

**Final Report
Academic Program Review
Department of Economics**

Review Process

The Department of Economics prepared a self-study following program review guidelines. A two-person external review team visited the campus. They met with members of the Program Review Committee (PRC), Department of Economics faculty members, and University administrators. The PRC reviewed the self-study, the report of the external review team, and discussed the department with the Chair and the Dean of the College of Business Administration. The observations and recommendations of the PRC are summarized below.

Self-Study

History and Mission

The Department of Economics has existed at Bowling Green State University since 1936. It is a well-established program in the College of Business Administration. In 1992, there was some discussion of moving to the College of Arts and Sciences, but the move did not occur.

The mission of the department is to provide excellence in economic literacy, excellent support of General Education in its principles-level courses, excellent major programs, an excellent Master of Arts program, and an environment for substantial and meaningful research.

The goals of the Department of Economics are to teach people to think critically and to develop better citizens. The department sees these goals as being compatible with the state-funded status of Bowling Green State University. The activities of the department appear to be consonant with the core values of the University, particularly with respect to students' intellectual and spiritual growth.

Faculty

In the academic year 1999-2000, the department was home to 14 faculty members: five full professors, six associate professors, two assistant professors, and one instructor. This number is down substantially from eight years ago due to the

impact of the ERIP. The student/faculty ratio in the Department of Economics is higher than other departments in the College of Business Administration.

The faculty have a strong commitment to teaching excellence, some having received awards and commendations for excellent teaching. Their graduates have been very successful, going on to good jobs or entering prestigious doctoral programs.

Programs

The department offers a BA in the College of Arts and Sciences, a BS in the College of Business Administration, and an MA in Economics. It also offers three specializations as part of the BSBA degree in the College of Business Administration: economics (ECON), industrial and labor relations (ILR), and public and institutional administration (PIA).

Support of Other Programs

The department serves a large number of students through its support of programs in the College of Business Administration, General Education, Honors, Education and Human Development, Arts and Sciences, Health and Human Services, and Technology.

The department offers multiple sections of economics principles courses (i.e., ECON 200, 202, 203) in support of the General Education requirement and the elective programs of other majors in the University (e.g., Recreation and Tourism, Sport Management). Two courses in principles of economics are required of all majors in the College of Business Administration.

The department provides support courses in the Master's of Business Administration in the College of Business Administration and the Master's of Public Health in the College of Health and Human Services. The department offers some elective courses for specific audiences (e.g., Poverty and Discrimination, Sports Economics, Environmental Economics) and hopes to offer a course on Law and Economics in the future.

Number of Majors

The BS ($\underline{n} = 6$), BA ($n = 16$), and MA programs ($\underline{n} = 12$) are small. The numbers of students in the specializations are small as well: ECON – 16; ILR – 5; PIA – 5. Nationally, economics programs at public institutions have experienced declining enrollments. However, at liberal arts colleges and state universities with Ph.D. programs, enrollment in economics programs is on the upswing.

Assessment

At the undergraduate level, the department's assessment activities include a phone survey of recent graduates, what graduates do after graduation, and a

performance rubric for the general education courses. The assessment plan includes examining student performance in intermediate micro- and macroeconomics courses. Assessment of MA student learning outcomes is done primarily through comprehensive exams.

Indicators of the quality of the MA program (and distinct from “assessment” of student learning) are the department’s success in obtaining several Muskie Fellowships, admission of graduates to outstanding Ph.D. programs (e.g., Minnesota, Western Ontario), and the excellent jobs students have obtained in banking and consulting.

Program Evaluation

The self-study suggests that the department is distinctive in that it provides a social science perspective to a business curriculum.

The self-study evaluates the department’s research record as productive, particularly considering the class load and absence of a doctoral program. It also notes that the faculty value good teaching and invest a lot of effort in their teaching.

Strengths of the Department

The self-study reports that: the faculty are committed to quality teaching; the majority of the faculty are involved in research; the program is effective in preparing students for their future endeavors; and there is a high level of collegiality within the department.

