

# External Reviewer Report

Year 2025

Program reviewed: Department of Kinesiology

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Campus visits dates: November 13, 2025

This report is based on a careful review of the self-study report prepared by the Department of Kinesiology, a full-day campus visit, and multiple interviews with faculty, students, and administrators at Sonoma State University. On-campus interviews included 30-minute meetings with the Dean, Interim AVP of Academic Affairs, Department Chair, four Kinesiology major students, four part-time lecturers, and four tenure-track faculty members. Although these interviews were brief, they provided valuable perspectives on the Department's program. A tour of the campus and the department facilities, part of the campus visit, offered additional insight into instructional and research spaces, crucial resources for students learning and faculty member's scholarly activities.

It is noted that the Department of Kinesiology is currently navigating a transitional phase. Program learning outcomes (PLO) were revised in Fall 2024 and recent comprehensive curriculum revision is planned for launch in Fall 2026. In addition, ongoing uncertainty surrounding the university's athletics program and leadership changes seem to create ambivalent perceptions among faculty and students and make the Department's strategic planning for student enrollment and resource utilization more complicated. Despite these challenges, the Department continues to demonstrate strong dedications to students learning, community engagement, and faculty-student research collaborations.

There is a notable sense of "team" Kinesiology among faculty and a strong feeling of "community" among faculty and students. Administrators also highlighted the Department's significant contributions to the campus and the nearby community. Students expressed high satisfaction with their learning experiences and spoke positively about their interactions with faculty in and out of classroom. Nevertheless, upcoming changes, including the implementation of the revised curriculum and the development of a new interdepartmental pre-health program, appeared to have generated a mix of excitement and concerns among tenure-track and part-time faculty. As these changes come along, a

structured and systematic assessment plan will be essential to support early-stage implementation, address emerging issues, and ensure that student learning outcomes are effectively monitored and validated.

The previous review cycle identified several concerns: outdated laboratory equipment, insufficient research and instructional space, and limited personnel resources. It was noticeable that some progress was made. In particular, laboratory space renovations and equipment upgrades were recently completed thanks to consistent effort by faculty and administrative support. Additionally, the approval of a new tenure-track hire, of which I was inform that the search had begun, is a welcome development that will certainly help alleviate faculty workload and enhance student learning outcomes. However, other issues from the prior review remain unresolved, such as the shortage of instructional space and ongoing student advising workload issues, which have not yet been adequately addressed and require immediate attention for administrative support.

This review is organized into the following sections: Curriculum Coherence and Consistency; Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes; Faculty Engagement; Program Resources and Capacity; and Final Thoughts.

### Curriculum Coherence and Consistency

The Department revised its Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) in Spring 2024, as outlined in the self-study report. The five PLOs are clearly defined, and the updated curriculum maps demonstrate improved coherence and alignment compared with the previous version. The revised curriculum is designed to strengthen student learning by providing both a solid disciplinary foundation and meaningful applied experiences. Lower-division coursework incorporates biology, chemistry, psychology, and statistics, while upper-division core courses address the historical, physiological, sociological, psychological, and biomechanical dimensions of human movement.

Alignment with PLOs and WSCUS Core competences, including written and oral communication, critical thinking, quantitative Reasoning, and information literacy, is now much clearer. Each PLO is intentionally mapped onto the curriculum through sequenced coursework that progresses from foundational understanding in the lower division to advanced application in upper-division core and concentration courses. The updated curriculum map illustrates how PLOs are scaffolded across support and core courses, facilitating students learning experience from developing-level to mastery by the time of graduation.

The overall curricular framework is thoughtfully structured to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of human movement, the historical perspective of the discipline, and its impact on society. This structure supports the Department's goal of preparing students for professional careers as well as for professional graduate programs across the three established concentrations.

As noted in the self-study report, faculty are currently working to embed the revised PLOs more explicitly into course syllabi and instructional materials. As the Department moves into the next phase of curriculum implementation, it will be essential to develop Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) or Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for each course and to ensure their alignment with the PLOs. Additionally, establishing a systematic assessment plan will further strengthen curricular coherence and consistency. Such a plan will help ensure that PLOs are regularly monitored and reinforced, and that evidence of student learning is effectively documented across the program in the coming years.

### Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

The self-study report provided detailed data on enrollment trends, student distribution across concentrations, and demographic characteristics. It also summarized survey findings from current students and alumni (55 current students and 68 alumni from the classes of 2019–2024). Survey results indicated that approximately 85% of students were satisfied with their decision to major in Kinesiology, with 48.9% reporting they were extremely satisfied and 36.2% somewhat satisfied. More than 80% of students expressed satisfaction with the overall quality of their coursework, noting that their classes enriched their learning and career preparation by offering both practical skills and meaningful insights into future professional pathways.

