

Program Review 2021-2022

Economics

Created on: 08/30/2021 09:37:00 PM PDT
Last Modified: 01/21/2022 10:21:21 AM PDT

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General Information (Program Review 2021-2022)

2021/22 Program Review

2021/22 PROGRAM REVIEW FORM

Form: 2021/2022 Program Review (See appendix)

Reference Section

MESA2030 COMPREHENSIVE MASTER PLAN

ROADMAP TO MESA2030: STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2026

MESA DATA DASHBOARDS

Requests Forms

REQUEST PORTAL

Appendix

A. **2021/2022 Program Review (Form)**

Form: "2021/2022 Program Review"

Created with : Taskstream

Participating Area: Economics

Date submitted: 12/02/2021 3:53 pm (PDT)

2021/2022 Program Review

(REQUIRED) Name of Lead Writer and Manager/Service Area Supervisor

Name of Lead Writer : Xiaochuan Song

Name of Manager : Monica Romero

(REQUIRED) In what ways (if any) did changes to an online/remote modality due to COVID-19 impact student success and equity in your area/program? Please provide evidence.

In March 2020, all face-to-face courses offered in our economics program have been converted to online format, which has been proved very successful. Before the pandemic, we offered half of our courses online and half of them face to face for many years. For most faculty, the transition has been smooth, especially for our 3 contract faculty who have been teaching online over a decade, the transition to online has been nearly seamless. We have not experienced major disruption and decrease in enrollment, actually, all online courses have been filled faster since then with a clear pattern of decreasing drop rates and increasing retention rates, as well as rapidly increasing success rates.

The strong performance of our program during the pandemic has been demonstrated by the following robust evidence. Previously, our success rates, while strong when compared to the college as a whole, tended to have been lower in spring-fall than they had been in intersession-summer (when many 4-year college students take the classes at Mesa). This trend did not play out in the 2020-2021 academic year as we had an 86% success rate in fall 2020 and 83% success rate in spring 2021, which are equal to or very close to the winter intersession and summer success rates during the same academic year. Our overall 77% success rate is well above our school 71.3% success rate, as well as our college's 73.2% success rate. Our program retention rate is well above 93%, with fall 2020 the highest at 96%, spring 2021 the second highest 94%, both beating the intersession 2021 93% retention rate. We have successfully reversed the historic cycle. If we exclude one outlier: Econ 220, which has only 31% success rate and 38% retention rate in spring 2020, our program success rates and retention rates are even higher.

We attribute our remarkable success to the following 4 factors: First, our faculty worked extremely hard to help out our struggling students during the crisis and many of us have been working 10/7 online (at least myself). Second, our program has accumulated so many years successful online teaching experiences and we have been well prepared for the sudden change. Third, our management team has implemented a well-functioning strategic planning and scheduled a student-centered online course structure. Finally, the most important factor, online education by nature better serves our community college students' population with diverse academic, socioeconomic, and ethnic backgrounds, especially those students who are underprepared during the pandemic, as well as those highly-motivated students who enjoy academical challenge.

Unfortunately, our program shows some equity gaps with low success rates of African

American and Latinx students' populations, which is typical for economics major, reflecting our national pattern, even though we are doing better than the national average in this area. A tremendous amount of literature in this active research area emerged in recent years, exploring its socioeconomic, cultural and historical roots and some possible solutions or remedies, such as hiring more minority faculty as a role model to match students' diverse population, which is beyond the scope of this review.

The good news is: the gender gap of our program has been reversed with female success rate 78.1%, passing the male success rate 76.2% in the current academic year. A possible reason for this reversal is that online education may better serve female students due to its built-in program flexibility, which effectively helps many working/studying from home moms better balance their career-family trade-off, alleviating 'motherhood penalty and fatherhood premium'. We are hoping this trend will continue with more online courses offered many years to come.

(REQUIRED) What practices has your area/program implemented since the last program review cycle that you would like to improve/continue? Identify impacts on student success and equity.