Weaknesses of the Department

The self-study also suggests that: the number of faculty is less than ideal, resulting in large sections and few electives; the number of undergraduate majors is small, which the self-study attributes to the location of the department in the College of Business Administration, the department’s high academic standards and a national trend for students to major in fields that have more easily recognizable career outcomes; the master’s program is small; the joint research efforts of the faculty are limited; the budget for research expenses is inadequate; and the faculty have not had success in obtaining external funding.

Plans of the Department

The plans of the department include the following goals: to continue the commitment to excellent teaching; to strengthen the assessment activities; to hire three new faculty; to increase the number of undergraduate Economics majors from 48 to 60 by 2007; to encourage greater research productivity by offering a research award (reassignment of load credit from teaching to research); to increase the professional allowance for faculty and travel budgets; and to enhance the record of grant procurement.

The Department requests three new faculty members, all of whom must have a commitment to teaching. The contributions of these new faculty would be in the areas of grant procurement, building connections across campus (e.g., CPAPS, CSI), and research in monetary economics or philosophy and economics.

Report of the External Review Team

Strengths Noted by the External Review Team

The external team noted and commented positively on the following aspects of the department: the strength and substance of the introductory courses; the annual conference on the Teaching of Economics; the writing component and critical thinking approach to the study of economics; the strength of the 300 and 400 level courses; placement of MA graduates in jobs or in excellent Ph.D. programs; the rigor of the MA program (e.g., two comprehensive exams); availability of graduate assistantships for MA study; success in obtaining Muskie Fellowships; across-the board productivity of faculty; and hard-working, scholarly, productive, dedicated faculty—"more productive than its colleagues at near-by Toledo and no less academically vibrant than those at Miami."

Concerns Noted by the External Review Team

The external team noted the following concerns: small number of Economics majors; small number of Economics faculty; and limited general expense fund. They also noted that the faculty do less "mainstream economics than we expected." The external review team noted some confusion about the amount of money allocated for supplies, phone, and mailing.

Recommendations of the External Review Team

Principles of Economics and General Education

The external team praised the Principles of Economics courses, both in terms of "substantive content" and "pedagogical approach". Their one recommendation in this area was actually aimed at increasing the number of majors. By renumbering ECON 202 and 203 as 100-level courses, it might be possible to dispel the culture that economics is intended for sophomores. Eventually, this might result in attracting undergraduate majors earlier in their college careers.

They also suggested renumbering ECON 200 as a 100-level course and re-focusing it to be about specific economic issues that would be of greater interest to students outside of the business major. It might attract more students from the College of Arts and Sciences.

The Role of Economics within the Business College

The external team argued for increasing the number of upper division courses from which business students may choose. Benefits of this expansion would

be making economics more interesting and relevant, making economics more attractive to potential majors, and contributing to the professional development of faculty, who could teach more courses within their own sub-fields.

The Economics Major

The external report argues that it would be appropriate “for the faculty to reallocate time, effort, and creativity to determine how its major can be strengthened and made more attractive to the University’s student body.” However, they were reluctant to create a list of specific recommendations to accomplish this. Instead, they recommended that “...the Department develop and execute a University-wide program to yield more economics majors, and make economics and economic analysis a more visible aspect of campus life.” Toward this end, they suggested:

- Restoring the size of the faculty, particularly if new hires “...focus almost exclusively on sustaining and enriching the Department’s 300 and 400 level courses.”
- Consider restructuring the microeconomics sequence.
- Consider moving Econometrics to an earlier point in the curriculum.
- Discontinue the reliance on *ad hoc* readings courses to individual students who want to complete the major.
- Publicize the existence of entry-level economics jobs at the federal, state and local levels by posting such information on bulletin boards, exploiting the Economics Colloquium Series, asking marketing students to design a marketing plan and various other strategies.

The Graduate Program

The external report notes that “the MA graduate program should be commended on various dimensions.” The recommendation is to continue to devote resources and effort to building a viable, dynamic MA program in Economics.

They note the need to devote more resources to 600-level elective courses in areas such as international economics, labor economics, and public finance. Indeed, they comment that “the paucity of field or elective courses both at the undergraduate and graduate level is perhaps the greatest concern we have with respect to the overall program at Bowling Green.”

Professional Activities

The external report comments positively on the productivity of the faculty, and supports “...steps to enable more faculty to conduct more mainstream economic research.”

Another way to promote research, the external team notes, is to make sure that research grants result in improved circumstances for all, including students.

