

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
WSU Department Economics
Self-Study Document, Fall 2012

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The following is a summary of the self-study document, highlighting important points. For complete information, please refer to the full, self-study document itself.

Mission Statement: The mission statement of the economics department complements the missions of Weber State University and the Goddard School of Business and Economics in focusing departmental faculty on their role as teacher scholars. As evidenced by faculty productivity in the area of scholarship (Section F8. and Appendix E) and faculty involvement in high impact learning through the capstone experience course, this mission is widely embraced and successfully implemented by the departmental faculty. Especially with the increase in majors through the implementation of the 2+2 international program, the departmental dedication to high impact learning has been very labor-intensive and needs to be reconsidered in light of a number of resource decisions that are only partially under the control of the department. With at least three new tenure-track hires pending, the economics department should formally review this mission statement with the changed faculty during the next two years.

Curriculum: The department offers the Bachelor of Science degree in five emphasis areas of economics. Four of these areas are within social science and one within the GSBE. The social science emphasis areas are (1) General Social Science, (2) International Economics, (3) Legal Studies, and (4) Quantitative Economics. The fifth area, Business Economics, is structured identically to other business degrees except for upper-level major classes. In addition to offering these degree programs, the economics department is instrumental in supporting business foundations courses (almost 2/3 of these credit hours are taught within economics), general education courses in the core area of American Institutions and the breadth area of Social Science. The economics department also supports the MBA program within the GSBE with the equivalent of at least one full-time faculty.

Curriculum changes in the past 5 years have focused on streamlining admissions and assessment requirements in line with the GSBE, revamping the economics minor, streamlining pre-requisites for major courses and expanding elective choices to a large number of international transfer students in the 2+2 international economics program. An assessment driven change to the economics curriculum comes through the addition of a one-credit hour preparatory course taken one semester before the required ECON 4980 Research Methods course. This curriculum change strives to address measured deficiencies in student performance with respect to producing an undergraduate research project.

Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

The economics department currently has to meet and assess university wide learning outcomes for the general education courses (SS and AI) taught, college-wide learning outcomes particularly for the quantitative methods courses taken by all business and economics majors and departmental learning outcomes formulated for economics majors. The economics department contributes in data gathering and analysis for the college-wide learning outcomes and a senior economics faculty member currently coordinates the substantial college-wide assessment of learning efforts required for the maintenance of AACSB accreditation. General education assessment is still in its infancy within the department and extensive college-wide assessment efforts are detailed elsewhere (2012 5th year AACSB Maintenance of Accreditation report for the GSBE), therefore this report will focus largely on departmental learning outcomes.

The department of economics assessment story centers on the capstone experience course ECON 4980 that has been taught for the last 8 years and has been required for all economics majors for the last 6 years. This course allows students to create a research paper of their own with substantial guidance and individual mentoring by a faculty member. During the past years, the department has started to administer the nationally normed TUCE-4 (Test of Understanding College Economics) to directly measure achievement in the areas of micro- and macroeconomics and international economics as part of ECON 4980. The department has also adopted rubrics to directly assess the research papers produced and the oral presentations given by all economics graduates. With the change in the composition and numbers of economics majors (large numbers of international students), the assessment metrics on the TUCE and the research project have declined. The economics department needs to better identify the cause for this change (for example, knowledge of economics versus language skills) and will work with the GSBE advisors to use ECON 2899, the new Admissions and Assessment course for assessment of transfer student knowledge.

While the economics department has a clear narrative centered on departmental assessment efforts, mixed messages from the AACSB accreditation teams over time with regards to assessment (yes or no to indirect assessment measures, yes or no to departmental versus program or college-wide assessment) have made assessment efforts overly laborious, ultimately reducing faculty buy-in for this important activity. Streamlining of assessment activities on all levels of the university will likely help remedy this situation.

Academic Advising

For most of the review period, major advising has been conducted by the department chair with the college advisor handling general education advising. The process of advising new majors has been refined by a college wide initiative to implement a zero credit assessment and admissions course ECON 2899/BSAD 2899 starting in 2008. During the last three years, because of the 2+2 program, the number of majors and the complexity of advising have increased exponentially, resulting in advising taking up a substantial amount of department time, even with the introduction of regular group advising sessions for economics majors conducted by the department chair. With the start of the current academic year the GSBE has adopted an advising model that moves ALL advising to a centralized advising office staffed by two college advisors and one support staff. The department chair closely works with the advising staff and has transitioned the more complex advising of international students.

Effectively advising international students for the 2+2 program has required close collaboration with other administrative offices across the university, especially the transfer articulation office and the international student services center. While both of these offices have been responsive in working on helping students in the 2+2 program, the university as a whole needs to work on improving processes and services for international students, extending to internship and job placement.

Faculty: The department of economics has an active and engaged faculty in all three areas of professional activity, scholarship, teaching and service. Over the last five years, the economics faculty produced 46% of all per-reviewed journal articles within the GSBE with many of these articles published in quality journals as defined by external journal ranking lists. The economics faculty has published an average of 4.5 journal articles per faculty over the 2007-2012 time periods. Student achievements on the national and university level and next-level success in terms of graduate school admission indicate that the department adheres to rigorous standards in teaching, affording each student the ability to complete an individualized, extensive research project. The department is actively engaged in service on the college-level, university-level and with external constituencies. Several faculty have been recognized for outstanding performance with university-wide awards, best-paper awards by professional organizations, and appointments as fellows to prestigious national and international organizations.

