

Dean's Response to Economics Program Review

April 26, 2013

The John B. Goddard School of Business & Economics (GSBE) underwent an in-depth program review as part of its Maintenance of Accreditation review cycle during Fall 2012. GSBE provided a detailed report to AACSB, after which two deans and two accounting chairpersons from AACSB-accredited institutions visited the WSU campus for three days in October 2012. The review team recommended to AACSB that reaccreditation be delayed for a year (this is termed "6-year review"), conditional on GSBE meeting four criteria. Two criteria are specific to the School of Accounting & Taxation and are therefore not directly relevant to this program review.

I commend the department on bringing two economists from other universities to campus to participate in a comprehensive review of the economics program. Their report is, appropriately, quite complimentary of the department. However, the report includes several areas for attention and offers some specific recommendations. In their response to the report, the department faculty members have identified specific, appropriate action items associated with each recommendation. It would be useful to include a timeline for those action items.

The Department of Economics plays a large role in general education at WSU, supports all business majors, and has majors in both Business and General Economics. In addition, it operates a "2+2" self-support program in International Economics (IE) in association with Shanghai Normal University (China) and Woongji Accounting and Tax College (South Korea). The IE program generates over \$200,000 annually for GSBE. The Department of Economics also boasts the strongest publication record in the college, having averaged 4.5 peer-reviewed journal articles per faculty member in the last five years.

The AACSB condition require that (1) the four GSBE faculty who are not publishing at an appropriate rate increase their productivity to meet GSBE standards, and (2) all programs in GSBE improve their loop-closing activities based on the Assurance of Learning (AoL) assessment program.

The Department of Economics has no concerns related to condition (1). As indicated above, the publication rate and quality is outstanding and all continuing faculty exceed GSBE's research expectations. Like all units, however, the department must identify more loop-closing activities, must take action to close those loops, and then must assess the efficacy of those actions. The Department has made progress in each of those areas during the past two semesters.

Like all GSBE departments, Economics needs additional faculty positions. The college's three-year hiring plan calls for 1-2 additional tenure-track economists to be hired. The department is also exploring the possibility of adding an instructor, rather than a tenure-track faculty member, in one of those slots. Using IE program funding for an instructor might be possible, and discussions with Continuing Education (a partner in the IE program) have begun to determine whether such an arrangement can work

financially. The state of Utah also has restrictions on which revenue sources can be used to hire faculty, complicating this question.

The IE program, while successful, has created several challenges for the department. These include much larger class sizes, Asian-student-majority classes that might require very different pedagogies than do US students, concerns about teaching evaluations and associated tenure implications, significant new advising/administrative responsibilities (particularly for the chair and department secretary), etc. The department has engaged in a discussion of these issues and has sent a request for additional IE funding to address some of these issues. A continuing discussion between the department and the dean's office regarding resources is appropriate.

The consultants' report also identifies increasing the number of internships available to economics majors as an important goal. The department's intention to add an internship is an appropriate first step. However, the department faculty should also meet with GSBE's career services staff to develop a plan for increasing firms' appreciation for economics majors as interns. This particularly recommendation also appeared in the consultants' report. Department faculty could also take leadership roles by working with firms to identify internships.

The consultants recommend that the department consider creating an external advisory committee. Such committees, if organized well, can be instrumental in ensuring program relevance, arranging internships and jobs for students, and soliciting resources. I strongly encourage the department to create such a committee or board.

A final recommendation from the committee is for the department to create a formal five-year strategic plan. Strategic planning is a useful tool and the department is encouraged to create a plan during the coming academic year.

Looking forward, the Department of Economics faces some particular challenges related to the International Economics program and to its capstone course, in addition to challenges that face the entire GSBE. Continued departmental discussion, planning and action are required to address them, as are new resources. As noted above, the department has already determined action items for each suggestion. I am impressed and encouraged by the thoughtful, timely response by the faculty. Moreover, the reappointment of the outstanding current chair to another three-year term provides significant optimism that these challenges will be met in the near future.

The Dean's Office remains committed to allocating resources fairly across the college and to generating additional resources to supplement all program budgets. Continued, open conversations between the Dean's Office and the Department of Economics will be instrumental in achieving that goal. I would be quite happy to attend one or more department meetings to listen and/or discuss issues with the faculty.

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