

ACADEMIC PLANNING COUNCIL
Minutes of September 21, 2015
3 p.m., Altgeld 315

Present: Abdel-Motaleb, Collier, Douglass, Falkoff, Gordon, Goldberg, Hunt, Isabel, Jaffee, Mini, Mogren, Molnar, Shortridge and Winkler

Guests: Megan O'Brien, undergraduate student member; Chris Parker, Associate Vice Provost for Academic Outcomes Assessment; Jeff Reynolds, Director of Academic Analysis and Reporting; Ritu Subramony, Director of Academic Accreditation;

The meeting was called to order at 3:03 p.m.

Program Review: Economics

Carl Campbell, Chair/Associate Professor; Stephanie DeCicco, Assistant Dean CLAS; Jeremy Groves, Associate Professor/Graduate Director; Chris McCord, Dean CLAS; Virginia Wilcox-Gok, Professor & Director of Undergraduate Studies

Announcements: The minutes for the previous meeting went out via E-mail September 21, 2015 as well as being posted on Blackboard. These are lengthy minutes, so it's asked that these are reviewed and notification of any changes that need to be made be done, prior to September 23, 2015 at 4:30pm.

A second announcement was made regarding the change in membership for APC for the 2015-16 academic year. The new updated listing has also been sent out as well as being posted on Blackboard.

The meeting was turned over to Brianno Collier for the presentation of the subcommittee reports.

Strengths

The report was well written and pleasant to read. Shortly after the previous program review, the department went through a separate review and received recommendations that the department has done a good job implementing. The department is engaging in partnerships with the College of Business, Center for NGO Leadership and Development, the School for Public & Global Affairs, the Center for Governmental Studies, and the Division of Statistics in a synergetic way that is good. The higher ratios of women in a department in a field that is typically underrepresented by women is a plus. Additionally, the department is in the process of creating an external advisory board to provide feedback on curriculum, employers' needs and strategic planning.

The following questions were asked of the department:

Throughout the report, there is considerable discussion about the decline in full-time faculty since the last review. This is creating considerable strains within the department. Please comment on the impact of these faculty cuts on the academic programs and viability of the program.

We used to have more tenure and tenure track faculty but, as of this fall, we have fewer due to a number of retirements and a tenure denial. This means that one of our new hires is teaching three graduate courses her first year. This schedule doesn't leave adequate time for research. Additionally,

there are not adequate faculty available to teach courses in some of the areas that we have been able to offer in the past. Further, it is difficult to find tenured staff for dissertation directors for graduate students. Our department has always used graduate students to teach 100 and 200 level courses, but due to this issue, we now have them teaching 300 level courses and we would like to prevent them from teaching 400 level courses.

Do you have a sense of what you can do if you do not get the lines restored?

We are trying to utilize some of the partnerships we have. We've just recently accepted two members of the Center for Governmental Studies as Faculty Affiliates. One of these has expressed an interest in teaching an undergraduate course. We are trying to tap those external partnerships and resources when we are not able to get them elsewhere.

It's my understanding that you are working on a partnership with the College of Business?

The first that we are expanding is with Financial Economics in the Department of Finance in their masters program. This is probably where our most urgent need is for faculty. We currently have two people who teach Financial Economics, but will need a third full-time person when we expand this program. The dean has been very supportive of this change as the new program is expected to generate revenue. The second one is that it is very usual for an Economics Department to not have is in the international area. Last year we proposed a partnership with NGOLD and didn't get it. We will propose it again this year, and although it will probably be turned down again, we keep working to see if it can be brought about.

Dean McCord, is there anything that you would like to add regarding the Economics program?

