

SUBJECT REVIEW REPORT

**DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS**



**FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE
UNIVERSITY OF RUHUNA**

27th to 29th March 2006

Review Team :

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1. Subject Review Process

Subject review process evaluates the quality of education within a specific subject or discipline. It is focused on the student learning experience and on student achievement. It is designed to evaluate the quality of both undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. However, the responsibility for quality and standards lies within the institution itself, since it alone has the powers to control and to change existing practices.

Review process was conducted according to the guidelines given in the quality assurance handbook for Sri Lankan universities, published by the CVCD and University Grants Commission in July 2002. The department of Agricultural economics submitted a self evaluation report consisting of ten sections, namely: aims, learning outcomes and programme details; students, staff and facilities; curriculum design, content and review; teaching, learning and assessment methods; quality of students in relation to recruitment, admission, student progress and achievement; the extent of student feedback; external education programmes and research; peer observation; skills development; and academic guidance and counseling. The quality of education was reviewed according to the aims and learning outcomes given in the self evaluation report.

The following eight aspects of education were reviewed at the subject level:

1. Curriculum design, content and review.
2. Teaching learning and assessment methods.
3. Quality of students including student progress and achievements.
4. Extent and use of student feedback, qualitative and quantitative.
5. Postgraduate studies.
6. Peer observations.
7. Skills development.
8. Academic guidance and counseling.

The review team visited the department from 27th - 29th March, 2006.

The evaluation of eight aspects was based on:

- Meetings held with the Dean, Head of department, academic staff, non-academic staff, undergraduate students representing all four years.
- Observation of department and other facilities of the faculty (library, computer unit, audio visual equipments, lecture rooms, farm etc.).
- Observing teaching classes.
- Reviewing documents available at the department.

Each of the eight aspects was judged as good / satisfactory / unsatisfactory, noting the strengths, good practices and weaknesses in each. Considering the judgment of the eight aspects, an overall judgment was given as confidence / limited confidence / no confidence.

2. Brief History of the University and the Department

The University of Ruhuna was established as a university college in 1978. It was converted to a full fledged university in 1984. At present the university has 6 faculties, namely, Faculties of Agriculture, Engineering, Humanities and Social Sciences, Medicine, Management & Finance and Science. The Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Ruhuna is located at Mapalana, Kaburupitiya. The Faculty of Agriculture consists of 6 departments. They are: Departments of Agricultural Biology, Agricultural chemistry, Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Engineering, Animal science and Crop Science.

The mission of the Faculty of Agriculture is to develop human resources and technology to cater to contemporary and future needs of the agricultural sector, to advance and disseminate knowledge and to provide advice and guidance in the field of agriculture for sustained economic development.

The faculty offers four year B.Sc. (Agriculture) degree programme for the students who gain direct entry to the faculty on the basis of their performance at the GCE (Advanced Level) examination.

The students may specialized under different departments after 6 semesters of general study, followed by two more semesters of specialized study and research and thesis writing. The annual intake of the Faculty is 125. The important fact about the package of knowledge offered by the department of agricultural economics is the emphasis laid on the understanding of the farmer and his environment .During the final year the student depending on his/her performance and choice will select a subject in which he/she will specialize for a period of two semesters. The department offers specialization in two fields such as Agricultural economics and Farm management, and agricultural extension

About 38% of the students in the faculty in each year specializes in the department of Agricultural economics .The number of courses offered during the first three years by the department is seven, accounting for 480 hours. Two courses are offered during the 4th year, semester 1, accounting for 210 hours.

Students follow research project during the entire second semester of the 4th year. The department has 8 permanent academic staff members and 2 temporary staff members, of which 5 permanent members [acquired their doctoral studies from foreign universities] are pursuing their doctoral studies in foreign universities. The Department consists of a Professor, four senior lecturers and three lecturers. It has 3 non-academic staff members, one competent Technical officer and two committed laborers.

