General Comments:

The Exercise and Sport Science (EXSS) program has a dedicated faculty who strongly believe in the educational process of the undergraduate student. However, they are being pressured by large class sizes, a very high student/faculty ratio, diverse class offerings, diverse specializations within the major, research efforts, a move toward a Public Health School which will require more research and grantsmanship, and a limited number of tenure-track faculty. As such, the present faculty should consider reducing the number of majors by instituting admission requirements, restructuring course offerings, or expanding the number of faculty. The faculty should also reconcile how the physical education teacher education program and the non-thesis offering for the master’s program will fit within the confines of a School of Public Health.

From the catalog there appears to be a myriad of courses, but the students have some difficulty finding sequencing to finish the degree in a reasonable amount of time. This could be somewhat alleviated by improving “in-house” advising, improving the departmental website to make it more intuitive, and perhaps distributing an undergraduate EXSS handbook.

Specific Comments:

Students:

In general, the students appear to be happy with the course offerings, faculty teaching, and faculty availability for meetings. They feel prepared for their career goals and most are employed in a reasonable amount of time post graduation in a job commensurate with their education. The students feel that faculty are generally doing a good job teaching and would recommend the program. On the other hand, there is a very large number of majors. The student to faculty ratio appears to be about 54 students for one faculty. This is extremely high and attempts should be made to reduce that ratio to a more acceptable range of 25-30 students to one faculty; comparable with the norms for other programs and other institutions. Thus the department needs more faculty and/or needs to limit access to the majors.

With the large number of majors, one way to improve the student’s experience is to develop an undergraduate handbook outlining the four specializations and what
they prepare the student for, the courses of study, faculty and interests, specific contacts within department, practicum sites, internships, honors program, sites. This could be posted on-line or given to each student when they designate the major. There was some difficulty interpreting the course listings and figuring out the best sequencing and pre-requisites. The handbook could help, as could assigning someone within EXSS to serve as the advising person for problems (25% time). Along similar lines, to improve the student’s ability to manage their major course sequencing, some consideration should be given to numbering courses so that all courses in a specific area (athletic training, nutrition, fitness, etc.) are numbered similarly (e.g., athletic training 380, 381, 382, 383 instead of 350, 351, 380). Transfer students and those who change majors can catch up in the summer, but need special advising to keep on track.

Another suggestion would be a “major’s night” with undergraduate faculty present to discuss specialization options courses, internships, research to help the student. Bring local alumni to discuss jobs etc.

Class sizes appear to be too large to get personal attention. One student stated that there were over 400 in their physiology class. Efforts are needed to “right-size” the undergraduate majors (increased faculty or program admission requirements) ought to help with the retention of first- to second-year student, which is currently lower than the college and university numbers.

In some cases tutors and teaching assistants are available, but not all. Assigning teaching assistants from the graduate program could serve both the undergraduate program and provide the graduate students with a teaching experience. One suggestion would be that any class over 50 students have one teaching assistant (TA) and any class over 100 have at least two teaching assistants (a ratio of 1 TA/50 students). The large number of students also requires more laboratory space than is presently available.

There is a desire to provide research experiences for students. Concomitantly, there is difficulty finding research experiences. The small number of faculty involved with research presents a major barrier to student participation. Once again, the student/faculty ratio makes this a difficult task. Funding available for student research is in the summer; however, faculty are on a nine-month contract. Thus, providing a research experience for students presents an overload for faculty. Perhaps making the funding for such projects available during the normal school calendar could foster more research.

**Program:**

Since matriculating students outnumber freshman admissions to the majors, students are finding their way to majors in the department, which probably speaks well of non-majors’ experiences in their Baccalaureate Core classes. One undergraduate reported finding his way to EXSS after 3 shifts in majors at OSU.
However, as the university grows, the lack of admission criteria other than the university’s criteria will likely add even more students to an already large undergraduate program (1022 in 2010-11). Increasing admission standards by requiring a 2.5 accumulative GPA after second year to remain in the major, or implementing a pre-major program with benchmarks, would help control the size of the major.

Offering undergraduates four possible specializations with the limited number of faculty is a concern. The faculty needs to re-evaluate what it is attempting to provide, especially in light of their participation in the new School of Public Health. Many courses listed as different numbers are simply the same course offered in different semesters. This can be confusing to the student. The faculty should consider eliminating the redundancy and simply offering the same number for a course but allow 2-6 hours credit for that course. The faculty should also consider eliminating courses that are no longer taught and consider eliminating EXSS 131.

The role of nutrition within EXSS should also be evaluated. Although it appears congruent with the goals of EXSS, the department should examine the state requirements for nutrition and see if they are compatible with the limitations of teaching numbers and facilities within the department.

The department should consider better integrating coursework and activities related to oral communication, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and leadership into the curriculum, since alumni report that those important key outcomes were accomplished the least. Progress here may correlate to progress in decreasing class size and use of Teaching Assistants for class exercises.

**Faculty:**

The faculty are truly dedicated to the profession and teaching of the students. In general, they have good teaching skills. Furthermore, the students feel that faculty are generally doing a good job teaching and would recommend the program to others. Ultimately, this could present a dilemma as the department moves toward a School of Public Health, which generally focuses more on graduate programs and research. Thus over the up-coming years the heavy teaching load should be reduced to provide more time to research. Conversely, an increase in the number of faculty would help alleviate the potential problem. Overall, to maintain excellence, the College and newly formed School of Public Health will need to reaffirm their commitment to strong undergraduate programs by setting undergraduate instructional needs as a priority in planning for new hires. Thus could present an interesting conflict as Schools of Public Health tend to focus more on research than undergraduate programs. This will need to be addressed by the newly appointed Public Health Administration and faculty. Perhaps the new School of Public Health should seize an opportunity to capitalize on a large enrollment undergraduate program and strive to make it extraordinary.
Providing a research experience for undergraduates is another dilemma for faculty. Funding for student research is available in the summer, but faculty members are on nine-month contracts and not generally available for students during the summer. Summer funding is a barrier that 1) presents an overload for faculty and 2) means that students would be required to be on campus during the fourth quarter. Perhaps the faculty should consider having advanced doctoral students direct more of the undergraduate research experiences or providing more experiences during the normal school year. This is where the “major’s night” or the handbook could alert the student to the experiences available.

The faculty appears to receive little reward for their overload efforts. One way to reward faculty is to pursue endowed chairs. These entitlements can provide a stipend and research dollars, which can be a way to show support for the faculty member in times of limited funding. This would take efforts from the central administration, but usually costs the college very little and provides a great reward. The funds are usually un-restricted so that faculty could use them for their own benefit (research, travel) or can use the funds for the graduate student’s benefit. Travel funds for faculty are critical with the greater focus on research.

Overall, if the faculty is to develop a solid research program which is typically required by a School of Public Health, then the University has to improve its infrastructure to obtain that funding. Thus help with finding, writing, and administering grants needs to be improved. Also, the University or College should develop a mentorship program with new faculty, possibly assigning two mentors, one in the faculty member’s specialization and a secondary in another area of interest within the department.

Facilities:

Classrooms for teaching appear adequate and are amply supplied with smart boards and LCD projectors. There are a number of laboratories found within EXSS. However, the laboratory space is generally small and the labs are basically set up for research, not student use. Only the Pedagogy, EXSS Instructional Lab, and an athletic training Lab are truly dedicated to undergraduate teaching. The size of these three laboratories appears to be inadequate for the number of majors. In the Fitness lab, the basic equipment is present to train personal trainers, but more equipment could greatly improve the student’s experience. In addition, additional metabolic equipment is recommended so students can gain more “hands-on” experience.