

Internal Reviewer Review Report – Economics B.S. and M.S. California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

The purpose of this internal review of the Economics B.S. and M.S. is to provide an unbiased examination of the quality of education and service in the program, and to identify opportunities for improvement and growth. After carefully reviewing the program’s Self Study, we took part in an internal visit on April 23, 2024, with the Economics Department, where we talked with Dr. Bruce Brown (Chair), Greg Hunter (professor), Carsten Lange (professor), Shih-Tang Hwu (assistant professor) and Stephanie Gonzalez (ASC). This report is divided into sections based on the lines of inquiry, and it highlights the strengths, challenges, and recommendations.

Inclusive Polytechnic Identity	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department mission statement includes elements that align with the College’s mission. • The Economics Department is well aligned with the elements of an inclusive polytechnic education identified by the university: In senior seminars and graduate projects, students apply knowledge and skills acquired throughout their coursework to research papers and presentations. The Quantitative Option emphasizes group projects applying mathematical tools to real-world issues, and research assistantships and international study programs foster real-world application of economic theory. Several activity courses explicitly involve students in critical thinking and problem solving, both in groups and individually. Creativity, discovery, and innovation is demonstrated through undergraduate participation in research beyond the classroom, such as in student sessions at the Western Economic Association Annual Conference, and collaborative projects for student assistants in research and preparation of instructional materials. The Economics curriculum emphasizes multidisciplinary perspectives through the integration of different disciplines in their requirements (e.g., Accounting, Communication, Math) and the use of multiple approaches to real world issues, such as environmental issues (e.g., theoretical examination of policies, case studies in Environmental Economics, and empirical analysis of relevant real-world data in Econometrics). Integration of technology is evidenced in the use of statistical applets, R, Stata, Python, and GIS software in several courses, as well as a variety of publisher-based teaching technology used for online problem sets and projects, and in-depth use of LMS in online teaching and some face-to-face courses. Collaborative learning is demonstrated by group projects in courses such as Applied Economic Research and intermediate theory courses, as well as peer tutoring through the Peer Mentor program. Community engagement is prioritized through study abroad programs, guest speakers, and departmental events. The Department ensures students are career-ready through networking events, guest speakers, and scholarship opportunities. We highlight the exchange program with Germany set up by Carsten Lange, in which students enroll in EC 4442, which is connected to 3 Business courses students take in Germany. German students do similarly and enroll at CPP through the International Center. So far, the program has exchanged about 400 students. • Another noteworthy initiative is a networking event to help students connect with employment and internship opportunities. This year, the event not only doubled the number of participating students, but also attracted more alumni
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		from industry. This event resulted in visible benefits, such as an internship opportunity for students and securing funds for a publicist to work 5 hours per week to help communication with students and alumni through social media.
	Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no department level vision and values statements.
	Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop department level vision and values statements to go with an existing department level mission statement and align with the university and College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences level statements.

Department Structure and Organization	Strengths	The faculty is very cohesive, with strong connections to the department and the university. They also maintain a strong connection with the lecturers, who often need to teach upper division and even graduate courses. The conversation did not dig very deep into how work is distributed, but it seems that all faculty members are very engaged into departmental work.
	Challenges	The number of tenure line faculty has shrunk from thirteen in 1999, to five at present. This year the situation is particularly dire, with two tenure-track faculty members on paternity leave. For reference, in 2005 the department had ten tenure-line faculty and 53 undergraduate majors. In 2022 the department had five tenure-line faculty and 166 undergraduate majors.
	Recommendation	Engage in conversations with the Dean's office to ensure searches for new faculty not only to increase tenure density but also to make sure to maintain a service / administrative workload that is equitable and does not exceed the 3 WTUs that are to be dedicated to this component of faculty work.

