

A Report on a Self-Study and
Five Year Review of
The Department of Economics
California State University, San Bernardino

Submitted by

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I. Background and Overview

On February 23, 2001 I visited California State University, San Bernardino to conduct an on campus review of the Department of Economics' Programs. At that time I was able to meet extensively with all full-time members of the Department, save Dr. James Charkins who was unavailable. I discussed in detail, individually, all concerns and ideas that each faculty member presented during the course of our meeting of roughly one-half hour duration. I also met with Dean Conley (twice) and Associate Provost Pritchard. Furthermore, I met with a group of students, approximately 10 in number, who are economics majors. In addition I toured the economics lab and observed for some time the computer capabilities and programs available at the lab. My on-campus interviews were preceded by a dinner on February 22, 2001 attended by Dr. Rose, the current chair of the Department of Economics, and Dr. Toruno, past chair of the program.

In addition to the above, I was provided with a copy of the Department of Economics' "Self-Study 2000-2001 " document--a 78 page single-spaced analysis, which I read with care. (In what follows any reference to page "x" will refer to pagination of this document.) I also received and carefully reviewed a binder of materials which included an array of documents pertaining to the program, including vitae of each member of the Department of Economics and course syllabi. And, from Dr. Charkins, I was provided with a copy of a 20 page pamphlet describing the "Economic Strand" of the California History/Social Science Standards prepared by Dr. Charkins for the California Council on Economic Education.

On the basis of the above information and interviews I hereby submit my report as the external consultant for the self study. (All recommended changes will be denoted with a "bullet" •).

II. The Department

The Department is comprised of 8 very capable, experienced and well-trained economists. With one exception, all faculty have considerable experience serving as professors in the CSU system. None are merely looking forward to retirement, all are vitally involved--their focus remains on the further development of their professional careers. All faculty appear to be pleased with CSUSB--their enthusiasm is genuine. The

Department as a group, and without exception, holds the University's administrative cadre in high regard. Such esteem is reciprocated by the administrators I interviewed. It was clear to me that the CSUSB administration is proud of the faculty in the Department of Economics. There is no question in my mind that the Economics Department is a "strong program". I therefore share the views of both the CSUSB economics faculty and the CSUSB administration on this point.

The Department clearly achieves its primary mission, excellence in teaching. In my group interview with the economics students one student forcefully made this point: "All the professors in economics are great teachers." When the student said this all the other students made it clear that they were in agreement. I sought to elicit any complaints or reservations the students may have wanted to express; but there were none. Prior to searching in this direction I had put the students at ease, and I am certain that, they were quite frank with me.

Members of the Department are enthusiastic regarding their professional responsibilities and activities at CSUSB. The faculty are congenial and caring. In a word, they are excellent colleagues. I found that all were respectful regarding the work of other faculty. This is very important, as it is the basis of morale within a Department.

Given the constraints of the CSU system the Department appears to have adequate budgetary support. Department members stated that they had adequate travel funding allowing them to keep abreast of developments in their field by attending and participating in professional conferences and meetings.

After reading the vita of each member of the Department I concluded that the level of publication and scholarly activity is more than adequate for the Department as a whole. Some members put more emphasis on scholarly activities, others on service. It is refreshing to find that many faculty have written editorials for the local newspaper. (Many scholars shun "popular" writing, to their and society's detriment.) Several faculty have written books, while a wide range of professional journals have published articles by the members of the Department. It is noteworthy that all the tenured faculty have continued to publish their research--this indicates a degree of commitment and professionalism which is not always "apparent for full professors throughout the CSU system. (Three years ago I conducted a review of another CSU Economics program. Many of their senior faculty had very little recent scholarly work.) It is most impressive that the Department does not have one or two "stars". Rather, the strength of the Department, in terms of scholarly activity and teaching, appears to be in the breadth, universality and consistency of their performance.

I did not meet with Mary Schmidt. However, judging from the description of her duties, and from my knowledge of secretarial duties as a long-time faculty member and former chair, Ms. Schmidt has responsibilities which are simply too extensive. Although she apparently has some assistance, she should not be expected to coordinate the demands of 18 full-time faculty, numerous part-time faculty and two programs, with over 400 majors.

•I recommend that a professional secretary be hired to assist Ms. Schmidt before the end of the academic year 2000/2001.