The external team emphasized the opportunity for policy research in conjunction with the Center for Policy Analysis and Public Service, in order to prompt opportunities for grants, research and professional growth. They also recommended that the department pursue research on Ohio economic issues such as rural development, migration, education, low-income families, automobile manufacturers and suppliers, and other industries. Finally, they encouraged renewed emphasis on the relationship with the Canadian Studies program.

Program Review Committee Findings

Mission and Goals

The PRC finds that the goals of developing critical thinkers and better citizens are worthy. The study of the discipline of economics, however, is less prominent than would be expected. The PRC finds that the balance of attention given the various programmatic aspects of the department's mission (general education, majors, master's, and faculty research) could be improved by giving more attention to the undergraduate program for the majors and/or the graduate program. Furthermore, we find that the research program of the department is diffuse, which mitigates the overall success (as evidenced, for instance, by visibility, collaborative opportunities and attractiveness to prospective graduate students) of the research effort.

Faculty

Some of the Economics faculty have outstanding academic records. Most faculty are active researchers, whereas five senior faculty members have publication records less accomplished than would be expected. Three of the latter, however, are either currently in administrative positions or have fairly recently been relieved of administrative duties, which limit time and effort that can be devoted to research. The record of the other two is not explained in the self-study. The PRC congratulates the department for developing the joint appointment with CPAPS during the course of this review.

The Department of Economics has a record of high SCH production per FTE in the College of Business Administration. However, this fact alone is not a persuasive argument for additional resources. A more persuasive argument for additional faculty would include not just "demand" related to SCH production, but the role of new faculty in contributing to programmatic needs, such as a more vigorous major or MA program, or for developing coherence or "focus" for the research profile of the department as a whole.

Programs

The Department of Economics makes an excellent contribution in providing high quality teaching and learning in the principles courses (ECON 200, 202 and 203). Enrollment in these courses is greater than desirable, and the faculty expend a

great deal of energy on them. The department relies heavily on tenured and tenure-track faculty to teach the principles courses.

The Department of Economics has five undergraduate programs and a Master's program, all of which have few students. Enrollments in upper division courses are also small. The Dean of the College of Business Administration requested that the external review team and the PRC provide advice on how to attract more students to these programs. In this vein, the PRC questions the utility of the three separate specializations within the BSBA.

The Dean suggested that because there is a College of Business Administration at BGSU, the Economics major is not likely to grow a great deal. Moving the Department of Economics to the College of Arts and Sciences would not increase the number of majors because competition for interested students would continue to come primarily from programs in Business Administration. The lack of both a strong major and a strong graduate program will make it more difficult for the Department of Economics to attract and retain high quality faculty. This line of reasoning suggests efforts to build the graduate program would be worthwhile.

Assessment

Assessment activities at the undergraduate level include final examinations, evaluation of classroom performance, and a telephone survey of recent graduates. The telephone survey yielded two suggestions, to which the faculty actively responded. The assessment plan for general education is sophisticated; we look forward to the implementation of these plans. At the graduate level, assessment is based primarily on the two comprehensive examinations, which the external review team evaluated as rigorous.

Program Review Committee Recommendations

- 1) The Department of Economics should reevaluate the balance among the various aspects of its mission. The PRC encourages the faculty to develop strategies that would help them direct similar effort and creative energy toward the major, the graduate program, and economics research as it has done so excellently in the area of general education. We include additional recommendations about these components, below. The department should report to the Dean by the end of spring semester, 2001 on their plans for adjusting the balance within their mission.
 - a) *The Undergraduate Major.* The PRC shares the department's and external review team's concern for the small number of Economics undergraduate majors. However, we do not feel that a large increase in numbers is possible. We endorse the external review team's suggestions for the recruitment of additional majors from outside the University. The PRC does not recommend the strategy of competing with A&S for majors, as this yields no net gain to the University, and is not likely to net substantial results.

