physical Education at SNU has many strengths. These include the highly respected brand of the Seoul National University, healthy combination of young and experienced talented faculty, strong leadership, exceptionally strong students at all levels, well-equipped laboratories, and rich resources. It is of no surprise that the Department was ranked #12 in the World among sports-related programs by the QS ranking system in 2019.

There is, however, ample room for improvement that requires keeping-up with the changing world, job markets, and scientific and technological progress. In particular, there is obvious contrast between the name of the Department and its Graduate Program as well as aspirations of undergraduate and graduate students. The faculty seem to be overcommitted given the very large number of graduate students (which is, by itself, a strength of the program!). The rigid undergraduate program should be more flexible to give students an opportunity to shape their curriculum depending on their plans for future employment and/or graduate education. There is need for more specialized classes and for a Department-wide high-level seminar.

Given these strengths and weaknesses, the ERC is advancing the following recommendations:

Rename the Department in a way that reflects the changes in its evolution: The current name of “Physical Education” is outdated, too narrow, and does not reflect the variety of faculty and student interests.

Modify course offerings at both undergraduate and graduate levels. The current undergraduate curriculum was designed to prepare teachers of physical education and has little room for aspirations of a majority of current undergraduate students. The Department should consider offering more specialized courses for those who plan for future careers in health-related areas, sports, or sport management. Increasing the number of classes taught in English could also be a benefit. At the graduate level, starting a Department-wide high-level research seminar is strongly recommended.

Invest in new faculty. Given the very large Graduate Program, hiring a few more tenure-line faculty seems to be crucially needed. The number of graduate students per faculty should drop to not more than 6-7. Consider cluster hires to support the existing areas of strength of the Department and/or creating new areas of strength.

The remainder of the report consists of additional detail regarding these observations and recommendations.

II. Strengths of the Department of Physical Education

The ERC noted several strengths of the unit and its programming. Each of the noted strengths is outlined individually below.

Strong Reputation. SNU is one of the best Universities in the World, and the Department of Physical Education has been ranked highly by QS among sports-related Departments. In particular, it is ranked very highly on the Employer Reputation scale.

Talented Faculty. The Department of Physical Education has a very strong and diverse group of faculty with strong reputation in their respective fields. There is healthy balance between experienced researchers and young, energetic, and highly productive scholars.

Strong Leadership. The Department has been fortunate to have progressive, capable, consistent, and forward thinking leaders. The leadership have created an admirable scholarly culture for students and faculty.

Student Level. The Department can be proud of their student body at both undergraduate and graduate levels. The Graduate Program is particularly large and strong. Both undergraduate and graduate students express their thoughts openly and clearly both with respect to the Department as a whole and their specific areas of expertise.

Resources. The infrastructure is overall very good. The Department has well-equipped classrooms and spacious modern offices in addition to the adequate space for research laboratories.

Technology. The Department has excellent technology infrastructure for classroom teaching and research.

III. Weaknesses and Challenges of the Department of Physical Education

While the Department boasts many strengths, no program is perfect. The ERC discovered a few weaknesses and challenges that may be preventing the Department from evolving to the next level. The noted areas represent specific challenges and opportunities for growth that can be leveraged to continue to proactively evolve and advance the programs and infrastructure of the Department for the foreseeable future.

The Obsolete Name of the Department. The current name of the Department reflects its history as the program for future teachers of physical education. Currently, however, most undergraduate students interviewed by the Committee plan for different careers in such fields as Health over the Lifespan, Rehabilitation, High-level Sports, Sport Management, etc. The Graduate Program is focused broadly on the field of movement science and related disciplines. The outdated name of the department is misleading and may act as a turn-off for young talented students and faculty.

Overworked faculty. The current number of faculty is clearly insufficient to provide high-level instruction and training at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Many faculty advise over 10 graduate students in addition to their relatively high teaching load and administrative duties. As a result, time is scarce and faculty face challenges finding enough time for face-to-face discussions with graduate students.

Rigid Curriculum. The current undergraduate curriculum leaves very little space for students to pursue their interests that go beyond the traditional teacher preparation classes. There are very few specialized classes for future careers in areas different from physical education.

Limited Faculty Interactions. There is no high-level Department-wide seminar where faculty and graduate students would have a chance to learn about each other's research interests and accomplishments and potentially develop collaborations. The very large individual faculty groups leave little time for interactions among the Laboratories that could be highly constructive and lead to great productivity.

