

Review Team Comments and Suggestions

December 9-10, 2013

The review team has not followed your proposed review outline. We do not believe either the time allotted nor the material provided were sufficient to do an adequate assessment of departmental strengths and weaknesses. Rather, we have focused on the department report of actions taken since the last review of 2008 and on other issues that came up during the review process.

- 1) The department needs to focus greater attention on recruiting, particularly minority students.
 - The department has made good progress in increasing student numbers. Creation and marketing of the new natural resource economics major has been a great help.
 - Recruiting minority students continues to be a challenge.
- 2) All future faculty hires should be split appointments.
 - We recognize that the department was faced with critical needs in extension, so getting more extension faculty on board was a priority. However, we disagree that it was a good idea to have 100% extension appointments.
 - Having a large number of 100% teaching and extension appointments and some near 100% research appointments is not in the best spirit of the Land Grant mission.
 - It appears that much of the responsibility for the non-split appointments must rest with the college upper administration. Upper administration should facilitate and encourage more joint appointments. The administrative barriers to split appointments need to be removed. However, it also appears that the department readily accepted non-split appointments.
 - The department needs to develop a long term staffing plan in which it projects possible retirements and also functional and topical needs based on a market assessment for graduates and for the profession. Then it would be much easier to reallocate existing resources and plan future hires to meet those needs.
- 3) The department should offer an EXCEL course to teach financial and logical functions.
 - The college now has a one hour basic Excel course and a one hour Access course. It seems the department could add a one hour course on financial and logical functions, statistical functions, and breakeven analysis.
 - However, the undergraduate students expressed that their Excel skills were OK. They were, however, disappointed in the quantitative preparation. There is no undergraduate econometrics course and no math programming course. The department now teaches a basic statistics with an intro to math programming.

The students did not feel this is adequate. They felt they were not prepared for the quantitative analysis they will be asked to undertake in their jobs.

- We believe that both econometrics and math programming should be offered in the undergraduate curriculum.
 - However, this decision probably is best made as part of a comprehensive undergraduate curriculum review, which should be undertaken as soon as possible. That review should include feedback from alumni and employers.
- 4) The department should increase the number of undergraduates participating in study abroad programs.
- We do not believe adequate efforts have been made to promote and increase study abroad.
 - Study abroad can be a transformational experience for undergraduates. The department should set a goal for the fraction of graduates with a study abroad experience in the 10-20% range.
 - We agree that effective classroom teaching is extremely important, but that in no way excludes greater study abroad experience.
 - More resources should be allocated to study abroad both at the college and department levels.
- 5) Teaching ratings don't coincide with students' comments.
- No comment on this issue.
- 6) The department should collect better information on job placement and alumni contacts.
- We understand the university is making a substantial effort to improve data in many dimensions. That is to be applauded.
 - The department has made important strides in collecting better information on job placement and updating alumni contacts. This needs to be continued and enhanced.
- 7) The department should pursue collaboration with the Department of Economics in establishing a PhD program.
- This is a tough one.
 - The department, in thinking long term about the graduate program, needs to consider whether resources are better spent having an excellent MS program or maintaining low numbers PhD program with fewer resources allocated to the MS program. There are pros and cons of both directions.
 - The resource requirements needed for a program with economics do not seem to us to be excessive.
- 8) Faculty incentive programs, tied to grants and contracts, should be reviewed.

- The department has done this and now returns 25% of F&A funds to the faculty member. This is a positive step.
 - What about salary savings? Does the faculty member share in those?
- 9) The department needs to go beyond the traditional definition of Extension and embrace the modern broader vision of Extension.
- This appears to still be an issue both in the department and in higher agricultural administration.
 - Our view remains that extension does not end at the state boundary.
 - With an educator in each county and around nine regional specialists, there appears to be scope for the departmental extension program to take on more of a regional and national perspective.
- 10) Define and re-advertise the endowed chair position.
- This has been done. The department is to be congratulated on this accomplishment.
- 11) The department head meets with non-tenured faculty quarterly and unless there is a problem, this is too frequent.
- Quarterly meetings seem a burden to us, but if both parties believe it is productive, no problem.
- 12) The department needs to enhance collaboration with other units within and beyond the institute.
- Substantial progress seems to have been made in this area. There appears to be good collaboration with animal science, plant science, forestry, and other areas.
- 13) The department should create an external advisory group.
- We still believe quite strongly that this should be done.
 - Given that the department is going to undertake an undergrad curriculum review starting in 2014, this is an ideal entry point for external input.
- 14) The department should place more value on international activities.
- In recent years, there have been more faculty undertaking international experiences, which is quite good.
- 15) The department should do a better job of promoting its successes.
- The department has done a good job of getting local awards for faculty.

- More attention now needs to be focused on regional and national awards.

Other issues

- Major field exam results – The review team was quite surprised by the major field exam results, as the marks seem quite low. Interpretation of these results is quite difficult given the information available. We recommend that the department do a careful assessment and interpretation of the meaning of the exam scores. Perhaps this could be done in conjunction with the curriculum review.
- The NAMA program also should be included in the upcoming curriculum review. It requires considerable faculty resources and also provides benefits to students, and these tradeoffs need to be considered in the review.
- While we did not undertake a thorough assessment, it appears to us that the natural resource and environmental economics program is quite strong.
- APAC review – There are good reasons for undertaking a review of the Agricultural Policy Analysis Center soon. There may be important staffing changes in the near future. Also, the Center might play a productive role in the new Tennessee Governor's agricultural initiative.
- The undergraduate students were quite pleased with the individual attention they received from individual faculty. They felt the resources available to them in terms of computer support and library were quite strong. We did get a strong sense that the food and agribusiness major is too focused on farm economics. This feedback should be considered in the curriculum review.
- The department should evaluate other models for handling undergraduate counseling. One model is to use full time counselors for freshmen and sophomores and faculty for juniors and seniors. The counselor also could handle student audits at the end of the junior year to help minimize problems with students failing to meet all the university, college, or department graduation requirements. The counselor could also manage data on students, placement, and alumni. This model has worked exceptionally well in other institutions – to the point that those undergrads feel they have the best counseling possible.
- We suggest that the department consider this counseling option and also reconsider the position request for a 100% faculty teaching position. If the department were granted resources to hire a full time counselor, that person could also work on recruitment, and at the same time free some teaching faculty time for research/extension. Again, the upper administration would need to work with the faculty to achieve these objectives.