

Summary of Report

The following quotes from the review team generally summarize the evaluation of the Economics Department.

“The Department clearly has made it a priority to be excellent in two areas, classroom instruction and scholarly productivity. In many respects, it appears that the Department intentionally wants to be evaluated by those standards used typically to define the outstanding research universities across the nation.”

“It is fair to say that the Department is accomplishing its own goals. It has established a handful of important priorities; it has hired excellent faculty members who embrace those priorities; and, it has secured the resources necessary to help its faculty and students be successful in fulfilling those priorities.”

“There is absolutely no question that the Department of Economics is one of the leading departments at Weber State University. Its commitment to scholarly productivity might exceed any other department on campus. It is also fair to observe, however, that the Department’s priorities come with some opportunity costs.”

Recommendations and Responses

In this section we present comments from the review team and responses.

1. “Some faculty members feel they would benefit from exposure to the research of outside faculty members. Although noting that seminars by outside faculty members do occur and are supported by the college, more seminars presented by researchers from other institutions would be desirable for some faculty.”

Response: The Dean has provided funds for a seminar series for the last two academic years. Every faculty member has been invited to bring in a speaker during the 2005/06 and 2006/07 school years. Only a few faculty have taken advantage of this opportunity. This appears not to be important to most faculty.

2. “ Faculty members expressed a need for a larger travel budget and noted that the Department’s travel budget has remained flat for several years. There were suggestions that too much of the research incentive money is allocated to support research (e.g. data

collection) and not enough for travel to present research results and interact with faculty outside Weber State University.”

Response: This is a true statement. The travel budget has been decreasing over time. The Dean has committed to address this problem in the future.

3. “The Review Team detected an inconsistency with regard to internships. Pat Wheeler indicated that numerous internships are available for economics majors, but also suggested that there was little interest in these prospects on the part of students. None of the students we interviewed were aware of internship possibilities, although most expressed interest in such opportunities. Perhaps this disconnect could be corrected by better communication between the career counseling center and economics faculty, who could convey information to economics majors. More simply, perhaps internship prospects can be communicated directly to economics majors via e-mail.”

Response: The observation of the review team is correct. Recently, the department has been receiving e-mail notifications of internships and jobs and the department needs to insure that these go out to students.

4. “The Economics Department has a commendable mission that emphasizes imparting both theoretical and practical knowledge so that students will be able to think analytically and strategically and be able to lead effectively.... **The Review Team found that the Department seems to be fulfilling its overall mission quite well** (emphasis added). The Department has hired an excellent and diverse faculty which embraces these priorities and provides the support necessary to help its faculty and students succeed in fulfilling the mission. Further, the Department actively encourages teaching and research excellence on the part of its faculty and the ability to conduct meaningful analysis on the part of its students... While the Department is generally succeeding in accomplishing its mission, many faculty and students have only an implicit understanding of the objectives of the program.”

Response: The point is to satisfy the mission. Being able to do so with an implicit understanding rather than explicit memorization of a mission seems to point out that the faculty have internalized the mission and act in consort with the mission. It suggests that we believe in the mission without having to be reminded every fall of what exactly our mission is. If explicit memorization of the mission is important I suggest you have the wrong mission or have hired the wrong people. This statement reflects a positive rather than a negative.

For the team to conclude that the department is “generally fulfilling our mission” suggests that enough assessment data is available for an outside review team to feel comfortable in making this conclusion. It suggests we are collecting the correct assessment data.

5. “The Review Team also finds that there is an unclear distinction between program goals and student learning outcomes. Specifically, Goals 1, 5, and 6 reflect program objectives and support the mission. Goals 1 and 6 pertain principally to the composition and development of faculty. Goal 5 pertains to the overall educational objectives of the program. On the other hand, Goals 2, 3, and 4 reflect specific student learning outcomes.”

Response: The department believes that goals 1 and 6 (hiring and maintaining quality faculty) as well as all other goals relate to, and support, our mission. It seems reasonable that a department mission include goals for students, faculty, program goals, and learning outcomes.

6. “The Review Team recommends that program objectives and student learning outcomes be separated and separately assessed. Further, assessment of student learning should vary by the types of degree programs that students pursue.”

Response: Although we offer only two degrees (BS and BA in economics) we agree that outcomes should be individually assessed. We currently do this in our Research Methods class.

7. “The Review Team recommends that learning outcomes be clarified and that primary trait analysis be conducted to identify assessment points throughout the curriculum. Other measures that depict student learning, beyond overall grades in specific courses, should be adopted. This would provide multiple observations of learning and opportunities to provide formative feedback to students. This is particularly important given that there are various paths through the curriculum. The specified learning outcomes and assessment points should be correlated to each degree program offered by the Department.”

Response: Although I have no idea what primary trait analysis is, we do think it is important to assess the program at different points. Again we only offer two degrees (BA and BS in economics). We currently assess at multiple points (in the classroom and in Research Methods). As indicated by the review team, the economics department has been a success, although there is an opportunity cost to all actions. Given additional resources, or suggestions on what we should give up to address this issue, a more detailed assessment could be addressed in future years.

8. “As currently administered...there is almost universal disappointment with the senior thesis on the part of faculty and students. There is significant variance in the outcomes that are emphasized and how students are evaluated.”

Response: This statement is certainly true and is a clear indication of why our assessment is working. In fact, this statement simply indicates that the economics

department has “closed the loop” in its assessment process and is discussing what changes need to take place.

In addition the “variance in the outcomes that are emphasized” reflects positively on how assessment is conducted. Different faculty do emphasize different outcomes. This is the value of a diverse faculty. If we wanted everyone to place the same value on every outcome we would hire a monotonous, homogenous faculty. As indicated by the review team, this diversity of thought is a strength rather than a weakness. The research methods class is undergoing revision, and as our capstone course, revision and continuous improvement in the course in the future seems a certainty.