

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Academic Program Review

DEPARTMENT/PROGRAM

Bachelor of Arts in Economics

Master of Arts in Economics

Master of Science in International and Development Economics (IDEC)

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

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CAMPUS VISIT:

April 13-15, 2015

The review team read the self-study written by the faculty in the department; reviewed the curriculum, course syllabi and evaluations; conducted class visits; interviewed faculty, students and staff; and met with the Dean, Associate Deans and other relevant members of the campus community. Prior to their visit, the reviewers were provided with USF's Vision, Mission, Values Statement, the department's self-study and other university materials.

1. How did the external review committee rate the quality of the program – excellent, very good, good, adequate, or poor? How does the program compare with benchmark top-tier programs nationally? Please provide a brief rationale for the external review committee's rating.

The external review team rated the BA in Economics program as "Good," the MA in Economics program as "Very good" and the MS in IDEC program as "Excellent." They noted no significant problems in any of the programs. The "difference in the rankings is primarily due to the uneven concentration of faculty talent across the programs." All three programs have "well-crafted learning goals." The team commended the faculty for the "extremely high level of scholarship." They commented that the MS in IDEC program is "thriving" due to "excellent leadership." The development and growth of the graduate programs may have come at the expense of the undergraduate student learning experience, which is relying too heavily on adjunct faculty.

2. What are the most important general issues that emerged from the external review process?

- The team is concerned about the "relative lack of strategic planning and quality control" for the undergraduate program compared to the graduate programs.
- The department needs at least two faculty lines to meet their research and teaching needs.
- Department faculty should create a strategic plan for hiring additional faculty that will allow them to address student learning in the undergraduate program, branding of the MA in Economics program, and growth in the MS in IDEC program.
- The faculty should conduct a curriculum and requirements revision for the MS-IDEC program, building on changes already in place.
- The department and administration should work together to streamline reimbursement and accounting processes for international research.

3. **What specific recommendations for improving the program's quality has the external review committee made to the Dean?**

The review team provided general recommendations for the department, and suggestions by type of program:

- **General recommendations:**
 - Increase faculty size by adding at least two tenure-track faculty lines and consider adding a two-year "visiting assistant professor" position to bring productive, early career scholars to the department based on interest or need.
 - Engage in more strategic planning for student tuition remissions.
 - Streamline processes for reimbursement and accounting for international research.
 - Examine the courses that mix undergraduate and graduate students by assessing student learning for both groups.
 - Consider comparing assessment data to results from other comparator institutions.
- **Undergraduate Program:**
 - Engage in more strategic planning and assessment of student learning experience.
 - Increase career advising and career development/planning activities for the students, including internship possibilities, career placement information, and career panels.
 - Add more informal, conversational settings for students to discuss research and research experience possibilities with faculty.
 - Consider establishing a chapter of the Economics honor society.
- **Graduate Programs:**
 - Revise curriculum and requirements within the MS in IDEC program.
 - Consider introducing a specific research component to the MA in Economics program.
 - Locate better space for students to study and collaborate.
 - Increase tuition remission flexibility to increase size of the program.
 - Encourage staff participation in the National Association for Graduate Admissions.
 - Make the "math summer camp," recently implemented to increase the mathematical skills of all entering students, a regular feature of the program.
 - Experiment with different pedagogies and strategies to address variability of student skills in the classroom

4. **In the opinion of the external review committee is the program following the University's strategic initiative in that it is;**

- a. *Recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty of outstanding teachers and scholars.*

The reviewers highly praised the teaching and scholarship of the full-time faculty, especially the new junior faculty. The term and part-term faculty members in the undergraduate program are excellent educators. The reviewers expressed concern about the over reliance on term and adjunct faculty in the undergraduate program because many are not active researchers and several do not have a Ph.D. degree in Economics. The review team did not comment on the diversity of the faculty.

- b. *Enrolling, supporting and graduating a diverse student body that demonstrates high academic achievement, strong leadership capabilities, a concern for others, and a sense of responsibility for the weak and vulnerable.*

All three programs have grown in the last five years. The discussion of student diversity focused on the students in the MS in IDEC program. The diversity of the students enrolled in this program appears to be “relatively higher than that of the MA-ECON program.” The team suggested that more flexibility around the fieldwork requirement could help expand and cater to a wider variety of faculty and student interests.

- c. *Providing the environment necessary to promote student learning in the program.*

As stated above, the researchers praised the learning goals and the curricula of all three programs. The undergraduate program “exhibits good sequencing” and the capstone writing experience is a “point of distinction.” The students in the MS in IDEC program progress through the program at a reasonable pace while “targeting various academic and logical challenges.” The team suggested, however, that courses that mix undergraduate and graduate students may not meet learning outcomes for both groups of students, and should be assessed. In addition, they recommended that there could be more interaction between research-active members of the department and undergraduate majors. Finally, more research experience could be added to the curriculum for the MA in Economics program.

- 5. In what way is the program contributing to the goal of making the University of San Francisco a premier Jesuit, Catholic urban university with a global perspective that educates leaders who will fashion a more humane and just world?**

The review team stated that all three programs “aligned extremely well” with the USF Mission. The Mission is best exemplified by the MS-IDEC program, with its commitment to “rigorous study of the problems confronting the poorest and most vulnerable populations of the world.” The program immerses students in the “gritty reality of the poor” and prepares them to be “men and women for others.”

- 6. What is the timetable for the response to the external review committee’s recommendations for program improvement? What can the Office of the Provost do to appropriately respond to the review?**

The next step is for the Dean and Associate Deans to meet with the Department and discuss the action plan based on the self-study and reviewers’ report. Based on the reviewers’ suggestions, the Office of the Provost could assist the program by supporting: (1) faculty hires, (2) curricular and structural changes decided by the program faculty and the Dean; (3) streamlining of reimbursements for international research; and (4) links with the Career Center.

- 7. What general comments or issues, if any, are crucial to understanding the reviewers report?**

No additional information is necessary to understand the report.