While on campus I sought the opportunity to meet with faculty in the Business School to discuss the Business Economics Concentration, but it was impossible to arrange a meeting on short notice. It is apparent from the self-study document that the Department of Economics does not have constant and ongoing discussions with the Business School regarding the Business Economics Concentration.

- I would recommend that an effort be made to open up the lines of communication between the two schools involved in this major. Such an effort might be initiated through a meeting of the two Deans of the schools involved, to be followed up by the designation of two faculty liaisons, one in economics the other in business who would then constitute formalized lines of communication between economics and business. Such two-way, ongoing communication would likely serve to enhance the Business Economics Concentration and raise the likelihood that more course electives available to the business students would be taken in the economics program.

It is a promising sign that the Department will offer a new B.A. track in Political Economy in 2001/22. This will likely prove to be a creative innovation and will address concerns regarding enrollment and majors. More important, however, is the fact that the Department is enthusiastic regarding this change and it will constitute a very good fit due to the fact that a critical mass of the faculty are seriously committed to research and analysis in political economy.

III. The Curriculum

A. The B.A. in Economics

I agree with the Department's assessment that the program is "fairly traditional".

- I would recommend that the Department devise an assessment instrument to determine student opinion regarding the courses in the major.

I am sympathetic to the required core courses, yet I do not intuitively find either Econ. Hist. of the U.S. or International Economics as courses that should necessarily be prioritized over others.

I am uncertain as to the goal of the Math 110 requirement. Can it be waived for those who have adequate High School math, and if not, why? I would presume that a good math background from High School would suffice for Econ. 300 and 302, but perhaps it would not. The Department might want to consider Ec. 104 in lieu of the algebra requirement.

The clusters (7,8,9) do not have any internal logic, that I can see. Why not group in clusters such as "History", "International", "Applied Macro", "Applied Micro", "Political Economy", or, some such.

If the Department is content with Ec. 335 as a requirement, I would then recommend the math-related classes as additional electives.

I wonder if the note urging even more math (24 units) as the gateway to graduate study might intimidate some students. If the Department conducts adequate advising, as it apparently does, there is ample opportunity to suggest preparation for graduate school.

- For better or worse, students today are very career oriented. To meet their career j anxieties and to make the Economics degree more attractive I would recommend an Internship program. I would imagine that in the Inland Empire there would be adequate opportunities to set up internships with industry, finance, government and legal firms.

Rather than approaching the B.A. as an opportunity to produce more economists, I would suggest that the B.A. be recommended for students who would like strong preparation for law school, or for a Masters in

Public Administration and for several other fields including the M.B.A. program and international business and finance.

B. The Business Economics Major

- I would also recommend that the Business Economic Concentration have some further exposure to economic theory, two quarters of theory at the intermediate level does not seem like much of a hurdle for the Business students. Instructors could use some of the more straightforward micro and macro theory texts to expose these students to core ideas in economics. (Perhaps the Managerial Economics course adequately meets these goals).

- I would recommend that the electives for the Business Concentration be broken into two or three clusters which would have a logical grouping (e.g. "International").

C. The Social Science Credential

The Department should remain attentive to the possibilities of attracting majors through this program. There is an obvious need today for well-trained teachers for economics programs taught in the public school. I am not clear regarding the effort made to highlight this aspect of the program. Moreover, I am not aware of the size of the Education program at CSUSB. Based on other campuses, this is likely to be a strong program in terms of size. Has the Department exhausted every opportunity to engage with the Education program to attract teachers to economics?

- I would recommend that the Department devise an assessment instrument, allowing for participation by students and faculty in Education to determine how the Social Science Credential program is perceived and what changes might be made.

Why should the prospective teachers, already attempting to meet the massive course requirements in this area take more intermediate theory than the Business Economics majors? In fact, for High School and lower level teachers I do not see the value of intermediate level theory classes. These teachers would be better served, in my opinion, by broader courses.

- Since most or all of those finishing this program will teach in California, where ethnic diversity is extremely high and incomes are spread across a vast range, I would require Econ. 352.

In addition to Ec. 510, could the Economics program develop another teacher-specific course and substitute this for, say, intermediate micro theory?

D. Course Offerings

The Department is much better able than any outside consultant to determine the frequency of course offering. I would only add that the one negative I heard from students had to do with the difficulty of scheduling classes, particularly to meet graduation requirements. Given this, and the limited size of the faculty, perhaps the Department would consider this point an additional reason to revisit the requirements of the major with the goal of reducing the number of required courses.

