

**CARLETON UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON
QUALITY ASSURANCE**

**Cyclical Review of the Undergraduate Programs in Economics
Executive Summary and Final Assessment Report**

This Executive Summary and Final Assessment Report of the cyclical review of Carleton's undergraduate programs in Economics (BA General; BA Honours; BA Honours in Applied Economics; Combined Honours) are provided pursuant to articles 4.2.5-4.2.6 of the provincial Quality Assurance Framework and articles 7.2.23-1 and 7.2.23.3-4 of Carleton's Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The undergraduate programs in Economics reside in Carleton University's Department of Economics, a unit administered by the Faculty of Public Affairs. As a consequence of the review, the programs were categorised by the Carleton University Committee on Quality Assurance (CUCQA) as being of **GOOD QUALITY** (CARLETON'S IQAP 7.2.12).

The external reviewers' report, submitted on December 18th, 2015, offered a positive assessment of the programs. The reviewers opened their report by stating that 'the Department of Economics provides high quality education,' and later remarked that the programs offer 'multiple opportunities for students to develop their capabilities and interests.' The reviewers also noted that 'the faculty have an excellent research profile and are dedicated teachers and mentors,' adding that 'the Department has a substantial number of excellent scholars with international reputations.' The reviewers further observed that the students they met 'were very satisfied with the programs, finding them consistent with learning outcomes expressed at the course level and excellent preparation for graduate work.'

Within the context of this positive assessment, the report nonetheless made a number of recommendations for the continuing enhancement of the programs. The response to the recommendations, submitted to CUCQA by the Chair of the Department of Economics and the Dean of the Faculty of Public Affairs on April 3rd, 2016, addressed all the issues raised in the External Report. The Department was particularly inspired by the reviewers' comments that Economics 'needs to take a fulsome look' at the 'Standard' and 'Applied' options for the Honours degree and needs 'to rethink and reframe' these streams. Consequently, the response proposed numerous major modifications to the programs that were far more extensive than the specific recommendations made by the external reviewers. As such, the Department's response demonstrated a proactive attitude towards program improvement that bears witness to the progressive purpose and regenerative value of Cyclical Program Review process.

An Action Plan detailing how, when and by whom the proposed major modifications will be implemented was produced by the Department of Economics on June 1st, 2016 and accepted by CUCQA on June 22nd, 2016.



To: Dr. John Shepherd, Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President (Academic)

From: Dr. Keir Armstrong, Chair, Department of Economics

Date: 1 June 2016

Re: Action Plan of the Cyclical Program Review for the Undergraduate Programs in Economics

Please find below the Department's Action Plan in relation to the recommendations of the external reviewers as well as those of the Self-Study.

The following recommendations were proposed by the external reviewers in their report dated 18 December 2015:

- I. Restructuring the degree programs offered
 - 1) The Applied Honours program should be rebranded, and given a character and destination of its own. Some professors place too low a value on it, even though it is an excellent program. The rebranding of the program could still involve the same set of year-1 Economics courses and most of the 2000-level courses, so that students who initially favor the non-Standard stream would be able to transfer to the Standard stream.
 - 2) The Applied stream requires a name change. First, it is somewhat a misnomer, in that the Standard Honours program is equally 'applied' in an economist's interpretation of the word: the Standard stream prepares students at least as well to work with data and hypothesis testing. In the second instance, students graduating from high school perceive an 'Applied' program as inferior, and the name pejorative. The Department's Advisor explained to us that the term 'applied' is used to describe the non-academic stream in high school, and therefore carries a stigma when used in a university context.
 - 3) We do not presume to know or give specific advice to the Department on how to revamp its Applied stream and how to channel students appropriately among the streams. We could imagine a range of outcomes from rebranding and changing the name as indicated above to a more fulsome look at what should be the main honours program. The Department may wish to consider making the Applied stream the core program (without the name Applied) with those with sufficient grades in second and third year and interest in graduate school in economics to take a more theory and mathematically intensive specialization. These are details for the Department to work out.

Action: Reintegrate the existing Economics Honours programs so that the modestly transformed Applied program becomes the new standard under the name "B.Econ.