The most important practice our program has implemented since the last program review cycle is the transition from half of our courses online and half of them face to face modality to online/remote only modality, which we would like to improve and continue. The overwhelming positive impacts on student success and equity have been summarized in our answers to the previous question. However, the imposed back-to-campus mandate in this coming spring semester without considering its possible adverse impact on our program is deeply troubling, which we will discuss further in the last question.

(REQUIRED) What practices has your area/program implemented since the last program review cycle that you would like to change/discontinue? Identify impacts on student success and equity.

As mentioned above, a careful data analysis reveals one outlier: Econ 220, Environmental Economics. We offered this course only 3 times since it was created and introduced a few years ago. The success rates of this course have been astonishingly low: 35% in spring 2018, 47% in spring 2019, 31% in spring 2020 and the grand total is 38%. The course retention rate in spring 2020 is only 38%. The equity gap of this course for Latinx students' population is -41.7%. Apparently, this course considerably drags down our program, as well as our school overall success/retention rates and widens our program equity gap.

Professor Arnold took a sabbatical leave to create this course a few years ago. The subject, of course, is overwhelming important and it is one of my personal favorite research topics. However, as a decent Econ class, it requires at least a 300 level intermediate microeconomic analysis as a prerequisite. I simply cannot image how a rigorous cost-benefit environmental analysis could be conducted without introducing some fundamental concepts, measures, at least a workable analytical framework first, such as indifference curve, budget set, consumer surplus, producer surplus, public goods defined as no-rival in consumption and no-excludable in provision with associated positive vs. negative externalities. To my best knowledge, no

community college ever offers this course at 200 level without 300 level intermediate microeconomics and econometrics as prerequisites. A simple analogy is, how could you offer a Real Analysis class which should be at least a 400 level math-major core course (at community college?) without a rigorous 300 level intermediate calculus as a prerequisite?

I candidly expressed my opinion against offering this course whenever it became an agenda at our department and school meeting and I believe, our department chair, Mark, who is a field expert, agrees with me over numerous discussions. Unfortunately, approved by Mesa Program Review Committee, Academic Senate, and Mesa Sabbatical Leave Committee, this new class has been added to our program. Now, Professor Arnold retired and no one else in our department is capable of teaching this Becca-only class. As far as myself is concerned, even I were a Nobel Economics Prize winner specializing in environmental economics, I am simply not able to turn a rigorous 400 level upper division course into a 200-level community college course.

Since no one is able to teach this course now plus Professor Arnold has never completed the Course learning Outcome assessment of this class as she promised numerous times, we hereby request to deactivate this class soon to remove the hurdle on our way towards completing our DOC work.

(REQUIRED) What college-wide practices implemented since the last program review cycle have affected your area/program positively or negatively? Identify impacts on student success and equity.

The main college-wide practice implemented since the last program review cycle is the transition to distance learning. The positive impacts on our student success and equity have been summarized in our answers to the previous questions. Nevertheless, the next spring back-to-campus mandate to meet the 67% threshold for EACH INSTRUCTOR rather than each program or school without considering the nature, the history, especially the current status of each program is deeply troubling. The ultimate goal of education is to provide a learner-centered, effective teaching-learning environment to better prepare our students to meet the challenge of the 21st century. This one-model-fits-all administrative-centered mandate may adversely impact our program and defeat our hard-won success over a decade, possibly reducing our success rates, retention rates, and widening our program equity gap in the next program review cycle.

With that being said, we believe, our program schedule should be evidence-based and program specific, meeting the needs of Mesa community diverse academic, socioeconomic, and ethnic population during the pandemic. The goal is supposed to serve the best interest of our students instead of putting political consideration or contractual obligation first. We are concerned that the current deeply politicized mask/vaccination divide, unavoidable and costly, may inflict some further frustration and confrontation in those mandate face-to-face classes, reversing our program progress and moving us down to a wrong direction.