



Office of the Acting Vice President
For Academic Affairs

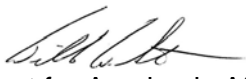
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Nozar Hashemzadeh
Chair, Department of Economics

FROM: Wilbur W. Stanton 
Acting Vice President for Academic Affairs

SUBJECT: Undergraduate Economics Program Review

DATE: 21 August 05

COPY: Dr. Paul Sale, Chair of the Academic Program Review Committee
Academic Program Review Committee Members
Penelope W. Kyle, President
Dr. Bill Dempsey, Dean, College of Business and Economics

Introduction

Academic program review is designed to assure regular examination of the University's curricula and academic structure and guide recommendations for improving academic quality. In addition, the process guides the effective allocation of resources, encourages continuous faculty and program development, and provides a rationale for making decisions about maintaining, enhancing, reconfiguring, or phasing out programs as required by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia and/or as indicated through other analyses and by other criteria. Further, the Program Review process provides a tool for working with departments and academic programs to implement the University's Strategic Plan. For the process to be fully effective, departments and programs must commit themselves to following through after the initial self-study and analysis by responding to the recommendations and/or required actions of the Academic Program Review Committee (APRC), the appropriate dean, and the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

During the 2004-2005 academic year, the APRC and the academic programs under review worked with program review criteria that were approved in April 2003. I commend the Academic Program Review Committee for the diligent, thoughtful review of academic programs and for the report detailing its study and recommendations. Moreover, I commend each of the academic

programs that undertook the self-study required to develop and present reports that allowed the APRC to complete its work.

This memorandum completes the first stage of the Academic Program Review process. Included in this memorandum are the APRC's specific program recommendations for the Economics Program. Also included are the APRC's overall recommendations.

Observations Pertaining to All Programs in General

I have several general observations that come from the reading of all the program review materials:

1. Programs were encouraged to work with the QEP implementation team in the preparation of this year's reports. Those that did so had superior documentation compared to those that did not work with the team. We need to work together to ensure that programs clearly report results of the implementation of the program's Quality Enhancement Plan. Outcomes should be reported in measurable terms and changes made based upon those outcomes should be noted in the program review reports (see Quality Enhancement Plan Template column "Evidence of Improvements"). To that end, I have asked Ms. Bethany Bodo, in her role as Director of Academic Assessment, to provide, in the form of a fictitious department report, how outcomes can be reported and utilized to enhance programs. When this document has been created, I will make it available to all programs.
2. We need to continue efforts to collect alumni data. For example, helpful information may include alumni employment data, satisfaction with the program, and recommendations for improvement. This information is burdensome for individual programs to collect and maintain. Therefore, I am working with the Division of Institutional Research to enhance University coordination with programs and thus facilitate centralization of the data for program use during review processes. The APRC committee recommended that this information be gathered in possibly 1, 3, and 5 year intervals. While this would be robust and useful for program enhancement, the ability for the university to implement this will be dependent upon faculty workloads and the capacity for Institutional Research to design, gather, analyze, and disseminate resulting data. At a minimum, however, this must be part of every program review cycle meaning that alumni data must be collected once every five years as part of the self-study.
3. Finally, programs continue to make good cases for faculty and staff needs. It will remain increasingly important in a continuing environment of constrained resources that Radford University use the academic program review process to contribute to the determination of how to most effectively deploy available resources. We will continue to use the state's rubric (Schedule M) as a major determinant of workload expectations, but this metric alone cannot fully capture the uniqueness of a program and its centrality or contribution to the mission of the University. During the next academic year, I will work with the Council of Deans to explore a more inclusive set of workload criteria while retaining the state's workload principles.

Observations for the Undergraduate Economics Program

The following observations, recommendations, and conclusions are based on my review of APRC's analysis and Program Review Report, the self-study of the Economics Program submitted by the Department of Economics, and the comments and recommendations submitted by Dean Dempsey.

The Undergraduate Economics Program self-study was well written in regard to the analysis, interpretation, and conclusions based on data available to the program. In particular, I was impressed with the extent to which the program utilized available consumption data. This should provide strategic insight and program refinement during the next program review cycle.