- b) *The Graduate Program.* The PRC endorses the external review team's suggestion that the Department continue to devote resources and effort to building a viable, dynamic MA program in Economics. A vigorous graduate program can contribute meaningfully to faculty recruitment and to the research program of the department.
- c) *The Introductory Courses.* The PRC agrees with the external review team that the faculty has developed exceptional introductory courses. However, the PRC recommends that the department pursue alternative strategies in scheduling and staffing these courses, in order to allow the faculty to put greater emphasis on some other aspects of the department's mission. In particular, the PRC recommends making greater use of instructors to staff the principles courses (ECON 200, 202 and 203). Other ideas relevant here are included in recommendation number 2.
- d) *Research.* The PRC recommends that the department develop a research focus.
 - i) Faculty should discuss the prospects for building a focused research program in Economics, one that is coordinated with a graduate program. The Department of Economics could build a strong master's program if they identified a focus in economics research. Should the department decide to place a renewed emphasis on its graduate program, the faculty might consider partnering with a doctoral program in another department (e.g., Industrial-Organizational Psychology, Sociology). The Economics master's could be conceptualized as a one-year program serving in a preparatory role to the doctoral program. They might also consider promoting their graduate courses to students in other fields of study (e.g., sport administration, recreation, family and consumer sciences, higher education, etc.).
 - ii) Economics is an area in which grants are more available than in some other disciplines in the University. Economics faculty should capitalize on this advantage. As a department, Economics should develop a departmental research plan, including benchmarks and timelines, to be reviewed and approved by the Dean of Business Administration and the Vice Provost for Research.
 - iii) Collaborations with other departments and centers could be one benchmark for success in research collaborations. For instance, faculty should discuss the substantial opportunity that exists for the Economics department to build a research relationship with CPAPS.
- 2) *Number of Faculty.* The PRC suggests there may be internal changes that could alleviate some staffing problems if no new faculty resources are immediately forthcoming. For example,

- a) The strategy of assigning senior faculty to introductory courses in order to enhance recruitment efforts has not worked; senior faculty expertise should also be utilized in upper division and graduate courses.
 - b) Graduate Teaching Assistants should be assigned to assist faculty with their classes rather than being assigned almost entirely to research support and administration.
 - c) During the fall semester, 2000, the Chair in consultation with the Dean should devise a differential teaching load system for the Department. This system should be designed to create equitable workloads, take into account that workload typically changes throughout a career, protect the career development needs of the faculty with reference to criteria for promotion and tenure, encourage only those service activities that are in the best interests of the department and University, and make efficient use of the department's personnel resources. The new system should be implemented beginning in the fall semester, 2001.
 - d) The faculty should engage in a discussion aimed at building high quality, programs - attractive to and populated by students - in addition to the principles courses. This discussion should produce a well-articulated justification for additional resources in Economics (other than the high SCH/FTE ratio).
- 3) *Seven-year Plan.* The required seven-year plan included in the materials was not presented in full. The department should submit a detailed seven-year plan with specific goals, to the Dean by the end of spring semester, 2001. Continuing present efforts does not address the needs. The plan must indicate the efforts the department plans to take toward improvement, explaining what they are currently contributing to the University and how additional resources will enhance those contributions.
- 4) *Resources.* The PRC acknowledges the excellence of the "Teaching of Economics Conference" and the faculty's efforts to obtain external funds to support it. The PRC recommends partnering with entities within the University (e.g., CTLT, CPAPS, College of Education & Human Development) to obtain appropriate funding.
- 5) *Professional Meetings.* The PRC recommends a higher frequency of attendance at and participation in professional conferences, as such activity is an excellent way to promote the undergraduate and graduate programs as well as to interact with colleagues who might become collaborators on research projects or grant proposals. There are several small funding sources in the University they could tap to help defray some of their travel expenses (e.g. FRC, FDC, college and departmental offices).
- 6) *Assessment.* The assessment plan for the general education courses is impressive. The PRC recommends carrying through on these excellent plans. At the master's

level, the comprehensive examination questions are challenging and reflect the learning outcomes indicated for the master's program. However, final examinations, evaluation of classroom performance, and a telephone survey are inadequate for the undergraduate major students. The PRC recommends that the faculty build on their experiences in assessing general education to develop a more sophisticated assessment plan for the major. Assessment reports should be made yearly to the Dean of the College of Business Administration and the Vice Provost for Academic Programs.

The Department of Economics should report annually to the Dean of Business Administration, with a copy to the Provost, on the implementation of these recommendations.