

PROGRAM REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION PLAN
PROGRESS REPORT
Agricultural Economics
2016 - 2017

- 1. Keep the academic coordinator position and clarify responsibilities, specifically to include: advising freshman and transfer students; developing advising materials with course sequencing information; and developing and implementing clear undergraduate academic requirements, mentorship and expectations.**

Assessment method:

As with most items in this plan, observation is the most practical means of reporting status, unlike activities such as instruction where formal assessment methods can be developed.

Results: We hired Susan Skees to replace Erica Flores as Academic Coordinator. We have the largest freshman class (37) in memory, doubling freshman recruitment from previous years. Susan is building relationships with employers. Susan Skees and Roger Brown each advise about 25-40 undergraduates, with the remainder distributed across faculty advisors.

Analysis of results and reflection:

Increasing our freshman intake has long been a strategic goal. Susan and Roger are effective advising mentors for the other faculty advisors.

Ongoing improvement actions:

We just launched the first freshman-level class the department has taught in several years, partly as a recruiting tool, but mostly to give our own freshmen a course in their home major early in their program. Susan conducts training sessions for advisors.

- 2. Hire a director of experiential student learning who is responsible for internships, education abroad, student clubs, quiz bowl and other activities.**

Assessment method:

N/A, please see item 1.

Results: Susan Skees and Roger Brown standardized the experiential education requirement to improve consistency of expectations and ease of assessment. The instructors of our two recurring education abroad courses effectively administer those in concert with the Education Abroad office, and Tim Woods continues to advise the Agribusiness Club in partnership with Susan Skees. Our quiz bowl coach will be taking a position at another university.

Analysis of results and reflection:

As faculty adapt to the standardized experiential education procedures, we see increased uniformity in expectations. Internships, education abroad, and the Agribusiness Club are all on sustainable and positive trajectories. Our quiz bowl coach cannot be easily replaced.

Ongoing improvement actions:

Hiring another staff member is not feasible with current resources. Other priority areas are more under-served, so if we gained new resources, this might not be the first need to address.

3. Allocate adequate DOE time (currently 15%) for the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) to develop and implement clear graduate academic requirements, mentorship and expectations.

Assessment method:

N/A, please see item 1.

Results:

The DUS and DGS have each received, and will continue to receive, the recommended 15% DOE. Currently, departments are asked to place this effort under Administration.

Analysis of results and reflection:

We believe the existing policy is appropriate. The DGS expectations listed above are standard expectations that we have held previously. The Graduate Committee is in the process of reviewing academic requirements for the MS and PhD programs.

Ongoing improvement actions:

We plan to continue with the current DOE policy, which mirrors the recommendation. The Graduate Committee will clarify graduate academic requirements and make needed changes.

4. Develop and implement a development funding plan to enhance student success and faculty professional activities.

Assessment method:

N/A, please see item 1.

Results:

The department chair met with the College's new Senior Director of Philanthropy to discuss development priorities and how we might assist with development efforts. Apart from KALP, the department has no large development successes, but many small donors.

Analysis of results and reflection:

During meetings with the current and previous philanthropy directors, we emphasized a goal of recruiting donations to support education abroad. The chair provided development personnel with information to encourage donations through a new philanthropy website. The department chair expressed interest in accompanying development officers on donor visits.

Ongoing improvement actions:

It is useful to maintain contact with college development personnel, expressing our willingness and ability to assist with fundraising.

5. Develop a formal mentorship program that provides direction for junior faculty to promote collegiality, quality scholarly productivity and retention.

Assessment method:

N/A, please see item 1.

Results:

We have had a formal mentorship program for many years. All junior faculty assemble a mentoring committee within their first six months, and to meet with their committee twice each year. Beyond annual performance evaluations, each junior faculty member undergoes a two-year and four-year evaluation focusing on progress toward promotion.

Analysis of results and reflection:

All of our current junior faculty created their mentoring committee on schedule, though sometimes more than six months passes between committee meetings. A major goal of the mentoring committees, and of the two- and four-year reviews, is to avoid promotion-related surprises. The program has been successful in this regard.

Ongoing improvement actions:

Given its success in achieving its intended purpose, maintaining the existing program seems appropriate. Junior faculty will be urged to maintain a regular schedule of meeting with their mentoring committee, if they are not already doing so.

6. Increase opportunities for graduate students to obtain research assistantships through organized grant funding. Develop clear expectations and follow-up for research engagement and publication, as related to graduate student performance.