Advising was another area of strong student satisfaction. Approximately 85% of respondents reported being satisfied with their advising experience (48.5% somewhat satisfied and 36.4% extremely satisfied). However, data revealed that advising primarily focused on course scheduling rather than on career planning or preparation for graduate studies. Additionally, 44.4% of respondents reported participating in research, and 75% of these students indicated that their research involvement helped refine their career goals and academic interests. Alumni responses also reflected positively on the program, with 54.9% rating their overall experience as excellent and 37.3% as good. Notably, 71% of alumni (44 respondents) reported that they are currently working or pursuing further study in a Kinesiology-related field.

The previous review recommended that the Department develop and implement a formal assessment plan for PLOs. While faculty recognize the importance of establishing such a plan, significant reductions in tenure-track faculty, a major curriculum revision, and substantial workload demands over the past five years have limited the Department's capacity to do so. Although forming an assessment committee may be difficult given the small number of faculty, it cannot be emphasized enough that the Department designate at least one faculty member to serve as an assessment coordinator who can initiate and guide the development of a formal assessment plan for PLOs. Without appropriate workload compensation, such as reassigned time, assuming this responsibility will not be feasible at all. It is strongly recommended that the Department seek administrative support to secure reassigned time for the faculty member appointed to this role.

One of practical ways for implementing an assessment plan can be identifying one PLO to be assessed per year, resulting in a five-year assessment cycle for all five PLOs. Under the leadership of the assessment coordinator, all faculty would contribute to this effort by revising syllabi, developing CLOs or SLOs, aligning CLOs with PLOs, contributing to data collection for assessment report, and supporting surveys administered to current students and alumni. Both quantitative and qualitative data should be gathered to provide meaningful insights into how well PLOs are being achieved across the curriculum.

For example, the Department could develop a survey instrument for upper-division students that may ask them to evaluate how they felt they had learned contents covered by PLOs or how they perceived the role of co-curricular activities, such as integrated practicums, service-learning experiences, or community engagement projects, in supporting PLOs. In case that a course has multiple sections taught by different instructors, it may help to identify a lead instructor who can help streamline communication and ensure consistent assessment practices. Lastly, alumni data can serve as an important component of the Department's assessment plan, helping validate how well the curriculum prepares graduates for workforce demands and professional expectations. The implementation of a structured and sustainable assessment plan will allow the Department to systematically monitor PLOs, strengthen curriculum–PLO alignment, and sustain continuous improvement of curriculum.

### Faculty Engagement

The tenure-track faculty are highly engaged in research and consistently provide exceptional co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities that enrich students' learning

experiences. It is particularly impressive that faculty devote significant time and effort to involving students in research and supporting their professional development, including opportunities to present findings at regional and national conferences. Additionally, the faculty's active involvement in community engagement projects, such as the Seawolf Fit Project, National Biomechanics Day, and the Walking Buddy Program, is commendable. These activities not only enhance student learning but also promote the visibility and reputation of both the Department and the university.

Despite these strengths, the small size of the faculty, currently four tenure-track members, has inevitably resulted in significant workload strain. One area that places particularly heavy strain and demands on already-overstretched faculty is advising-related workload. Kinesiology faculty often carry the responsibility of advising majors on course planning and scheduling, a task that, while important, may not be the most effective use of faculty member's expertise and time. The extensive advising workload can also impact faculty well-being and their capacity to maintain high-quality instruction and research productivity.

It is strongly recommended that the Department request a dedicated academic advisor to alleviate this burden. Additionally, the development of online advising resources, such as informational videos, Canvas modules, or interactive quizzes, would empower students to take a more active role in their own coursework planning. This may also help faculty redirect their time and effort toward research mentorship, career guidance, and community engagement programs.

Faculty-initiated community engagement is one of the Department's greatest strengths and a distinctive feature of the Kinesiology program. Despite limited faculty and personnel resources, the Department excels in offering valuable co-curricular and extra-curricular experiences for students. To sustain these impactful programs, faculty should receive appropriate incentives, compensation, or meaningful recognition within the retention, tenure and promotion (RTP) process, as well as strong administrative support.

