

**OTTAWA-CARLETON COMMITTEE ON GRADUATE QUALITY ASSURANCE**  
**Cyclical Review of the joint PhD in Economics**  
**Cyclical review year: 2016-2017**  
**Executive Summary**

This Executive Summary and Final Assessment Report of the cyclical review of the joint PhD in Economics is provided pursuant to the provincial Quality Assurance Framework and the Institutional Quality Assurance Process for Joint Graduate Programs of Carleton University and the University of Ottawa.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The joint PhD in Economics resides in the Ottawa-Carleton Graduate School of Economics (OCGSE), a School administered by the Department of Economics at Carleton and the Department of Economics at the University of Ottawa.

As a consequence of the review, the program was categorized by the Ottawa-Carleton Committee on Graduate Quality Assurance as being of good quality (Joint IQAP 6.6).

The External Reviewers' report offered a very positive assessment of the program. Within the context of this positive assessment, the report nonetheless made a number of recommendations for the continued enhancement of the programs. These recommendations that were put forward were productively addressed in a response to the External Reviewers' report and Action Plan that was submitted to OCCGQA by the Chair of the Department of Economics, the Dean of the Faculty of Public Affairs and the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs at Carleton University in April 2019; and by the Chair of the Department of Economics and the Dean and Vice-Dean, Graduate Studies of the Faculty of Social Sciences' at the University of Ottawa, in February 2019.

**Ottawa-Carleton Graduate School of Economics  
Action Plan  
April 9, 2019**

| External Reviewer Recommendation & Categorization  | Action Item   | Owner  | Timeline  | Will the action described require calendar changes? ( Y or N) |
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| <p><b>1. Funding.</b> <i>This concern, which is particularly, if not exclusively, concerning for the University of Ottawa, has been already discussed under issues arising from the previous review.</i></p>   | <p><i>Engage in discussions with U of O Graduate Studies to seek a more flexible funding model and to increase the share of funding allocated to international students in economics to reflect their share of graduate admissions in the Faculty of Social Sciences.</i></p>   | <p><i>Department of Economics, University of Ottawa</i></p>  | <p><i>Ongoing</i></p>   | <p><i>N</i></p>   |
| <p><b>2. Supervision.</b> <i>A very important role, if not the most important, in the training of PhD students is played by the supervisor. Although potentially very rewarding, this is an extremely time-consuming duty that is crucial for the successful training of a new researcher. In their choice of supervisors, students select according to their interests, but also, and rightly so, according to the research record, experience, access to external funding, and reputation of faculty members. As a result, this task is not evenly distributed across faculty members, being concentrated on more senior and reputed scholars. In the case of the joint PhD program, this degree of concentration is particularly high. For instance, in</i></p> | <p><i>The Department of Economics at Carleton to explore the introduction of an incentive scheme to encourage PhD supervision.</i><br/><i>The Department has also just been awarded a Tier II CRC which should help with the distribution of supervision.</i><br/><i>The introduction of the second-year paper can help redistribute the shares of supervision by having a wider range of faculty</i></p> | <p><i>Incentive Scheme – Carleton Department of Economics. Second-year workshop - University of Ottawa Department of Economics, and Carleton</i></p> | <p><i>Spring-Summer 2019 (in time for calendar changes for Fall 2020 intake.)</i></p> | <p><i>Y</i></p>   |

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| <p><i>Carleton 15% of the faculty members (4 of them) were responsible for roughly 80% of the supervision (self-study pg. 53). Part of this concentration is a direct consequence of demographic changes in the faculty, with newly hired Assistant Professors naturally contributing less to PhD supervision. As these faculty members become more established and begin to attract outside funding they will surely join the pool of active supervisors. Nonetheless given the large cohorts of PhD students and the associated needs for supervision, this committee believes there is a need to think carefully about means to enlarge the group of active PhD supervisors, be it through an incentive scheme, as is done in other Ontario universities, or through hires at more senior levels.</i></p>  | <p><i>members giving feedback on PhD student research early in the student's program.</i></p>   | <p><i>Department of Economics.</i></p>                                       |  |                 |
| <p><b>3. Modifications to the PhD curriculum.</b> <i>The first-year curriculum in the PhD at the top-10 Canadian Economic departments, excluding the program under consideration, is standard. All of them require their students to take year-long sequences in Microeconomics, Macroeconomics and Econometrics. At the end of the year students take Comprehensive exams. This is the standard not only in Canada, but also at the top US and European research-oriented Universities, with the possible exception of the UK. First-year sequences provide the theoretical background required for the successful completion of a dissertation. In contrast to this paradigm, the program under review only offers one term of each of these three core subjects. While some students are de facto moving to year-long sequences on their own by taking the compulsory courses from both the PhD and the MA program, we feel it will be advantageous to the overall</i></p> | <p><i>The departments to work together to bring forward the calendar changes at their respective institutions to implement these important changes. The net addition of two additional one semester (0.5 credit) courses (adding a course in each of micro, macro and econometrics and removing the math econ course) to bring our first-year sequence up to the Canadian standard of six courses. With the addition of a second-year paper, the program will entail a net increase of 2.0 credits, to be shared equally across the two departments. In</i></p> | <p><i>Departments of Economics at Carleton and University of Ottawa.</i></p> | <p><i>Spring-Summer 2019 (in time for calendar changes to be in place for Fall 2020 intake.)</i></p> | <p><i>Y</i></p> |

