

Annual Assessment Report

Academic Year: 2017-18

Department: Agricultural Economics and Economics

Program(s): Economics

1. What Was Done

The Department of Agricultural Economics and Economics (DAEE) has an assessment plan that have been developed and updated with involvement from the DAEE advisory committee and resident instruction committee. Following this assessment plan, the undergraduate program has consistently focused on the following three objectives as being central to the Economics program.

1. Our graduates will develop excellent critical thinking skills
2. Our graduates will develop effective communication skills
3. Our graduates will receive educational programming that enables them to understand and cogently discuss current economic issues

2. What Data Were Collected

Student evaluations and senior exit interviews are annually evaluated to assess the Department's progress in meeting the three objectives and fulfilling the specific goals in the assessment plan. Other data are also collected including detailed Danforth reviews of faculty teaching for candidates for retention, tenure, and promotion. When possible, feedback from program alumni is collected to assess the long run impacts of the program.

3. How Data Were Analyzed

Student evaluation data are evaluated as part of the annual faculty and instructor review process by the Department's advisory committee and the department head. The department head then meets with each faculty and instructor to discuss evaluation outcomes and recommendations from the advisory committee. Discussion from the senior exit interviews is transcribed and reviewed by the Department's resident instruction committee and the department head. Peer-evaluation and reviews for candidates for retention, tenure, and promotion are reviewed by the Department's tenure and promotion committee and the department head.

For quantitative data (e.g., student evaluations), evaluations are based on historical comparisons and trend analyses for each individual faculty and instructor and based on comparisons to average scores received by other faculty and instructors teaching courses of similar level (e.g., upper-level courses). The former provides an opportunity to examine growth at an individual level, and the latter helps assess a faculty or instructor's teaching effectiveness relative to a normalized department-wide scale.

Qualitative information is compared to similar information collected in previous years, providing an opportunity to determine whether weaknesses have been improved and whether new issues are arising.

4. What Was Learned

1. Students indicated that their critical thinking and assessment skills have become highly developed. They noted that relative to the cost of the degree, the learning outcomes were a significant return on investment.
2. Faculty are sufficient in helping students complete courses that best suit their career plans after completing the degree. Students noted that the faculty are very approachable.
3. Students appreciated several new upper-level elective courses and noted that additional upcoming courses (e.g., behavior economics, finance, game theory) would be excellent choices for increasing the breadth of educational outcomes in the program.
4. Students noted that both STAT 216 and STAT 217 may not be sufficient to prepare them for the types of analysis asked of them in upper-level economics courses, and especially 400-level offerings. Additional need for applied statistical software training was voiced.
5. Several students suggested that the economics program provide different curriculums based on whether a student is interested in pursuing a post-graduate education or enter the labor force.

5. How We Responded

The DAEE has highly successful undergraduate programs that continue to meet the objectives stated in the assessment plan. The department will continue focusing on and innovating to ensure that it remains excellent in the three areas.

The DAEE is considering the opportunities to develop a 1-credit course that would enable students to learn applied statistical software skills prior to entering upper-level economics courses. The DAEE resident committee and the department head are developing suggested economics degree plans that would enable students to better prepare themselves for entering graduate school or a specific labor field. These plans would suggest a four-year educational plan that integrates courses from other departments (e.g., mathematics, statistics, political science) with the economics program.

6. Closing the Loop

In previous years, feedback from seniors in the economics program indicated that a better system was needed to match students with faculty advisers. The DAEE resident instruction committee is in the process of developing a survey to elicit professional interests from students entering the economics program. The results of the survey will be used to improve how students are matched with faculty based on shared interests, rather than using the traditional assignment structure.