The Department has a separate up-stairs building. It has two lecture theaters and one air conditioned auditorium. The faculty computer unit has 33 computers for 600 students and the faculty library has about 20,000 books. The faculty lecture rooms are sufficiently equipped with audio visual aids such as blackboard, whiteboard and an overhead projector. Only the auditorium that is used for lecturing purposes has multimedia facilities. The department has no audio visual centre which is essential for a

department that teaches Agricultural extension programmes. Faculty is provided with internet facilities.

3. Aims and Learning Outcomes

3.1 Aims

The department of Economics was established in 1978 as a prime department of the faculty to encourage and provide facilities for undergraduate study and research, in keeping with the needs of the agricultural development and extension.

The department aims to provide;

3.1.1 Theoretical and practical knowledge in all related areas in agricultural economics and extension in order to make students fully competent in the discipline.

3.1.2. Comprehensive intellectual background to enable students to undertake research in all major branches of agricultural economics and extension.

3.1.3 The departmental approach is to provide a technical based social science education & training, research and outreach program with a problem-driven and problem-oriented character, and a focus on knowledge transfer.

3.1.4 The aim of the programs of the department could be described in terms of competencies in scientific and practical skills in technical, economic, environment as well as social aspects in agricultural sector that students must acquire as a result of a highly interactive process.

3.1.5 The extensive research base enables the department to meet the urgent needs for expertise in agriculture, the food industry and natural resource management.

3.1.6 Besides generating knowledge, the department sets great store in the dissemination of knowledge through many outreach programs.

3.1.7 The students learn to be aware of their accountability to society, to tackle problems systematically, to take initiative, to be creative and independent, and to function well in a multicultural environment.

Agricultural Economics & Farm Management

3.1.8 The program focuses on the food chain and its environment in the field of economic studies through research-oriented approach.

3.1.9 Aim is to provide the methodological insight, analytical capability, and theoretical and empirical basis.

Agricultural Extension

3.1.10 Produce skilled professional who understand the social, technological and communication aspects of innovation processes, and disseminate the knowledge which would apply in a variety of contexts in the agricultural sector.

3.2 Learning Outcomes

Micro-economics & Macro-economics

- * Microeconomic and Macroeconomic theories are studied and applied for socio-economic analysis related to agriculture and agribusinesses.
- * The central issues are approached from both microeconomic viewpoint to obtain insight into the behavior of individuals and group of individuals and from sector and macroeconomic viewpoints to consider the consequences of options and choices on the development processes at regional and national levels.

Development Economics and Agricultural Policy

- * Able to understand the development problems of the country and the various development options.
- * Able to analysis of the economic and policy environment of the agri-food chain, addressing issues concerning the agricultural sector, trade and related areas.
- * The students are prepared to understand institutional reform, new technologies for social and economic purposes, and formulation and application of policy.
- * Able to link social, cultural, economic and institutional aspects and the design of technology and policy in agriculture.
- * Learn to focus on consumer and household behavior, their lifestyle and trends, and consumers view in production process as the agri-food chain is becoming more and more consumer-oriented.
- * Use theories to analyze consumer behavior in view of developing marketing strategies and knowledge and insight into the interrelations between government policy and consumer behavior.

Farm Management and Agricultural Extension

- * Improve the analytical knowledge and skills of Agricultural Economics and Extension.
- * Improve the ability of persons to make decisions concerning economic activities, especially under uncertain situations.
- * Study to combines detailed consideration of the underlying principles and processes from a natural science perspective with social and economic studies.
- * Learn about the role of various forms of knowledge in processes of change and innovation.
- * Study the role of communication in individual and collective change process.
- * Able to link social-science insights to technical knowledge in order to enhance the future professional experiences in various institutional settings.

Farm Practice course

- * Study the system approach of different aspects of plant and animal production at various integration levels ranging from crop and herd to farm and rural area.
- * Improve creative thinking, analysis and designing of sustainable farming systems and marketing systems and understanding management options for sustainable farming.
- * Able to concentrate on the management process including basic management topics and management accounting.

