

**CARLETON UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON
QUALITY ASSURANCE**

**Cyclical Review of the graduate programs in Political Economy
Executive Summary and Final Assessment Report**

This Executive Summary and Final Assessment Report of the cyclical review of Carleton's graduate programs in Political Economy are provided pursuant to articles 4.2.5.b-4.2.6.a-b of the provincial Quality Assurance Framework and article 7.2.23 of Carleton's Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The graduate programs in Political Economy (MA in Political Economy; MA in Political Economy with specialization in African Studies; PhD with specialization in Political Economy (collaborative program)) reside in Carleton University's Institute of Political Economy, 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 to the Institute of Political Economy on December 14th, 2015, offered a very positive assessment of the programs. According to the reviewers, the Institute "has a national reputation that is unequalled" and "is widely recognized for its deep commitment to the field [of Political Economy] as a discipline in its own right." The report goes on to say that "both the MA and Ph.D. programs give students a very good grounding in both theory and methodology," and that the Learning Outcomes are met "through the strong intellectual profile of those associated with the program, through the core courses, through strong connections with the wider community, through its strong support of students, and through the research-intensive degrees." The Reviewers also noted that "the students are highly complimentary of the attention they receive from both the Director and the Administrator." The reviewers observed as well that all faculty members associated with the programs "have exceptional research profiles, publish frequently in the appropriate academic journals, and are active participants in issues related to political economy in the wider community."

Within the context of this positive assessment, the report nonetheless made a number of recommendations for the continuing enhancement of the programs. These recommendations were productively addressed by the Director of the Institute and the Deans of the Faculty of Public Affairs and the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs in a response to the report of the External Review that was submitted to CUCQA on May 25th, 2016.

An Action Plan detailing how, when and by whom the recommendations will be implemented was received and approved by CUCQA on December 14th, 2016.

FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

Introduction

The graduate programs in Political Economy (MA in Political Economy; MA in Political Economy with specialization in African Studies; PhD with specialization in Political Economy (collaborative program)) reside in Carleton University's Institute of Political Economy, 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 site visit, which took place on October 14th and 15th, 2015, was conducted by Dr. Marjorie Griffin Cohen, from Simon Fraser University, and Dr. Daniel Salée, from Concordia University. The site visit involved formal meetings with the Assistant Vice-President (Academic), the Deans of the Faculty of Public Affairs and the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs, and the Director of the Institute of Political Economy. The review committee also met with faculty members, contract instructors, staff, MA and PhD students, as well as with Chairs of units affiliated with the Political Economy programs. The Reviewers also toured the Institute's facilities.

The External Reviewers' report, submitted on December 14th, 2015, offered a very positive assessment of the program.

This Final Assessment Report provides a summary of:

- Strengths of the programs
- Challenges faced by the programs
- Opportunities for program improvement and enhancement
- The Outcome of the Review
- The Action Plan

This report draws on eight documents:

- The Self-study developed by members of the Political Economy programs (please see Carleton's IQAP 7.2.1-7.2.3) (Appendix A)
- The Report of the External Review Committee (IQAP 7.2.9.16) (Appendix B).
- Communication from CUCQA regarding the outcome of the external review (IQAP 7.2.9.18) (Appendix C)
- The response from the Director of the Institute of Political Economy and the Deans of the Faculty of Public Affairs and the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs to the Report of the External Review Committee (IQAP 7.2.9.19) (Appendix D).
- The internal discussant's recommendation report (IQAP 7.2.11) (Appendix E).
- The communication from CUCQA regarding the outcome of the review (IQAP 7.2.15) (Appendix F).
- The program's Action Plan (IQAP 7.2.16) (Appendix G)
- The acceptance by CUCQA of the Action Plan (Appendix H)

Appendix I contains brief biographies of the members of the External Review Committee.

This Final Assessment Report contains the Action Plan (Appendix G) agreed to by the Director of the Institute of Political Economy and the Deans of the Faculty of Public Affairs and the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs, regarding the implementation of recommendations for program enhancement to have been advanced as a consequence of the cyclical program review process.

The Action Plan provides an account of who is responsible for implementing the agreed upon recommendations, as well as of the timelines for implementation and reporting.

Strengths of the programs

General

The External Reviewers' Report states that the Institute of Political Economy (IPE) "has a national reputation that is unequaled. [... It] is unique and has an excellent reputation, both within Canada and in other parts of the world. There is no other stand-alone Political Economy graduate program in Canada." The report adds that "its outcomes, in both the number, and quality of its graduate students, are outstanding. Because of the strong intellectual community it has fostered, it also is the catalyst within the University for those dealing with political economy in their research and teaching, something that adds significantly to the experience of students."

Faculty

The External Report indicates that all faculty members "have exceptional research profiles, publish frequently in the appropriate academic journals, and are active participants in issues related to political economy in the wider community. The faculty members attracted to this program are exceptional and most are known throughout Canada. Two are Chancellor's Professors and all are involved in research projects."

