Graduate Program Review
Texas Tech University

Program Reviewed: Department of Economics

Onsite Review Dates: March 4-5, 2014

Name of Reviewers
Internal:
Please include name, title, and Department
Andrew Vernooy, Professor and Dean, College of Architecture
Drew Winters, Professor of Finance, Rawls College of Business
Vickie Hampton, Professor and Chair of Personal Financial Planning, College of Human Sciences

External:
Please include name, title, and Department
David Laband, Professor and Chair, School of Economics, Georgia Institute of Technology
Cary Deck, Professor and Director of Graduate Studies, University of Arkansas

I. Academic Unit Description and Strategic Plan
Please evaluate the following:

Vision, Mission and Goals
__ Excellent __ Very Good __Appropriate _X_Needs Improvement

Strategic Plan
__ Excellent __ Very Good __Appropriate _X_Needs Improvement

Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Strategic Planning.
The written Mission and Vision for the Department of Economics are very generic and could fit any academic unit. When prompted, no one could respond to questions about the vision or mission. It appears that the department has been reactive rather than proactive, working in a problem-solving mode rather than thinking strategically about what the future should look like. While this is not surprising, given the history of the department, the lack of a vision that specifically defines the ambitions and direction of the program has resulted in the following issues:
1. Lack of curricular structure that engages the faculty and the students with a common mission.
2. Lack of a coherent hiring plan that is articulated beyond just hiring replacements.
3. Resorting to just solving problems that are narrowly defined by fiscal return—an impression of the RCM budget system.
4. The junior faculty has not been engaged in Vision and Mission construction, leaving them feeling somewhat disconnected from the program to the extent that they do not have a plan for achieving tenure and promotion that relates directly to the mission of the program.
5. Lack of a curricular structure concomitant to a Vision has resulted in unplanned semester offerings frustrating individual student program planning.
6. Lack of a Vision for the Master’s program precludes the opportunity for the program to create a distinctive Mission. The resulting piggybacking of course work hurts both graduate degree programs (masters’ and doctorate).

*Other comments (optional)*

The good news is that these problems can be addressed simply by entering into a visioning process that includes all the stakeholders. It should also include stakeholders from related programs on campus and it should be led by a professional moderator.

II. *Program Curriculum*

Please evaluate the following:

*Alignment of program with stated program and institutional goals and purposes*

__ Excellent __ Very Good __ Appropriate  __ Needs Improvement  __ N/A

*Curriculum development coordination and delivery*

__ Excellent __ Very Good __ Appropriate  __ Needs Improvement  __ N/A

*Program learning outcomes assessment*

__ Excellent __ Very Good __ Appropriate  __ Needs Improvement  __ N/A

*Program curriculum compared to peer programs*

__ Excellent __ Very Good __ Appropriate  __ Needs Improvement  __ N/A

*Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.*

Click here to enter text.

*Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Program Curriculum.*

The department offers eight core courses and 15 elective courses. The electives are designed to allow students the choice of six different two-course fields. They must choose three fields. The course work typically takes three years.
The choice of courses and fields are reasonably standard for Economics. The concerns listed below are with implementation of the curriculum.

1. All the courses are listed as 5000 level courses. This means that MA and PhD students are in the courses together. In addition, the elective courses are not offered each term so students must take a course when it happens to be offered. The result is that beginning MA students are in the same course with third year PhD students. Any course with this mix is a compromise, and the student comments suggest it is a compromise that neither set is happy about. MA students are overwhelmed, and the PhD students are left wanting more content. Book selections reflect the need to teach the courses at an introductory level.

2. The faculty prefer offering the six different fields because they want the PhD student to have a broad ranging education to prepare them for teaching positions. However, the department consistently offers only one Econometrics class (a core class). The Time Series Econometrics class has not been offered on any consistent basis. The PhD students do empirical dissertations and empirical research, and the information covered in one Econometrics class is not sufficient, regardless of the level at which it is taught. Adding the mix of MA and PhD students in the course only increases the problem of offering only one class.

3. The students told us that even though Agricultural Economics offers three Econometric classes which would solve that problem of limited empirical skills for the students, they are not allowed to take these classes for credit towards their degree. The faculty repeatedly mentioned the lack of resources for the Economics Department over the last 20 years and that in the last few years they have been getting more resources based on student enrollment. It is good that the department has been gaining resources, but the generation of student credit hours has blinded the faculty to the needs of their PhD students. The College of Arts and Sciences can relieve this concern by providing a clearer picture of the budgeting process with some assurances that there will be a consistent budget regardless of SCH changes.

4. The MA degree program has only two required courses. Thus, the program has no focus or emphasis. It tries to be everything for everybody. This is a problem for the University because a Master’s degree option for undergraduates from within the department and from other departments on campus is an asset to the larger academic culture of the institution. The PhD program has the same problem with its six fields. This is inconsistent with a limited faculty (same number for 20 years) that has been resource constrained.