- * They learn about Rural Sociology and Rural Development that focuses on processes of social transformation and generate problems with multi-dimensional nature.
- * Students learn to conduct holistic, integrated research, including appropriate evaluation methodology, and participate in research projects involving in farming systems or rural development, and write a report.
- * The students acquire the skills of planning and conducting field studies, data handling and analysis and report writing. Moreover, students are allowed to grasp the realities of the peasant life.

Advanced Course

- * Students learn much about practical experiences of eminent scientists and intellectuals in agricultural sector thorough the visiting ***lecture program***.
- * Students acquire the skills to analyze complex problems in agriculture and society in preparation for the ***thesis research***.
- * Students may base their thesis and spend in an institute which involves in the food and agricultural research or industry in order to acquire real practical experience under the working atmosphere.
- * The thesis-research entails writing a research proposal and a thesis which offers students the opportunity to apply their newly acquired insights to a concrete situation.
- * The student will learn to deal with a research problem independently. This will involve, understanding the problem, choice of the appropriate methodology of studying the problem, organizing field work, analyzing data, application of statistical techniques, writing a research report and the presentation of research findings. The students will have a presentation in front of the staff and students in the department. Their ***presentations*** take the form of a seminar followed by the ***oral examination***.
- * Moreover, students are also encouraged to ***publish their work*** at national academic sessions as well as at international sessions.
- * Graduate who in the specialization of the department are well equipped for academic-level or executive-level positions in the public sector, private companies or non-profit organizations.
- * They have career prospects as Economists, Extension Officers, Managers, Research Officers, Teachers, and consultants in business, agribusiness or public administration.

4. Findings of the Review Team

4.1. Curriculum Design, Content and Review

The students follow a general programme during the first 3 years, followed by a specialized programme in the fourth year. The academic year consists of two semesters. During the first three years, the Department of Agricultural Economics offers 7 subjects to provide the required basic knowledge. During the 4th year, compulsory courses are offered for specializing students to enhance the theoretical and practical knowledge. The entire second semester of the 4th year is allocated for research project and the thesis.

This gives an opportunity for undergraduates to apply their learnt knowledge in practical situations, and to gain experience in real-world problems.

The review team is of the opinion that the content of the courses offered are adequately covered the requirements for a degree programme of this nature. However, the contents of some courses need minor revisions as recommended below. The team also has noted that a significant effort has been made by the staff members of the Department to ensure high quality graduates in the overall programme. However the review team viewed that module outlines of each course should be further improved by including learning outcomes, breakdown of the total time among each topic, reading list under each topic, and an indication of how learning outcome of each module is related with the overall learning outcome of the Degree programme.

The students follow the entire course in English medium. However, course in computer literacy is offered only in the final year. It is true that this is not a course offered by the Department of Agric. Economics, however better knowledge in computer literacy is inevitable for the enhancement of the quality of the students learning. Though the Department has taken adequate measures to improve the quality of English language proficiency, the quality of the English language program is not well recognized by the students. However, the department has taken a significant effort on developing these soft skills, which are vital for employability. As revealed by the students during the discussion, there is a high competition among students within the faculty to specialize in Agricultural Economics, demonstrating the quality and relevance of the programme.

The present curriculum has been designed few years back and the department itself identifies the need for a revision in order to address the future needs. The department is planning to offer course module in "Information Communication Technology (ICT) in Agribusiness Management" by March 2006 in collaboration with the Department of Business Management, Writtle College, UK. However, at present there is no formal mechanism for curriculum revision. The review team suggests that a formal mechanism for curriculum revision should be introduced.

In relation to the curriculum design, content and review, the judgment of the team is good.

4.2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods.

A range of teaching methods are presently being used by the Department staff. The most common method of imparting knowledge is through lectures. As indicated by students as well as staff members, the teaching takes place in an interactive environment. This was also noted by the review team during the observation of teaching sessions. In addition, a range of more interactive methods such as case studies, individual and group presentations, take home assignments, term papers, reports, tutorials, field studies and practicals, etc. are being used. Most of the lectures were conducted according to a carefully prepared format. The review team observed that the lecturers were successful in attracting the attention of almost all students in the class. The team appreciates the techniques of teaching such as constant interaction with students adopted by some lecturers.

