

REVIEW OF THE B.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 B.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 percentage of women among the faculty has increased from 22.2 percent in fall 2014 to 30.0 percent in fall 2019. Similarly, the percentage of students identifying as female has increased from 41.7 percent in fall 2014 to 47.6 percent in fall 2019. In addition, the percentage of undergraduate students from racial/ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented in the discipline has increased from 8.7 percent in fall 2014 to 15.7 percent in fall 2019.

The committee acknowledges that the Department has been active in recruiting students through its presence at several types of venues, including high school and community college visits, college and career fairs, industry events, and state- and national-level conferences. Faculty and staff are involved in these efforts through the Department's Recruitment and Retention Committee, and students participate through the Agriculture Ambassadors program, a selective group of student leaders in the department. Securing student scholarships as part of fundraising through private and corporate donations also has aided in the Department's recruitment efforts during the current review cycle. 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 acknowledges that the number of tenure track faculty has increased from 9 faculty in fall 2014 to 15 faculty in fall 2019. This increase in tenure track faculty has shifted the Department's tenure track faculty to total faculty FTE ratio above the ratios both for the College of Applied Science and Technology and for Illinois State University. The committee appreciates the contributions provided by the agriculture teacher education faculty as part of the teacher education unit's accreditation with the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) in 2019. The committee also recognizes the contributions of the Department to the General Education program through its two course offerings focused on agriculture and the environment and on global perspectives regarding food, resources, and societies.

The committee appreciates the Department's commitment to monitoring its undergraduate academic advising throughout the current review cycle. The recent administrations of the Department's senior survey have indicated that on average, 89% of the 4% of students who responded rated the Department's advising services either as 'Good' or 'Excellent.' The committee also 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 Committee, and this has increased communication between the Department and the Library.

The report provided several examples of curricular changes that have been made within each of the plans of study offered. Students have multiple opportunities to participate in co-curricular activities that allow them to learn from experts in the field, network with potential employers, and compete in regional and national student competitions. These opportunities include 11 registered student organizations (RSOs) and three academic/professional fraternities, such as Collegiate Farm Bureau and Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Science (MANNRS). During the review cycle, every faculty member in the department has been involved in advising and supporting these student organizations, and several students have been recognized for their work as part of these organizations, including championships at national competitions. During the semi-annual meetings of the Agriculture Alumni

Association, students present the highlights of their organizations' activities which allows for building relationships between the alumni and current students.

Faculty also involve students in their research activities, often when students complete Honors projects, independent studies, or internships. Through their participation in such activities, students gain applied skills by working with relevant technology and have been recognized at the College level with the College of Applied Science and Technology (CAST) Outstanding Undergraduate Researcher Award in 2018 and at the University level with selection as a Student Ambassador for the Office of Student Research on campus during 2019-2020. In addition, students have co-presented research findings with faculty at professional conferences on the regional, national, and international levels, and one faculty member include students as co-authors in three peer-reviewed journal articles and four peer-reviewed abstracts

Faculty have worked to infuse diversity into the program through incorporating examples, readings, and discussions that address diversity with their courses; addressing agronomic factors, such as food, feeds, fuels, and fibers on a global scale; and discussing agribusiness developments within various regions and nations. Since the previous program review, the faculty have revised their student learning outcomes assessment plan by aligning learning outcomes to courses across the plans of study, considering assignments in those courses as direct measures of student learning, and incorporating indirect measures through multiple stakeholders' feedback. The information gathered through these measures has been used to make program changes, and several examples of these changes were specified.

The Department has established two study abroad opportunities for agriculture students: a four-week program at École Supérieure d'Agriculture in Angers, France, and a 10-day program in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The committee recognizes that 36 students participated in these faculty-developed programs during the current review cycle. The committee appreciates the in-depth analysis of comparator programs offered at other public universities within Illinois. As part of their comparisons, faculty included multiple indicators and detailed their considerations from the analyses of these programs. The committee also recognizes that in completing analysis of faculty-identified aspirational programs faculty developed specific action plans to implement similar initiatives to those studied at other institutions.

Recommendations. The Academic Planning Committee thanks faculty and staff of the B.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.

Examine the high schools and community colleges attended by students and adjust recruitment efforts as appropriate. 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 students and external transfer students in the program. Given the time and energy that must be devoted to such recruitment activities, the committee notes that considering which locations are most likely to be successful in recruiting students and prioritizing those when recruiting can provide an efficient strategy to assist in guiding these efforts. Analyzing the balance between first-time-in-college and external transfer students and adjusting it toward greater recruitment of the former may also be a strategy to consider.

Integrate program alumni with recruitment efforts. The committee appreciates the involvement of students in the Department's recruitment activities through the Agriculture Ambassadors program. Given their presence within the Department, current students can be ideal representatives of the program and encourage prospective students to

consider and enroll. The committee notes that alumni also can be effective representatives given that they were students but now can reflect on their experiences both in the program and since graduating and entering the field.

Analyze the enrollment trends and determine ideal enrollment for the program. The committee recognizes the challenges that the Department has experienced regarding student enrollment in the program given the industry factors that seem to influence perceptions of the field. The committee notes that such factors have made it difficult to stabilize program enrollment but examining the trends and competitive challenges can provide insight that may be used to develop an ideal enrollment for the program.

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 should 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 either in hybrid or online modalities during the summer session and has provided several study-abroad opportunities for agriculture students during the current review cycle. Given the value of distance education courses for students, the committee notes that such offerings can be continued and that faculty professional development for teaching hybrid and online courses can be encouraged. Similarly, the committee notes that Departmental study abroad opportunities can continue to be offered and opportunities for experiencing additional aspects of international agriculture can be explored as faculty are able.

Continue implementing and refining the student learning outcomes assessment plan. The committee commends faculty for their work to develop and begin implementing the assessment plan during the current review cycle. As part of this work, faculty have considered the incorporation of additional direct measures of student learning to accompany the multiple indirect measures that are used to gather stakeholder feedback. The committee notes that such work can assist in identifying areas for improvement by providing a more holistic perspective on student learning.