

Dean's Response to the Department of Economics' Program Review

June 19, 2018

Overview

The Department of Economics is arguably the Goddard School's strongest department, with many faculty excelling in teaching ratings, scholarly output, and service activities every year. In addition, department faculty are engaged in community-engaged learning and undergraduate research projects with their students, supporting key university initiatives.

Both the department and the program review team have done outstanding work in identifying key strengths and areas for improvement.

My comments follow the organization used in the Faculty Response document.

Mission Statement

The department has worked especially over the past couple years to identify key issues and propose initiatives that address those issues. I concur with the review team that the initiatives tend to be objectives. To complete the strategic plan, each objective should have one or more associated actions, a timeline for each action, success metric(s) for each, and clearly-identified person(s) responsible for accomplishing the action. I look forward to seeing that fleshed-out plan when it is ready.

Regarding the eight specific initiatives identified on page 1 of the faculty response, I offer the following observations:

- Offer additional electives. This could exacerbate the problem of having multiple low-enrollment courses offered each term. The chair should think through the expected offerings and expected enrollments and provide more detail on what is likely to happen, so that he and the dean can determine how many low-enrollment (e.g., less than 15) courses the college can support.
- Experiential learning & sending students to conferences. Excellent initiative. Conversation with Brandon indicated that the department could help students with funding in the short term. In the longer term, the department might consider a request for recurring funding to support this initiative.
- QUAN coordinator. I'm enthusiastic about this initiative, particularly because the department uses adjuncts so heavily to deliver the courses. I encourage the department to think carefully about providing broader (both ECON & QUAN) support for adjuncts, such as pre-semester training in the use of technology, experiments, modern pedagogies, etc.
- Advisory Board. It's important to identify the specific goals of the board before creating it. For example, the board's main goal could be developing internship and job opportunities for economics majors. Alternatively, it could be providing financial support for the department, faculty & students. The make-up of the board would likely be quite different in each case.
- Streamlining majors. It would be interesting to see more data on the implications of having so many economics majors. For example, how many additional courses must we offer each year because there are six majors instead of one business and one non-business version? How many of those courses are expected to be low-enrollment? (For the record, I have no philosophical

concerns about having six majors, since each benefits students in a different way and prepares them for specific post-graduation activities. I just think being clear about the costs is sensible.)

- Recruit majors. The college's marketing manager will focus on student recruitment this year. I encourage the department to work closely with her to ensure that economics is well-represented.

Curriculum

See bullet point #1 in the preceding section.

Student-Learning Outcomes and Assessment

There is a potential problem with assessing outcomes in internships normally assessed in the final-term capstone course (ECON 4980), if students are doing an internship early in their college careers. The two groups of students would naturally perform differently. The department has suggested one alternative—having workplace supervisors evaluate students on their progress toward learning objective. This could be reported separately from the capstone assessments, keeping each pure. Alternatively, and in support of the Goddard School's encouragement of multiple internships, the department could consider having two internship courses (one earlier in the curriculum, one in the final semester or year), with only the latter assessing as the department does in ECON 4980.

Academic Advising

The chair has taken responsibility for ensuring that advisors learn about and are continually reminded about the value of an economics major, careers that open up, graduate school options, etc. I commend the chair for his proactive approach.

Faculty

See bullet point #1 in the Mission Statement section. Adding electives is great, but I want to see more data on the expected effects on enrollments, faculty loads, and budgets. Both AACSB faculty qualification and faculty sufficiency ratios should be included in the analysis.

Program Support

The associate dean has worked with departments in spring term to customize computer-replacement schedules, with quicker replacements for higher-intensity number crunchers. The college will replace 24 faculty and 4 staff computers in early fall, 2018.

Conversation with the chair indicated that there is not really any current problem with internet access in the building. Faculty who have specific issues are encouraged to bring them to the associate dean or dean.

Recruiting

See final bullet in Mission Statement section.

Enrollment

It appears that the "\$80 fee" is a reference to the college's differential tuition. In fact, that differential is \$60/credit hour and is assessed on all upper-division Goddard School courses. Revenues

from the differential tuition were used to hire additional faculty and raise salaries for remaining faculty to eliminate inversions caused by hiring. Thus, while the fee likely caused some loss of enrollment, rolling it back would require eliminating a number of faculty positions, which is not feasible. Moreover, the college's enrollment trend doesn't seem to have been affected significantly by the additional of the tuition increase. The college can do a better job of explaining to students why the differential exists, however.

Relative to the dropping by three majors of Business Calculus, which is taught exclusively by the Department of Economics, will certainly affect demand for that course. This could provide flexibility for the department to offer more electives, but could also result in a substantial decrease in SCH. The department should be consulting with the Management Information Systems (MIS) faculty in the college to determine whether MIS' new Minor in Data Analytics opens new teaching opportunities for economists.

Tenure Process

While I acknowledge the review team's proper concern regarding consistency of promotion and tenure standards and adequate notice to faculty who are not meeting standards, I believe that we have a strong faculty review process and a consistent set of expectations for promotion and tenure. The college chairs provide every faculty member with a formal annual performance evaluation every year. That process begins with faculty filling out a comprehensive report on their teaching, scholarship and service activities for the year under review. Chairs then draft evaluations in each of those three areas plus an overall evaluation. Then the four chairs, associate dean and dean convene a "leveling" meeting in which chairs explain each rating for each faculty member and explain the rationale underlying those ratings. Although the final evaluation is the exclusive purview of the chair, this leveling process often identifies minor inconsistencies across departments (especially with new chairs), ensuring consistent, college-wide standards. Thus, every faculty gets five annual evaluations, a second-year evaluation and a third-year evaluation before going up for tenure and promotion. The dean and chairs have in the past required fourth-year and/or fifth-year evaluations for those faculty who seem to fall short of expectations at the third-year stage. Finally, department and college committees and the dean seem to have maintained constant expectations over time. Junior faculty reported in the recent (fall 2017) accreditation visit that they felt that promotion and tenure expectations were both reasonable and generally known. Thus, I note the committee's warning and the college will remain vigilant, but there doesn't seem to be an actual problem now.

Experimental Lab

In consultation with the department chair, the dean has approved a recurring department budget increase of \$26,000 to support experimental (and perhaps other, at the chair's discretion) scholarship. The review team's point that no current faculty have actually been trained formally in experimental research design is well-taken. The department has already discussed loosening travel requirements to allow faculty to attend the recommended *Economic Science Association's* (or similar organization's) meetings. I support that change. It might be cost-effective this year to bring an expert in to train all interested faculty (whether in economics or other disciplines) in experimental basics, rather than sending several people to the conference. I also support the smart suggestions of getting blanket IRB approval and automatic ORSEE database enrollment at WSU.