Assessment method:

Review of assistantship budgeting records.

Results:

Currently, seven graduate students are being funded on grants, for an expected total of \$160,000 in 2017-18, or 27% of total graduate stipend and tuition expenditures. Journal publications and conference presentations by graduate students are high and growing. Strategic planning sessions with graduate students indicated that they want to be held to high expectations, for the betterment of their career prospects.

Analysis of results and reflection:

Currently, community economic development represents an area with many grant opportunities. Junior faculty are often funded through collaborative, integrated projects. Extension faculty obtain substantially more grants than research faculty. Regarding graduate student research outputs, high levels of activity are partly due to departmental support for conference participation, having a large number of productive late-stage doctoral students, and having many active junior research and extension faculty who push students to publish.

Ongoing improvement actions:

The faculty who spearheaded a USDA National Needs Fellowship proposal last year plan to resubmit the proposal. If successful, it would expand our ability to fund graduate students

with competitive stipends. The departmental culture is slowly moving toward recognition that external funding is a catalyst for recruiting, training, and graduating students.

7. Develop a strategic hiring plan for future hires that includes program focus and emerging research priorities (e.g. policy).

Assessment method:

N/A, please see item 1.

Results:

This topic was the main agenda item for a recent faculty meeting, and will be again soon.

Analysis of results and reflection:

High priority areas included research/teaching positions in community economic development, regional economics, and ag policy. A need for quantitative analytical skills exists, both for research success and to mentor graduate students. Future discussions will be affected by the skill sets lost through resignations or retirements.

Ongoing improvement actions:

Faculty input is the driver of all faculty hiring proposals, so providing regular opportunities to openly discuss evolving needs is the primary action needed. Developing rigid plans intended to guide decisions over many years has never been successfully pursued.

8. Develop a strategic Extension plan to address the ever changing rural communities and Kentucky agriculture, including programs and personnel (e.g. farm finance, ag law, policy, natural resources, sustainability).

Assessment method:

N/A, please see item 1.

Results:

Ag Economics Extension faculty, Extension Associates, and KFBM staff met off-campus on May 10-11, 2017 *“to develop talking points and actionable items for internal group and full faculty discussion and for the benefit of the new department chair.”* A draft of the College-wide extension review report was released in August, 2017.

Analysis of results and reflection:

The Extension Coordinator is compiling a summary. Faculty wish to obtain enterprise-level data from KFBM. A graduate student representative for Extension was added. This led to graduate student attendance and participation at several Extension activities in 2017. Recent MS graduates benefitted from the department’s support of extension-related work.

Ongoing improvement actions:

Continuing to encourage graduate students’ interest in extension is a productive recruiting and professional development strategy. Discussions with KFBM specialists regarding production of enterprise-level data began in September, 2017.

9. Hire an Extension Associate to enhance Extension programming and allow for the reduction of teaching demands on specialists.

Assessment method:

N/A, please see item 1.

Results:

We do not have resources to add a position at this time. A typical teaching appointment for an extension faculty member is 10%, i.e., one course per year.

Analysis of results and reflection:

The extension faculty create outstanding benefits for students and connections within the agriculture community through their teaching. Reducing teaching demands would eliminate those benefits, and create deeper mission-specific divisions among faculty.

Ongoing improvement actions:

Continuing to encourage flexibility in teaching schedules is one way to gain the benefits of teaching by extension faculty while disrupting their other duties as little as possible.

10. Analyze the current staffing responsibilities before developing a staff hiring plan to accommodate current needs. Future hires are inevitable to keep AEC running smoothly.

Assessment method:

N/A, please see item 1.

Results:

Compared to 2011 staffing levels, the department lost one staff member. From a financial perspective, the 2017 federal and state budget for staff is 111% of the 2012 budget, in contrast to the total federal and state budget, which is only 103% of its 2012 level.

Analysis of results and reflection:

Due to technological advances and shifting University priorities, staffing changes led to reduced administrative assistance, and more business management and academic coordination. Excellent student workers have helped in office management. The current staffing level is usually adequate but there is no cushion, causing job-related stress that is incompatible with those positions' pay levels. KFBM could fully employ another specialist.

Ongoing improvement actions:

Giving staff scheduling flexibility reduces strain from operating with little cushion. Much productivity is lost due to poorly communicated and uncoordinated design of University procedures, and unnecessarily frequent procedural changes. Given the budget outlook, additions to staff numbers are unlikely in the short-run. Making professional development opportunities available, and lobbying for appropriate compensation, are useful strategies.