

**PROGRAM REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION
PLAN PROGRESS REPORT
Agricultural Economics
2019 - 2020**

- 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: Our freshman enrollment for fall 2020 was 17 which is down from more than 30 in each of the previous three years. This may just be a result of COVID-19 concerns, but it is something that we will watch for the future. 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 – although this has all been impacted for the last several months by COVID-19. 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:

Maintaining our levels of freshman intake remains 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 relatively new freshman-level core-curriculum class (AEC 110) continues to have strong enrollment (32 students in fall 2020). 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. COVID-19 eliminated almost all internship opportunities in the summer of 2020 as well as to Departmental education abroad courses. Dr. Tim Woods continues to advise the Agribusiness Club (in partnership with Ms. Skees) and the case study team. Dr. Roger Brown 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 were all on sustainable and positive trajectories prior to the onset of COVID-19. We look forward to those activities returning to prominence whenever possible.

Ongoing improvement actions: The Department's "Undergraduate Student Opportunity Fund" attempts 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.

Ongoing improvement actions:

We plan to continue with the current DOE policy, which mirrors the recommendation.

- 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 occasionally with personnel from the College's philanthropy office. A philanthropy fund has been established 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. That event was not held in 2020 due to COVID-19. A quarterly Department of Agricultural Economics newsletter was begun in 2019 and is being distributed via email 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 through 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:

During the past academic year, approximately 40% of total graduate student stipend and tuition expenditures were funded by grants. Journal publications and conference presentations by graduate students remain at a desirable level.

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 and having many active junior research and extension faculty who push students to publish.

Ongoing improvement actions:

Assistantship levels have been increased to be more competitive. 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:

Last year 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 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.

Ongoing improvement actions:

Two research/teaching faculty positions were filled effective July 2020. These positions, in the areas of production economics and marketing/consumer demand economics, replace two retirements. Two other positions vacated by retirement were lost due to budget cuts.

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 had been meeting 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. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic those meetings have been occurring monthly via video conferencing. KFBM specialists continue to enhance enterprise-level data collection.

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 does fund a M.S. level Farm Management Specialist who provides extensive 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:

Recent budget cuts eliminated two more staff positions. Funding for replacing lost staff positions 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. The one place that we desperately need additional staff is in business management where the increased dependence on external funding has significantly increased the workload for our one business officer.

Ongoing improvement actions:

A vacant extension support staff position was redefined to have much more emphasis on communications. Nicole Atherton has been in that position for less than a year but has had a tremendous positive impact on Departmental communications (publications, presentations, web site, social media, newsletters, etc.). Her communications skills have been invaluable during the pandemic.