This summer the MSAE program underwent a thorough review by the graduate school. Such reviews are important to help us determine the strengths and weaknesses of our program. One of our greatest strengths has been the ability to attract high quality students, which is due in large part to the success of our online program. USNWR recently rated our online program 32nd in the country (p. 3). While such ratings are often over-hyped, we hope to continue to build on our success with several new initiatives to support student research this upcoming year (p. 4).

We also welcome Professor Wei Yang to the department. Joining us this fall as an Assistant Professor, Professor Yang brings to the program a strong record of research productivity and a wide range of research interests (p. 5). Prof. Goenner
cullen.goenner@und.edu
UND MSAE and MBA programs receive national attention  By Kate Menzies

Every year, the US News and World Report issues rankings for the nation’s top online programs. The University of North Dakota’s own Master of Science in Applied Economics (MSAE) program and Master of Business Administration (MBA) program were ranked 32 out of nearly 1,000 schools.

“Being ranked 32 is a strong indication that we are producing a quality education for students who enter our programs,” said Dr. Cullen Goenner, professor in the Department of Economics.

“More importantly, the data that is used to determine the rankings is used to improve our efforts to deliver quality education at a distance.”

The rankings are based on faculty credentials and training, student service and technology, student engagement and admission selectivity. UND scored particularly high in student engagement and admissions selectivity. The study also showed that the MSAE and MBA program had high retention rates compared to other institutions.

This could, in part, be attributed to class size.

“Unlike many for profit or some non-profit online institutions, we are interested in keeping our class sizes small, so we can provide a learning environment where students succeed,” said Goenner.

Other factors that influenced the rankings were levels of accreditation and recommendation of reputations of excellence among peer institutions. The ratings confirm that other institutions in nation recognize that UND is a university to take note of.

The MSAE program gives students quantitative and applied skills needed to succeed as an economist in strategic planning, consulting, applied research and economic development. The MBA program prepares graduates for leadership positions in the business industry.

A unique aspect of both UND’s MSAE and MBA programs is that courses can be taught both online and on campus to enhance the educational environment. Not all other schools have this option.

“UND deserves this top rating because of the high quality education received and the hybrid delivery mechanisms through which courses are taught,” said Michelle Garske, Assistant Director of Graduate Programs.

“Networking among on and off campus students is so important and facilitates collaboration.”

Goenner added, “Part of our success is tied to the students we are able to recruit. Our online students typically have higher levels of experience and test scores than their on-campus counterparts. This, in effect, enables us to set the bar higher for admissions, which in most cases results in better prepared students and better educational outcomes (retention, graduation, placement, etc.).”

This top ranking provides UND with much needed recognition that will be useful for recruitment purposes.

“This ranking will heighten the College’s profile among other institutions. It will help attract not only students, but quality faculty who want to teach at quality programs,” said Garske.

US News and World Report rankings provide validation for UND’s continued progress towards achieving excellence in education.

Online or on-campus

Master of Science in Applied Economics students can take the entire curriculum for the degree online. MSAE classes are broadcast live over the internet via Adobe Connect. Adobe connect allows students to interact with class. This option allows our students to work, while building their skill set.
STUDENT PROFILE

Adrian Troyer

MSAE student Adrian Troyer is in the process of completing his thesis research in partnership with the Centre de Recherche en Economie Appliquée pour le Développement (CREAD) in Algiers, Algeria. While working in southern France, Adrian traveled into Algeria in the spring of 2014 to establish the partnership, and he plans to return for several months in 2015 to finish the work. Adrian’s thesis will highlight the segments of Algeria’s labor force that, when utilized, are having the greatest economic impact in a mid-level wealth, oil-dependent nation struggling to develop in ways that its economic profile and available resources suggest it could.

Adrian spent the early stages of his career in the field of linguistics and language training, working in the private sector in the United States before living the last 6 years overseas doing development and education work in Africa and Europe. He has completed his MSAE coursework online while living in three different continents, carrying a 4.0 GPA. Adrian has been married for 13 years and he and his wife have two young daughters adopted from Ethiopia.

FACULTY PROFILE:

WEI YANG

Professor Yang joined the Economics Department in August 2014, having previously worked as a Council of Library and Information Resources (CLIR) research fellow at McMaster University. In 2012 he completed his PhD at McMaster University on the economics of volunteerism, charity, and healthcare. He teaches statistics, microeconomics, and public economics at both undergraduate and graduate levels. His primary research interests include household behavior with respect to contributions to public goods, investments to health, and resources distributions among household members. His past research has been published in Economics Letters.

Currently he is working on a project about parental sex selection in the context of China.