5. Compared to peer programs nationwide, the PhD program requires more classes, more fields and more time to complete. It appears that the PhD students are coming for the funding support instead of the curriculum.

6. There is not an explicit math requirement for entry into the PhD program. This is handled, in part, in the two Math Economics classes. However, this causes these classes to start at a low level and adds extra courses to the curriculum.

7. The stated goals are not complete or specific enough to guide the curriculum, leading to the issues outline above.
**Other comments (optional)**
The good news here is that assurances from the College with regard to budget can go a long way to opening up dialogue on mission and vision, thereby giving the curriculum the same sense of improvement and excitement that the infusion of new, young faculty have given the department.

### III. Faculty Productivity

*Please evaluate the following*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Appropriate</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Publications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Load</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Grants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Evaluations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.*

Click here to enter text.

*Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Faculty Productivity.*

Full Professors: None. None means there are no full professors, so there is no productivity from full professors. The lack of full professors creates a huge leadership void across all aspects of the department, but a leadership void in research is particularly troublesome for the graduate program.

Associate Professors: Limited research productivity and the productivity that exists is not in high quality journals. The tenured Associate Professors bore the brunt of the resource constraints over the last 20 years, and their research has suffered. While they have worked to keep the department intact, none have a record that would warrant promotion to full at this time. Furthermore, there does not seem to be promise, under the current course of action, of future productivity that could warrant promotion to
full at a research oriented university. This creates a number of problems, but one obvious problem is that the existing tenured Associate Professors are not in position to fill the void at Full Professor. Additionally, no one has been tenured in the department in the last 10 years. The lack of high quality publications by the tenured faculty prevents them from being credible research mentors for the Assistant Professors. The tenured faculty do review the Assistant Professors regularly, but the focus of the reviews is on teaching. There is a new hire Associate Professor that was hired without tenure who has a research record that can be tenured.

Without high quality publications it is difficult for the Associate Professors to contribute to the profession. Journal editors will not look to them to provide reviews because they are not active scholars. Associations will not look to them for leadership.

Assistant Professors: There has been a revolving door at the Assistant Professor level for many years. The current group of Assistants looks promising, as they have been hired from top programs. However, they are in the beginning of their probationary period, so only time will tell about their research productivity.

The new Assistant Professors are being hired at below market salaries (about $20,000 below), but are being offered start-up packages of between $50,000 and $100,000. This appears to be working to attract promising Assistant Professors, but it does provide an incentive to move to another school after the hiring package has run out since their salaries are below market. This would contribute to the revolving door.

GPTIs are used for course coverage, given the limited number of faculty. This is good method to generate student credit hours cheaply. Cheap student credit hours are important to the tenured faculty as they view credit hour generation as the only means to gain additional resources. However, the graduate students also gain teaching experience that is valuable when they go on the job market.

The department has a substantial number of TAs to support instruction. However, everyone (faculty and students) suggests that there are twice as many TAs as needed. A better resource allocation would be to re-assign TAs to be RAs, but university rules do not allow this as TAs are funded from course fees. This is a common problem across the university that needs to be addressed.

All faculty mentioned the need to submit grant proposals. Because grants are not common in Economics, this may be a waste of time that contributes to the main problem of the department, which is a lack of high quality research and publications.

The form asked about teaching effectiveness. The self-study document does not contain teaching evaluations so the committee did not discuss teaching evaluations. However, there is one aspect of teaching effectiveness that was discussed, and that is the dissertation process. The lack of research-active senior faculty is a major problem for supervising dissertations. With no Full Professors and Associate Professors are not publishing in high quality journals, this raises concerns about being current
for supervising dissertations. Also, the small senior faculty causes junior faculty to supervise
dissertations, and a couple of PhD students noted that the turnover in junior faculty causes issues with
the completion of dissertations. The faculty also noted the high student-to-faculty ratio with their PhD
students and the burden this creates for supervising dissertations.

Other comments (optional)
Click here to enter text.

IV. Students and Graduates

Please evaluate the following

Time to degree
__ Excellent  __ Very Good  __Appropriate  _X_Needs Improvement  __N/A

Retention
__ Excellent  _X_Very Good  __Appropriate  __Needs Improvement  __N/A

Graduate rates
__ Excellent  __ Very Good  __Appropriate  __Needs Improvement  __?_N/A

Enrollment
__ Excellent  _X_Very Good  __Appropriate  __Needs Improvement  __N/A

Demographics
__ Excellent  _X_Very Good  __Appropriate  __Needs Improvement  __N/A

Number of degrees conferred annually
__ Excellent  __ Very Good  __Appropriate  __Needs Improvement  __?_N/A

Support Services
__ Excellent  _X_Very Good  __Appropriate  __ Needs Improvement  __N/A

Job Placement
__ Excellent  _X_Very Good  __Appropriate  __Needs Improvement  __N/A

Student/Faculty Ratio
__ Excellent  __ Very Good  _X_Appropriate  _X_Needs Improvement  __N/A

Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.
Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Students and Graduates.