Assessment	Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The self-study includes a clearly defined Program Learning Outcomes and Student Learning Objectives, as well as a Curriculum Matrix. • Based on the Office of Assessment and Program Review website (https://www.cpp.edu/assessment/college_of_letters_arts_and_social_sciences.shtml), an annual assessment report has been submitted every year.
	Challenges	<p>We identified two main challenges regarding assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the one hand, the Self-study did not include much information about the department assessment efforts because the assessment leader (the faculty member in charge of the graduate culminating experience) was out on maternity leave. The rest of the faculty did not have access to this information. • The annual reports submitted every year include very scarce information, with no report of results and initiatives proposed or implemented to close the loop. Assessment does not seem to follow current practices, either. For example, all three SLOs are assessed every year, instead of only one, which would allow a more in-depth assessment.
	Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With respect to the first challenge, while assessment efforts should be led by one person, we suggest the work be not left to only one person. Including more than one faculty member would make assessment more meaningful to the department, because the results would be shared and perhaps produce closing-the-loop initiatives. In fact, based on the way the faculty talked about the program during our meeting, it is very likely that these conversations are already taking place in the department, but they do not seem connected to the assessment process. In addition, with more faculty members included in assessment, a maternity or professional leave of the assessment leader would not leave the entire department unable to continue the assessment work or to talk about it. • Another recommendation is to keep a departmental folder or an organizational Canvas shell as a repository of assessment materials (e.g., rubrics, artifacts, minutes, annual reports, ...) so that continuity does not hinge on one specific person being on campus. • With respect to the second challenge, we suggest the department work with the Office of Program Assessment and Program Review for support. They would provide good guidance that would make assessment more meaningful, while, at the same time, less heavy and more streamlined (e.g., by assessing only one SLO every year). <p>These challenges and recommendations must be qualified by an acknowledgment that the small number of faculty members would make following these recommendations very challenging.</p>

GI 2025	Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economics’ six-year graduation rates are similar to CPPs, with higher rates for the latest cohort (71% vs. 66.3%). • The department has engaged in initiatives to support student success: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Added corequisite 1-unit activity to support student success with challenging quantitative courses that students struggle with the most (intermediate economics, statistics, econometrics, and applied math). These 1-unit courses provide additional help practicing problems rather simply attending the lecture with and seeing example(s). - Students take 3 prep courses in quantitative analysis, microeconomics and microeconomics taught by same instructor. This ensures consistency across courses. - The department has a very active Economics students club that brings students together and fosters belonging. - Most academic advising is done by the student success center, while the faculty advising work focuses on career paths. The advisors serve as partners to the department, especially chair, in getting the students graduated. The department is very satisfied with the work the student success center. Stephanie Gonzalez (the Dept ASC) also helps with advising but is not officially her job.
	Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four-year graduation rates for economics students are lower than for the university overall—and not narrowing. This is likely due to many Economics students pursuing minors and double majors, which reduces the four-year graduation rates, but increases post-graduation success. For example, a double major in Political Science and Economics is a viable substitute for a Political Economy degree popular at elite institutions and ideal for students considering law, but not available at Cal Poly. Another practical and popular addition to the Economics Major is a Business minor. Although allowing students to extend their graduation time might be an investment in students’ career success, it could be argued that this is not an option to all students, especially those who need financial aid and/or to enter the job market rapidly. • Because of the faculty reduction, the department is no longer able to have the same instructor teach all three prep courses to ensure consistency. • Although the Department is happy with the advising help the CLASS student success center provides, they find the rapid turnover to be a little bit challenging.