The Head of the Department and the Professor (Chair) in teaching undergraduate courses demonstrates the gravity of the situation. It was found that the department has a group of qualified academics guiding the students.

The department is equipped with modern teaching aids; it makes the maximum use of the existing teaching aids, such as OHP, slide projector, whiteboard, chalkboard and multimedia. Handouts are provided whenever possible. Multimedia and video demonstrations are used in most of the situations. Further access to internet facilities at the department enhanced the quality of learning process.

The teaching and learning environment is conducive. The review team noted that the students are highly motivated and enthusiastic. Both academic and non-academic staff displayed a high level of commitment. Both summative and formative assessment methods are being used. Approximately 1/5 of the final marks come from summative assessments, whereas the remaining 4/5 is through an end semester examination combining structured and unstructured essay type questions. The papers are scrutinized, moderated and double marked by an internal and an external expert. In general, the question papers for each course adequately cover the material included in the course outline.

The Department has a well qualified and credible research team. The thesis based on the final year research project is evaluated by both external and internal supervisors and the presentation is evaluated by a panel. The marks given by the external supervisor is based on 20 criteria based on two categories.

General : punctuality and time management, maturity in research, commitment to work, follow instructions, ability to work independently, discipline and manners, expression of ideas, communication skills, and English skills.

Research Project: subject coverage, collection of information reference material, formulations of objectives, conformity to standard methodology, data analysis and interpretation, conclusion and recommendation, citation of references, report writing skills, covering targets in time, overall research performances, etc.

In relation to the teaching, learning and assessment methods the judgment of the team is good.

4.3. Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements

At present, the student intake into the specialization programme is based on their request even though there is a performance based scheme for selecting students. The review team is with the view that the performance based scheme is more appropriate to ensure the high quality of students.

Throughout the program, various measures have been taken to ensure students' progress to achieve expected learning outcome of the programme. These include: monitoring performance through continuous assessments, advising and counseling of weaker students etc. During the discussions held with the students as well as teaching

sessions observed by the review team, the students were found to be quite confident and demonstrated good communication skills in English.

The final results of the last three years indicate a high proportion of students obtaining 1st and 2nd upper classes out of the students specializing in Agricultural economics. The discussions held with department staff members and final year students revealed that all the graduates of this programme are presently employed, both in the private and public sector organizations.

Although the members of the staff believe that their students are successful in securing employment after graduation, it was noted that the department does not maintain a record of their output. It is strongly suggested that the department should pay attention to develop a database of their graduates. If possible it is worth to initiate alumni of the department.

In relation to the quality of students, student progress and achievements the judgment of the team is good.

4.4. Extent and Use of Student Feedback, Qualitative and Quantitative

The student feedback is based on formal and informal methods. The department uses structured questionnaires to obtain student feedback on teaching of academic staff members of the department. It was evident from the documents available at the department. The feedback obtained from such surveys is mainly used by staff members to improve the quality of teaching. There is no formally established system to analyze the results of such questionnaires. At the end of each semester, some lecturers get written comments regarding their teaching from students. The discussions with staff members and students revealed that the feedback has been effectively used by the lecturers in improving their teaching. The review team also noted that the existence of a close rapport between the students and the staff.

In relation to the extent and use of student feedback the judgment of the team is good.

4.5. Postgraduate studies

The department is planning to commence a two year M.Sc degree programme in Agricultural economics and Resource Management. This has already been approved by the faculty board and the senate and scheduled to commence shortly. Also one PhD candidate is supervised by a senior lecturer of the Department. The absence of a more successful postgraduate programme at the department is noted as a weakness by the review team.

In relation to the postgraduate studies the judgment of the team is satisfactory.

4.6. Peer Observations

Peer observations are being practiced to some extent at an informal level. The teaching conducted by temporary assistant lecturers has been observed by the senior academic staff. The continuous guidance is provided to them on all aspects of teaching. Lack of a formal mechanism for peer observation was noted as a weakness by the review team. The review team is in view that establishing a formal mechanism for peer observation would further help to enhance the quality of teaching.

