

DEAN'S SUMMARY REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

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The Dean's Summary Report is based on the 2004 Program Review (self-study) by the Department of Economics (DOE) and the External Review of the DOE by the external reviewer, Dr. Tom Trulove (Department of Economics, Eastern Washington University). Both documents are comprehensive and accurate in their assessment of the DOE. The Summary Report also reflects knowledge derived from the College of Business preliminary Self-Evaluation Report (SER) for the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business – International (AACSB).

The faculty of the DOE is commended for creating an outstanding and exemplary department over the past two decades. As an overall assessment, I concur completely with the conclusion of the external reviewer: "... the CWU Economics Department is an exceptional small department with a very strong and respectable program."

Mission and Goals

The DOE states and delivers on a strong student-oriented mission. The Program Review presents clearly the continued emphasis on an academically-qualified faculty, teaching excellence and a high quality educational program – all leading to student success. The DOE is noted for its personal attention to students in the classroom and with advising and mentoring.

The external reviewer provides a strong validation of department's student mission and goals based on feedback from faculty and students. Faculty "... commented on their universal open door policy and their intention to differentiate the department by developing a reputation for being more student friendly and supportive than other departments." More importantly, he further states:

Their approach is working. When I asked students the same question they similarly identified the open door policy, dedication to students, good advising and close personal support from faculty as the best aspects of the department. They also liked their courses very much despite the fact that they were perceived as more difficult than most others at the university. [S]tudents feel very positive about the department. Comments are rarely negative. They seem to like their professors and courses, believe they learn more than in courses in other departments, and find the course expectations rigorous. Consequently, they especially

appreciate the help and support they get from faculty. Remarkably, ... almost all comments are positive and the criticisms offered tend to be suggestions for improving some minor aspect of the course. Comments also indicate that majors and minors feel they have a “home” in the economics department, a place they can count on for help and support beyond the classroom. The department’s career and graduate school counseling is among the best I have seen. Their advising system is comprehensive and excellent. The student experience is clearly a good one and is justifiably a source of departmental pride.

This lengthy citation is instructive and provides a comprehensive summary statement of the extraordinary effort the department devotes to teaching excellence and working with students.

The Faculty and Department Culture

The department faculty is collectively an exceptionally strong one. The seven full-time tenure track members are terminally qualified with a Ph.D. in economics. Six of the seven faculty members are academically-qualified based on AACSB standards for faculty development and intellectual contributions. (During the 2003-04 academic year, the seventh member of the department returned from an administrative position and is pursuing intellectual contributions consistent with AACSB and the College’s Faculty Research Standards.) Overall, there is a strong and effective continuous improvement ethos for teaching, scholarship and service.

I concur with and support the conclusions of the external reviewer that there is a high degree of collegiality, mutual respect, cohesiveness, communication, shared values and goals, and working together for a common good of building a strong department. The faculty mentoring program has proven results where new faculty are quickly and effectively integrated into the culture of the department. The mentoring program places considerable emphasis on the importance of mission and goals stated above, and the importance of the new faculty member for developing an appropriate research agenda for successfully achieving tenure and promotion in the department and the College of Business. Other departments in the College and, for that matter, across campus can learn much from the DOE about mentoring and faculty development.

The DOE delivers its program primarily in Ellensburg, with limited program delivery on the Westside (principally at the Lynnwood Center). It enjoys the benefits of a common disciplinary focus and a relatively small size in a single location. As such, it has not encountered some of the coordination and management problems of other departments in the College. But, I want to make it clear that the DOE has delivered on its mission, goals and strategies. The dedication of the faculty and the department’s governance structure are keys to this success. I commend them for building an exemplary department for the students they serve and for themselves as academic professionals.

The Program and Curriculum

The department offers an undergraduate degree only, with specializations in General Economics and Managerial Economics. The program prepares students for employment in public and private sectors, or a graduate program in economics, public policy and administration, law school and MBA.

Student recruitment (majors and minors) continues to be a challenge for the DOE as it is for most economics departments across the country. The department has approximately 35 majors and 30 minors. But, it must be noted that it is one of the leading departments on campus as measured by average class size (which exceeds the College and university averages) and the total number of students taught -- largely because of its general education courses (the only ones offered by the College) and service courses (particularly, the introductory micro and macro courses for the College's preadmission courses). Recruiting students occurs in the introductory and general education courses when students encounter the teaching excellence and student orientation of department faculty.

The department offers a traditional curriculum. Its preadmission requirements and core theory courses (Intermediate Microeconomics and Intermediate Macroeconomics) are the same as those at other schools. As noted by the external reviewer, "The quantitative requirements of Econometrics and Economic Research make for a strong General Economics option and are a more rigorous approach than that taken by many undergraduate programs. These requirements are exactly where the economics profession is going and are essential if students are to be competitive with those from other universities and in the job market. The Managerial track appears to be entirely appropriate to accomplish the goals for it set out by the department."

There are many challenges in offering and scheduling a consistent set of elective courses. These challenges are due to the small faculty size, unanticipated staffing issues (faculty short-term medical leave, military call-up, etc) that have emerged during the past few years, and a large number of electives.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the department is uniquely international in terms of staffing and faculty expertise and experience. This provides a distinctive opportunity for students and their exposure to global issues and perspectives.

Commendations

Aside from the affirmations and validations stated above, the department is commended for the following.

- pre- and post-testing approach where the pre-test is given in their introductory courses (ECON 201 and 202) and a post-test to those students completing the intermediate theory courses (ECON 301 and 302)

- an extensive informal assessment effort based on student letters, student e-mails, exit surveys of graduating seniors and alumni surveys
- use of information technology and computers in the curriculum
- involvements in the Douglas Honors College, Resource Management program and other initiatives at reaching across campus to faculty colleagues and academic programs
- department support for AACSB accreditation.

Reflections

As the dean of the College of Business, there are two fundamental reflections. The first involves the growth potential at university centers, particularly the Westside centers at Lynnwood and SeaTac. The opportunity exists and a viable strategy needs to be developed. However, to expand program delivery will require more faculty resources such as increased staffing for adjuncts and/or perhaps year-to-year faculty or tenure-track faculty.

The other reflection is the concern – or, what is best characterized as a fear – associated with my suggestion to merge the department with another disciplinary program in the College of Business where disciplinary synergy might occur. I understand the concern or fear, and the risk of such a merger in the short-run. The current department culture makes possible shared values, goals and leadership while facilitating the achievement of AACSB accreditation standards. I understand and appreciate the apprehension of the department faculty. The external reviewer concludes quite accurately: “Currently the department appears willingly to be one of the most productive, if not the most productive department, within the COB and CWU, as measured by publications, numbers of students taught and average class size. There is much pride of discipline and pride of departmental identity at work here. Unbalancing such a well running machine might not be such a good idea.”

No decision has been made about a merger.

Future Directions

The department is focused on a number of commendable initiatives and activities.

- need for continuous improvement in areas such as curriculum review, course offerings and scheduling, advising, internships
- internationalization of the economics curriculum
- more emphasis on writing and continued integration of computers and quantitative approaches

Conclusion

As stated at the outset, the DOE is an exemplary department with an outstanding faculty. The department is student centered and it operates at highly efficient and effective levels. The commitment of the faculty serves students well and efforts of the College, particularly regarding AACSB accreditation.