

Final Assessment Report

Economics (BA/MA), Applied Economics (PhD)

September 2016

Summary of the Program Review:

In accordance with the University Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), this final assessment report provides a synthesis of the external evaluation and the internal response and assessments of the programs (BA, MA, PhD) delivered by the Department of Economics. A self-study (Volume I) was submitted to the Associate Vice-President, Academic and the Associate Provost, Graduate Studies Office on August 4, 2015. The self-study presented the program descriptions and learning outcomes, an analytical assessment of these three programs, and program data including the data collected from a student survey along with the standard data package prepared by the Office of Institutional Analysis & Planning (IAP). Appended were the course outlines for all courses in the program and the CVs (Volume II) for each full-time faculty member in the Department.

Two arm's-length external reviewers selected from the list provided in Volume III of the Academic Program Review, Dr. Hugh Neary, from the University of British Columbia, and Dr. Sam Bukovetsky from York University, were ranked and selected by the Associate Provost, Graduate Studies and the Associate Vice-President, Academic. In addition, one faculty member, Christina Vester from Classical Studies at the University of Waterloo, accompanied the external reviewers.

Self-study documentation was sent to the reviewers in advance and the site visit was conducted on December 10-11, 2015. The visit included interviews with the Associate Provost, Graduate Studies; Associate Vice President, Academic; Manager of Quality Assurance; Dean of Arts; Chair of Economics, Acting Chair of Economics for the fall term¹, faculty members, staff and meetings with a group of current graduate and undergraduate students.

Program characteristics:

The Department of Economics was established as an independent unit in the Faculty of Arts, offering a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1969. A Master of Arts (MA) program in Economics was approved in 1970 and has been operating successfully since then. The Department began its PhD in Applied Economics in the fall of 2004.

¹ There was an Acting Chair of Economics in the fall term of 2015 while the Chair was on sabbatical.
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Summary of strengths, challenges and opportunities based on self-study:

Strengths

- Significant number of faculty members have been hired in the last 15 years
 - At the time of the 2008 academic review, there were 23 faculty members (including one continuing lecturer). From 2009 to 2014 ten new probationary or tenured appointments were appointed in the Department as well as two continuing lecturers. There were also five retirements and a number of other departures. By 2014 there were 27 assistant, associate and full professors and three continuing lecturers. Since the review was completed, an additional associate professor has joined the Department.
- Well-balanced expertise of faculty with significant strength in econometrics, theory and applied research
- Faculty pursue research at the frontiers of economics and are publishing in excellent quality journals
- Ability to teach a large number of courses at the undergraduate level is enhanced by a number of lecturers (3 continuing, 3 definite term)
 - Economics has approximately 13 thousand course enrollments. There were 480 students registered in one of the three Economics Major plans in 2014/15. In 2015, 121 students graduated with an Economics Major and 180 with a minor. Approximately 160 course sections are taught annually.
- Undergraduate students receive rigorous training in econometrics, theory and applied courses

Challenges

- The Department seeks to improve its international research ranking
 - Higher research ranking should be achieved as the research of faculty hired over the past decade increases in impact.
- Additional expertise in macroeconomics and finance needed
- Higher ratio of classes taught by sessionals than desirable
 - Data reported in Volume I shows 55 sections out of a total of 160 taught by sessional lecturers in 2014.
 - We are addressing this issue by considering reforms in the delivery model of first and second year undergraduate classes.

- Due to large class size, instructors are relying on teaching and assessment methods that are not ideal in terms of student learning or student experience (e.g., multiple choice exams in first year).
 - The Department is addressing this issue by increasing support for students. We have already instituted tutorials for three core courses, and as noted above, will consider reforms in the delivery model of other classes.
- Addressing the needs of students who are not bound for graduate school and who struggle with the quantitative nature of many economics classes (e.g., scheduling formal tutorials in courses students find difficult)
- Ensuring adequate resources for student success (e.g., having adequate number of TAs for tutorials)
- Recruitment of Canadian graduate students to the graduate programs
- Lack of space
- Budget restrictions affect the department in various ways such as the ability to provide an adequate seminar series to support the department's research mission and the ability to support student success through tutorials, etc.