In relation to peer observations the judgment of the review team is satisfactory.

4.7. Skills Development

As far as subject specific skills are concerned, the department has adopted various methods to improve the skills of their students. They have introduced new courses of study, such as Participatory Rural Appraisal, and Communication- Principles and Practices, which will greatly enhance the marketable skills of their graduates. Also, the students are being trained to conduct independent research studies that enhance their research capabilities.

The department has also made arrangements to improve generic skills of their students through the provision of language (English) proficiency, computer training and in-service training in the institutions outside the university to enhance their employability.

Students are often worked as temporary enumerators during week-ends, holidays and vacations for the field data collection, data entry and analysis for the research programs of staff members. By doing so, students are able to develop their skills in data collection, entry and analysis under the close supervision of staff member and scientists in other institutes.

Having a panel of visiting staff from various institutions is a positive approach taken by the department to further strength students' skills in the industrial sectors.

There is no subject specific society. The review team viewed that having a subject society helps to improve their skills by organizing different activities such as publishing a magazine, guest lecturers, excursions, etc.

The review team noted the inadequacy of computers (33 computers for the 600 students in the faculty) and other IT related facilities, which is an obstacle in successfully training students in the field of ICT. Nevertheless, the department and the computer unit have taken adequate measures to overcome them.

In relation to the skills development the judgment of the team is good.

4.8. Academic Guidance and Counseling.

The department has taken adequate measures to ensure effective academic guidance and counseling, both in formal and informal ways. During the research project period, the internal supervisor also provides guidance for students. The university appoints student counselors from all faculties. At present two permanent staff members of the department are appointed as student counselors for the year. Sometimes students have personal problems that could have an effect on their studies and, in such instances members of the academic staff do assist them. In the final year, each student has a supervisor from the department who has close contacts with the student's academic and personal life. The student-staff relationship is satisfactory.

In relation to academic guidance and counseling the judgment of the team is good.

5. Overall Judgment - Suspended

6. Summary of conclusions

Based on the observations made during the study visit by the review team, the eight aspects were judged as follows:

Aspect	Judgment
Curriculum design, content and review	Good
Teaching learning and assessment methods	Good
Quality of students including student progress and achievements	Good
Extent and use of student feedback, qualitative and quantitative	Good
Postgraduate studies	Satisfactory
Peer observation	Satisfactory
Skills development	Good
Academic guidance and counseling	Good

7. Recommendations

1. It is recommended that the module outline be further improved by including learning outcomes for each module, comprehensive description of evaluation method, breakdown of the total time among individual topics, reading list under each topic, and relationship of learning outcome of each module with the overall learning outcome of the degree programme.
2. It is recommended to establish a formal mechanism for periodic curriculum revision. This may be done by obtaining the views of all stakeholders, and assistance of the department advisory committee.
3. In the opinion of the Reviewers, the student intake into the specialization programme based on performance is more appropriate to ensure the quality of the students.
4. Review Team recommended to establish a suitable system of peer observation.
5. It is recommended to develop and maintain a database of the present and past students including the employment records when they graduate. If possible it is worth to initiate alumni of the department.
6. It is desirable to introduce the Computer literacy / skills development course should be introduced from the first year.
7. In the opinion of the Review Team, The Department should take adequate measures to provide students more hours of computing to improve their levels of ICT literacy.
8. More else collaboration of the Department with the ELTU in teaching English is desirable.