This department is currently at a fairly critical moment. Departures have created a fairly immediate challenge and reduced near to long term opportunity. This department in the not too distant past was in danger of stagnating a bit and I think they have made some good new hires that has brought some rejuvenation to the department. Additionally, the leadership has been very dedicated to rejuvenating the department as well, but I think faculty strength is a critical issue. There is only so much that can be done with the resources currently available to them. They are currently in a situation where opportunity currently exceeds the available resources. We do have some interesting opportunities to do something about that but, very much in a transition mode. Where our situation eight years ago was and where we will be eight years from now will probably not look all that similar. I think it will be a better department eight years from now.

In your report, you mentioned ways to possibly remedy the shortage of faculty, these options being : (1)Make cuts and reduce offerings to an already streamlined undergraduate program, (2) increase the teaching duties of regular faculty, or (3) cut back or delete the Ph.D. program. Could you discuss these options?

The few tenured faculty that we have are already serving dual duty in administrative positions. It is therefore not really practical to think about increasing teaching duties to the limited staff that we have. To think about cutting offerings at an undergraduate level too much would restrict our students' ability to graduate in a timely fashion. Getting rid of the Ph.D. program would create a real long term loss to the university and its visibility. You cannot have a top university without having a top Economics program with a Ph.D. program. Additionally, a lot of the partnerships we have developed are set up around the Ph.D. program because we have the resources in that program, so to delete that program could have a domino effect not only within the department, but also across those partnerships.

So just to summarize, it sounds like the only place that is realistic to make changes is potentially option #1, which is to streamline the undergraduate program, and that #2 and #3 are not really options for you.

We are working with the college office and have already streamlined this area as much as we can. Additionally, the new masters program in Financial Economics is expected to bring in 50 to 75 new students with added revenue.

None of the tenured/tenure-track faculty are African American or Hispanic. Are there more efforts the department could make to attract such candidates?

When looking at candidates with a Ph.D. in Economics, African American and Hispanic candidates account for approximately 3% each of the possible options, creating a very small pool from which we are able to draw.

Review of B.A./B.S. in Economics

Strengths:

All students complete a capstone project. The department is taking advantage of the Springboard program to provide students more authentic projects.

Partnership with foreign universities including a prestigious Chinese University to create 2+2 undergraduate programs.

Department conducts a meaningful assessment of its students learning outcomes.

The following questions were asked of the department:

You offer a B.A. and a B.S. in Economics. What is the distinction there and does offering both programs come at an additional cost?

The distinction is that a B.S. student is required to take certain math and or computer classes, where the B.A. student will be required to take language classes. Depending on what direction the student intends to go with their career would determine which route would be best to go down. B.A. students might go into applied administration or go into law where they probably won't need as much of the quantitative coursework.

It is typical in social science to offer both options?

I would say every social science departments offers both options.

The costs involved are actually elsewhere. It's a foreign languages vs. a laboratory sciences.

To what degree do students participate in internships (both credit-bearing and non-credit bearing)?

This is something that is still somewhat in process. We negotiated with the college last year to take one of our undergraduate advisors and have her work on the internships, so she is doing a lot this semester. We also hired a student for an internship to help with developing all types of advertising, making connections, keeping track of who's where and doing what. The web page is up, but I'm not sure if it's open to the public yet or not, but by the end of this year this all should come together.

Do you have a sense of how many students are doing internships at this point?

Since 2010, 67 students were involved with Econ 494 which is where the internships allows the student to get credit.

Can you give some examples of what type of internships your students might have?

One of my previous students worked as an analyst for Discover Card over the summer and I'm happy to announce he was also offered a job.

Enrollment has been declining over the past few years. From where (community college or high schools) do most of your majors come from? Given this, how are you focusing your recruitment efforts?

Generally 68% are transfer students. The majority of our students are from local community colleges. The typical freshman does not come to a major university planning on majoring in Economics.

Why is that?

Most students would not get a lot of exposure to Economics while in high school. It isn't typically until they start taking Principles of Economics that they realize that this is really interesting and what they want to do.

