

Action Plan Department of Applied Economics Undergraduate Program Review

Introduction

The Office of Academic Programs and Assessment conducted a 10-year site review of the undergraduate programs in the Department of Applied Economics that concluded with a site visit March 3-5, 2019. The review team participating in the site visit were:

External reviewers:

- Christine Wilson: Professor and Director of Undergraduate Programs, Department of Agricultural Economics, Kansas State University
- Joan Fulton: Professor and Associate Department Head, Department of Agricultural Economics, Purdue University

OSU Faculty:

- Michele Swift: Instructor, College of Business
- Michael Harte: Professor, College of Earth, Ocean and Atmospheric Sciences

Review process

In preparation for the review, an iterative process was used to create a Self-Study Report. Initial datasets and background information were compiled by Jennifer Alix-Garcia and Tjodie Richardson, Department Head and Head Advisor for Academic Programs, respectively. Alix-Garcia then drafted major portions of the document with help from James Sterns, Co-Chair of the Undergraduate Committee. A draft document was then shared with all members of the Undergraduate Committee in order to solicit their suggestions, feedback and help with general editing. This resulted in a draft document that was distributed to all faculty members of the Department, who were invited to participate in two departmental faculty meetings to discuss the document and any further revisions. A final version of the document was then completed by Sterns and Alix-Garcia.

During the review team visit, the team met with groups of faculty, instructors, our advisor, staff, undergraduate students, the department head, and the College deans. The review team toured departmental facilities and issued their recommendations shortly thereafter. In April, shortly after the review was received the undergraduate committee and department head issued a response to the review, addressing some inaccuracies in the report, and noting that the majority of the specific concerns that we as a department had identified in our self-study had gone unaddressed by the reviewers. As the next step in the overall review process, the following serves as the department's summary of the review, and contains our planned actions, given the review team's recommendations.

Summary of findings

The assessment of the reviewers was that the undergraduate program has excellent faculty and instructors, and strong departmental leadership. They noted that the curriculum is consistent with

other programs around the country and of high quality, and that both degrees are highly marketable. Advising is excellent and students are dedicated. The reviewers also felt that undergraduate teaching was not as well supported as research and graduate teaching within the department, and noted the disconnect between the large undergraduate body in agricultural business management, and the clear depth in the faculty in environmental economics. The team pointed out that resource allocation may not be aligned with the university funding model and that FTE dedicated to extension is almost non-existent. The reviewers worried about the disconnect between majors within the program and the limited diversity among tenured and tenure-track faculty. They also noted the lack of diversity among the undergraduates in the major. Related to this, there is limited financial support for undergraduates, instructional faculty complain of lack of TA support, and recruiting efforts are ad hoc. They also noted low enrollment in the four minors and an inability to actually offer all the courses required in the offered minors.

Recommendations

This section lists the recommendations given by the committee:

1. University (Provost office level) and College leadership should work to resolve the disconnect and increase collaboration and coordination between the Applied Economics department and the Economics program in the College of Liberal Arts. This would help encourage efficiencies in course offerings and minimize potential duplication.
2. Create a position of Director of Undergraduate Programs to support the Department Head, provide a focal point for the undergraduate curriculum committee and advocate for the success of undergraduate programs and students.
3. Allocate FTE for recruitment of students for the majors and minors and marketing of the program, including Ecampus and formalize this activity as appropriate in position descriptions.
4. Develop a targeted recruitment program for majors and minors, within and external to OSU, with a special emphasis on increasing diversity of students.
5. Be more efficient with allocation of teaching FTE and course offerings. For example, consolidate and restructure 300 and 400 level course offerings to reflect FTE availability, current and anticipated enrollment and the new budget model. Also review lower division and upper division courses - for example, offer a joint AFBM/EEP 100-level course. This course could provide a mechanism for attracting AgSci college majors and Natural Resources and Environmental Science students to the Applied Economics majors or minors.
6. Rationalize/reduce minors offered, perhaps to two (e.g., minor in ABM or EEP).
7. Increase Ecampus offerings, possibly substituting some on-campus classes for Ecampus delivery (either hybrid or fully online) to make best use of limited teaching FTE. Also offer the ABM degree online to enable potential students not likely to attend the on-campus program to enroll.
8. Ensure P&T processes reflect position description so undergraduate teaching is appropriately recognized.
9. Examine the potential to offer experiential learning opportunities/requirements in more resource effective ways. This is because of the disproportionate FTE required to advise standalone experiential learning requirements. One possible example is greater use of experiential learning opportunities in existing courses.
10. Explore ways of increasing instructional FTE, potentially using non-tenure positions to meet teaching needs.
11. Develop a fundraising strategy that includes coordination with the OSU Foundation. Identify priority funding areas.
12. Expand diversity and inclusion efforts for faculty, staff and students.

