

**PROGRAM REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION  
PLAN PROGRESS REPORT  
Agricultural Economics  
2021 - 2022**

- 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:** For fall 2022 we enrolled 22 1<sup>st</sup>-year students and 9 transfer students. This compares to 15 1<sup>st</sup>-year students enrolled in fall 2021 and 17 in fall 2020. 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 by COVID. Developing and maintaining relationships with potential employers has also been made more difficult by CAFE ceasing to have an annual career fair. Ms. Skees advises between 90 and 100 students (including almost all 1<sup>st</sup>- and 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students), while Dr. Roger Brown, our DUS, advises approximately 15 students. The remaining students are advised by other faculty advisors.

**Analysis of results and reflection:** Increasing 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 core-curriculum class (AEC 110) targeted to 1<sup>st</sup>-year students continues to have strong enrollment (34 students in fall 2022). The course serves partly as a recruiting tool but also provides our 1<sup>st</sup>-year students with 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. Some of Ms. Skees responsibilities with regard to undergraduate experiential learning have been shifted to another staff position. However, the other staff position has recently been vacated (and is currently being re-advertised). So these responsibilities have temporarily reverted to Ms. Skees. Dr. Brown also continues to support and direct undergraduate experiential learning efforts. Ms. Skees is encouraging employers to provide internship opportunities for students. COVID reduced the number of internship opportunities available for the spring and summer of 2022 (though 6 students were able to participate in internships during the spring and 14 during the summer). All Departmental education abroad courses remain cancelled due to

uncertainties regarding COVID international travel restrictions. Dr. Tim Woods continues to advise the Agribusiness Club (in partnership with Ms. Skees) and the case study team. The Agribusiness Club had a highly-successful out-of-state trip to Texas during the spring 2022 semester. Dr. Roger Brown is the faculty advisor to the quiz bowl team with assistance from a graduate student. Dr. Shuoli Zhao will take over from Dr. Brown in the spring 2023 semester.

**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. These activities are gradually returning to prominence as conditions allow. The quiz bowl team remains quite active.

**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. A large endowed gift has recently been received that will fund international professional development opportunities for students, faculty, and staff.

**Analysis of results and reflection:** Staying in contact with alumni and friends of the department is a critical element of departmental philanthropy efforts.

**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 or 2021 due to COVID or in 2022 due to scheduling conflicts. We are currently considering alternative opportunities for alumni events. A quarterly Department of Agricultural Economics newsletter was begun in

2019 and is being distributed via email to alumni and friends of the Department. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the newsletter has been very well received by alumni. Alumni also stay in touch with the department through our social media outlets (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn).

**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 stipend levels were increased during the summer of 2022 to be more competitive. This is the second significant increase in assistantship stipends over the past four years. Departmental funds for graduate student travel to professional meetings are adequate at this time.

**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:** A few years ago 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:** 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. The department has a request under consideration by the college for a new research faculty position in the area of regional economics/community development. A new faculty member has been hired (start date January 1, 2023) to fill an Extension faculty position that was vacated due to failure to achieve promotion and tenure.

**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. A recent point of emphasis has been the need for more graduate student training in, and experience with, Extension programming.

**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.

**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 an 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:** Budgeted funding for additional 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. A time-limited business office staff position was filled in 2021 using non-recurring funds.

**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. Even when fully-staffed (all budgeted staff positions filled), we do not have enough staff to meet current needs (which keep growing due to increased University regulations and reporting requirements). Furthermore, our increased reliance on grant funding greatly increases the staff time needed to perform business operations. Under-staffing and turnover of staff positions creates significant job-related stress for other staff members.

**Ongoing improvement actions:** In late 2019, a vacant extension support staff position was redefined to have much more emphasis on communications. That change proved to be critically important during the pandemic. The recent hiring of an additional business office staff person has been very beneficial, but the position is time-limited since it is paid with non-recurring funds. A second similarly-funded business office staff position is currently advertised. Since the work performed by these individuals is a recurring need, it will be important to find continued funding for these position. One staff position was recently vacated and another is likely to be vacated during the current FY. These positions will be redefined, based on input from faculty and staff, and refilled as quickly as possible.