

**PROGRAM REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION  
PLAN PROGRESS REPORT  
Agricultural Economics  
2017 - 2018**

- 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:** Relative to previous years, we experienced larger freshman enrollment in our undergraduate major in 2017 (37 freshman) and 2018 (31). Susan Skees, our Academic Coordinator, is leading our advising and undergraduate professional development efforts. She is building relationships with potential employers and inviting them to guest lecture in classes, interact with our undergraduate student club, and participate in networking events with students. Ms. Skees and Dr. Roger Brown, our DUS, each advise 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. Building and maintaining relationships with potential employers of our students is also an important goal. Ms. Skees and Dr. Brown are effective advising mentors for the other faculty advisors.

**Ongoing improvement actions:**

Our new freshman-level core-curriculum class (launched in 2017) continues to have strong enrollment. The course serves partly as a recruiting tool but also provides our freshmen an early course in the major. Ms. Skees conducts regular 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:** Hiring another staff member is not feasible with current resources. Ms. Skees and Dr. Brown provide leadership regarding Departmental experiential student learning efforts. Ms. Skees is encouraging employers to provide internship opportunities for students. Approximately 20 students participated in internships during the summer of 2018. The instructors of our two recurring education abroad courses effectively administer those in concert with the Education Abroad office. Dr. Tim Woods continues to advise the Agribusiness Club in partnership with Ms. Skees. Dr. Leigh Maynard is now serving as faculty advisor to the quiz bowl team with assistance from a graduate student.

**Analysis of results and reflection:**

Internships, education abroad, and the Agribusiness Club are all on sustainable and positive trajectories. In 2018, our quiz bowl team repeated as national champions for the 3<sup>rd</sup>

consecutive year and the case study team took 3<sup>rd</sup> place in a national competition at the annual meeting of the Food Distribution Research Society.

**Ongoing improvement actions:** A new study abroad course will be offered in the summer of 2019. A gift from a generous alumnus has allowed the department to create an “Undergraduate Student Opportunity Fund” which will attempt to address some of the financial limitations that prevent students from taking advantage of various professional development opportunities, including (but not limited to) internships and education abroad.

**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 currently conducting a comprehensive review of our MS and PhD programs.

**Ongoing improvement actions:**

We plan to continue with the current DOE policy, which mirrors the recommendation. Following discussion and approval by the faculty, any recommendations arising from the comprehensive MS and PhD review will be implemented.

**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 meets regularly with the College’s Senior Director of Philanthropy to discuss development priorities. Efforts are being made to leverage the initial gift that established the Undergraduate Student Opportunity Fund.

**Analysis of results and reflection:**

To further development efforts, the Department needs to do a better job of staying in contact with alumni.

**Ongoing improvement actions:**

In 2018 the Department hosted its first ever alumni event associated with the CAFE Roundup. To invite alumni to this event, contact information was obtained from the CAFE Office of Philanthropy and Alumni. Many of the email addresses proved to be no longer active. The Department is following up through U.S. Mail in an attempt to solicit accurate

email addresses. A goal for next year is to begin a quarterly Departmental e-newsletter that will be distributed to alumni and friends of the Department.

**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:**

All junior faculty members are supposed to assemble a mentoring committee within their first six months, and are supposed to meet with their committee twice each year. Beyond annual performance evaluations, each junior faculty member undergoes two-year and four-year evaluations focused on progress toward promotion.

**Analysis of results and reflection:**

Each junior faculty member currently has an active mentoring committee, though the frequency of meetings depends on the preference of the junior faculty member. 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. Each junior faculty member will be urged to maintain a regular schedule of meetings with their mentoring committee.

**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, eight graduate students are being funded on grants, for an expected total of \$100,000 in 2017-18, or 35% of total graduate stipend and tuition expenditures. Journal publications and conference presentations by graduate students are high and growing.

**Analysis of results and reflection:**

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:**

A comprehensive review of the MS and PhD graduate programs is underway. Efforts are also underway to increase assistantships to competitive levels. Absent a large increase in external funding for assistantships, this will necessarily reduce the number of assistantships offered. Departmental funds for graduate student travel to professional meetings is more

limited than in previous years, necessitating the development of a competitive internal process for graduate students to obtain travel support.

**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:**

In a recent faculty meeting the Department identified the following (in no particular order) as priorities for future research hires: 1) regional economics/community development; 2) agricultural resource/production economics; 3) marketing/consumer demand.

**Analysis of results and reflection:**

A preponderance of the faculty seem to have come to the conclusion that the Department needs to hire by building on strategically-identified areas of strength rather than simply filling sub-disciplinary holes. This is, in large part, how the three priority areas mentioned above were identified. Regardless of sub-disciplinary focus, future hires will need to exhibit strong quantitative analytical skills and an ability to attract external funding.

**Ongoing improvement actions:**

Efforts are underway to advertise for two new research faculty positions. As a result of a faculty vote, these positions will be 1) and 2) listed above. Priority 3) will be revisited when future openings occur.

**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:**

While perhaps not quite a “strategic Extension plan,” the Extension faculty in 2017 did develop a set of “talking points and actionable items” as part of the process of hiring a new Chair. Extension priorities and coordination of effort are discussed at regularly scheduled monthly Extension faculty meetings. Two recent points of emphasis have been the need for more graduate student involvement in Extension and the need for enterprise-level data from the Kentucky Farm Business Management (KFBM) program.

**Analysis of results and reflection:**

A graduate student representative now regularly attends Extension faculty meetings and graduate students are encouraged to participate in various Extension activities. In the review of graduate programs, Extension faculty are seeking more emphasis on students gaining Extension experience.

**Ongoing improvement actions:**

Extension faculty now meet semi-annually with the Agricultural Economics and Community Development Committee of the Kentucky Association of County Agricultural

Agents to learn about emerging issues and plan Extension programming. KFBM specialists are initiating a process of obtaining enterprise-level data.

**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:**

Some Extension faculty members hire Extension Associates from external funds. The Department does not fund any Extension Associates but has recently transitioned Jonathan Shepherd's responsibilities to have less emphasis on KFBM and more on supporting Departmental Extension programming. A typical teaching appointment for an extension faculty member is 10%, i.e., one course per year which does not seem excessive.

**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:**

Funding for additional staff seems highly unlikely. The Department has instead focused on providing support and training for our existing staff. Student workers also help reduce some of the workload on staff.

**Analysis of results and reflection:**

Technological advances and shifting University priorities have led to a reduced need for staff to perform clerical duties or provide administrative assistance. At the same time, greater needs now exist for staff to perform duties related to business management, information technology, communication, and academic coordination. The Department's current staffing level is usually adequate but there is no cushion, causing occasional job-related stress.

**Ongoing improvement actions:**

Giving staff scheduling flexibility reduces strain from operating with little cushion. The Department continues to encourage staff professional development and advocate for appropriate staff compensation. To meet an immediate need, the Department recently began sharing a communications staff person with the Community and Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky (CEDIK).