Selecting Journals for Publications. One of the QS scales where the Department compares unfavorably with competing departments is the h-index of publications. This is likely a consequence of papers published in Korean Journals, which have limited impact on the international scientific community.

Lack of Leadership Continuity. The short-term appointment of the Department Chair may be viewed as a weakness (particularly when a strong leader emerges into the role), which could impede long-term planning and implementation of needed changes.

IV. Recommendations

The ERC is advancing a few specific recommendations that they feel may assist in advancing the Department and making it more productive and competitive given the changes in technology and society. These recommendations are structured into “Immediate” and “Long-Term”.

A. Immediate Recommendations

Rename the Department. After discussion with the faculty, the ERC has come to a conclusion that changing the name of the Department to “Department of Kinesiology” is needed urgently. The new name will reflect the breadth of the faculty, the different career paths available for undergraduate students, and the variety of research interests across the groups of graduate students and their mentors. The new name will position the Department for development and successful competition in areas that are not typical for “physical education”, in particular in health-related areas and in the area of top-level sports. This is expected to make the Department more attractive for students at all levels who are interested in those, quickly developing fields of movement science. ERC recommends to change the name of the Department as soon as possible, preferably within the next year.

Adjust the Curriculum. The number of obligatory courses in physical education should be reduced to make room for elective courses in other fields of kinesiology. Faculty could be given teaching course releases to develop new courses, and the curriculum committee should design possible course sequences preparing students for careers in the areas of their choice. These changes can be implemented within the next 1-2 years.

Hiring New Faculty. At least 2-3 new faculty lines should be added effective as quickly as possible to reduce the advising load of the current faculty and implement the suggested changes in the curriculum. The ERC strongly recommends a cluster hire that would create a new area of excellence in the Department or improve one of the already existing areas.

Diversify the Faculty. The ERC recommends that the Department make it a strategic priority to recruit additional female faculty members to the unit as they expand their faculty ranks. More than a third of the student body of the Department is female and thus expanding the number of tenure line women faculty that teach and oversee research in the unit is imperative.

Expand Physical Exercise Courses. The ERC recommends the Department strengthen and expand on their physical exercise courses for general students. Demands for these courses, if acknowledged useful and popular, will be increasing rapidly as the 4th industrial revolution progresses, which will also require the hiring of additional faculty members to the Department.

Improving Faculty Interactions. Starting a high-level, Department-wide seminar (or colloquium course) seems urgently needed to initiate and foster scholarly communication and collaboration among faculty and their research groups. This can be done effective immediately.

Benchmarking and Data Collection. The ERC recommends that the Department begin to systematically benchmark the unit against a peer group of sport science oriented departments. The QS rankings offers limited insights as to the impact of the research being disseminated from the Department. An ongoing benchmarking study can provide SNU administration with excellent metrics to utilize in decision making and performance based resource investments.

The ERC also recommends that the Department begin to collect “exit interview” data during the final semester of enrollment of all of their graduates. The exit data should include satisfaction metrics, course utility metrics, employment readiness and plans, and open-ended questions to provide opportunities for students to provide specific insights as to their experiences in the department upon their graduation.

B. Long-Term Recommendations

Evolving into School of Kinesiology. The very large size and high visibility of the Graduate Program in the Department suggests to the ERC that, in future, the administrators and faculty may consider turning the Department into a “School of Kinesiology” with a number of departments, which may include Physical Education, Athletics, Sports Management, Biomechanics and Motor Control, Exercise Physiology, and maybe others. Similar schools of Kinesiology exist at other higher education institutions in Korea. This evolution would effectively elevate the level of the Department to that of the best schools in the world such as Loughborough University.

More New Hires. Implementing this program would definitely require more new faculty lines but, in the opinion of the ERC, this would represent wise investment into the future of this program.

Upgrade the SNU PE Sport Facilities. The ERC observed that the sport facilities of the Department are dated and in need of a much needed upgrade to enhance instruction and the competitiveness of the SNU varsity sports teams in the future.

V. General Comments:

The faculty and staff at the Department of Physical Education and SNU did an excellent job preparing for the ERC before, during, and after the site visit. The site visit was very well organized and included adequate time for dialogue and interaction with the faculty, students, and administrators. The ERC hopes that the suggestions provided within this document reflect the university’s desire for continuing success and progress in the competitive world of high education.