The Undergraduate Economics Program has made both a significant and positive contribution to the College of Business and Economics, both as a discipline and as part of the AACSB accredited core. Additionally, the Economics program has demonstrated a steady increase in enrollment since the previous review cycle. I was particularly impressed by the degree to which the faculty have been active professionally and the number of articles published in peer reviewed journals.

As noted by the Committee, there are three areas that raised some concern, and I concur with these.

1. There are not methods in place to accurately track all of the various ways in which students are engaged in experiential learning activities.
2. There is not a clear linkage between the program's expected learning outcomes and assessment measures leading to review, change (if and where appropriate) and reassessment for the purposes of continuous improvement.
3. Full-time faculty staffing according to Schedule M standards indicates that the program is understaffed. Adjunct faculty produce approximately 30% of the student credit hours within the department.

Recommendations and Conclusions for the Undergraduate Economics Program

During the next decade there will be an increased emphasis on practical applications of academic theories to "real world" problem-oriented environments; continued integration of subject areas via cross-functional and cross-discipline teaching and learning; added emphasis on "people skills" in all aspects of education; and the movement from passive to active learning.

1. I encourage you to continue to create an atmosphere in which student engagement is given high priority. While the Undergraduate Economics Program already has a history of employing experiential learning modalities, I concur with the Committee's recommendation to expand and track the use of activities such as internships, independent studies, group projects, service learning and student/faculty research partnerships to supplement traditional lecture, so your students can take a more active role in their own learning.
2. The Committee noted that enrollment demands have stretched faculty resources and recommend that current enrollment and staffing issues must be addressed. I concur. Last year Dean Dempsey was authorized to hire an additional faculty member in Economics, and that faculty member will begin this fall. In addition, I have authorized Dean Dempsey to

open a search for another faculty member to begin in the fall of 2006. Demand for business education will likely continue to increase during the next decade. I encourage you to monitor the trends carefully, work to increase the percentage of student credit hours produced by full-time tenure-track faculty, and work with your dean to proactively address faculty and related staffing needs.

3. Accountability, the battle cry of state governments and accreditation agencies requires the University to demonstrate that we are meeting expected learning outcomes. As with many educational governing boards, SCHEV has begun establishing performance indicators and "institutional agreements" focused on standards of learning, student outcomes, and guaranteed student competencies. Assessment of student achievement and university "report cards" will become increasingly important for legislators in determining higher education appropriations, as goal attainment and quality assurance will be expected to be clearly and substantively demonstrated by all Commonwealth Colleges and Universities. In this regard, the Committee recommends that the Economics Program develop assessment methods tied to the expected learning outcomes in a way that are measurable and in such a way that the measurement leads directly to the identification of ways to continuously improve and strengthen the program. For example, the program should evaluate learning goals with respect to oral and written communication skills and where and how those outcomes are being met. The program should also work with colleagues in the College of Business and Economics to identify if and how these outcomes are met within the business core. I concur with the Committee's recommendation that the program continue the process of developing pedagogically sound learning objectives and linking assessment to the learning objectives.

I commend the APRC for making recommendations whose intentions are clearly to strengthen the Undergraduate Economics Program.

It is essential that that faculty in the Undergraduate Economics Program immediately undertake the work required to secure these improvements. In doing so, the Department Chairperson and the faculty members in the Undergraduate Economics Program should work collaboratively and persistently with the Dean of the College of Business and Economics to make the changes and improvements that are recommended.

Following the Program Review Guidelines, "the Department Chair or Program Coordinator will submit a report to the Vice President for Academic Affairs and appropriate Dean(s) on or before April 1 [2006], indicating how the program has addressed recommendations of the Academic Program Review Committee and any recommendations from the Dean(s) or Vice President for Academic Affairs."

This document should include findings and results from the initial implementation of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) and an updated QEP table (see page 3 of the Program Review Guidelines) that includes a completed "evidence of improvement" column. Programs are expected to discuss methodologies utilized and any challenges encountered during the process. They should also elaborate on ways in which they utilized the findings for program improvement and note programmatic decisions that have been made as a result of the implementation. All programs should document the QEP implementation process and keep this information, including any pertinent data, on file and accessible.

In conclusion, the Undergraduate Economics Program is a viable program that meets SCHEV productivity standards and should be maintained.