I am of the opinion that Introductory Microeconomic is not a prerequisite to Macroeconomics. I have been teaching Macroeconomics for roughly 33 years. I am also of the opinion that microeconomic bores students and for good reason--most of it is boring. I often teach microeconomic, I hasten to add. I have probably taught it for 20 years, as the need arises. Why not reverse the sequencing of the introductory material? This might address the issue of declining majors.

- I recommend that the Department assess this issue with student opinion, including (if possible) students who are not majors and who may have steered away from economics because of their encounter with microeconomic.

Courses such as SSCI might attract majors to the program, but if that is the aim the enrollments are too high. Enrollments are definitely too high in Ec. 104, if this course is designed to attract students to further study in economics.

I believe there is adequate research demonstrating that class size ideally should range from 20-30 students. Limiting class size for the above courses and Ec. 200 might make students feel that they were encountering more personalized instruction--which could encourage students to study economics further. I would challenge the line of argument expressed on page 29, urging increases in the size of the principles courses. I think the Department, for its own good, should find a way to support Ec. 104 without attempting to raise enrollments in 200 and 202. The work professors do in the 200 and 202 is by far the most important teaching available to them. Here they meet students who will be taking their last courses in economics, in most cases. What little they know of economics, through the course of their lives, will be obtained from the instructor in these courses.

- I concur with the statement, page 32, that the Department count Ec. 104 toward the major.

IV. Instruction

The Department states that it does not formally examine teaching and learning. I assume that evaluation of teaching is mandatory for non-tenured faculty, including part-time faculty. And, I assume that post-tenure reviews include a formal evaluation of teaching.

A. Enrollment

I have made several comments and recommendations above which address the issue of enrollment. In addition, I do think it is a creative and excellent idea to send the A students a letter of congratulations, urging them to study more economics. Why not extend the letter to the B+ students? Many good B students get B's because they study for learning, not merely to satisfy an instructor or to achieve a top grade. Many B students are late bloomers.

In addition I would suggest that greater effort be made to work with philosophy and other majors that attract pre-law students. The fact of the matter is that economics is arguably the best preparation for law school. The Department should search for ways to draw attention to the program regarding the advantages of learning economics for pre-law students.

The Department has made a concerted and good-faith effort to address the enrollment issue through a number of creative steps (page 40).

- The Department should consider mandatory advising. Students often find that the advising encounter is a good opportunity to learn more about the program and to alter their perceptions regarding courses, requirements, etc. Most resent the paternalism of mandatory advising, but for many such encounters will be one of the rare occasion to actually visit a faculty member in their office. Faculty should see such encounters are much broader than advising. These encounters are excellent opportunities to learn more about the students and for students to feel more at ease with faculty. Such encounters raise the esprit de core of the majors and minors in economics.

- The Department could investigate the possibility of joint programs with other majors, or joint minor programs.

- The Department should pursue, with the direct assistance of the Dean, enhancing the level of instruction in economics as offered by the M.B.A. program.

- The Department should pursue the creation of an "Economics of Crime" class designed for the criminal justice program.

- The Department should pursue the possibility of cross listing public finance with the political science program, and/or the Masters in Public Administration program.

- The Department should be supported in its attempt to introduce "Introduction to Political Economy" into the GE curriculum.

- The Department has a critical mass of faculty with training and professional credentials of note in the area of political economy. The Department should continue to pursue a new major, not designated economics, in Political Economy. Such a step would , likely attract a group of majors and minors, but would also likely demand an additional hire at the tenure track level.

The FTES per faculty position numbers (page 41) show a dramatic rise. Does this ratio include part-time instructors, or is the "per faculty position" limited to full time? The SFR ratio is somewhat lower than the cohorts. Other CSU SFRs in economics seem to be much too high. Is this because the economics programs are "workhorses" carrying other programs and schools (the case, I believe, where I am located) or is this because economics faculty teach to immense principles courses on some campuses'? My view is that a average SFR of 25.6 is much too high and evidences a tendency to exploit faculty and students in economics programs. I imagine that average SFRs for all programs at other campuses are close to CSUSB's 19.8. Thus, it seems that economics is treated fairly by the administration at CSUSB, but is used to carry lightly enrolled programs (such as engineering) on other campuses.