Faculty dedication to student success is clearly evident and highly commendable. During interviews, students emphasized that their relationships with faculty are among the Department's greatest strengths. They expressed feeling welcomed, supported, and deeply connected to faculty members in the Department through research involvement, community outreach activities, academic advising, and student club participation.

## Program Resources and Capacity

The Department currently has access to only one dedicated classroom (PE 33), which has a maximum capacity of 30 students. There is an urgent need for additional instructional space designated specifically for lecture courses that can accommodate 40–45 students. Until Spring 2025, the Department of Kinesiology shared the Physical Education (PE) Building with the Athletics Department, a facility with very limited classroom availability. Due to this shortage, the Department has relied heavily on PE 15, a conference room primarily intended for faculty meetings and events by repurposing it to host additional classes. Securing more appropriate instructional space would significantly enhance student learning and support faculty teaching effectiveness, while also alleviating ongoing scheduling challenges related to space and time constraints.

In response to recommendations from the previous review, the Department has made notable progress in improving laboratory spaces, including renovations to the Biomechanics Laboratory and the Golf & Motor Learning Laboratory. These updates are commendable and provide ideal environments for students' hands-on learning and research activities. However, these spaces are not suitable for lecture-based instruction due to limitations such as inadequate seating with desk space, the absence of appropriate presentation technology, and the need to protect sensitive laboratory equipment.

Although many things seem to be dependent upon the return of the university's athletic program, it must be important for the department to have a strategic contingency plan for acquiring additional instructional space: plan A: space usage if athletic program is reinstated and plan B: space usage if athletic program does not return. This should require clear space and time delineation of identified areas in the facility with a proper support from administrative division on campus.

Given the uncertainty surrounding the future of the university's athletics program, it is essential for the Department to develop a strategic contingency plan for acquiring additional instructional space. This plan should include a) Plan A: space usage strategies if the athletics program is reinstated, and b) Plan B: space allocation scenarios if the athletics program does not return. This process must accompany clearly delineated timetable and specific areas in the building with strong administrative support, which will be necessary to implement either scenario effectively.

Faculty resources also remain a significant concern. Over the past five years, the Department lost five tenure-track faculty members while adding only two, resulting in a net

loss of three positions. Although a new tenure-track line has been approved and is currently in the hiring process, faculty shortages and workload overload are still significant challenges. These challenges are further exacerbated by faculty obligations to service and administrative roles. Additionally, the heavy advising load placed on faculty reinforces the need for a dedicated academic advisor to support students in the Department and relieve faculty of routine advising responsibilities.

Enrollment trends present another area requiring a strategic plan for program capacity. From Fall 2019 to Spring 2025, student enrollment in the Department of Kinesiology declined by 89 majors (a 24.2% decrease), which is notably smaller than the university-wide enrollment decline of 35.4% (from 8,649 to 5,585 students). Interestingly the Department has seen an increase in transfer student admissions, from 17 to 56 during this period, which is a positive development. However, the recent elimination of the athletics program has negatively impacted enrollment, as approximately 20% of the Department's majors were student-athletes. Enrollment declines across California's higher education landscape will make it increasingly challenging to stabilize or grow enrollment.

To address these challenges, the Department should develop a comprehensive strategic enrollment plan. Strengthening community partnerships through outreach initiatives and service-learning programs can enhance visibility and serve as effective recruitment tools. Therefore, it is critical for the Department to continue supporting and strengthening community ties via its outstanding outreach programs and service-learning program. Increasing the Department's social media presence to highlight students' activities and faculty accomplishments may also improve recruitment efforts. Additionally, more frequent visits to local high schools and community colleges, along with regular hosting of Department's open houses, could support enrollment sustainability and potential growth.

### Final Thoughts

After a careful review of the self-study report prepared by the Department of Kinesiology, a campus site visit, and multiple interviews with faculty, students, and administrators, the following commendations, recommendations and suggestions are summarized.

- Commendations are findings of merit for which the Department deserves specific recognition.
- Recommendations are proposed items for the best action.
- Suggestions are ideas that the Department may consider for further development.

The Department of Kinesiology at Sonoma State University demonstrates a deep commitment to student learning, faculty's student engagement, and meaningful community involvement. The revised PLOs and curriculum with improved curricular mapping reflect thoughtful planning and a clear intention to strengthen academic quality and coherence. Students and alumni express strong satisfaction with their educational experiences, highlighting supportive faculty relationships, valuable practical experiences, and well-designed coursework. Faculty members are highly dedicated to students' learning experience, offering significant research opportunities, community engagement activities, and professional development pathways despite being stretched thin and overworked.

