

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 B.A., B.S. in 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. We note that the program's enrollment (considering first and second majors combined) during the program review cycle has fluctuated (from 108 in 2015 to 102 in 2021, with a peak of 116 in 2019 and a low of 83 in 2017). The committee notes the department faculty for efforts to increase the gender and racial/ethnic diversity among its students. The percentage of students identifying as female has increased slightly from 15 percent in fall 2015 to 17.5 percent in fall 2021. The percentage of undergraduate students from groups traditionally underrepresented in the discipline has also increased (from 24.2 percent in fall 2015 to 30.0 percent in fall 2021). The committee acknowledges the work faculty have completed regarding their recruitment efforts and that this work has been successful in enrolling both first-time-in-college and external transfers as first and second majors in the program (e.g., recruiting efforts in 100-level and 200-level general education courses, the creation of Checkpoint Charts to assist prospective majors in determining the timing of courses to facilitate on-time graduation, and participation in Open House events). We applaud the planned collaboration with University Marketing to target Chicago-area high school students interested in an Economics major. The committee commends the program for the use of several endowed scholarship funds for retaining students and for exploring ways to use scholarships to support recruitment as well.

The committee commends the program faculty for their efforts to support the success of their 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 on its ability to continue to limit enrollments in many of its courses, which is in keeping with the University's commitment to fostering a small-college atmosphere with large-university opportunities. The committee commends the program for the varied co-curricular options it provides its students (e.g., the chapter of Undergraduate Women in Economics, the Economic Student Association, and a local chapter of the Omicron Delta Epsilon honor society). We commend the program faculty for supporting opportunities for independent student research through capstone papers and independent studies, which may result in conference presentations and journal publications. We further applaud the program faculty for sponsoring an opportunity for a group of students to attend the Annual American Economic Association Conference on Teaching and Research in Economic Education. The committee commends the program faculty for their support of the Honors program as evidenced by recent work to allow greater access for majors that contributed to increasing participation from 3.8 percent in Fall 2016 to 12.5 percent in Fall 2021.

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. This work included splitting ECO 105 into two separate courses (ECO 101 and 102) to allow for more in-depth discussions of core economic concepts. While this change resulted in an overall increase in required credit hours for students in the program, it better supports the program's objectives and provides some majors more flexibility within the curriculum. Program faculty also developed a new ECO 250 course to better prepare students for advanced content in 300-level courses. Other curricular revisions included the addition of more course prerequisite options, the addition of a grade of "C or better" requirement for several prerequisite courses, and the revision of 300-level courses to create 400-level counterparts within the graduate curriculum. Furthermore, the program faculty are commended for their work to infuse issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion throughout the program curriculum; into courses as well as co-curricular through their participation in the Undergraduate Women in Economics Challenge initiative. The committee further commends the program faculty for their support of and participation in institutional programs (e.g., General Education and AMALI).

The committee commends the program faculty on the development, implementation, and revision of their plan for the assessment of student learning outcomes. During the current review cycle, faculty have used the evidence gathered through the student learning outcomes assessment plan to inform program changes, and this includes the incorporation of rubrics as tools for assessing student coursework regarding the program's learning outcomes. The committee acknowledges the use of such rubrics as one method to provide consistent reviews of student learning that can provide potential areas for improvement. The committee commends the program faculty for developing and implementing a student exit survey as part of their assessment practices. The information gathered through these measures has been used to make program changes, and several examples of these changes were specified.

The committee recognizes the faculty members of the program for their scholarly contributions to the B.A., B.S. in 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 to improve the program at Illinois State. Actions planned as a result of these analyses include an expansion of recruitment and retention plans within a lens of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, and the development of interdisciplinary and accelerated programs and international collaborations.

Follow-up Report.

Develop a new Strategic Plan. The previous program review recommended that the program faculty compile a new strategic plan, however the self-study report indicates that no formal progress had been made to address this recommendation. The committee asks that the faculty engage in strategic planning discussions and develop a new strategic plan for the program. We recognize that both the College of Arts and Sciences and the institution as a whole are currently engaged in strategic planning and that the department's strategic planning will be impacted by these processes. Accordingly, the committee asks the faculty to engage in discussions of this plan and to summarize the findings of those discussions in an initial report submitted to the Office of the Provost by May 15, 2024 and a finalized strategic plan by May 15, 2025.

Recommendations.

The Academic Planning Committee thanks faculty members of the Department of Economics for the opportunity to provide input regarding the B.A., B.S. 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.

Continue to refine and implement your plan for enrollment management. As stated above, the committee commends the program faculty for conducting a thorough analysis of enrollment trends. The committee acknowledges the work faculty have completed regarding their recruitment efforts and that this work has been successful in enrolling both first-time-in-college and external transfers as first and second majors in the program. Given the time and energy that must be devoted to such recruitment activities, the committee suggests that program faculty continue to identify external student populations for recruitment. The committee encourages the program to continue refining and implementing their plan for student recruitment, including strategies for increasing enrollment by women and students from 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 plan may provide an overarching structure for other plans (e.g., retention, curriculum, alumni engagement). The committee recognizes substantial work by former and current faculty members to review and update the program and its curriculum. The committee recommends 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. We also recommend that the program continue to explore providing more opportunities, both curricular and co-curricular, for students to participate in civic and community engagement.

Continue to review and revise the curriculum. The committee recognizes substantial work by faculty members to review and update the program and its curriculum. The committee recommends continued periodic review of the program structure including assessing the impact of recent revisions. The committee expressed concern about the time-to-degree statistics reported in the self-study. While the statistics have seen some improvement over the period of review, we recommend that the program faculty examine the sequencing and prerequisite structure within the curriculum for potential revisions that may accelerate this trend towards improvement. The committee strongly recommends that the faculty continue to explore ways to infused issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion into the program.

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. We also recommend that the program work with the subject liaison librarian to develop a tiered approach for information fluency learning outcomes for the department, align those outcomes to the curricula, and integrate those outcomes into the student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program.

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. We support the plans to re-activate the Economic Advisory Board. 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.