I concur with the analysis which indicates that enrollments in economics are driven by enrollments in business programs. Business programs have bee hit by lower enrollments at most CSU campuses, and this has impacted most of the economics programs. Fullerton's economics program has been able to counter this trend because they are housed in the Business School and the business majors are encouraged (in some cases required, I believe) to take upper division economics courses. The CSUSB Business School should be encouraged to seek more elective courses from among the many offered by the economics faculty. In particular the Business Cycle and Managerial Economics courses would make a very good fit for business majors. International Business majors should take the International Economics and Multinational Corporation courses.

V. The Faculty

Based on the vitae of the faculty, all members are active scholars engaged in their fields of specialization. The magnitude of their work is impressive and compares favorably with other Economics Departments within the CSU. The faculty, taken as a group, or individually, are impressive.

The program is too dependent on part-time instructors. For the past 3 years nearly one-half of the principles of economics have been taught by part-timers. Part-timers are a risk for a department. Some work hard and effectively, but many have commitments and perspectives which do not serve a department well. Many do not understand the department in which they work. I would draw a strong inference between declining enrollments and rising part-time instruction in the Principles of Economics courses. The department does not offer enough principles courses, and the ones they do offer are saturated with part-time instructors, probably teaching large classes.

Does the Department, across the board, enjoy teaching principles? Are there some faculty who would rather teach their specialties and leave lower division to part-timers? If so, (and I do not know the answer to this) then the Department will have to address the issue in order to solve the declining major problem.

- To the degree that the administration believes the declining trend in majors is an issue, the administration should consider a new tenure-track hire to ensure that fewer principles classes are taught by part-time faculty who have no long-term commitment to the University.

VI. The Students

I have made numerous comments above regarding the students. All survey assessment instruments indicate that the students regard the program as excellent.

VII. Library and Related Resources

I did not visit the library. It is distressing to read that the on-line catalog is often unavailable due to computer problems. This would seem to impact students who have but limited time for library searches. It also obviously impacts the faculty and should be remedied.

I visited the lab and found it to be excellent. The Department has many creative programs running on the computers. The lab is used by many courses, and to good effect.

Temporary classrooms undermine student and faculty moral. The administration should assure that no programs "own" prized classrooms while others are forced to offer a higher portion of their courses in temporary buildings. I do not know whether or not the Economics Department has offered an above average number of courses in temporary buildings. If so this issue should be addressed and remedied.

Faculty offices are more than adequate. No faculty complained of inadequate computers or programs.

VIII. Faculty Governance

The faculty have developed a system of governance which is suitable to their needs. I learned of no complaints regarding governance--the issue was never raised by any faculty.

IX. Extramural Funding

Given the difficulty of attracting grants for faculty who are not in applied fields such as environmental economics or regional economics, the faculty have received an adequate number of grants. One should remember that large grants from the major foundation tend to circulate at prestige universities. The foundations encourage a certain limitation of their scope, at least in economics. Cal State faculty, with the exceptions listed above, cannot be expected to receive many or large grants. Scholars writing on Adam Smith, or even Keynes simply do not have many, or any, foundations interested in their research. The faculty have proven to be very competitive with internal grants. This registers the strength of the Department in research.

X. Perceptions by Others

All indicators suggest the Department has established a very strong profile.

XI. Off Campus Contributions

Five of the eight faculty are highlighted in this section. Their contributions are extensive and impressive. It is likely that the remaining faculty are also somewhat active in this area, although their contributions are not noted. In any case, not all faculty can be expected to be proficient in each and every area. Some are more vested in research, others in service via faculty governance, others through instructional innovation, etc. Given the innate diversity of faculty contributions I would judge this faculty to make more than adequate off campus contributions.

XII. University-wide Contributions

The Department has a solid record in this area and will attempt to offer more courses in General Education.

XIII. Summation of Strengths and Weaknesses

I have commented throughout the above document in many areas, making numerous recommendations. It would be redundant to recapitulate in detail at this point. Readers are encouraged to review the above comments and suggestions because many of the recommendations, while not reducible to the "strengths and weaknesses" dichotomy, do address the issue of how a very strong department can enhance its performance and increase its work efficiency.

In summation I will repeat that the Economics Department is very strong and exhibits no major weaknesses. It is addressing the primary mission of the CSU faculty, excellence in teaching. All indicators suggest that across the entire faculty the quality of teaching is very high. The faculty are conducting research in their specializations, and they are all professionally active at a level which is generally above that of their cohorts throughout the CSU.