



Resource Economics

A department in the College of Natural Resources and the Environment offering the B.S., M.S. and Ph.D. in Resource Economics.

■ The Review Process

This was a standard AQAD review. Reviewers were:

Susan Capalbo (Montana State University)
Jim Opaluch (University of Rhode Island)
Rich Sexton (University of California, Davis)

■ Main Issues

Overall, the visiting team had a “very favorable impression” of the department. It was found to have a “strong and collegial faculty” with “greater gender and ethnic diversity than most of its peer departments,” and with “nearly unparalleled excellence in teaching at all levels.”

Most of the team’s comments centered on the key question posed in the department’s self-study: “How to maintain the commitment to teaching excellence while becoming a more research-productive department?” In addressing this question the team made several observations:

- The team found the department to be “overcommitted in its teaching obligations, given the breadth of its teaching, the relatively small size of its faculty, and the limited use of adjuncts in the teaching composition.”
- Maintaining both an M.S. program and a Ph.D. program is “increasingly problematic,” and the department was urged to “prioritize within the graduate program.” The team observed that the Ph.D. program is “the weakest of the department’s teaching programs,” and the department should “consider the limited opportunities in the present environment to raise the profile of its Ph.D. program.” The team also noted the difficulty of recruiting domestic graduate students to the Ph.D. The possibility of partnering with other institutions in the region was raised. With respect to the M.S. program, the team urged less emphasis on the thesis option.
- Although research records of many faculty are strong, they are “not fully exploited due to heavy teaching obligations.” In order to increase research productivity and “change from a teaching-dominated to a more balanced, teaching-research mission,” “time must be released” from other obligations, and the most productive research faculty must be “provided with greater flexibility.” Suggestions offered by the team included “recognizing the opportunity cost of the last hours of resources devoted to teaching,” investing fewer resources in supervising marginal M.S. theses, allowing some faculty to buy out of one or more classes, and arranging for reduced course loads for junior faculty. The

department should also build a “research culture” by reviewing the reward structure, considering the use of adjuncts in teaching and post-docs in research, focusing on “hitting the first-tier journals more frequently,” and investing in support personnel to create the infrastructure for a successful research program.

- The department’s plan for faculty hiring was found to be “well thought out,” with hiring in Industrial Organization seen as “critical,” and Experimental Economics as “strategic.”

■ **Results of the Review**

The Dean concurred with the team’s assessment of the department’s teaching excellence, noting that “the department’s service teaching load is high, and the impact on faculty time is heightened because of the great attention paid to quality instruction in large lecture as well as smaller class sizes.” He reported that “the department wishes to improve its research productivity without sacrificing the quality of its teaching,” a goal which requires “having the will to do so (which is clearly evident) and a good plan (which is underway).” A committee within the department is considering the team’s recommendations for the M.S. and Ph.D. programs. The Dean, however, said he would “caution against the elimination of the doctoral program—it will certainly be necessary if we are to be competitive in hiring the best faculty in the years ahead, and it will be vital to the envisioned ascendancy in national reputation and distinction of the Department.”

The Dean was supportive of the department’s faculty hiring plan, and especially enthusiastic about hiring in Experimental Economics.