Program Support: Conducting the array of professional activities required and aspired to, faculty face two constraints, time and money.

In the past years, through the dean's office and the self-funded 2+2 International Economics program the economics department has seen an increase in its operational budget and the availability of travel funds. Base salaries (generally below national averages for Weber State University) of faculty have been supplemented by funds for publications in peer-reviewed journals under the Research Incentive Program, by overload teaching, largely in the MBA program and through targeted salary increases after years of frozen base salaries. In light of the financial difficulties of the past years, the department has fared comparatively well. Financial issues to be addressed over the next years are salary inversions as market salaries for new faculty rise at a faster rate than salaries for very productive senior faculty. A second issue is the question of how reduced overload teaching (seemingly mandated by the accreditation agency) will impact the ability to support all four areas of instruction. In addition, reduced overload teaching will compound the issue of salary inversion. These resource issues need to be resolved at the college-level.

In terms of time, faculty is increasingly stretched thin. A myriad of small, administrative tasks start to encroach on the core functions of teaching and scholarship. It is here, that effectively functioning processes at the central administration level of the university could be most helpful to the department. While the department feels well focused in prioritizing time to fulfill its mission, it is not always clear that other administrative units share this vision.

Relations with External Community:

A small number of faculty have ongoing, extensive and important relations with external constituents. Involvement of other faculty members tends to be ad hoc, fulfilling one-time requests, e.g. for local media.

Student, Faculty, Contract/Adjunct Faculty and Staff Statistics:

Department of Economics Student and Faculty Statistical Summary

	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Student Credit Hours Total	7,155	7,010	7,455	8,892	8,909	9,425
Economics	4,071	3,873	4,356	5,034	5,183	5,756
Quantitative	3,084	3,137	3,099	3,858	3,726	3,669
Student FTE Total	238.50	233.65	248.50	296.40	296.97	314.17
Student Majors	73	99	100	113	147	159
Economics	68	91	94	106	140	154
Quantitative	5	7	6	7	7	5
Program Graduates						
Certificate	3	0	1	3	1	0
Bachelor Degree	11	8	12	8	21	43
Economics	9	5	10	3	20	42
Quantitative	2	3	2	5	1	1
Student Demographic Profile	73	99	100	113	147	159
Female	21	32	30	34	51	77
Male	52	67	70	79	96	82
Faculty FTE Total	15.48	14	13.74	14.48	15.57	NA
Adjunct FTE	4.49	4.61	4.15	4.33	5.42	NA
Contract FTE	10.99	9.39	9.59	10.15	10.15	NA
Student/Faculty Ratio	15.41	16.69	18.09	20.47	19.07	NA
*Student majors include pre-professional programs						

Note: Data provided by Institutional Research

Note that this data does not count the economics department contributions to the MBA program. This comprises about 6-7 sections per year that are mostly taught on an overload basis.

Appendix B: Financial Analysis Summary

Department of Economics					
Cost	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12
Direct Instructional Expenditures	1,001,697	1,068,119	875,223	869,678	1,126,371
Cost Per Student FTE	4,287	4,298	2,953	2,929	3,585
Cost per student FTE in 2007	4,287	4,074	2,855	2,794	3,308

dollars at CPI (July each year)					
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Funding	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12
Appropriated Fund	992,817	1,049,359	865,369	859,081	1,100,193
Other:					
Special Legislative Appropriation					
Grants of Contracts					
Special Fees/Differential Tuition	8,880	18,759	9,854	10,597	26,178
Total	1,001,697	1,068,119	875,223	869,678	1,126,371

07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12
FTE	FTE	FTE	FTE	FTE
233.65	248.50	296.40	296.97	314.17

Results of Previous Program Reviews:

Problem Identified in previous BOR review (2007)	Action that has been taken
In the previous program review, the economics department was asked about the low number of majors.	The department initiated partnerships with international universities that allow students to complete a 2+2 degree in economics (Shanghai Normal University, China) or continue their studies with a bachelor’s degree from WSU (Woongji College of Tax and Accounting , Korea). In addition to increasing the numbers of economics majors, the presence of the students supports the GSBE goal of internationalizing the student experience for all WSU students.
Format and Assessment of the capstone experience course ECON 4980 Research Methods.	Students have the opportunity to take a one-credit hour course ECON 4800 to help them prepare for ECON 4980 Research Methods during their last semester. Student preparation and improved faculty expertise in teaching the class have resulted in increased and stable pass rates for the course. Improved assessment techniques have highlighted areas where students need to improve. Those areas (application of theory and writing) are emphasized in ECON 4800.
Travel funding to support faculty development with respect to scholarship.	Revenue from the self-funded international economics program and an increase in the operational budget for the department has helped to increase travel funding for all economics faculty and at the same time maintain operational expenses during the last three academic years.

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