Opportunities

- Further development of international partnerships with Chinese universities (e.g., 2+2 program, as well as the 1+1+1 programs for Master's students)
- Reform of the undergraduate program was initiated at the same time as the recent Arts standardization plan. The Department hopes to better meet the diverse needs of students whether they are seeking employment immediately upon graduation or heading to graduate school
- Focus on skill development of MA students through coaching on professional skills

Summary of key findings from the external reviewers:

The reviewers found that "all programs within the Department of Economics were consistent with the discovery, application and communication of knowledge, all of which is a central tenet of the mission statement of the Faculty of Arts." They were also very impressed with "the clarity with which the department communicated its degree requirements at all three levels"

**Program response to external reviewer recommendations:
Recommendations**

1. *Carefully monitor the consequences of the undergraduate curriculum reform.*

Response

The Undergraduate Associate Chair will closely monitor trends in undergraduate enrollments and majors as well as learning outcomes and student experience. The Undergrad Committee will consider whether any further curricular changes are warranted, and in consultation with the Department will take the appropriate steps for implementation.

2. *Carefully monitor work demands on staff and resources.*

Response

The Department (the Chair and Associate Chairs) will continue to monitor work flow, particularly those arising out of new responsibilities (i.e. the Management Studies Minor), changes to university procedures (i.e. course scheduling), and extra advising required with the transition to the reformed undergraduate curriculum. Furthermore, the Department will request additional resources and/or changes to work load in order to ameliorate the situation. However, the Department does state that particular aspects of staff responsibilities and their remuneration is determined by the Human Resources Department and not the Department. Nonetheless, the Department recognizes the volume and complexity of the work conducted by Economics staff.

3. *Conduct an ad hoc review of the questions raised about the graduate programs – in particular, the balance between theory and application.*

Response

The Department reviewed these questions at their Departmental retreat in August 2016. Further discussion will take place at subsequent graduate committee meetings throughout 2016-17. Once the consultation phase is over, the Graduate Committee will be responsible for implementing any recommendations.

4. *Monitor the success of formal tutorials scheduled for the first time for Fall 2016 in Econ 211, Econ 221, and Econ 322.*

Response

The Department will review effectiveness of tutorials at the end of every term with respect to student feedback and student success. This will be closely monitored by the Associate

Chair, Undergraduate Studies. The tutorials will be considered a success if we receive positive student and instructor feedback.

5. *Pursue closer ties with current 2+2 partnerships and expand to additional universities.*

Response

The Department will maintain regular communication with partner universities, including visiting partner universities once per year if budget allows. The Department will also push through additional agreements that were initiated in 2015. Representatives from the Department visited China in Fall 2016 and plan to have additional 2+2 agreements in place by early 2017.

6. *Consider developing international partnerships with institutions outside of China.*

Response

The Department recognizes that it is preferable to have partnerships with universities from diverse nations. As a result, the Chair will request Waterloo International to notify the Department of potential new international partnerships. The Department views this as a long term goal and will revisit this recommendation in Fall 2018.

7. *Work with alumni network through Arts Advancement to look for additional sources of funds for lecture series.*

Response

The Department will continue to seek ways to engage alumni and intends to plan special events for alumni and current students as resources permit. It is hoped that some of our Economics alumni will be willing to provide financial support for our annual Distinguished Lecture.

8. *Assist PhD students to find a thesis supervisor more quickly.*

Response

The Department has implemented a new requirement whereby PhD students must complete a second year research paper under the supervision of a faculty member. The Department hopes that this will assist students in finding a supervisor by building relationships with students and faculty members. In Economics, PhD students do not normally choose a supervisor until their second year.

9. *Address concerns of MA students that they are not adequately prepared for co-op interviews in January.*

Response

The Department has introduced more applied, policy courses in the fall of 2017 that should better prepare students for job interviews and the job itself. The department now offers the opportunity to sit through mock interviews with faculty members to prepare for specific jobs in economics.

External reviewer recommendations that were not selected for implementation:

1. *If qualified foreign applicants are willing to pay the higher foreign fees, they should be admitted.*

Response

The reviewers suggest that it may be worthwhile to admit foreign graduate students without any financial support. However, it is university practice to off-set the international tuition differential and to offer graduate students the same funding no matter their origin. Hence implementation of this suggestion lies outside the purview of the Department.