	<p>Recommendation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To allow interested students to receive a broader education that encompasses Economics and another area, such as Political Science or Business, without this extending their graduation time, the department could engage in conversations with other departments to create interdisciplinary BAs, such as Political Economy. Another possibility is to create interdisciplinary minors comprising courses in two programs (3 + 3, for example) so that students from both majors can add a minor to their respective BA by only taking three additional courses—in the other program. Of course, the specifics can only be understood by the relevant parties. We merely suggest exploring this possibility with the Dean’s assistance, which we understand is very amenable to facilitate these conversations. • We believe the hiring of additional Economics faculty, as recommended in other sections of this report, could help with GI2025 by (a) allowing the department to consider and work on initiatives such as the one proposed above, and (b) allowing to maintain consistency in the three prep courses in quantitative analysis, microeconomics and microeconomics by these being taught by same instructor. • Finally, we suggest the department bring up the issue of the CLASS Student Success / Advising Center rapid turnover to the Dean’s office, so that the situation can be improved and benefit other CLASS programs, as well.
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<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Graduate Program</p>	<p>Strengths</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The department has worked on the culminating experience to improve graduation rates: they eliminated the culminating exam (100 questions) and now they offer two 6000-level culminating experience classes. The first teaches general techniques (e.g., citations, data) and the second focuses on the project and how to do research. The courses are taught by the same faculty, and they read the projects within the class. • The department is planning to offer badges for skills developed in different courses so that students can show they are doing exemplary work to their potential employers. • The Program is also trying to get higher enrollments. They just submitted a reclassification request so classes can be counted toward STEM to extend training visas for international students (from 1 year to 3 years), as they did in the past. The new Dean is pushing this initiative, and the department is hopeful it will be approved. The STEM classification would also result in more pay for students.
	<p>Challenges</p>	<p>We have limited information on the graduate program, because this section was not written in the draft we read, but during the interview, we learned that, due to limited faculty, the program has started having difficulty offering the courses students need to graduate from the MA program. This fall they couldn’t offer 6000 courses and had to find a work around.</p>

	Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We believe that additional faculty would benefit this area. We recommend the faculty write a strong Graduate Program section in the self-study, so that the external reviewers can better identify the strengths and challenges of the program and make useful recommendations.
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Technology	Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The website is very informative and organized. All faculty uses programs, such as R statistical software, with consistency throughout all coursework so students are prepared with the same platform. The program is free so students can afford it. If they don't have a computer, they can use the virtual lab offered by I&IT with their own device at home, which allows them to see the full Windows computer in cloud at Microsoft.
	Challenges	The department used to do economic forecasting for the Inland Empire, but they had to stop because they lost funding for REMI, a forecasting software. Arrowhead Credit Union donated \$50K to support the software but university had to match. CLASS used to provide funding but at some point, funding stopped. The Economics faculty considers this a to be a huge, missed opportunity for the university to increase exposure potentially leading to endowment and for students to engage in research. In the present, they are using another software, IMPLAN, but this software is less dynamic, useful and attractive to future employers.
	Recommendation	Consider the possibility to use a SPICE grant or an external grant to purchase / support REMI. Discuss with the Dean's office the possibility to offer the necessary funding, and the ability to sustain this type of purchase with the revenues it would produce.

Support	Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
	Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main challenges of the department seem to stem from limited tenure-line faculty, which has been exacerbated by the extended leave of Graig Kerr, a leave that is most likely permanent, and paternity leaves. This has greatly impacted their ability to produce a strong self-study with complete data on assessment and their graduate program.
	Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage in conversations with both the Dean's office to discuss the possibility to receive faculty searches, and the Program Assessment and Review Office to receive guidance on the Assessment process. As recommended above, expanding assessment efforts to more than one faculty member and creating a repository of assessment-related materials, will ensure that the absence of the assessment leader during program review does not impede discussing that data in the self-study. Of course, this might require increased faculty.

Summary

The B.S. in Economics is a strong program, providing students with the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in today's Government and Business sectors. The faculty is strongly committed to the success of the program and seem to work in strong collaboration with one another.

The main challenges stem from the reduced number of faculty, which really struggles when one or two faculty members are on leave, as it has been the case this year. This impedes continuity in the faculty member assigned to teach prep courses, an initiative that had proved to be beneficial for student success. It also causes difficulties to offer graduate courses. Lack of faculty also makes assessment and program review work weaker. We strongly recommend the hiring of additional Economics faculty.

We enjoyed reviewing the Economics program's self-study and meeting with the faculty. We appreciate all faculty for their hard work and dedication to their program and their students. We hope that they receive the STEM designation for their Graduate program, and the potential benefits this redesignation could bring. And we also hope the recommendations made in this report are of help.

Sincerely,

Reviewer 1: Amàlia Llombart

Signature/Date:



Reviewer 2: Amy Gimino

Signature/Date:

