

PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Review Outcome: The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the M.A., M.S. in Applied Economics to be in Good Standing.

The Academic Planning Committee recognizes that many of the efforts and activities that led to the development of the self-study report were accomplished during the time-period coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic. The committee thanks the program for a comprehensive and critical self-study report that included input from multiple stakeholders.

The committee commends the program faculty for their in-depth analysis of enrollments during the period of review. The committee notes that the program's enrollment during the program review cycle has fluctuated over the period of review (from 33 in 2015 to 25 in 2021, with a high of 40 in fall 2017 and a low of 23 in fall 2020). The self-study report indicates that, with current resources, this enrollment level is below the stated ideal target of 40 students. We recognize that due to traditionally high number of international students in the program, recent enrollment drops are likely related to the impact that the pandemic had on international students' ability to enroll in the program. The committee commends the department faculty for efforts to increase diversity among its students leading to levels of diversity that are higher than what is typical in the discipline (white male dominated). During the period of review the percentage of women enrolled in the program has averaged is 48.5 percent. The percentage of domestic graduate students from groups traditionally underrepresented in the discipline remains low (from 6.1 percent in fall 2015 to 8.7 percent in fall 2020). However, when considering the international students, the percentages of those identifying as non-white is much higher (increasing from 58.7 percent in 2015 and 76.2 percent in 2021).

The committee commends the program faculty for their comprehensive efforts to support the success of their graduate students. This includes a graduate assistant orientation program, individualized training and mentoring, and formalized procedures for evaluation with clear mechanisms for providing feedback to the students. We applaud the program for designing the multi-purpose Economics Learning Center that promotes active student engagement, fosters collaborative opportunities, and contributes to building stronger peer-to-peer and student-to-faculty interactions. The committee commends the program for the co-curricular options it provides its graduate students including the opportunity to tutor and advise undergraduate students, network with guest speakers, and participate in Applied Econometrics workshops. We commend the department for their support for graduate students who present research at regional conferences (e.g., the annual meeting of the Midwest Economic Association). We commend student-faculty collaborations that have resulted in fifteen peer-reviewed co-authored publications. The committee also notes that students have opportunities to participate in activities that allow them to learn from experts in the field, network with potential employers, and engage in meaningful civic and community engagement (e.g., Applied Community and Economic Development sequence, and Electricity, Natural Gas, and Telecommunications Economics sequence summer internship). Alumni employment and labor market outcomes data reported in the self-study indicate strong outcomes for graduates of the program.

The committee commends the faculty for their substantial work during the period of review to revise the curriculum to ensure that the content reflects changes within the discipline. We commend the program faculty for their successful proposal to change the CIP code for the program to a STEM-eligible designation which more accurately reflects the current curriculum. Other curricular revisions include the introduction of a new capstone project (ECO 492), the development of two new courses (ECO 444 & 443), the introduction of a new sequence in Quantitative Economics designed to prepare students interested in pursuing a doctoral degree, revisions to the structure and content of the Applied Community and Economic Development sequence to better meet student needs, and substantial revisions to a course (ECO 406) to include a more active civic engagement component. Furthermore, the program faculty are commended for their work to infuse issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion throughout the program curriculum.

The committee recognizes the faculty members of the program for their scholarly contributions to the M.A., M.S. in Applied Economics. Faculty members are active researchers who publish peer-reviewed journals articles, and present at national and international professional conferences. The program faculty regularly engage in professional development opportunities, including wide participation of the online course development (DART and AIM) events. Additionally, we recognize that faculty in the program have been actively involved in advising and supporting

professional student organizations demonstrating their commitment to facilitate learning and educational experiences of our students outside the classroom.

The committee appreciates the in-depth analysis of comparator and aspirational programs. As part of this analysis, the program faculty identified multiple institutions with similar programs that excel in ways that our program may aspire to. The committee also recognizes that faculty developed specific action plans to implement similar initiatives as those to improve the program at Illinois State. Actions planned as a result of these analyses include the development of an accelerated undergraduate sequence that will support undergraduate majors who pursue continuing into the graduate program, potential collaborations and partnerships to develop dual master's degrees, and exploring the potential of developing an online degree option.

Recommendations.

The Academic Planning Committee thanks faculty members of the Department of Economics for the opportunity to provide input regarding the program at Illinois State University through consideration of the self-study report submitted by faculty. The following committee recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle are provided in a spirit of collaboration with faculty members. In the next program review self-study report, tentatively due October 1, 2030, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

Develop a plan for controlled enrollment growth. The committee notes that demand for the program remains strong but enrollments are below target levels. The committee encourages the program to continue refining and implementing their plan for student recruitment, including strategies for increasing enrollment by students from domestic racial and ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented in the program and discipline.

Continue to focus on diversity, inclusion, and equity. The committee recognizes the efforts that have resulted in the diversity of faculty and students within the program and encourages the program to continue to pursue its goals related to further developing an equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment that effectively supports students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds. We encourage the program to continue refining and implementing their plans for recruiting students from groups who are traditionally underrepresented in the program and discipline. Furthermore, we encourage the program faculty to continue to examine ways to infuse diversity, equity, and inclusion into the curriculum.

Continue to focus on student success and retention. The committee recommends that the program faculty develop a plan for student success. The plan should be used to increase transparency and communication around "student success" by defining the program's goals for, assessment of, and actions towards supporting students enrolled in the program. The committee recommends that the plan includes mechanisms for continued periodic review of the program structure and content to remain current with changes in the field and to maintain program retention and graduation rates. The committee recommends that the program continue monitoring student retention, particularly of students from traditionally underrepresented groups.

Continue implementing and refining the student learning outcomes assessment plan. The committee encourages faculty to continue its implementation of the student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program during the next program review cycle, to continue to utilize information gathered through plan implementation to make program revisions as necessary, and to document how that has been done. The committee encourages faculty to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the plan in assessing student learning to identify any modifications to the plan faculty may deem necessary.

Continue the collaborative work with Milner Library. The committee recommends that the program work with the subject liaison librarian to examine and evaluate the library's journals and monograph collection to aid in both the selection and deselection process of these sources. Given recent journal cancellations and expected increases in distance and hybrid courses, we encourage the department and library to further collaborate to increase awareness of alternative access to resources, such as Interlibrary Loan and I-Share lending, among faculty and students.

Develop a plan for alumni tracking and engagement. The committee encourages the faculty to continue to refine their plan for tracking program alumni and use this system to enhance alumni networking and engagement. These activities may become even more important in the years ahead as the program's alumni become more diverse. The

program could benefit from increased involvement of its alumni, employers, and other external stakeholders in providing input regarding the program and in mentoring students and provide employment opportunities for program graduates.