Honours” and the set of “advanced theory” courses that renders the existing standard distinct becomes an optional concentration (in Economic Theory) within the new B.Econ. Honours program.

Action: Push for the development of an appropriate version of ESLA 2000 (English Language Development for Specific Purposes I) to complement the proposed new ENGL 1020 (Academic Writing) course so that the Department has the option of inserting “0.5 credit in ENGL 1020 or ESLA 2000” as a non-Major requirement of the new B.Econ. Honours programs *or* has an introductory rhetoric and composition course *with remedial fallback* to recommend to its students.

- 4) While the General stream generates less income for the University, the persistently large size of the graduating cohort demands that the Department (and perhaps the Faculty) think more seriously about this half of its student body and how best to accommodate them if the goal of the university is to graduate its students with an honours degree. Our discussions at every level in the University were suggestive that General programs are of secondary interest. The Department’s self-study repeatedly describes it as an ‘off-ramp’, attributes little importance to it, and gives the impression that the students going through this program are no more than failures. As externals, we do not know how the Department markets this program to students; but if it is a neglected program, yet availed of by half of the graduating students then some serious thought into its destination is in order. For example: is the general-honours breakdown of graduating students in other departments that funnel most of their incoming cohort into honours, similar or different?

No Action: The (three-year) General degree is not a “neglected program” as the external reviewers suggested it might be, but rather a path for students that provides them with a recognized credential for their efforts.

- 5) In regard to concentrations: the Department should consider if it wishes to continue to support the number of concentrations currently on offer. It is surprising that the Natural Resources and Environment option has so little interest in the current era. If the Department believes in the value of concentrations then it should think about future enrollments and perhaps, how better to market and accommodate these streams within the course sequencing.

Action: Create variants of the new standard program that allow students to complete either one or two (of seven—four existing and three new) concentrations.

- 6) The Department should consider the role of its Quantitative and Mathematical Economics stream, particularly in light of the high quality and high technical content of its Standard Honours program. The Standard Honours program

provides students intending to progress to graduate school in Economics with a very rigorous training. However, the specialization program has had 5 or fewer students in fourth year in each of the past five years. In an effort to offer a wide array of choice to students (this Specialization, plus four Concentrations), the Department has sizable enrollments in only one of those five options – Finance. The Department needs to take this on board when requesting additional resources.

Action: Transform the distinct-from-standard aspects of the existing Quantitative and Mathematical Economics specialization into a new Concentration in Mathematics and Quantitative Economics.

- 7) In conjunction with any revisions to the honours programs, we advise the Department to reformulate their learning outcomes so that they better reflect goals of the programs and expectations for students. We understand that the University now has more resources and expertise to assist the Department in articulating their learning outcomes in a way that is useful to the unit and its students.

Action: Reformulate by the end of the 2016–17 Fall-Winter session our program-level learning outcomes in relation to the new B.Econ. to “better reflect goals of the programs and expectations for students.”

II. Course delivery at the first year level

- 8) The Department should research the availability of on-line material for all students registered in Economics 1000 and attempt to establish how much of the absenteeism is attributable to the availability of the on-line material. This attendance pattern should be worrying to the Department – and the University at large, if it is widespread. Students who are beginning a program and displaying such myopia seem ill prepared for a rigorous program in Economics, or any rigorous program for that matter.

Action: The Undergraduate Supervisor will set up and chair a committee of Principles instructors to look into the ECON 1000 attendance issue, “attempt to establish how much of the absenteeism is attributable to the availability of on-line material,” and determine what if anything might be tried to lessen it. This action will be completed by the end of the 2016 Fall term.

III. Faculty workload

- 9) Without wishing to trespass into graduate territory, given the interactions between the programs, we recommend that the Department explore means to balance the workloads of faculty who have a large amount of graduate student supervision, particularly those with a relatively large number of PhD students.

We understand that Carleton does not typically use any sort of credit systems for graduate supervision as do some other universities, but other means such of balancing are possible such as which undergraduate courses faculty are asked to teach.

Action: Exploration—further to that undertaken by the Chair during the last couple of years—in the context of the current cyclical *graduate* program review of “means to balance the workloads of faculty who have a large amount of graduate supervision.”

