

Assessment Report, B.A./B.S. Program in Economics
(October 2004)

Mission and Centrality

The undergraduate economics degree provides a sound and valuable foundation for a variety of careers. Kansas State University economics graduates have gone on to careers in business, government and academia. Our graduates have gone on to receive law degrees, Ph.Ds in economics, Masters of Business Administration, Masters of Public Administration, and other degrees. Every university has an economics department, and the Kansas State University Department of Economics and its undergraduate program are central to the overall mission of the University.

Degree Program and Quality of Faculty

The qualifications, strengths, and productivity of the faculty in economics at Kansas State ensure that the undergraduate economics degree is one of high quality. At least five faculty members have won Stamey Awards for undergraduate teaching excellence in the college of Arts and Sciences, and two faculty members have won the award more than three times. One faculty member has won the prestigious Presidential Teaching Award at Kansas State. One faculty member has won the Advising Award in the College of Arts and Sciences within the past two years. Our faculty are regularly updating and revising their courses and introducing new technology into the classroom. The K-State Online system has enabled even faculty teaching classes with 160 students to give regular homework assignments. Anonymous written comments from our senior majors in economics indicate that our faculty are conscientious, accessible, and generally effective in the classroom. Consistent with the views of our faculty, quality of instruction is an important component of annual faculty evaluations and reappointment decisions. Quality teaching and scholarship are complementary endeavors. Our faculty have published textbooks with such major publishers as Prentice-Hall, Harcourt Brace, McGraw-Hill, and Dryden Press. Research books have been published by our faculty in highly prestigious academic presses such as MIT Press, Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, and Johns Hopkins University Press.

Quality of Students in Economics

The quality of our undergraduate majors tends to be bimodal. On the one hand, economics majors at KSU have been selected as Rhodes Scholars, Truman Scholars, Fulbright Scholars, and nominees for Marshall Scholarships. Our majors have won Phi Kappa Phi Fellowships, Giessen Scholarships to study in Germany, and numerous scholarships to attend graduate school and law school. Among our graduates are students who have received MBA and Ph.D. degrees from such schools as Harvard University and the University of Virginia. Several have gone on to receive law degrees from the University of Kansas and other universities. One of our former undergraduate majors is now on the faculty at the University of California-Berkeley.

On the other hand, we also have a number of majors who have relatively inferior degrees of skill and/or motivation. Some of these apparently have chosen to major in economics because

their GPA's fall short of the cutoff for admission to the College of Business Administration, e.g., 3.0 for admission to accounting and 2.5 for certain other areas of specialization. One of our goals is to increase the quality of the average economics major. There are two avenues through which we expect to achieve this goal in the near future. First, we are striving to improve the quality of instruction in our principles of economics courses. This is being done by training the GTAs that we use in the principles class before authorizing them to teach, and by giving incentives for our top instructors to teach the introductory class. In addition, we have instituted a program of singling out the better students in the principles class and inviting them to the department to hear discussions of current economic topics and visit with faculty. We anticipate that these efforts will increase the demand for the economics major at Kansas State University, as well as increasing the average quality of our majors.

Employer Demand

Employment of students with degrees in economics has grown in recent years, and starting salaries in economics are appreciably higher than average. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Handbook* (March 2004), employment of economics majors is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2012. Because economics is considered excellent training for law school, and because economics majors often rank high on LSAT scores, demand for the undergraduate economics degree may also be influenced somewhat by demand for lawyers, which is also expected to grow at a rate similar to that of all occupations.

Service to the University and Society at Large

By providing a sound grounding in the principles of economics, the Kansas State University Economics Department helps impart knowledge and a way of thinking that is essential to an educated citizenry that must come to grips with a multitude of important economic issues ranging from the crisis in the funding of social security and medicare to the appropriate government response to outsourcing of jobs to the role of the Justice Department in enforcing anti-trust laws. The KSU economics department provides a major service role to the university in generating a very high number of student credit hours. In academic year 2003-2004, student credit hours generated in our Principles of Macroeconomics and Principles of Microeconomics courses alone totaled 12,942. Student credit hours in upper-level undergraduate courses in this same year totaled 6,275. The share of SCH in the College of Arts and Sciences contributed by economics courses has increased appreciably in recent years.

Cost Effectiveness

Clearly, the Economics Department and the undergraduate degree program meet all reasonable standards of cost effectiveness. We have either the highest or second highest ratio of student credit hours generated per faculty member among the more than 20 departments within the College of Arts and Sciences. This is all the more remarkable given that we have a very large graduate program with more than 40 students. Such a program is inherently very labor-intensive. Hence, our department feels that we are significantly understaffed, both relative to other universities, and relative to other departments at KSU.

