January 5, 2018

Members of the Department of Economics, AYSPS External Review Team

Dear Review Team Members:

Thank you very much for agreeing to serve as reviewers for the Department’s Academic Program Review. We sincerely appreciate your willingness to participate in this process which seeks to help us make important strategic decisions on behalf of the Department in the context of Georgia State University’s goals and those of the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies. We look forward to your insights and recommendations.

The Department’s self-study committee has provided a detailed account of the status of the Department and includes a set of recommendations for furthering the success of this unit. The committee’s members, Barry Hirsch (chair), Andrew Feltenstein, Garth Heutel, Grace O, Vjolca Sadiraj, and Yongsheng Xu, did a great job of assessing the Department and demonstrates the important role that the Department plays in our academic and outreach programs. The Committee was able to tie many of their findings and recommendations to the strategic goals of GSU and AYSPS.

Your packet includes the Department’s self-study report, the GSU Strategic Plan, and the AYSPS Strategic Plan. As a backdrop to your review, I would like to highlight a few features of the Department and the environment in which we work. The Department of Economics is the largest academic department in AYSPS and is the only economics department on campus, thereby serving as a public resource to the entire GSU community as well as to the Andrew Young School. It is a well-regarded department as noted in the self-study, and I believe its success lies in the focus on a specific set of sub-disciplines as outlined in the self-study and Chair’s report. Applied microeconomics is the hallmark of the Department and serves as a natural conduit for multidisciplinary research across other colleges at GSU and beyond, including other universities, non-profits, and governmental agencies.

The self-study outlines a set of goals and objectives, some of which call for additional resources. There are a few sources available for these resources, which is an important consideration when we discuss action items: 1. Redirection within the School 2. Success in the University’s Next Generation Initiative, which is a competitive program aimed at furthering areas of strength and excellence in trans/interdisciplinary research, and 3.Externally funded grants and contracts. In general, I agree with the goals of the self-study and I look forward to the review team’s assessment of the Department and its goals. I request that you consider the following questions and issues as you perform your review and again, thank you for your time.
Department Goal 1: Improve retention and progression to graduation of our diverse undergraduate majors while increasing and strengthening college-career pathways.

- Are there new innovations in assessment that provide useful information early in a student’s career?
- The Department suggests consideration of adding new prerequisites—is it your experience that this will affect time to completion of degree? What is the discipline norm regarding pre-requisites?
- Your thoughts about modes of delivery (flipped classrooms, on-line learning, etc.) would be very helpful as we navigate new trends.
- We are also very interested in your ideas on how to reach students early in terms of career planning—including potential graduate school enrollment. We have a very diverse student body with many first time college students and students who work part or full time. Have you found innovative ways to reach these students to discuss long-term plans?

Department Goal 2: Restructuring the MA programs to better serve contemporary graduate students.

- What is your opinion on the right way to assess learning outcomes at the MA level? In that vein, how expansive should those outcomes be given our population of MA students (largely students who are working and/or are international)?
- What trends do you see in MA level education? We have had some discussions of increased relevance of analytics, internet of things, and artificial intelligence and I am curious regarding your thoughts of bringing those changes in our economy into the classroom. These “future” thoughts are relevant to the Ph.D. and undergraduate programs as well.
- Are modes of instruction changing for MA programs? Would we be serving more students effectively in on-line courses and programs?
- Are there successful models of translating MA level economics learning and thinking into career? How important is an internship model? Are there other ways to connect the classroom to career for MA students through (for example) shorter courses, plunge exercises, weekend retreat classes, etc.?
- Should we provide some basic courses in methods across disciplines in YSPS or with other departments in the University to make more use of scarce resources? Do you know of programs that do that successfully?

Department Goal 3: Furthering strengthening of the Ph.D. program

- The issue of graduate stipends has been a big source of discussion. Can you help advise us regarding a market rate for graduate stipends? Are there innovations in dealing with the additional cost of fees and health insurance?
- Is our Ph.D. program about the right size given the size of our faculty?
- Do you have insights regarding how we can increase/change our marketing to access quality students?
• We have a successful Ph.D. in policy offered through our department of Public Management and Policy (PMAP). Students might take classes across econ and pmap, but that is not heavily promoted. In your opinion, can we leverage the policy orientation of the school and these resources better?

Department Goal 4: Continue building and retaining a world-class research faculty.

• I am very curious about the norms for faculty workloads. Do you see a trend toward 2-1 teaching loads for research faculty? If so, any thoughts on funding that model at a state institution?
• We have not had the success in diversifying our faculty that we would like to have. I am very interested to know if you have suggestions as to how we might be more successful in terms of race and gender.
• Would it benefit the Department to have a consistent post-doc position? I would like to know your experience with post-docs—do they add to the life of the department? Do they help the reputation of the department?
• How successful is the faculty interaction with our centers? Do you see this as an important distinction of AYSPS in attracting faculty and supporting externally funded research?
• How important do you view externally funded research for senior faculty?

Sincerely,

Sally Wallace, Interim Dean
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Director Fiscal Research Center
Andrew Young School of Policy Studies
Georgia State University