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| <p><i>training of PhD students to implement the curriculum that is standard in economics. In the second-year of the economics PhD program there is more heterogeneity across schools. Nonetheless there exists a trend towards a reducing field requirements, including the elimination of field exams, and the introduction of research objectives, usually in the form of a second-year research paper that provides the student with an early opportunity to apply the tools developed over the first year. Such a requirement allows students to explore a research question and often serves as the starting point for dissertation work. In this sense, this committee recommends considering replacing the field exam with a second-year paper requirement. This paper requirement could be integrated as the final output of the research seminar that is currently targeted to students that have already completed their second year. In many schools, the research paper is not only submitted at the end of the second year (or perhaps early in the first term of the 3rd year to allow for polishing during the summer before the 3rd year), but two or three days are set apart for students to present their results to the faculty and other students. This reinforces the perception of the second-year paper as an important milestone towards the completion of a successful dissertation. Although at first sight these three changes –year-long first-year sequences, elimination of the field exam, and addition of a second-year paper-- may be interpreted as increasing the number of requirements and therefore might lead to an increase in the time to completion, we believe that they will reduce this time by solidifying the theoretical training and by encouraging students to begin much earlier with their research agendas.</i></p> | <p><i>addition, Carleton's Economics department plans to shift existing teaching resources to the PhD program, rather than requesting new resources.</i></p> |  |  |  |
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| <p><b>4. Time to completion.</b><i>In recent years we have witnessed an increase in the time to completion in top PhD programs in Economics. While a couple of decades ago there was a stigma associated with obtaining a PhD in economics in more than 5 years, nowadays it has become the norm for students aiming at academic position to spend at least 6 years in their PhD training. Our goal is not to justify this trend or to understand the reasons behind it, but simply to acknowledge it. In general, economics PhD programs at research-oriented institutions attract two types of audiences –those who want to pursue an academic career and those who want to access high level positions in government or industry. This distinction, as a result of the Ottawa location, is even starker in the joint PhD program. As opposed to most other schools, the employment opportunities for students while enrolled in the joint PhD program are plentiful. In this sense we believe the increases in time to completion that the joint PhD program has experienced could roughly be attributed to two reasons, one common to most leading PhD programs and one specific to the joint program related to the abundant job opportunities in Ottawa. Overall we believe the proposed changes in the curriculum will speed up the progress of students through the program, front-loading a bit more the program while accelerating the transition to research. Ideally, these changes will induce students taking external job opportunities to do</i></p> | <p><i>See response to recommendation #3.</i></p> |

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| <p><i>so at a later stage when their research is already on track, progressing toward the dissertation.</i></p>   |   |  |                         |                 |
| <p><b>5. Scope for additional coordination in the Ottawa-Carleton Graduate School of Economics.</b> <i>Although a lot of progress has been made at integrating the joint PhD program, there are still important differences in admissions criteria, funding, access to resources (software and the research seminar, which seems not to be offered on a regular basis at Carleton), ability of students well-advanced in the program to teach at least once their own course (as an anecdote, one of the internal reviewers pointed out that in a recent tenure-track search in his department at the Assistant Professor level, only those with previous experience in teaching a course were considered for the position, those that only had experience as teaching assistants were not considered), evaluation criteria (rules for sharing questions and comments of external examiners), and supervision requirements. Some of these differences -particularly in funding, access to resources, and teaching opportunities-- are regarded by some students as unfair, preventing them from identifying with the OCGSE project. In our view the choice of supervisor should be primarily determined by the interests of the student, of course conditional on the agreement of the faculty member. Requirements on a certain mix of supervisors from Carleton and Ottawa, or restrictions on the supervising role of members of the one department for students of the other do seem artificial. This should not prevent that in some or many</i></p> | <p>(1) <i>Departments to continue to work together to harmonize admissions standards.</i></p> <p><i>See action item for recommendation number 1.</i></p> <p><i>Carleton Economics department to explore and ensure access to software is adequate (PhD students already told they should be attending seminars).</i></p> <p><i>Both departments to review teaching opportunities for advanced PhD students.</i></p> <p><i>Departments to discuss possibility of removing primary supervisor restriction with Graduate Faculties.</i></p> <p><i>Departments to continue to work towards greater coordination of seminar series and field-specific workshops involving professors from both universities.</i></p> | <p><i>Carleton and University of Ottawa Departments of Economics and Graduate Faculties.</i></p> | <p><i>Fall 2019</i></p> | <p><i>N</i></p> |

*cases students end up choosing committee members from both schools. Our understanding of the current state of affairs is that the main supervisor should be appointed from the student's home institution, while if the student is interested in a member of the other department this member could be at most recognized as a co-supervisor. This could lead to situations in which a student working in area A ends up being supervised on paper by a faculty member with expertise in area B. This might impact the likelihood of success of the student in the academic job market since his main supervisor will not be an expert in the student's research area. We are aware this has already happened in at least one instance in the recent years. Additionally, coordination between departmental seminars would be desirable, particularly when speakers at both schools have similar areas of specialization. This will allow interested faculty and students in both schools to attend both seminars, which seems an important part of exploiting scale economies in the combined program.*

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