NEW INITIATIVES SUPPORT RESEARCH BY MSAE STUDENTS

The department of economics is excited to announce three new funding initiatives to assist MSAE student research. The funding has been set aside by the program to support:

1. **Conference Travel.** The department envisions funding 3-4 student presentations of their research at academic conferences.

2. **Research materials.** The department has set aside $1500 per academic year to help support MSAE students acquire research materials.

3. **Distinguished Thesis Awards.** The department each year will award the best master’s thesis $750 and the runner up $250.

In the future you will hear more about how our current students are making the most of these funds.

Adrian Troyer’s research in Algeria is being supported in part by the Department of Economics.
ALUMNUS PROFILE:
Randall Ronsberg ‘13

By Kate Menzies

The University of North Dakota’s Master of Science in Applied Economics (MSAE) degree has paved the way to a job on Capitol Hill for UND alumnus Randall Ronsberg.

Originating from Fargo, ND, Ronsberg is now an employee of Summit Consulting LLC, an analytical consulting firm based in Washington, D.C.

Ronsberg earned his undergraduate degree in Business Economics from UND and afterward decided to pursue a graduate degree from UND’s MSAE program.

His choice in degrees is fitting, as the majority of Ronsberg’s work pertains to government contracts tied to agencies such as the Department of Labor, the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of the Treasury. On a day-to-day basis, he completes a wide array of statistical and economic analyses for clients ranging from program evaluation to modeling.

None of this would have been possible without the high quality education he received from UND.

When Ronsberg was an incoming freshman, he knew that he wanted to pursue a degree in business.

“I am a very curious person. I like understanding processes and the way things work,” said Ronsberg.

He also had an aptitude for mathematics and was aware of the value of a business degree.

“I knew that people who understood business math such as finance, statistics and accounting were always in high demand,” said Ronsberg.

It was this combination of curiosity and mathematical intuition that led him to the field of economics. After completing his undergraduate work in this field, Ronsberg decided to pursue a graduate degree in the MSAE program.

“It was a great fit because it had the applied focus I was looking for in a graduate program and I was already familiar with the department faculty, which helped me anticipate the degree workload,” said Ronsberg.

This perfect fit is a result of the outstanding efforts made by the College of Business and Public Administration to help students better prepare for careers after college.

Ronsberg viewed the MSAE program favorably with similar programs across the nation. This is, in part, due to the focus of the program.

“Traditional economics master programs are more theory based. But in today’s job market, there is a high demand for people who understand math, statistics and quantitative techniques. All of which are highlighted in UND’s MSAE program,” said Ronsberg.

Another unique feature of UND’s MSAE program is the hybrid model of teaching. Students are able to learn via the typical classroom setting or online.

“The online classes allows for a lot of flexibility, which is great for the busy student, part-time students and students working full-time,” said Ronsberg.

This means students aren’t limited by geography or time.

Lastly, the price tag makes UND’s program one to beat. The quality of the program’s faculty and the reasonable tuition establish UND’s MSAE program as a viable competitor with similar programs across the nation.
Ronsberg—continued

Ronsberg had nothing but positive experiences with the MSAE program and encourages other students to pursue graduate degrees.

"There is a high demand in the job market for people with quantitative analysis skills. Not only are there more opportunities available to people with advanced degrees, they are likely to see an increase in compensation over others who don’t possess an advanced degree," said Ronsberg.

Although Ronsberg loves his job, he would be interested in exploring careers within the healthcare and energy sectors.

I think there is going to be huge growth and opportunities for quantitative analytics in those two areas.

As Ronsberg said it best, “graduates of the MSAE program would be a great fit for those opportunities.”

From North Dakota to Capitol Hill, UND continues to make its presence known.

North Dakota. It’s more than just the oil.  By Kate Menzies

That's why folks like David Flynn, a University of North Dakota professor of economics, are jumping at the chance to study this booming state.

As the head of the Bureau of Business and Economic Research, Flynn is researching the oil boom and other factors that could have long-lasting effects on the North Dakota economy, population and housing. "Economists have gotten the reputation of being the bearers of bad news," said Flynn. He knows that the black gold won't make the economy stay booming forever. Like all booms, Flynn predicts this too will eventually slow as a result of growing too much too fast.

Most media attention is directed toward the oil boom; however, Flynn recognizes there are many subtle factors at play. The state's agricultural growth and the expansion of the retail sector from Canadian traffic helped spur the economy. North Dakota also stayed above the red because it was one of the few states in which banks did not participate in subprime mortgage loans. These loans were deemed a major factor in the 2008 recession.