IV. Faculty resources

- 10) The University re-examine the contribution Economics makes to enrollment using a different base year or average of 3 to 5 years when determining its appropriate size of faculty complement.
- 11) In view of the large number of students, the large amount of service teaching to other units, and unusually large class sizes in the final years of its programs, we recommend that the Administration consider increasing the Faculty complement to a number that is consistent with the teaching needs of that student body.

Action: For many years now, the Department of Economics has recorded work load measures that exceed FPA-wide measures, which in turn have exceeded Carleton-wide measures and indeed those of all other Faculties on campus. Efforts to address this matter through the allocation of additional faculty positions will require an injection of funds from central administration and thus the support of FPG.

The following recommendations were proposed in the “Program Improvement” Section (J) of the Department’s Self-Study (14 August 2015 revision):

“First and foremost is our persistent shortage of faculty. ... [W]e are forced to depend quite heavily on contract instructors for core, required courses, which should have a larger faculty involvement. This is especially true in relation to the foundational course ECON 1000, which has for a long time been the most important mechanism for recruitment into the undergraduate economics program and for the last several years had only one faculty member involved in its teaching.”

Action: See the preceding action on “Faculty resources.”

“Second is our almost complete lack of dedicated undergraduate study space. While we allow students to use what was originally intended to be the Department’s faculty lounge (C-879 Loeb) during much of each workday, that room is too small relative to the demand thereby leading to over-crowding at times and general dissatisfaction among

actual and potential users (faculty and students alike). As the Department has done all it could to make efficient use of its space in recent years, internal re-allocation is not the answer. That the Department uses its space efficiently and has a need for more is evidenced by the fact that it was given a small increment during the last major assessment by the University even though it is located in the building where academic space is at its highest premium.”

Action: Remove the three walls separating C-862 Loeb (currently an undergraduate Student Computer Lab equipped with nine PCs and associated chairs) from the adjacent three hallways and thereby create a substantially (~80%) larger open space. The new space could be equipped with 8 PCs along the east wall and another 6 along the west wall (with the unused extra door to C-865 sealed permanently) as well as some lounge-type furniture in the middle. Alternatively, tables and chairs could be placed along the east and west walls and the existing computer-lab furniture and equipment could be moved elsewhere on the 8th floor of Loeb. Done properly (the middle part of the space in particular), neither of these arrangements would impede access by Ph.D. students to the Edwin G. West Reading Room (C-866) and the adjacent Ph.D. Student Workspace (C-867) to the northwest nor access to the W. Irwin Gillespie Seminar Room (C-869) to the north. Note that this project has been submitted to the University’s 2016–17 Capital Program; a decision is pending.

The new space envisioned above would enable a good number of undergraduate Economics students to work simultaneously in close proximity to their professors and (graduate-student) teaching assistants and promote interaction amongst the same thereby leading to greater collegiality and improved learning outcomes. According to CPR External Reviewer Ian Irvine, an economics professor at Concordia University in Montréal, a similar space in his department works well in achieving these ends.

“Finally, given the current lot of the undergraduate economics program as one of the large number of Carleton’s B.A. offerings and the attendant lack of effort made by the Admissions Office to recruit the right kind of students into it (see Sections G1 and G6 ... for details), the program’s relatively low retention numbers (as commonly measured) should come as no surprise. The solution we propose is to re-brand the undergraduate economics program as the ‘Carleton B.Econ.’ (or ‘Carleton Bachelor of Economics’), prohibit the direct entry of new, first-year students into the associated General program to reinforce its function as an ‘off-ramp’ for Honours students, and then hire a dedicated Admissions officer with some expertise in the subject matter to sell the merits of the ‘new’ degree outside the University. We believe strongly that doing so would increase the quantity of well-qualified, new, first-year, Economics students and have the knock-on effect of increasing retention and number of graduates. In conjunction with the Department’s demonstrated ability to switch well-qualified students into economics from other Carleton programs and its reputation for producing well-trained graduates for both further study in economics or other graduate programs and the workforce, this

change has the potential to pay for itself many times over and really raise the profile of Economics and, by extension, enhance the reputation of the University as a whole.”