The Department continues to face several ongoing challenges that must be addressed to ensure long-term program sustainability. These include insufficient instructional space, substantial academic advising load on faculty, limited tenure-track staffing, and uncertainty related to the future of the university's athletics program. Additionally, the Department needs to develop and implement a systematic assessment plan for PLOs with CLOs in each course and to establish an enrollment management plan that supports recruitment and retention as encountering a period of statewide and university-wide enrollment decline.

### **Commendations**

- **Exceptional Faculty Dedication and Student Support**

Faculty demonstrate remarkable commitment to teaching, research mentorship, advising, and student engagement. Students consistently cite faculty support and accessibility as major strengths of the program.

- **High-Quality Community Engagement and Service-Learning Experiences**

Programs such as Seawolf Fit, National Biomechanics Day, and the Walking Buddy Program provide transformative learning experiences and enhance the Department's visibility within the campus and local community. These have been recognized and commended by the university administration, and further recognitions and support are essential for their sustainability.

- **Improved Curriculum Alignment and Program Learning Outcomes**

The revised PLOs and curriculum with well-aligned curriculum maps significantly enhance curricular coherence, sequencing, consistency, and alignment with PLOs and WSCUC Core Competencies.



- Strong Student and Alumni Satisfaction

Surveys indicate high satisfaction with the program, coursework quality, advising, and research opportunities. Alumni outcomes demonstrate that the curriculum supports entry into Kinesiology-related careers and advanced graduate programs.

- Significant Improvements to Laboratory Spaces

Renovated laboratory facilities and updated equipment reflect meaningful progress in supporting hands-on learning, research activities, and student engagement.

## Recommendations

- Develop and Implement a Formal Assessment Plan for PLOs

Designate an assessment coordinator with reassigned time to lead a structured five-year assessment cycle, ensuring clear alignment between PLOs and CLOs/SLOs, ongoing data collection, systematic validation of PLOs accomplishments, and documentation of evidence-based improvements.

- Address the Critical Shortage of Instructional Space

Work collaboratively with campus administration to secure additional lecture spaces capable of accommodating 40–45 students and equipped with updated instructional technology. Develop a dual contingency plan for space utilization, with one scenario anticipating the return of athletics and another planning for a future without it.

- Hire a Dedicated Academic Advisor

Reduce advising-related workload on tenure-track faculty by securing an academic advisor for the Department. If current budget doesn't allow a designated advisor for the Department of Kinesiology, consider employing a reliable lecturer with in-house experience for half-time workload temporarily. Supplement this support with online advising tools, such as Canvas modules, videos, and interactive quiz materials.

- Plan for Enrollment Management

Develop a strategic recruitment and retention plan that includes enhanced community outreach, expanded social media presence, increased engagement with local high schools and community colleges, and regularly scheduled department open houses.

- Recognize and Continue to Support Faculty-Led Community Engagement

Provide meaningful incentives, RTP recognition, or additional resources to sustain the Department's outstanding community-engaged initiatives.

## Suggestions

- Continue to Advocate for Expanding Tenure-Track Faculty Capacity

Keep advocating for additional tenure-track hires to ensure a sustainable balance of teaching, research, advising, service, and administrative responsibilities.

- Involve Guest Speakers in the Lower Division Courses

Integrate guest speakers in the lower division courses and help students explore various career options in the field of Kinesiology and closely related health and fitness professions. Consider inviting alumni and lecturers for guest speakers so that students can feel more relatable if all possible.

- Organize Career Workshops for students

Invite related professionals from alumni and local organizations and organize career fair or workshop for students on a regular basis.

- Offer Open House for Students

Provide a regular opportunity for students to learn research and community engagement activities available within the Department.

- Create Fundraising Events with Students

Consider fundraising events which can help increase not only funding sources but also students' engagement and community involvement.

- Expand Awareness and Procure Donations

Work closely with the university's advancement and development officers to expand the awareness of various activities, which may lead to potential procurement of donation.

## Summary

The Department of Kinesiology is a highly engaged, student-centered academic unit with strong faculty dedication, a cohesive sense of community, and a curriculum that prepares students effectively for careers and further graduate education. With strategic investment of time and effort, particularly in development of formal assessment plan, instructional space allocation, acquisition of a dedicated academic advisor, and administrative recognition and support, the Department of Kinesiology is well positioned to continue its excellent work and further enhance the quality of its program. By addressing proposed items for recommendations while sustaining its many existing strengths, the Department can ensure ongoing excellence and provide further contributions to both the university and the broader Sonoma community.