Action plan

Table 1 below details the action plan developed by Applied Economics to address the recommendations of the review team. Upon receipt of the Review, all faculty and instructional staff met to discuss the recommendations and prioritize activities. The plan below was then developed by the department head and the undergraduate committee.

Table 1: Action Plan

Recommendation	Action	Metric	Goal	Timeline	Who
AEC/ECON collaboration	Commitment from CLA/SPP to collaborate on undergraduate and graduate education	Written commitment detailing articulation between UG curriculum, integration of AEC RAs into ECON UG programming, and shared teaching at the graduate level	Expansion of UG economics/applied economics education at OSU; improved UG experiences through greater interaction with grad students in AEC	Ongoing	Upper administration
A collaboration document was shared with economics in August, 2018. A meeting with the CAS leadership is set for July 2019 to discuss this issue. We also intend to pursue additional collaborations with other academic units as opportunities emerge.					
Create director of UG programs	None				
The undergraduate committee operates under a system of co-Chairs that was established in AY 2018-2019 (after the period covered by the review). This system seems to be working well. Although there was a small amount of faculty support to create such a position, there is no FTE or available funding to formalize it, with little evidence that, given these constraints, any modification of the administrative structure of the department would substantively improve outcomes.					
Allocate FTE to marketing and formalize this as an activity in PDs	Form a marketing committee dedicated to broadly disseminating information indicating the quality of our educational, outreach, and research activities	Creation of committee; development of marketing plan; implementation of marketing strategy	To expand knowledge of AEC educational, outreach, and research activities both within and outside of the OSU campus.	Ongoing	DH, three faculty members, two undergraduate interns
In summer 2019, the department head formed a new marketing committee tasked with a variety of marketing activities. In fall of 2019, the committee will begin overseeing the activities of an undergraduate intern from the College of Business, and another intern from New					

Media Studies.					
Develop recruitment program with focus on student diversity	Participate in university efforts to recruit students; increase social media presence; improve online information; extend outreach to community colleges; broaden appeal of AFBM major	Number of university efforts participated in; number of SM followers; updated website; increase CC outreach beyond LBCC	Increased enrollment in EEP and AFBM majors, and increased numbers of minoritized students within the new student population	Ongoing	DH in coordination with UG committee
<p>We have put our EEP major on the list for “undersubscribed majors” that will be part of the university’s new recruitment initiative; in 2018 we participated in LSAMP in the fall, and intend to continue to do so; when potential students visit the department, they will now meet with both the advisor and key faculty members, instead of just the advisor; we now have a presence on Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram, and are working hard to increase content there. In 2018, we finalized the change of the name of our ABM major to Agricultural and Food Business Management (AFBM). We now intend to target and recruit a broader student population that includes students with an interest in Food Industry economics and management, hoping to expand our appeal beyond traditional “ag” student populations.</p>					
More efficiently allocate teaching FTE and course offerings	Consolidate some courses; expand offerings of popular 200-level courses; offer a new 100-level recruitment course	Greater number of UG students served per tenure track faculty FTE	Increase in number and retention of majors, as well as number of students “touched” with basic economics skills (not just majors); greater involvement of tenure track faculty in UG curriculum.	Ongoing	All faculty, coordinated by DH, undergraduate and graduate committees
<p>As of July 2019, we have consolidated two of our undergraduate courses (AEC 460 and AEC 465). We have also had a faculty meeting and a faculty retreat to discuss the streamlining of the graduate program curriculum in the service of the suggested FTE reallocation. We have also greatly expanded our Ecampus offerings of 200-level courses for the coming academic year. There is broad faculty support for the offering of a new 100-level course, but it is currently unclear who would actually teach it. However, several useful ideas have emerged for helping create more cohesive cohorts through small modifications of AEC 121.</p>					

