Expected Outcomes: Ability to Define Research Objectives

Ability to identify important research problems and formulate well-defined research objectives.

Assessment methods

**Method:** Alignment Matrix

The learning outcomes are assessed through a variety of activities required courses, preliminary examinations, a required research paper, and preliminary and oral examinations. The outcomes are mapped in a matrix to these learning opportunities. All faculty involved in the program provide input on student learning.

**Findings:**

The topics selected by PhD students for their Research Papers are not well aligned with the Department’s research mission, especially in relation to contracts and grants.

**How did you use findings for improvement?**

Starting AY 2012 the Research Paper course will be taught Fall semester rather than Spring semester. Also, time will be set aside for departmental faculty to discuss their research projects.

**Additional comments:**

Moving the class forward to Fall semester will provide incoming PhD students immediate assistance in writing for journals. It will also help them identify a research topic early, which should improve the quality of papers submitted the following July. Setting aside time for departmental faculty to discuss their research projects will provide an opportunity for students to become familiar with the department’s research mission. This will help students in selecting a major professor, which, in turn should help align students research interests with the department’s research mission.

Expected Outcomes: Ability to Contribute to Scholarly Literature

Ability to contribute to the scholarly literature in Applied Economics.

Assessment methods

**Method:** Alignment Matrix

The learning outcomes are assessed through a variety of activities required courses, preliminary examinations, a required research paper, and preliminary and oral examinations. The outcomes are mapped in a matrix to these learning opportunities. All faculty involved in the program provide input on student learning.

**Findings:**

A report from the Auburn University’s Office of University Writing indicated our PhD students needed and wanted more help in writing for journals. The students indicated that the help should come from economics/agricultural economics faculty rather than from the...
How did you use findings for improvement?

Starting AY 2012 the Research Paper course (AGEC 7970) will be modified to place increased emphasis on journal writing skills. Also, at least one class section will be devoted to plagiarism, with an emphasis on how it can be avoided, and why it should be avoided.

Additional comments:

This will address students' expressed desire to have economics faculty help them in developing their journal writing skills rather than the University Writing Center per se. Still, international students and others needing help with sentence structure, grammar, paraphrasing and other basic writing skills will be encouraged to use the Center, as these skills will not be covered AGEC 7970. Devoting at least one class session to plagiarism should improve students' understanding of its meaning and consequences, thereby reducing its incidence.

**Expected Outcomes: Practice Highest Level of Professional Conduct**

Practice highest levels of professional conduct (e.g., in professional activities take responsibility, be accountable, show integrity, have strong ethics, and respect diversity).

**Assessment methods**

**Method: Alignment Matrix**

The learning outcomes are assessed through a variety of activities required courses, preliminary examinations, a required research paper, and preliminary and oral examinations. The outcomes are mapped in a matrix to these learning opportunities. All faculty involved in the program provide input on student learning.

**Findings:**

Plagiarism appears to be endemic, especially in papers submitted by international students. Increased graduate student enrollment (currently 51, up from 30 in 2008) in the face of reductions in teaching/research faculty has increased advising loads. This, coupled with the demands of the Research Paper, has stretched faculty resources to the limit.

**How did you use findings for improvement?**

Starting AY 2012 the Research Paper course (AGEC 7970) will be modified to place increased emphasis on journal writing skills. Also, at least one class section will be devoted to plagiarism, with an emphasis on how it can be avoided, and why it should be avoided. Starting in AY 2012 the written exam given in August for PhD students with a GPA < 3.5 in first-year core courses will be eliminated. Henceforth, the written prelim requirement will be satisfied by receiving a passing grade on the Research Paper. A student who receives a “start over” grade on the Research Paper and who also has a GPA < 3.25 in the first-year core courses will be given the option of converting to a terminal MS, or leaving the PhD program.

**Additional comments:**

Devoting at least one class session to plagiarism should improve students’ understanding of its meaning and consequences, thereby reducing its incidence. The revised research paper requirement will encourage students to take the research paper seriously while at the same time reducing the amount of time and effort faculty have to spend developing and grading exams. It will simplify the review process for the research papers in that all students would...
be on the same time schedule for submitting papers and receiving review comments. Finally, it provides an efficient mechanism for culling weak or unmotivated students early in the program.