

REVIEW OF THE M.S. IN AGRICULTURE

Classification of Instruction Programs (CIP) Code: 01.0000
Agriculture, General

Review Outcome. The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the M.S. in Agriculture 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 appreciates the thoughtful and critical self-study report that incorporated ample evidence to support the claims that were made. The self-study process involved multiple stakeholders, including students and alumni, and the committee recognizes that faculty had the opportunity to review and provide their feedback on the self-study report prior to its submission.

The committee commends the Department for efforts to increase the gender and racial/ethnic diversity among its faculty and students. The Department has increased the percentage of female faculty from 22.2 percent in fall 2014 to 30.0 percent in fall 2019. Similarly, the percentage of female students has increased, from 41.7 percent in fall 2014 to 47.6 percent in fall 2019. In addition, the Department has increased the percentage of graduate students from racial/ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented in the discipline from 8.7 percent in fall 2014 to 15.7 percent in fall 2019.

The committee acknowledges that the number of tenure track faculty has increased from 9 faculty in fall 2014 to 15 faculty in fall 2019. This increase has shifted the Department's tenure track faculty to total faculty FTE ratio above both the ratios for the College of Applied Science and Technology and Illinois State University. In addition, the committee recognizes the acquisition of an additional 80 acres of farmland as part of the University Farm in Lexington, Illinois, that, like the Horticulture Center in Normal, Illinois, provides experiential learning opportunities for students.

The committee commends that several courses offered by the Department incorporate library instruction sessions during which the agriculture librarian provides students with training on the use of library resources and information fluency skills used in the discipline. A faculty member currently serves on the Library Advisory Committee, and this has increased communication between the Department and the Library.

Graduate assistants typically help faculty with research-related tasks, such as reviewing literature and collecting or analyzing data. The committee acknowledges that all graduate students are encouraged to participate in the professional development opportunities offered by the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT) on campus and through professional/disciplinary conferences.

The report provided several examples of curricular changes that have been made within each of the plans of study offered, including revisions of existing courses and development of new courses. The committee recognizes that students participate in numerous co-curricular activities, such work associated with the University's Horticulture Center; McLean County's Home, Lawn, and Garden Day; and the Illinois Pork Producer Youth Day. The committee commends the Department for introducing the Outstanding Graduate Student award and for providing this award to five students in the four years since it was established. Students are involved in research activities and present their work at the University Research Symposium on campus and at professional conferences.

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 information gathered through these measures has been used to make program changes, and several examples of these changes were specified.

Follow-up Reports. The committee notes that student enrollment has fluctuated during the current review cycle and appreciates that faculty have considered the industry-based factors that contribute to these fluctuations. In addition,

faculty are aware of the various reasons why some students who were admitted did not complete the program. The committee asks that the faculty develop a recruitment and retention plan to establish target enrollment numbers for the program and its sequences, consider the reasons students pursue a master's degree and their goals after graduation, and involve all faculty in examining reasons for and potential trends in students exiting the program prior to graduation. As part of this work, the committee notes that collaborating with other units on campus, such as the Graduate School, can allow for sharing of resources without duplicating efforts. The committee requests that the Department of Agriculture submit its graduate-level recruitment and retention plan as a follow-up report to the Office of the Provost by May 15, 2022.

The committee notes that faculty completed the comparator and aspirational program analyses as part of the self-study report. In doing so, faculty indicated that the program is the only master's-level program in agriculture that is offered at a public university in the State of Illinois and identified three initiatives to pursue and other programs that have implemented these or similar initiatives. The committee asks that the faculty revisit the comparator analysis because there are other, master's-level programs in the state and region that are closely related to agriculture and may serve as valid comparisons. In addition, the committee asks that the faculty complete the aspirational analysis by considering how the identified programs implemented the initiatives and develop action plans as appropriate to implement the initiatives in the Department. The committee requests that the Department of Agriculture submit its comparator and aspirational program analysis as a follow-up report to the Office of the Provost by May 15, 2022.

Recommendations. The Academic Planning Committee thanks faculty and staff of the M.S. in Agriculture program for the opportunity to provide input regarding the program at Illinois State University through consideration of the submitted self-study report. The following committee recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle are provided in a spirit of collaboration with agriculture faculty and staff. In the next program review self-study report, tentatively due October 1, 2028, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

Consider the future potential collaborations among the Department and other programs and units at the University. Given the broad scope of agriculture and its multiple fields that are represented within the Department, the committee notes that working with those in other, similar fields may create synergy that could extend to faculty teaching, research, service, and outreach. One potentially beneficial collaboration might be that between agriculture and the forthcoming engineering program at the University.

Consider changes to the curriculum and implement as appropriate. The committee recognizes the multiple curricular changes that the faculty has made during the current review cycle, including the development of new courses offered by the Department. The committee also acknowledges the current work faculty are completing, such as reviewing the available capstone options and considering additional options that could be offered. Given this and other work, the committee notes that one potential consideration may be the development of graduate certificates for those who desire additional education but not a master's degree. In addition, one potential expansion in the agriculture education and leadership area can include special education and educational administration as options.

Continue the collaborative work with Milner Library. The committee commends faculty and the subject liaison librarian for their work to integrate library instructional sessions with several courses. Given recent journal cancellations and expected increases in online and hybrid courses, the committee notes that the Department and Library can work to increase awareness of alternative access to resources, such as Interlibrary Loan and I-Share lending, among agriculture faculty and students. In addition, the committee notes that the program can 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.

Continue efforts to expand alternative modes of program delivery. The committee acknowledges that the Department has offered several courses online and given the value of distance education courses for students, the committee notes that such offerings should be continued and that faculty professional development for teaching online courses be encouraged.

Continue implementing and refining the student learning outcomes assessment plan. The committee commends faculty for their work to implement the assessment plan during the current review cycle. As part of this

work, faculty have considered the incorporation of curriculum maps to align learning outcomes with program courses, a more consistent approach to surveying program alumni, and the discussion of assessment findings and program revisions among faculty. The committee notes that such work, in addition to examining and revising the current plan as appropriate, can assist in monitoring student learning and identifying areas for improvement.