

Expedited Program Review: Economics

On October 10, 2019, the Provost asked the Social Science department to reflect on the viability of the “BASS Economics Program,” and the continued need for this program at UAS, given perceived enrollment declines and relatively low numbers of degrees awarded.

An Element of Interdisciplinary Degree Curricula

Before discussing the costs and benefits of our economics concentrations and UAS’ approach to providing economics curriculum over the years, we want to emphasize two important points:

First, contra the language of the Provost’s request for a special program review, UAS has no economics “Program,” nor do we have Economics “majors,” just as we have no major or degree program in History, Anthropology, Political Science, Sociology or Psychology. Instead, we offer a single Social Science major through the Bachelor of Arts in Social Science. Like these other Social Science disciplines, economics faculty at UAS have historically sat in the Social Science department, and have delivered courses that serve students in the BASS and a number of other majors.

Second, perhaps because of the interdisciplinary nature of UAS’ degrees, we continue to struggle with problems of institutional effectiveness (IE) data quality. The provost, in her request for a special program review, cited data that we believe to be inaccurate; namely, that we have only awarded degrees to three economics students since 2010, and that we have an average number of four “majors” over the last five years. Our records show different numbers. First, BASS exit interview data indicates four graduates since 2015 with concentrations in Economics; we do not have records back to 2010, but we believe the correct number of BASS graduates with an Economics concentration is substantially greater than 3. The likely reason for the discrepancy is a result of institutional effectiveness data which only counts graduates’ primary BASS concentration—it is common for students to study economics at UAS as a secondary concentration. After including secondary concentration students, Economics concentration students in the BASS look as follows:

AY	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Primary	4	4	2	2	4
Secondary	8	15	12	13	12
Total	12	19	14	15	16

It is no secret that Economics has historically been the smallest of our concentrations, but we appear to have several times the number of Economics concentration students suggested by the Provost’s memo.

Support for Core Curriculum and Important Programs

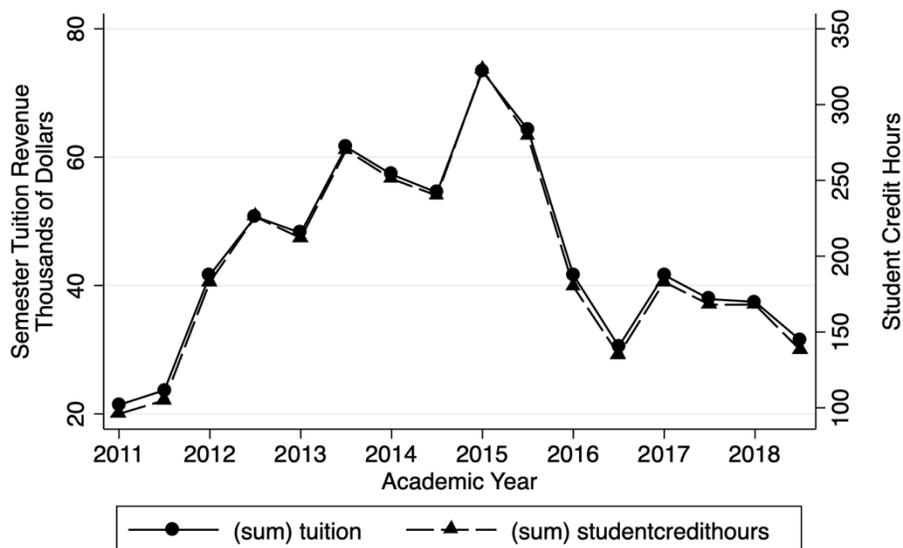
More than most faculty at UAS, our economics professors provide significant, and important curricular support to a number of degree programs. Economics courses are degree requirements for a large number of academic programs at UAS, including our occupational endorsement in Financial Institutions (requires ECON S201 Introduction to Microeconomics), the AAS in Business Administration (requires ECON S201 Principles of Macroeconomics and ECON S202 Principles of Microeconomics), the Bachelors of Business Administration (requires ECON S201 and ECON S202), and the BA in Fisheries and Ocean Sciences (requires ECON S202). Economics courses also satisfy requirements in Pre-Nursing certificate (ECON S100 Introduction to Economics), the certificate in Small Business Management, additional requirements in the BA in Fisheries and Ocean Sciences, the three Geography, Environmental, and Outdoor Studies concentrations, and the Bachelor of Liberal Arts, along with the BASS. Finally, the GERs include three economics courses, including ECON S100, ECON S201 and ECON S202.

