

AAC Economics Program Review April 2016

I. Introduction

The deadline for submission of the Economics Program self-study was November 1st, 2015. The Economics self-study was approved by the Program's Executive Committee on February 19, 2016. The Chair of Economics, Kumar Kangayappan, submitted the document to Dean Scott Furlong on February 22, 2016. The AAC discussed the self-study on April 7, 2016. A series of questions were emailed the Chair of Economics on April 7th, with a response requested by April 20th. A response to these questions was received on April 19th. This review reflects information obtained from the self-study and responses to the AAC's additional questions.

The Economics Program's stated mission is to "offer courses with the application of economic theory to real world empirical issues in the areas of environmental, regional and urban development; resource management, and government." In addition to the Economics major and minor, economics courses support many UWGB degree programs, including Democracy and Justice Studies, Business Administration, Nursing and Social Work. There are four full-time, tenured or tenure-track faculty. As of Spring 2016, there are 25 students majoring and 25 students minoring in Economics.

II. Assessment of Student Learning

The Program reports assessment of student learning outcomes in Econ 302 (Intermediate Macroeconomic Theory) during the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 academic years. These assessments were deemed insufficient to measure the breadth of the Program, and the program has expressed a need to assess an expanded slate of courses as well as a need to develop "sustained time series data". However, based on the document submitted it appears that no formal program assessment has taken place since 2013-2014, and no information was provided regarding future assessment plans. Given the low level of participation of economics graduates in alumni surveys, this data cannot be relied upon as a meaningful assessment tool.

The AAC requested additional information regarding the Economics Program's assessment plans. In their response, the Program acknowledges that assessment is a "weak point" and indicated their intent to assess more regularly. Student exit meetings and embedded questions for assessment purposes were mentioned as possible future assessment strategies.

III. Program Accomplishments

- Professors Huh, Nesslein and Stoll are publishing and/or presenting in the field.
- Professor Kangayappan has an ongoing book project, *Destiny of India*.
- Strong student performance in past Enactus competitions.
- Seemingly good track record of student employment and graduate school placement; however, low response rates to alumni surveys make this difficult to assess fully.

IV. Program Strengths and Areas in Need of Attention

Strengths

- Professors Huh, Nesslein and Stoll are publishing and/or presenting in the field.
- Professor Kangayappan has an ongoing book project, *Destiny of India*.
- The Minor in Economics can be obtained online, offering greater access to a wider array of students.

Areas in Need of Attention

- The most obvious concern is the steep decline in Economics majors and minors over the past couple of years – from 47 majors and 11 minors in Fall 2013 to 25 majors and 25 minors in Spring 2016.
- The lack of formal assessment or a clear strategy for future assessment is a clear weakness of the Program.

- Several potential new areas of emphasis are mentioned in the self-study, but it is unclear what, if any, steps have been taken to implement any of them.
- The Economics self-study as originally submitted made no mention of faculty teaching accomplishments or curricular development since the last program review. When asked to provide more information in this area, the Program submitted an extremely brief response. Student employment and graduate school placement were each cited as proof of quality instruction; however given the very low representation of economics graduates in alumni survey data, such end results cannot be fully assessed. It is telling that after noting alumni graduate school placement and employment the submitted response states: “Beyond that, there is not much to say.” Overall, the lack of attention devoted to areas of assessment, teaching, and curricular development is troubling.
- Related to the above: when asked for clarification about student recruiting, Economics noted in their response that the average GPA for their two large introductory courses in economics is 2.3. The conclusion the Program has drawn from this situation is that “many students are receiving very low grades and find economics too difficult to major or minor in.” This conclusion seems to be an oversimplification, and again appears to reflect a lack of concern for teaching methodology in the program.
- Forward motion in reinvigorating the Economics Program is on hold pending the results of a proposed merger with Business. However, it is unclear when or whether this merger might occur.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

The AAC recognizes the value of Economics as a discipline and the need for a strong Economics Program at UWGB.

- The Economics Program must develop and implement a holistic and proactive strategy for assessing student learning.

- Economics must actively recruit students for the program. Current recruitment strategies are decidedly ineffective. For example, when the AAC asked for more information regarding recruitment, Economics' response reiterated that they advertise U.S. Census data regarding high median salaries for workers holding an Economics degree. However, the few students who participated in the alumni survey report salaries that do not align with this Census data. Economics must make a case for its relevance to students' degree programs and future careers and must reinvigorate its curricular offerings.
- Given low student GPA in the intro level courses, the Program should carefully examine these courses and their teaching methodology. The Program should discuss ways in which these courses could be more student-friendly. As currently designed and implemented, these courses appear to be creating an impermeable barrier of entry to the field. The Program should reimagine these courses as having the potential to serve as a springboard into the Major or Minor.
- Economics stated that they need "a fresh approach to sustain and reinvigorate the Program" in the minutes of their November 23, 2015 faculty meeting. However, as noted above, there has been no forward motion in the area of curricular development since the last program review. The Program must *immediately* examine new approaches and embark upon the process of curricular redesign. New approaches might include exploring one of more of the new areas of emphasis mentioned in the self-study or developing a First Year Seminar course that introduces students to the field and creates a new potential path to the Economics major or minor.
- Given the current budget climate, the addition of new Economics faculty lines seems unlikely in the short term. The AAC notes that the Program must innovate within current constraints.

- Economics has proposed a merger with the Cofrin School of Business. The AAC encourages the strengthening of collaborative relationships between Economics and Business, but again notes that it is unclear when or whether such a merger might take place. Economics cannot afford to remain in a holding pattern in the meantime; the program must proactively plan for its future.