There is no question that the oil boom has caused people to flock to the state in search of jobs. The question on economists’ minds is whether or not this population growth will be sustainable. That is precisely why Flynn has turned his attention to studying local businesses. He is curious to know if bringing additional services and businesses to towns near the oil fields will give these temporary residents a reason to stay.

In another study, Flynn and a colleague from the University of Nebraska-Omaha picked South Dakota as a central meeting point to observe the survival of rural businesses there. Through their research, they found that rural businesses in South Dakota seem to survive more than urban businesses in particular sectors for reasons they are still investigating.

When not knee-deep in research, Flynn discusses the changes in North Dakota’s economy with his students. "The growth has made for an interesting case study for population and forecasting topics as a positive spot in the U.S. economy," said Flynn.

Flynn teaches courses in economic forecasting, statistics, banking and bank regulations, and population analysis. He enjoys being able to integrate lectures with topics he is currently studying. Because of Flynn's research, UND is getting an up-close look at the state's changes and students are getting hands-on experience in the field of economics.

How long will North Dakota keep booming? That's hard to say. Rest assured economists like Flynn have their nose to the grindstone, eager to find out.
A collaborative research grant between the College of Business and Public Administration and the Masters of Public Health Program will put one Blue Cross Blue Shield patient program under the microscope.

This $75,000 seed grant seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of the patient-centered medical home program dubbed MediQHome.

MediQHome coordinates patient services such as pharmacists, dieticians and lab technicians to provide a more comprehensive overview of each client’s needs. This has allowed Blue Cross Blue Shield to more closely monitor patients and has enabled medical professionals to make health diagnoses and recommendations sooner in the screening process.

An interesting aspect of MediQHome is that it isn’t optional for consumers. In other words, patients don’t have a choice to opt in or opt out of the program. Another feature of MediQHome is that it has a pay-for-performance scheme for providers, with said providers being ranked on a three tier system. Each tier comes with different incentives.

Ultimately, consumer choice may be impeded by confidentiality, as consumers are unaware of what tier their provider falls under. But does this mean these types of programs are a bad investment? That is precisely what two economics professors and researchers from the Masters of Public Health program seek to find out.

MediQHome was put into place to streamline costs and reduce inefficiencies among providers. The researchers in this grant hope to study the environments in which these programs are carried out to discover if some environments are more beneficial than others.

For instance, in rural communities, providers can’t always afford to carry out this integration of services on their own. This causes rural providers to need to team up with larger forces, such as Blue Cross Blue Shield or Sanford.

Professors Cullen Goenner and Chih Ming Tan of the economics department are interested in the incentives and behavioral side of the healthcare program, which will utilize the economists’ extensive training in statistical tools. They also want to take into account how economic agents exercise rational choice.

“Blue Cross Blue Shield will gain access to economists, who will be able to provide an outside view of the company, which can be very important when working with stakeholders,” said Goenner.

The Masters of Public Health program researchers will focus on understanding and evaluating predictive models used in healthcare programs. They will also be able to share their deep knowledge of healthcare systems.

“This could be a potentially fruitful collaboration,” said Tan. The grant could lead to substantial publicity for UND and could garner national attention for the University’s dedication to research. The findings of the research could also lead to further grant activities.

“The data we are getting access to will allow us to conduct research in an area (health economics) that is currently of great interest to the profession. The uniqueness of the data and topic area will allow us to produce publications in higher quality journals,” said Goenner.

More importantly, students will get to work alongside faculty members and be exposed to real-world applications in their fields.

“Everything is absolutely brand new for both students and faculty and that is why it’s exciting,” said Tan. This seed grant will provide information needed to improve healthcare for patients in our state.

“This research will help improve the state of healthcare in North Dakota and the United States by improving our understanding of the impact incentives programs and other changes such as the ACA have on healthcare,” said Goenner.

Grants like these continue to establish UND as a premier research institution and provide exciting opportunities for faculty and students alike.
Other Faculty News

Grant & Contract Activity

Prof. Goenner received a research grant ($49,500) from the ND Department of Transportation to evaluate stakeholder satisfaction (Summer 2014).

Faculty Publications in 2014


Other Student News

Spring & Summer 2014 Graduates

Tracy Dice: Modeling the Supply of Agricultural Land in Three Midwestern States. Advisor—Goenner

Jeffrey Dischinger: Using Medical Claims Data to Predict the Likelihood of Kidney Transplantation. Advisor—Tan

Justin Theriot: Determinants of Gold Returns: An Austrian Perspective. Advisor—Simlai

Emma Wetten: Economic Attainment by Religion. Advisor—Tan


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Kim Woods
Director of Development
UND Foundation
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