

UNIVERSITY of WISCONSIN
GREEN BAY

Date: June 3, 2016

To: Tom Nesselin, Chair, Economics

From: Scott Furlong, Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences



Re: Report on the Economics Program Review

The Economics program at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay is a disciplinary program that offers both a major and minor. The program also supports a number of other majors on campus including Business, Public Administration, Environmental Policy and Planning, Urban and Regional Studies and Democracy and Justice Studies. There are currently three economists, which is down since the last review due to recent retirements and resignations of faculty. The faculty are in Public and Environmental Affairs (2) and Democracy and Justice Studies (1). Like most disciplinary programs, faculty with the Economics program are also teaching classes within their interdisciplinary programs so that all of the faculty resources are not dedicated to Economics. The program supports the general education particularly its courses in micro and macroeconomics, as well as the ES&P graduate program. The program has been very successful in its support of the SIFE, which always does well in its competitions.

Enrollment Trends/Resource Issues:

Enrollments in Economics have been declining over the past five years. The number of majors have declined from a high of 48 to the current number of 26. While the program never had a large number of majors, for many years it had very healthy numbers within the minor. This number has significantly dropped from a high of 121 to the current number of 29 (please note that I am using most recent Institutional Research data from that website and not the written reports provided to the chair). Some of the decline, particularly within the minor's number can be attributed to a change within the Business program that no longer requires their students to have a minor as part of their graduation requirement. Nevertheless, the decrease in both majors and minors is concerning and something the program needs to address as it moves forward. Given the many linkages with other programs within the university as well as the inherent importance of Economics in general, the program needs to seek ways to make this program more relevant and appealing to our students. This may require faculty development to help students better engage with the subject matter.

At the course level, enrollments still remain healthy within the Micro and Macroeconomics sequence, although we have decreased the number of sections offered in the past and are doing more sections through online teaching. There has been a drop off in enrollments in a number of upper level classes including a number of the required courses and also within the electives. This is to be expected with the decrease in majors and minors. There have been situations in the past few years where we have had to cancel classes due to low enrollments. As I noted in the last program review I have concerns regarding enrollments in some of the upper level elective

courses over the past few years. Given the current faculty resources along with the low enrollments, it is likely time to do a thorough curriculum evaluation and consider a more directed set of courses for the minor and major and offer less in the way of electives.

The AAC noted concerns in regards to average GPA for the two introductory courses and the program's response to this, which they found to be an "oversimplification." I would agree with the AAC's perspective and strongly suggest that the faculty work on this issue of student performance and support. Should teaching methods change? What are the best practices in teaching these entry level classes? I have to believe that the discipline has some good ideas to offer to our faculty in this area.

As noted, there has been a decrease in faculty resources within the program. I understand needs for additional staffing but also want to see a plan for moving the program forward and getting it to a better position.

Assessment:

The last couple of AAC reviews noted an obvious lack of an assessment plan for the Economics program and my last review noted this as well. The current self-study does not contain a list of the student learning outcomes for the program, any detailed plan for how the program will assess these learning outcomes, or any significant information regarding the assessment done and the potential actions necessary to address concerns. In addition, the one area of assessment done did not include the entire learning outcome, but rather a subset of the Economics second outcome (as shown in the Assessment Website).

You note in your self-study current limitations to your assessment plan and the data (or lack thereof) that need attention. You must develop a more comprehensive assessment plan and begin the process of collecting information and having conversations regarding next steps (closing the loop). Please work with the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs and myself to address these issues. I also call your attention to the Assessment Website where there are models from other academic programs. The Psychology entries may be of particular use and are good models.

Curriculum:

The self-study implies a need for additional upper level courses within the program both to be attractive to students as well as to cover some existing holes in the curriculum. While there may be some need for these efforts, these discussions need to be addressed in the context of existing student demand as well as faculty resources. As I noted earlier, a thorough review of the Economic curriculum with an eye on a more directed course of study, perhaps the elimination of classes, and the creation of different ones is likely in order for the program.

Economics currently offers a number of its courses online/alternatively and thus has supported the Adult Degree program through these offerings. The fact that the minor can be obtained online needs to be more widely known.

Concluding Remarks

I agree with the program's self-study that UWGB needs a vibrant Economics program and I'm hopeful that this can happen in the near future.

The AAC notes, and I agree, the overall "lack of attention devoted to areas of assessment, teaching, and curricular development is troubling." The Economics faculty needs to address all of these areas. These are critical to the program's health and the ability to move forward. The Economics program attached a document to its self-study suggesting that it be moved to the Business program. I do not support this for a number of reasons, but primarily because the Economics program is much more tightly aligned with the various social science programs than it is to Business.

For reasons of clarity below I provide specific recommendations/suggestions/requirements to the Economics program.

- Develop a more comprehensive assessment plan for its learning outcomes and begin the process of collecting information in regards to this.
- Discuss the current curriculum and consider what revisions might be useful to the program as it moves forward. Consider a more streamlined curriculum given current student numbers and faculty resources.
- Consider and implement efforts to better engage students in the material being taught particularly at the introductory level.

I'm willing and available to discuss any and all of these issues with the faculty if desired.

cc: Lora Warner, Academic Affairs Council
Clif Ganyard, Associate Provost