Without economics faculty, UAS students will be forced to rely on courses delivered through UAA to complete their degree programs. Relying on courses taught at other universities creates barriers to completion for our students, likely leads to some retention and completion problems, and leads us to lose tuition revenue to other MAUs.

The Impacts of Economics Faculty Losses

The decline in economics SCH enrollments after 2015 is a cautionary tale which demonstrates the impact of faculty departures on student credit hour enrollments and tuition revenues. To put it simply, students cannot enroll in courses which UAS is unable to offer, and we can't offer

**Economics Student Credit Hours and Tuition Revenue
By Term for 2011-2019**



courses when we don't have appropriately qualified faculty.

In the period after UAS-Juneau hired economist Brian Vander Naald in 2012, we saw substantial increases in economics enrollments. Dr. Vander Naald and later Ketchikan-based economist Ann Spehar saw increasing economics enrollments from 2012 to 2015, a

trend that might have continued after 2015. However, when Dr. Vander Naald left UAS for another position and the Social Science department was not permitted to hire a replacement.

Subsequent declines in student enrollments have been dramatic, and, we believe, have led to substantial declines in UAS tuition revenue. Because such a large proportion of our ECON SCH enrollments are a result of courses required in our various certificates and degrees, it is unlikely these enrollments have been absorbed by other UAS classes—more likely students have enrolled in similar courses offered by the UAA economics department.

If UAS fails to permit the Social Science department to hire an Economist with the coming departure of Ann Spehar in Ketchikan, or Anthropologists to replace Erica Hill or Brandon Chapman, or Historian Robin Walz, it is very unlikely that the growth in Social Science majors UAS has seen for nearly the last decade will continue. Instead, we will likely see further declines in SCH enrollments and tuition revenues in those areas. It is not implausible that we could experience a collapse in BASS enrollments similar to the dramatic decline in enrollments we have seen in the BLA in the last several years; as the second-largest Baccalaureate program at UAS, such a collapse would have dramatic, negative consequences for the institution as a whole.

The Future of Economics at UAS

The Social Science department understands that UAS is in a challenging fiscal environment. However, we worry that responding to temporary crises with permanent institutional changes—for example, responding to three-year budgetary reductions by permanently eliminating whole disciplines—will harm our degree program and the University as a whole for a very long time. There is every reason to believe that this crisis—though real and significant—will be short-lived and in some ways quite predictable.

We would encourage UAS administrative leadership to consider the long-term implications of the elimination of academic disciplines like economics and to consider short-term solutions that will provide us flexibility over the long term.

Specifically, we would suggest that UAS be permitted to hire a single replacement for Ann Spehar and Brian Vander Naald; over the short term, a single position, located in Juneau, would allow us to deliver a mix of on-campus, blended, and online-only courses that would serve the needs of the BASS, BLA, Geography, Fisheries, and Business programs, among others. The enrollment figures presented above strongly suggest that there is sufficient demand for economics courses at UAS to more than compensate for the salary and benefits of a single professor.

We would prefer that this single position be tenure-track and tripartite, which will allow us to attract stronger candidates and generate research revenues. We would, as we have proposed in the past, hire a heterodox and/or interdisciplinary Economist in subfields such as behavioral or environmental economics, political economy, or economic history. Depending on the nature of the candidate selected, this position might also serve the needs of students in Anthropology, Psychology, Political Science, History, Geography, Environmental Studies, and other fields.

If such a hire is implausible, we would suggest that UAS hire a bipartite Economist, based in Juneau, who could teach online, on-campus, and using hybrid teaching methods. We view this approach as less desirable because we believe a tripartite position will be more attractive to candidates capable of rebuilding our economics curriculum at UAS.

Our third preference would be to leave UAS' economics line unfilled until 2022-2023 but not eliminate the line itself and rely on adjunct hires in the meantime. We could then hire a tripartite

professor of economics to rebuild our economics curriculum after period of budgetary reductions. This approach is less desirable because adjunct faculty will likely be unwilling and unable to maintain or rebuild our economics discipline.