

Weber State University
2018 Program Review
Department of Economics – Faculty Response

The Department of Economics would like to thank the review team, Drs. Cathy Carey, Rimvydas Baltaduonis, and Chris Hoagstrom. Faculty enjoyed the time they spent with the team and were very pleased with their dedication to understanding and improving the department's work. The team commended the department in many areas and provided recommendations for continuing excellence in the department. The team's recommendations are listed below along with faculty responses in italics.

Mission Statement:

Recommendations

The team recommends that the department articulate and formalize a longer-term strategic plan to support its mission. The Department has begun this process and had met on this in the most recent semester. The strategic plan should have a set of long-term goals supported by objectives and actions to meet those objectives. The self-study document lists a set of objectives to support the vision. A clear set of actions to meet those objectives would go a long way to completing the strategic plan.

Response

The department is committed to our mission, vision, and objectives. We welcome the advice to provide more specificity to our planning. In a planning process spanning this academic year, the department considered many strategic initiatives. In a second round of planning the department was surveyed to determine the most supported initiatives. Those items are listed below.

- 1. Offer additional electives: we currently offer Labor, Public, International Finance, International Trade, Money and Banking, Economic Development, Econometrics, Math Econ. This year we have added Environmental Economics. Based on survey data in the college we will also offer Game Theory Fall Semester.*
- 2. Provide opportunities for students to attend and present at conferences. Part of our vision is to provide engaging and experiential economics education. Students attending and presenting at conferences advances the departments vision.*
- 3. Streamline teaching of QUAN courses by developing a QUAN coordinator role.*
- 4. Improve opportunities for faculty interaction through no agenda lunches, "idea session" brown bags, faculty panels at Student Economic Association events once per semester, and Department BBQs*
- 5. Streamline and rename majors. The tracks under General Economics will become their own majors.*
- 6. Form an Advisory Board.*
- 7. Develop a career services liaison to work with the career services director and establish business relationships with area employers.*
- 8. Recruit majors.*

Curriculum

Recommendations

The team commends the Department for expanding its curriculum and offerings of programs and courses. The team cautions the Department that offering too many programs will require regular offering of a large number of courses, stretching faculty and resources, reducing student credit hours (without growth in the student population), and may make matriculation from some weaker programs more difficult for students. The College will need to support small class sizes in the event of student-major enrollment volatility.

Response

The faculty agree that the college will need to continue to support small class sizes. The college has done an excellent job of this so far. One point in terms of offering too many programs is that requirements mostly overlap with respect to the courses within the department. For example, a General Economics major can take the same economics courses as an International Economics major in fulfillment of requirements. This means that a large number of programs does not necessarily imply a large, distinct number of course offerings. The department will continue to monitor enrollments in light of this recommendation.

Student-Learning Outcomes and Assessment

Recommendations

With such a large number of programs, it may be difficult to assess all departmental learning outcomes for all programs. In addition, with assessment taking place in the Research Methods class (across all programs, with the exception of the AS), how will the growing number of students likely to take the Economics Internship option be assessed? Businesses are increasingly interested in hiring students with Internships. As this trend continues, fewer Business Economics and International Business Economics students will be assessed under the current departmental curriculum map. The Department might also want to consider providing some courses in which students can master the learning outcome (none are listed in the Map). In addition, the department may wish to add some level of learning (introduced, emphasized or mastered) of Learning Outcome 5 in ECON 1100, 4520, and 4810.

Regarding the feeling about too much assessment, perhaps learning outcomes between the university, college and department can be streamlined in some way so that assessment at one level is also occurring at other levels.

The Department should develop assessment tools to track the impact of the experimental lab on teaching and research. These tools should track impact on majors, learning outcomes, articles published, etc. Results can be used to ensure further funding sources for the lab.

Help from the College and University levels may be needed to better track progress and efficiency toward graduation and next-step-success of graduates.

Response

The team is correct in that much of the assessment has occurred in the ECON 4980 – Research Methods course. Students using the internship option instead of Research Methods do not participate in the assessment process. The department will close this loop by having internship students take the assessment test as part of the course. Another strategy the department will implement for assessing internship students is to have the internship employer rate the student with respect to department learning outcomes. This will provide valuable feedback on how potential employers view graduates' skills.

We encourage the streamlining of assessment efforts wherever possible. A reasonable place to start would be to identify the intersection of assessment activities in order to make assessment activities apply to multiple domains.

As the department proceeds with the experimental lab, we will track outcomes on teaching and research. Some metrics might include the number of faculty projects conducted in the lab, number of papers published as a result of lab use, number of student projects conducted in the lab, and the number of student research assistants used in conjunction with lab work.

The department endorses the recommendation to better track the progress and efficiency towards graduation. The new departmental annual report model required from the Office of the Provost has made some progress in this direction. For the last several years, the department has done an exit survey of all graduates, though we have not tracked graduates' progress. We will continue to survey our graduates. We also encourage and support college efforts to track the next-step-success of graduates.