2. *Delegation of more responsibility for admission decisions to the departmental level might help attract a better mix of graduate students.*

Response

Responsibility for ensuring that admissions criteria are followed lies with the GSO. While offers to non-standard candidates are allowed with sufficient rationale, the judgement as to what is qualifies as a valid rationale lies with admissions specialists in the GSO. The Department would appreciate more flexibility in justifying the admission of exceptional cases.

3. *“Space constraints continue to be a problem within the department (and within the Faculty of Arts). If it can be accommodated within the university’s resource allocation framework, an increase of 20% is needed in the (combined) space used for faculty, graduate students and staff offices, seminar rooms, and computing facilities throughout the Faculty of Arts.”*

Response

Inadequate space is an on-going challenge for Economics and for the Arts Faculty. Office space for graduate students, better space for the Economics Undergrad Society, computer lab space for undergraduate teaching and research lab space are of particular concern. The Chair and Associate Chairs will do their best to continue to raise these issues in the appropriate venues in hopes that a solution can be found.

Implementation Plan:

	Recommendations	Proposed Actions	Responsibility for Leading and Resourcing (if applicable) the Actions	Timeline for addressing Recommendations
1.	Carefully monitor the consequences of the undergraduate curriculum reform.	Watch trends in undergraduate enrollments and majors, make changes as needed	Undergraduate associate chair	Report at the end of each term
2.	Carefully monitor work demands on staff resources	Check in at monthly staff meetings. Deal with problems as they arise.	Department Chair	Monthly basis
3.	Conduct an ad hoc review of the questions raised about our graduate programs – in particular, the balance between theory and application.	Departmental retreat in August 2016	Department Chair and Graduate Associate Chair	Retreat in August 2016 and at subsequent graduate committee meetings throughout 2016 -2017. If changes are deemed to be desirable, we would begin the process in 2018.
4	Monitor the success of formal tutorials scheduled for the first time for Fall 2016 in Econ 211, Econ 221, and Econ 322.	Review success at the end of every term with respect to	Undergraduate Associate Chair	Review will be conducted every term.

		student feedback and student success.		
5.	Pursuing closer ties with current 2+2 partnerships and expand to additional universities.	Maintain regular communication with partner universities, visiting once a year as budget allows. Push through additional agreements which have been started.	Chair of International Programs Committee	<p>Trip to China to visit partner universities is planned for Fall 2016. Additional 2+2 agreements should be in place by early 2017.</p> <p>Update: Economics anticipated travelling in 2016 to China with a delegation from Science. This trip did not happen. However two of our faculty members have visited China on their own in the past year, and have visited some of our partners.</p>
6.	Consider developing international partnerships with institutions outside of China.	Ask Waterloo International to keep us aware of potential new international partners.	Chair of International Programs Committee	A long term goal to be reviewed in Fall 2018.
7.	Work with our alumni network through Arts Advancement to look for additional sources of funds for our lecture series.	Continue to seek ways to engage alumni. Plan special	Chair of the Alumni and Student Relations Committee	Review success in summer 2018

		events for alumni and students as resources permit.		
8.	Assist PhD students to find a thesis supervisor more quickly.	Implementation of the new requirement that PhD students complete a second year research paper under the supervision of a faculty member.	Graduate Associate Chair	Change has been implemented. Review success in summer 2017.
9.	Address concerns of MA students that they are not adequately prepared for co-op interviews in January.	Offer more applied, policy oriented courses in the fall. Provide the opportunity to participate in mock job interviews.	Graduate Associate Chair	Change has been implemented for fall 2016. Review success in spring 2017.

The Department Chair/Director, in consultation with the Dean of the Faculty shall be responsible for monitoring the Implementation Plan.

Date of next program review: _____ **2022** _____
Date

Signatures of Approval:

Chair/Director _____ Date

AFIW Administrative Dean/Head (For AFIW programs only) _____ Date

Faculty Dean _____ Date

Associate Vice-President, Academic _____ Date
(For undergraduate and augmented programs)

Associate Provost, Graduate Studies _____ Date
(For Graduate and augmented programs)