Reduce minors	Decrease the number of offered minors from 3 to two.	Existence of 2 rather than 3 minors, with reasonably modified names.	To better align administrative and instructional efforts and have better-defined educational products to market.	Before AY 2020-2021	DH, academic advisor
As a department, during our spring faculty meeting and retreat on undergraduate curriculum, we agreed that this is an important step to take and will begin the bureaucratic process during summer of 2019.					
Increase Ecampus offerings, substitute on-campus for Ecampus. Offer AFBM online.	Increase Ecampus offerings.	Number of students served by Ecampus courses.	To expand access of students to both basic economic education as well as increasing the attractiveness of our EEP major	Ongoing	DH, all faculty
Substituting online for on campus courses is inconsistent with university policy, so we are not considering that option. We are discussing with Ecampus potential demand for an online AFBM but for the moment are not pursuing it due to shortage of faculty FTE to develop these courses. However, we are now offering our popular AEC 250 and 352 courses every term this coming academic year on Ecampus. Importantly, we are also refreshing 5 of our online courses during AY 2019-2020, and are designing one new 400/500 level course directed at both our EEP majors and the online Public Policy students.					
Ensure P&T processes reflect PD to recognize undergraduate teaching	None.				
All PDs already describe all teaching efforts by faculty, including undergraduate teaching. The valuation of teaching is inherent in the process of tenure and promotion, which requires excellence in teaching and research, and we fail to see any reason to change this process.					
Offer experiential learning opportunities/requirements in more resource effective ways. One possible example is greater use of experiential learning opportunities in existing courses.	Design experiential learning that leverages graduate student and faculty research work. Assign permanent faculty member to AFBM internship program. Develop	Increased experiential learning opportunities integrating graduate student and faculty research. Permanent (not retired) supervisor for AFBM program.	To use resources more effectively to support experiential learning while maintaining program quality.	Ongoing	DH, all faculty

	lasting partnerships with internship employers.				
<p>In January 2019, we submitted a concept note to the Keck Foundation to support our experiential learning program and incentivize faculty. This was rejected, but we intend to submit a revised version of this project to NIFA in 2020. If funded, the proposal would more effectively leverage grad student and faculty research by linking these activities to undergraduate experiential learning opportunities. We also have a plan for transitioning a tenure track faculty member into the supervision of the AFBM internship program after December of 2019. We feel that the idea of creating experiential learning “in existing courses” violates the spirit of our experiential learning program, and so we do not have any intention of replacing our student individual experiences with group, in class experiences.</p>					
Explore ways of increasing instructional FTE, potentially using non-tenure positions to meet teaching needs.	Increase the use of graduate students as both instructors and teaching assistants.	More graduate students delivering and supporting educational content.	To increase the number of students we can teach using our limited FTE without sacrificing quality.	Ongoing	DH, Grad program director, UG Committee
<p>We fully intend to integrate more graduate students into our undergraduate educational mission. We are currently setting up a system that first employs students as TAs for a course and then transitions them into online delivery of content. This is a slow process, as it requires moving students through a multiyear sequence. We began this in spring 2019.</p>					
Develop a fundraising strategy that includes coordination with the OSU Foundation. Identify priority funding areas.	Form fundraising committee, identify priorities, meet with OSU Foundation to coordinate.	Funding to support endowed faculty positions, graduate education, and undergraduate experiential learning.	To increase resources available to support all missions of the unit.	Ongoing	DH, Fundraising committee
<p>The fundraising committee was formed in summer 2019. We are still sorting through priorities and have two ongoing efforts to engage funders in raising money for positions that support our undergraduate educational mission.</p>					
Expand diversity and inclusion efforts for faculty, staff and students.	Develop inclusive recruitment strategy for both students and faculty. Support and expand current curricular DEI	Increased numbers of minoritized majors and faculty.	To expand enrollment in our majors such that students reflect national demographics and worldviews.	Ongoing	DH, UG committee, Marketing committee, Fundraising committee

	efforts.				
--	----------	--	--	--	--

We found most of the suggestions by the reviewers to be related to items that are under the control of the university rather than our department. However, at a departmental level, in 2018-19 academic year we participated in the LSAMP program and expect to continue to do so. All annual reviews now include a section on diversity, equity, and inclusion. We have volunteered to participate in the university's new effort to offer scholarships for students in "undersubscribed majors" and hope to attract a more diverse student body using these awards. Furthermore, our marketing efforts are aimed at making our department a more attractive location for *all* students. Finally, we intend to integrate incentives for faculty to participate in campus level trainings to integrate diversity into departmental classes.