Academic Advising

Recommendations:

The College has three very new academic advisors. It is the Department's responsibility to make certain that advisors thoroughly understand what careers and job opportunities are available to students of economics and what educational route will help students reach their goals. The team believes that it is not enough that only the career advisor understands these opportunities. Since an academic advisor is often the first point of contact for a student, it is imperative for them to be knowledgeable in order to not discourage students from the major. If their first response is, "I don't know. Please go talk to the career advisor," then this is not an optimal model.

Response

The department agrees with this recommendation. The advising office is fully staffed as of the second week in April 2018. The department plans to work with the advising office to provide information about the ECON majors and job opportunities available to graduates. The department chair will plan on regularly scheduled meetings with advising and career services to talk about economics specific issues.

Calls for changes in advising to better meet the needs of students is a university-wide topic. Recently the Admissions, Standards and Student Affairs Committee presented a document to faculty senate encouraging each college to create an academic advisement plan. The document received the support of the full faculty senate body. The Advising Subcommittee of the Student Success Steering Committee is also committed to meeting the advising needs of students. In addition to department efforts, we look forward to partnering with the college to create an academic advisement plan including an advising council to address ongoing retention and advising issues.

Faculty

Recommendations:

The team was quite satisfied with the energy and engagement of the faculty and their commitment to excellence. The only potential concern is the increase in course offerings and programs given the number of majors and students. More offerings are likely to drop upper level course enrollments unless the number of students and majors continue to increase. While enrollments have shown a general overall increasing trend, the Department's reliance on the potentially volatile 2+2 program may be problematic, particularly if the university moves to such a model.

Response

The 2 + 2 program experiences volatility due to changing preferences of students in partner universities, regulations from governmental agencies in partner countries, and competition from other universities entering the market. In addition WSU has changed policies with respect to international recruitment in the last year. Given the change in policy, the department expects a dramatic restructuring of the 2 + 2 program at the end of our current memorandum of understanding with the Office of the Provost in five years or sooner.

The department is mindful of the potential for low enrollment with ever increasing course offerings. The department has been creative to ensure adequate enrollment of recent new offerings. For example, the department offered an upper division and lower division course at the same time with the same instructor but using different syllabuses and course requirements. The department worked with Finance to have ECON 4520 – Public Finance included as an elective for finance students. We also have surveyed students in the School of Business and Economics on their preferences for new electives. The most popular course in the survey, Game Theory, will be offered Fall Semester. The department will continue to monitor enrollments and seek opportunities for new students.

Program Support

Recommendations:

The team understands the importance of being included in the College's strategic plan. Although the Department appears to be valued by the College, paradoxically, exclusion from the list of "priority" departments in the strategic plan sends a conflicting message. The Department has an engaged faculty that would likely respond admirably to inclusion in this document. Revisiting the strategic

plan of the College and allowing all departments to showcase their strengths and contributions would likely go a long way toward creating a stronger team spirit among departments.

The Department is also concerned with the five-year replacement plan for faculty computers. While this is not an uncommon length for replacement, given the research productivity and number of non-tenured faculty who will likely be heavy technology users, discussion regarding sources of funding for replacement computers might be helpful.

The Department also had concerns about Internet access and quality. The team is aware that this is a university issue, but one that might be addressed none-the-less.

Response

The department agrees that a strategic plan in which all departments are included and encouraged to show their strengths would go a long way toward creating stronger team spirit among departments.

The department shared their concerns about computers with the new associate dean and he is working on a new model for replacements.

The department will work with the dean and technology specialist to diagnose internet access and quality issues and improve them.

Relationship with External Communities

Recommendations:

The Department boasts a large number of graduates going on to graduate school. However, a significant percentage will not. It might be helpful to begin aligning the Department with corporate partners. One way to do this is through the development of an Executive Advisory Council. Another way to do this is through the development of a Center for Applied Economic Research. And yet another way is through reaching out to businesses, including banks, insurance agencies, manufacturers, hospitals, law firms, etc., to create applied internships for economics majors. Still another way is through the Department's new alumni speaker series, which brings alumni back to speak with students. Interaction in all of these ways can have a secondary impact of bringing in more donations dedicated to the Department.

Response

In the past, the department has been concerned with the difficulty of targeted and purposeful staffing of an external advisory board given that the department has a small number of students who pursue very different paths after graduation. Despite this concern, the department is now ready to include community and business partners in department planning. The department's career services liaison is working with the career services director to create more partnerships with local business. Through these partnerships we plan to create applied internships for our majors. In addition, these partnerships, along with other relationships the department has with community members, will form the basis of a rotating focus group of professionals to advise the department.