A couple of years ago we also added the Economics Conference. With this we tried to bridge the gap between using it as our showcase for students to present their research as well as keynote faculty speakers. Besides doing that, we also started contacting many of the community colleges and inviting them. We figure even if they don't come, they are still receiving information about the programs. Additionally, the afternoon session will be used for high school students, with the hopes of opening that pathway more too.

Recommendations:

Track students' participation in internships better. The department should measure the degree to which the internships were valuable, meaning how often students continue to work with internship employers, even after they graduate. Try to measure effectiveness of recruitment efforts and think about additional ways to reach and engage prospective students. Expand utilization of the NIU Springboard program to give students authentic capstone projects.

Review of M.A. in Economics

Strengths:

New M.S. in Financial Risk Management, starting in fall 2016, which will bring in new paying graduate students.

Certificates and emphases appear to be valuable and reflect current demand.

The following questions were asked of the department:

The number of female students has dropped to 0 over the past few years. Is this something to be concerned about? Women tend to be underrepresented in these areas. Additionally, NIU graduate stipends tend to be lower than other universities, making it even more difficult to attract potential candidates.

In terms of looking for places to potentially cut, in the report, you state that the M.A. is essentially costless to the department since it piggy-backs onto the Ph.D. Is this really the case?

The students that take the master's program, the way the master's program is designed, start together with the Ph.D. students with classes. The difference comes in during the second semester of the first year, where Ph.D. student's classes are still programed out for them. The M.A. students

have electives available to them. These electives are the same classes that are available to the Ph.D. students. M.A. students also have 500 level courses offered to them, but these are combined with the 400 level courses that are offered to undergraduates.

Recommendations:

The department should continue to monitor enrollments from underrepresented groups and make efforts to increase diversity.

Review of Ph.D. in Economics

Strengths:

The Ph.D. program has met its goals from last program review to increase enrollment.

The program makes a significant contribution to the department's scholarly output.

The department enacted new initiatives to help Ph.D. students graduate in a timely manner.

Partnership with Statistics appears valuable.

The following questions were asked of the department:

There are qualifying exams that must be passed. In the report, 7 out of 31 students did not pass their exams, how do you interpret this?

This is a highly competitive area to go into and we want our students to be able to do well in the job force. When we accept applications, we receive them from a variety of students and schools. We look at the course work they have taken as well as the exams to determine who would be best suited to get into the program. For our own undergraduate students, we have started a mentoring program, which helps to guide them on how best to approach these tests from more of an abstract, open ended, basis. This year, the students that took the microeconomics exam, only three of the ten that took it the first time, did not pass. This is a significant improvement over what has taken place in the past. The three students that did not pass, will be working with the mentor or coach again during the semester, before they retake the exams in January. This allows them time to discuss and analyze what they need to do differently.

Have you reviewed the exam to see if students are making the same type of mistakes?

We have discussed this issue with the teachers that developed the tests and asked them, what they saw as being the biggest stumbling block. Based on their feedback, it was decided that the coaching approach was the best way to address these problems.

The report states that assistant professors are not allowed to supervise Ph.D. students, why?

We use this as a protection mechanism for the assistant professors. We are not necessarily guaranteed hiring lines, so we want to make sure that the professors that we get, are able to reach tenure. Supervising Ph.D. students takes a great deal of time and our department feels as though those first few years should be focused on research.

Recommendations:

The department states that the Ph.D. students contribute to the scholarly output. In our meeting, it was stated that the Ph.D. program is critical in attracting high quality faculty. It seems incongruous that graduate faculty criteria are defined in a way that prevents assistant professors from supervising Ph.D. theses. We recommend that the department discuss the policy with all the tenured and tenure track faculty, and consider how other Ph.D. granting departments address the issue.

Last item of the day is question asking if anyone would be interested in serving as a subcommittee chair-in-training for the coming year. No response to this request was given.

Meeting adjourned at 4:25 p.m.
Respectfully submitted,
Jeanne Essex