Table 1 : Students specializing in the department

Year	No. of students specialized			Percentage of the Dept.
	In the Department	In other 5 Departments	Total	
1998 ~ 1999	22	95	117	19
1999 ~ 2000	13	41	54	24
2000 ~ 2001	33	115	148	22
2001 ~ 2002	25	65	90	28
2002 ~ 2003	25	90	115	22
2003 ~ 2004	41	77	118	35
2004 ~ 2005	42	66	108	38

Table 2: Performance of the specialization students in final year examination (1998 ~ 2005)

Grade	Number of Students						
	1998 ~1999	1999 ~ 2000	2000 ~ 2001	2001 ~ 2002	2002 ~ 2003	2003 ~ 2004	2004 ~ 2005
First Class	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
2nd Upper	6	3	3	4	2	5	12
2nd Lower	3	3	12	9	9	14	17
Credit Pass	3	2	7	8	10	18	8
Pass	10	5	11	3	4	3	4
Fail	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total	22	13	33	25	25	41	42

Table 3: Staff members and their status and responsibilities

Name & qualification	Status	Responsibilities
Prof. Mahinda Wijeratne B.Sc. Agric. (Sri Lanka), M.Sc. Agric. Economics (Ghent), Ph.D. Agric. Extension (Wageningen), LL.B. (Open University)	Professor	Chief Examiner –3 rd year 1 st semester (Agric. Extension). Teaching Micro-Economics, Agric. Extension, Agricultural Economics and Farm Management, Technical Writing, Natural Resource Management and Supervise 3 rd and final year students' research.
Dr. Oscar Amarasinghe B.Sc. Agric. (Sri Lanka), M.Sc. Agric. Economics (Ghent), Ph.D. Agric. & Fisheries Economics (Namur)	Senior Lecturer	Chief Examiner – 2 nd year 1 st semester and 3 rd year 1 st semester (Farm Management). Teaching Development Economics, Farm Management, Environmental Economics, and Fisheries Economics, and Supervise 3 rd and final year students' research.
Dr. Mangala De Zoysa B.Sc. Agric. (Peradeniya), M.Sc. Management of Agricultural Knowledge Systems (Wageningen), Ph.D. Agric. / Forest Policy (Tokyo)	Head, Senior Lecturer	Chief Examiner – 2 nd year 2 nd semester and 4 th year 2 nd semester (Advance course). Teaching Agricultural Policy, Agricultural Marketing, Basic Management, and Supervise 3 rd and final year students' research.

<p>Dr. L. M. Abewickrama B.Sc. Agric. (Ruhuna), M.Sc. Agric.Econ (Peradeniya); Ph.D. Agric. Economics (Punjab)</p>	<p>Senior Lecturer</p>	<p>Chief Examiner – 3rd year 2nd (Farm Practice Course). Teaching Agricultural Economics, Farm Management and Rural Development, Social Science Research Methods, Applied Statistics, Econometrics, and Supervise 3rd and final year students' research.</p>
<p>Dr. Nilatha De Silva B.Sc. Agric. (Ruhuna), M.Sc. Env't. Economics (Peradeniya) Ph.D. Agric. Economics & Management (Allahabad)</p>	<p>Senior Lecturer</p>	<p>Chief Examiner – 1st year 1st Semester. Agricultural Economics, Resource Economics, Econometrics and Natural Resource Management and Agric. Extension and Agricultural and Environmental Policies and Supervise 3rd and final year students' research.</p>
<p>Ms. E. B. I. Dayananda B.Sc. Agric. (Ruhuna), Dip. Agric. Economics (Peradeniya) Reading for M.Phil in Environmental Economics (Sri Jayawardanapura)</p>	<p>Lecturer</p>	<p>Chief Examiner – 1st year 2nd semester and 3rd year 2nd semester (Farm Practice Course). Teaching Macro- Economics, Farm Management & Rural Development, and Supervise 3rd year students' research.</p>
<p>Mr. A. L. Sandika B.Sc. Agric. (Ruhuna), Reading for M.Sc. in Extension and Information Technology (Dahrwad)</p>	<p>Lecturer</p>	<p>On study leave</p>
<p>Ms. G. C. Samaraweera B.Sc. Agric. (Ruhuna); M.Sc in Agricultural Economics (Indira Gandhi)</p>	<p>Lecturer</p>	<p>Teaching Development Economics, Farm Management, Environmental Economics, and Fisheries Economics, and Supervise 3rd and final year students' research.</p>