

## **Précis**

### **Program Performance Review**

#### ***Economics, BA, MA***

Mihaylo College of Business and Economics

Morteza Rahmatian, PhD, Chair

### **Background**

The Department of Economics conducted a program performance review during the spring of 2010. Such a review included the preparation of a self-study, the evaluation of a visiting team, the Chair's response to the review and the Dean's summary and recommendations. The visiting team included: Wade E. Martin, Professor and Chair, Economics Department, California State University, Long Beach; Mark Thayer, Professor of Economics, San Diego State University; and Phillip L. Gianos, Professor, Politics, Administration and Justice, Cal State Fullerton. The visiting team reviewed the self-study and other documents including the vitae of the department faculty. Also, the visiting team interviewed faculty, students and clerical staff and the Vice President of Academic Affairs. They also toured facilities. The visiting team submitted a report of its findings and recommendations. Subsequent to the review the department met with the dean of the college and later held a retreat this past August to consider the findings and recommendations of the review process.

### **Key Data**

The Economics department is a large department in the College of Business and Economics offering the BA and MA degrees. In 2002 the department had 30.0 FTEF positions in 2008-09 that number had risen to 37.4 an increase of 24.7 percent. Student enrollments have trended upward from 739 FTES in 2003-04 to 829 in 2007-08. Graduate applications and enrollment have increased over the last year in 2008-09 headcount was 30.0 the department now reports that presently there are 42 graduate students enrolled. The department's enrollment is largely derived from the college and though the demand for courses has increased and the numbers of majors has also increased in 2002-03 there were 27 undergraduate majors in 2008-09 the number was 51. Graduation rates for upper division transfer students are improving 40 percent (2002 cohort) graduated in the major within three years and 50 percent within four years. None (3) of the first time freshmen graduated within the major and the majority enrolled in other majors by the seventh year. (For more data see self-study required appendices)

### **Key Issues**

There are several key issues that confront the department. As referenced above the department is largely a service department for the college offering core, global and other courses. There is a

need to increase the number of students in the undergraduate major. And while the graduate program under the leadership of the graduate advisor is flourishing there is the issue of the workload of the present advisor. In addition, the department is interested in establishing a mathematical track for those students interested in pursuing the PhD and an online program in economics education. The department has noted that it has insufficient funds to conduct some of its programs especially for graduate students support. To this end the department is challenged to develop ways to attract more external and internal funding to assist in support of its programmatic initiatives. Faculty staffing and development issues related to recruiting faculty to facilitate research clusters and to accelerate the conversion of lecturer positions to additional tenure track positions is cited for consideration. The development of a cohesive, comprehensive outcomes assessment plan for both undergraduate and graduate programs is critical to departmental effectiveness. (See below)

### **Outcomes Assessment**

It is not as if the department is not making efforts in the implementation of outcomes assessment there are some advances. After deliberation (reduced original number of goals and outcomes) the department developed department learning goals and learning outcomes. In order to evaluate the learning of graduating seniors the department administered the Educational Testing Service (ETS) subject examination. This was a voluntary activity characterized by low participation and performance was poor. So the issue is whether this instrument and its results are useful to the department faculty as a strategy in assessing the learning of students. Content knowledge of the discipline is important therefore, the department might want to develop its own instrument or implement other assessment strategies to assess content or discipline knowledge. The department has introduced a capstone course which includes the use of portfolios and an examination. (Econ 490) it maybe too early to begin to get results from the capstone experience that would inform faculty about student learning in the department but that would be a goal. The department also plans to survey alumni to obtain perceptions of their learning experiences including the relevance of specific courses.

For graduate students there also is Econ 595 a capstone course *Current Research in Economics* the one final class taken by all graduate students. Much of the course seems to be related to student research and publication. This course should be linked to learning goals and objectives of the program or it may serve as a quality indicator for the department. In addition graduate students might take either comprehensive exams or complete a thesis.

The department is aware of the essentialness of assessment of student learning. It needs to better conceptualize and coordinate its plan which should include not only the assessment of student learning but also the identification of indicators of quality and effectiveness. The establishment of a department assessment committee could facilitate this effort by bringing all the parts together for review and to monitor progress.

### **Outlook**

The Economics Department was cited by the visiting team of peers as being in “excellent condition” and they noted that the University should be proud of the achievements of the department. The team also mentioned that the department faculty maintain a complementary blend of teaching and research. The faculty are active professionally in the field and many have

noteworthy publication records. Strong collegiality and leadership also characterize the department. It appears that the department has appreciated the importance of the program review process, as stated above; they have met with the dean of the college and have subsequently convened a retreat to consider the findings and recommendations of the visiting team. Because it is expanding many efforts including the implementation of an online masters program and a growing masters enrollment as well as initiatives to increase undergraduate enrollment in the major – the department needs to use creativity and innovation to attract external resources to support these endeavors. Importantly, the department identified seven long term goals for the next seven years one goal is promotion of research and faculty development. The department needs to identify how these goals will be attained by providing an appropriate time line and measures of success.

The Economics department is a strong department has excellent leadership a highly engaged faculty and is taking the necessary steps to continue a trajectory of assessing, evaluating and improving.

Gerald W. Patton

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