Action: Prohibit the direct entry of new, first-year students into the associated General program to reinforce its function as an “off-ramp” for Honours students who no longer wish to complete that program.

Action: Work with the Office of the Vice-President (Students and Enrolment) and seek to hire as soon as possible a dedicated Admissions officer with some expertise in economics to sell the merits of the new B.Econ. Honours program outside the University. Base funds necessary for this hire to proceed will need to be requested from FPG.

Department of Economics

Action Plan Summary – Undergraduate Programs in Economics

Actions	Recommendations	Participants	Timeline
<i>Change degree designation from Bachelor of Arts to Bachelor of Economics (B.Econ.)</i>	1, 2, 3		<i>Approved at 27 May 2016 Senate meeting to take effect in 2017 Fall</i>
<i>Establish revised core Honours program (increase from 10.0 to 10.5 credits in major CGPA), including associated new courses and changes to relevant existing-course prerequisites and preclusions</i>	1, 2, 3		<i>Approved at 27 May 2016 Senate meeting to take effect in 2017 Fall</i>
<i>Closure of Applied Economics program (Honours, Honours with Concentration, Combined Honours) and deletion of certain current required Honours courses—one (ECON 3706) with a one-year lag</i>	1, 2, 3		<i>Approved at 27 May 2016 Senate meeting to take effect in 2017 Fall</i>
<i>Introduction of Concentration in Economic Theory</i>	1, 2, 3		<i>Approved at 27 May 2016 Senate meeting to take effect in 2017 Fall</i>
Implement the foregoing (on a course-section- and T.A.-neutral basis if the flow-through and enrolment levels of undergraduate Economics students don't change appreciably)	1, 2, 3	Department Chair	2017 Winter onwards
Push for the development of an appropriate version of ESLA 2000 (English Language Development for Specific Purposes I) to complement the proposed new ENGL 1020 (Academic Writing) course	1, 2, 3	Associate Dean (Curriculum and Planning) of FPA; Undergraduate Supervisor	2016 Late Summer – Fall
<i>Restrict entry to General program to be via internal transfer only</i>	<i>(4); Self-Study</i>		<i>Approved at 27 May 2016 Senate meeting to take effect in 2017 Fall</i>
<i>Create variants of new standard program that allow students to complete either 1 or 2 (of 7—four existing and three new) concentrations</i>	5		<i>Approved at 27 May 2016 Senate meeting to take effect in 2017 Fall</i>

<i>Transform distinct-from-standard aspects of existing Quantitative and Mathematical Economics specialization into new Concentration in Mathematics and Quantitative Economics</i>	6		<i>Approved at 27 May 2016 Senate meeting to take effect in 2017 Fall</i>
Reformulate program-level learning outcomes in relation to new B.Econ. to “better reflect goals of the programs and expectations for students”	7	Undergraduate Committee; Departmental Meeting	2016–17 Fall-Winter
Set up committee to look into the ECON 1000 attendance issue, “attempt to establish how much of the absenteeism is attributable to the availability of on-line material,” and determine what if anything might be tried to lessen it	8	Undergraduate Supervisor; ECON 1000 instructors	2016 Fall
Further exploration—in the context of the current cyclical <i>graduate</i> program review—of “means to balance the workloads of faculty who have a large amount of graduate supervision”	9	Graduate Program Review Team, 2016–17 Cycle	2016–17 Fall-Winter
Faculty resources—full-time appointments	10, 11; Self-Study	Dean of FPA; FPG	2017–18 budget allocation
Remove three walls separating C-862 Loeb from adjacent three hallways thereby creating a substantially (~80%) larger open space to be furnished appropriately for use by undergraduate Economics students	Self-Study	FMP; Dean of FPA (Capital Program request submitted to him by Chair on 9 May 2016)	2016–17 academic year
Work with the Office of the Vice-President (Students and Enrolment) and seek to hire a dedicated Admissions officer with some expertise in economics to sell merits of new B.Econ. Honours program outside University	(1, 2, 3); Self-Study	Dean of FPA; Director of Admissions Services; FPG	2016 Late Summer – Fall