Time to degree and graduation rates: Significant changes in 2010 gave the program more resources and led to higher aspirations regarding the size of the program. It does not appear that students are graduating within a reasonable time, although, it may be too early to tell.

Students were concerned that availability of required and desired courses may be extending their time to degree. Further, it appears that the first year course load is too light and that there may be too many field exams. This seems like an easy fix. Adding coursework to the first year and eliminating one field exam would help the students move more quickly through the program. Putting the eight required courses in the first year would mean that Comprehensive Exams would occur in the summer, when the students had fewer teaching responsibilities and more time to study. Taking advantage of other courses on campus would also help the students take courses when they need them. The most commonly mentioned course in this regard was Econometrics, which is taught well in Agricultural Economics.

The students mentioned that the loss of an Assistant Professor often meant the loss of a desired field course. This reinforced the concern that the curriculum was not predictable, possibly leading to extended time.

Generally, the students had a number of positive comments that received general support:

1. The quality of the program is improving.
2. The student body is diverse in origin and age.
3. The teaching opportunities are excellent.
4. The University is seen in an upward trend.
5. Funds are available for travel.
6. The new faculty members are exciting.
7. The senior faculty are easily approached and dedicated to teaching.

These positive comments should be seen as an opportunity for the University to help the graduate Economics program move to the next level. However, it seemed broadly obvious that absent a clear mission and vision this would be difficult. There were a number of constructive comments brought forward by the students:

1. Include more professional development opportunities.
2. Hold more seminars that engage the professional world.
3. Update available software.
4. Bring available research journals up to date.

Again, these seem like they are relatively easy to address and improve.

Other comments (optional)

Click here to enter text.
V. Facilities and Resources

Please evaluate the following:

**Facilities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Appropriate</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Facility Support Resources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Appropriate</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Financial Resources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Appropriate</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Staff Resources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Appropriate</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.
Click here to enter text.

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Facilities and Resources.

For the most part, the department seems to have appropriate resources; however, because so much of the funding is coming as a result of course fees they are limited in how the funding can be used. As mentioned earlier, there is a real need for research assistants to support the research faculty and to train future scholars.

Other comments (optional)
Click here to enter text.

VI. Overall Ranking

**Overall Ranking**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Appropriate</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please provide summative conclusions based on the overall review.

An AAU aspiring University needs a strong Economics Department. Events of 20 years ago had lasting, deleterious effects on the department. The program needs an infusion of senior, research-oriented faculty who can lead the department through a vision and mission process that includes junior faculty, students and members of aligned disciplines on campus. The curriculum needs to be more efficient and the Master’s program needs to be carefully structured and defined for the benefit of incoming students, continuing students from across the University, and other disciplines on campus. This restructuring
process should probably be lead from outside the department. This will be expensive, but the results should be worth it.

As the committee discussed possible solutions to the problems in the Economics Department, it became apparent that a research university needs a strong presence in Economics, but that this presence does not have to be housed in an Economics Department. Texas Tech may have the necessary Economics presence through the expertise available in Agricultural Economics, Business, Personal Financial Planning, and other departments/colleges. Accordingly, one possible (but nontraditional) resource allocation decision might be to have the Economics Department support undergraduate classes in Economics while other areas of the university provide graduate education and support research in Economics. This solution would take significant study and resource support from the university to be successful.

Please provide summative recommendations based on the overall review.

Quick Fixes:

- Allow graduate students to count appropriate courses taught across the university towards their MA and/or PhD degrees in Economics.
- Consider the use of some funding now spent on teaching assistants that are not being efficiently utilized to purchase software, sponsor a research seminar series, etc. that enhance the graduate program, keeping in mind what course fees can/cannot be spent on.
- To the extent possible before the visioning process is undertaken, address the issue of MA and PhD students sitting in all classes together. This may be possible through renumbering some courses at the 6000 level (PhD only) and/or through setting and enforcing prerequisites.

Major Needs:

- TTU needs a strong economics unit, either the Department of Economics or a unit that spans the colleges of Arts & Sciences, Business, Human Sciences, and others that already have faculty trained in Economics in their ranks.
- A visioning process that includes all the stakeholders, including stakeholders from related programs on campus, should be conducted to develop a vision and mission that would guide curriculum, degree program focus, faculty hire decisions, etc. It should be led by a professional moderator.
- It is likely that two or three faculty hires, at the professor level, will be required to build a strong graduate program in Economics. The current Associate Professors should not be “written off” as they have carried the department through a tough transition; however, successful transition to a strong research unit will require senior research faculty leadership.