Recruiting

Recommendations

The Department needs to focus on student recruitment. Recruitment for the program occurs at all levels.

- Faculty meet potential majors in lower level courses (we note this is already being emphasized and recommend its continuance)
- Advisors meet with students for major and course selections, as well as, for career advisement
- Promotional materials
- Career/Job fairs
- Alumni speaker series

Recruitment of more domestic students is essential to stabilize enrollments. Recruitment in the 2+2 program might be aided by surveying constituents in the students' home countries. A thorough understanding of what skills and abilities these constituents expect from students returning home might stabilize enrollments from those countries.

Response

The department agrees that recruiting is important. The department participates in many of the opportunities to recruit students through university and college functions. We also invite interested students in our classes to become economics majors. The department is working with the marketing director of the college to have a marketing plan completed during Summer 2018 that will include many types of promotional materials.

The department will visit our international partners during May 2018. We will ask the partner universities what skills and abilities they expect from their students returning home.

Additionally, the department is planning a monthly meeting with career services and the advising office to coordinate advising, recruitment, and career placement.

Enrollment

Recommendations

The \$80 fee has been mentioned as a possible source of the College's decline in enrollment relative to the University, which likely impacted Economics majors as well. The Department should conduct a study on the impact of the fee on the College's and Department's enrollments and revenues. If the fee is the source of decline, the College might consider (a) lowering the fee or (b) making certain that students understand the benefits that accrue to them as a result of the fee. The latter might involve a fairly significant internal marketing campaign.

Elimination of calculus for many programs in the College will directly and indirectly impact the Department and enrollment in economics majors. Perhaps the Department and College can agree to a form of *Business Math* that is inclusive of the needs of all departments.

Response

The impact of the differential tuition would be an interesting question to evaluate empirically. In the meantime, the department will discuss with the dean and the marketing manager the idea of conveying to students the benefits received as a result of the increased tuition.

In the last year, the college held a series of discussions regarding a form of business math that would be inclusive of the needs of all departments. Despite some progress, no consensus could be reached. The department needs to monitor carefully our majors as a result of the elimination of the calculus requirement for many programs in the college.

Tenure Process

Recommendations

The team has some concern over the tenure-review process. New faculty undergo a full progress-toward-tenure review during their third year. If there are issues, the process could trigger a fourth- or fifth-year review. However, if there is not an issue, the next full review comes at the tenure application. In addition, the committee reviewing the tenure applicant could be an entirely different committee with a different set of expectations. While there were no concerns expressed in the department at any level—junior, senior, or administrative—this is still a potential issue on the horizon with so many untenured faculty, increasing the chance of a faculty member denied tenure without proper warning. If nothing else, we recommend careful attention to annual reviews throughout the tenure-track process to ensure honest and supportive feedback that will give each faculty member the best potential for success.

Response

In addition to the reviews mentioned above, faculty also undergo a review by the chair during their second year. While not related to the tenure process, all faculty members receive additional feedback from the chair during the annual evaluations. All department chairs, the dean, and the associate dean have a meeting to ensure consistent annual evaluation standards across departments. The slow turnover of deans and department chairs means that the feedback faculty members receive comes from a consistent group within the college. The department will continue to monitor this situation and will strive to give accurate and informative feedback at each stage of review.

Experimental Lab

Recommendations:

It would be strongly advisable for the Department Chair and the Dean to support the attendance of these faculty members at the Economic Science Association (ESA) meetings – both international and regional – even when they are not presenting their own scholarship. Specialized training

workshops and summer schools (e.g. zTree or oTree programming workshops, experimental economics workshops for macroeconomists, etc.) on experimental methodology would be other worthy opportunities for experimental faculty development.

Faculty could be encouraged to attend specialized workshops on teaching economics with laboratory experiments, which would allow them to expand such experiential learning in variety of their courses.

A more prudent way to maintain ORSEE database would be by automatic enrollment of all matriculated university students with an option to opt out.

The current IRB practices seem to be timely and reasonable, but they also could be improved by granting all standard laboratory economic experiments, i.e. those that fulfil the widely accepted protocols, a blanket IRB approval. Thus, only the studies that involve vulnerable groups of subjects or non-standard experimental protocols would be required to go through full IRB review.

Developing appropriate assessment tools to track this impact would further facilitate prudent development of the experimental economics lab at Weber State.

Response

The department will consider sending faculty members to the Economic Science Association's meetings. Currently the department philosophy with respect to research conferences is to only provide funding if a faculty member is presenting. However, given the potential of the experimental lab to bring prominence to the department, and on the advice of the program review team, we may reconsider this position.

The department will work towards automatic enrollment of all matriculated university students in the ORSEE database. The department will also inquire about the feasibility of a blanket IRB approval for standard laboratory economic experiments.

The department agrees that assessment tools to track the impact of the experimental lab are appropriate.