

**Graduate Program Review Appeals Committee**  
**Informational Session: June 26, 2006**

**Applied Economics Ph.D.**

**Program representatives:** Bassam Harik (former chair), William Kern (professor and chair), Susan Pozo (professor), Mark Wheeler (professor and director of graduate programs)

**Program's Appeal Summary**

We reject the former provost's assertions that the Department is unimaginative, unproductive, does not recruit, and relies on mediocre international students.

The Ph.D. program in Applied Economics has been recognized by our national association and by prominent economists for its uniqueness and its quality. The program is unique in its emphasis on empirical methods applied to real world economic problems. The high quality of the program results in excellent "first round" job placements throughout the nation for our graduates. Successful job placements have increased the diversity of applicants and piqued the interest of minority students handpicked by our national association—with two entering the program in the fall. We attract excellent international students from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America, exposing WMU undergraduates to a rich array of cultures and experiences. The large proportion of international students in our program mirrors the national origin mix of students in U.S. economics Ph.D. programs.

The department has used the resources of the university in an efficient manner by producing a steady stream of highly regarded and well recognized Ph.D.s in relatively short periods of time. Our students' average time to completion of the Ph.D. is over a year shorter than the average time to completion for U.S. Ph.D.s in economics. Short completion times are due, in part, to the very close and careful supervision that candidates receive from their faculty mentors. Furthermore, evidence as to the fiscal impact of our program reveals that savings will not arise from termination of the program.

The department is very proud of the high quality Ph.D. program that has evolved. This sentiment is echoed by the positive reviews the economics Ph.D. program earned from the GPR review team, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and the Faculty Senate Executive Committee.

**Committee's Questions \***

1. Imagining a worst-case scenario in which you receive no new resources, no new or replacement faculty hires, and no additional support for TAs, and have to self-fund 100 percent of your growth, what would your program look like three to five years from now?  
Much the same. We'd be doing many of the same things. If we don't suffer serious cuts in terms of financial aid, we'll continue to do a good job. In fact, we'd actually welcome a holding pattern: despite cuts in recent years, we've been able to maintain our enrollment and completion rates and the quality of our student placements.
2. Are your Ph.D. students locals?  
We currently have 25 Ph.D. students, of whom 22 are from outside the Economics master's program. There was a misreading of the data by the provost's team. Our M.A. students are more local, which may explain the error.
3. The GPR team expressed concern about reductions in applications and enrollment. If those figures are accurate, what is driving them?

There has been no drop at all in enrollment. We have the same number of Ph.D. students today as we had in 2001. Applications are down (largely because of the overall reduction in international students), but still above the national average. We had roughly 40 applications this year.

4. Please describe your recruiting policy.  
It's fairly standard for most Economics programs. We rely on the quality of our current students, undergraduate and graduate. We encourage students to publish papers and attend conferences. We work with the American Economic Association to recruit minority students.
5. The GPR team was also concerned about a perceived lack of funding. How are you pursuing external funding?  
We have a more difficult time than the hard sciences, but we're making progress. We hire new faculty with their potential for funded research in mind. Recognizing the importance of external funding, younger faculty are putting out proposals.
6. Lack of breadth was identified as a problem by an external reviewer. Please comment.  
The reviewer wasn't referring to electives or to the overall program. The lack of breadth is in any given year, but we offer other things to make up: students take two of our elective courses in their second year, for example, and they can do an internship in their third year. Part of the department's innovative thinking is about coming up with enough good-quality fields.
7. Where do you think you're going in terms of applied status?  
We discovered over time that the internship model worked well. Some years we have a lot of internships; other years, the students' focus has been different, but we've never really lost that focus on internships. We don't have any trouble finding placements for our students.
8. What was the impetus for the provost's decision to transfer the program to the College of Business?  
We have no idea, unless it was to do with the fact that Haworth had no Ph.D.s.
9. How many Applied Economics programs are there in the U.S.?  
Very few. And to the best of our knowledge, none has our focus on internships.
10. So why aren't people copying you?  
We're brand-new, for one thing. Other departments may well copy us in future, particularly when they see how our graduates are snapped up by employers.
11. Could you give the committee a sense of your junior/senior faculty cohorts' productivity?  
The Ph.D. program has significantly increased the productivity of the faculty, from junior to senior. We still have our senior faculty teach introductory courses. Also, our graduate students do a wonderful job of teaching—they are not mediocre.
12. How would you sum up the basis for your appeal?  
It's important to consider that we were told that this was all about reallocating money and saving money. We've done a study and we can't see that very much money at all will be saved by eliminating this program. Keep in mind that there is no support for our M.A. students at the moment. If we end up only offering an M.A., the University would still have to support those students.

\* *Q&A text is not verbatim*