Students

The Reviewers commented that the quality of education in the programs is reflected in "the reception IPE's students receive in the wider world when their degree is finished. The Ph.D. students have an impressive publications record and even some MA students have been published in refereed academic journals." The theses that the Reviewers read "were exceptional in their quality and in their interdisciplinary nature." The reviewers also noted that PhD students consider the Institute "to be their 'consistent intellectual hub,' for many feel 'more at home in the Institute' than in their home department. MA students particularly liked its 'social active nature,' and the way that they were 'connected to various social issues'." The Reviewers also stressed that "all the students [they] met agreed that their life as graduate students was made considerably easier and nearly trouble-free thanks to the Director and Administrator who literally go out of their way to ensure that they be aware of every important detail related to their passage through the programs and ensure that their time at IPE is a pleasant one."

Curriculum

The Reviewers remarked that "the core courses have been designed to give students a broad understanding of the major theories and approaches to political economy [... and they] give the

breadth of knowledge that is crucial for developing critical abilities, and familiarity with various methodological approaches to research.”

Challenges faced by the programs

While the Institute is generally successful, the Reviewers stated that “the major drawback to the current programs is that IPE does not exist as a department with its own faculty. It is therefore totally reliant on other academic units’ good will to provide all of its faculty needs.” According to the Reviewers, “the programs would stand on firmer grounds if they could count both on a stable offering of courses conceived specifically for them and a core group of professors for whom a part of their teaching duties and workload would be formally earmarked for IPE.”

Since “there is no dedicated faculty, [...] designing the required courses is difficult because they are taught by different faculty with different approaches to political economy.” This results in some dissatisfaction on the part of students. Based on comments from doctoral students, the Reviewers reported that “there was some concern that the Ph.D. theory course becomes more like a ‘topics in PE’ course [...] Students would like a content that gives more attention to the shifts in theoretical approaches [to Political Economy]. This, they felt, would make the ‘discipline’ less ‘fuzzy’ and be more provocative in thinking about political economy.” At the Master’s level, the Reviewers observed a desire “to have the theory course extend to one year, or to combine the theory and methods course into a single one-year course. Whether or how to revise the core courses should be examined by a committee that focuses on curriculum.”

The Reviewers also indicated that “the other major issues raised that affects the governance of IPE related to the 0.4 academic position that IPE lost in recent years.” This loss has caused “real hardship in a very small unit [...] The removal of the 0.4 faculty appointment through attrition has created pressures on the Director and part of this deals with supervisory duties.” Therefore, the Reviewers commented that “reinstating this position could have a positive impact on the governance structure of IPE [...] The position could be assigned a specific role in the governance structure, including taking a role in mentoring MA students until their senior supervisor is in place.”

Finally, the Reviewers praised the current unit administrator. However, they cautioned that there is a risk that the administrator might “be overextended, which, over time, may have a negative impact on her effectiveness.” There is also the risk of an “operational breakdown that may ensue in the event that [the administrator] is kept away from work for a prolonged period. From the standpoint of administrative continuity, IPE is in a vulnerable position.” The Reviewers thus “strongly encourage the university to consider bringing in a junior support staff member at least on a part-time basis, who would assist” the current administrator.

Opportunities for program improvement and enhancement

The External Reviewers’ Report made 14 recommendations for improvement:

1. *Conduct regular exit surveys of graduates.*
2. *Include ‘quality assurance’ identification among the tasks for the development of a committee structure in IPE*

3. *If the 0.4 permanent faculty is restored that teaching at least one core course be part of the duties in order to ensure consistency in how the theory course is taught.*
4. *IPE needs to conduct a review of its core courses to both ensure that the content has consistency over time, but also to see if the content generates the outcomes desired. Ideally a committee focusing on curriculum would do this.*
5. *Consider offering more interdisciplinary courses in IPE*
6. *That IPE institute a small curriculum committee and/or steering committee*
7. *That IPE considers establishing an advisory committee that might include those within Carleton and from the wider community. This committee might function as a program committee that could plan and publicize IPE events*
8. *Create an Associate Director to assist with the governance of IPE.*
9. *Re-instate 0.4 faculty position with definite governance duties assigned to this position.*
10. *Students should be assigned a formal temporary faculty advisor when they enter the program*
11. *Increase support staff by the addition of part-time support.*
12. *Consider increasing the former 0.4 faculty position to full-time.*
13. *IPE should work on a definition of political economy to include in its brochure.*
14. *Provide a study or common room for Ph.D. students in IPE.*

CUCQA considered all recommendations to be pertinent and invited the Institute to address each of them in their response and subsequent Action Plan.

The Outcome of the Review

As a consequence of the review, the Political Economy programs were categorised by the Carleton University Committee on Quality Assurance (CUCQA) as being of **GOOD QUALITY** (Carleton's IQAP 7.2.12).

The Action Plan.

The recommendations that were put forward as a result of the review process were productively addressed by the Director of the Institute and the Deans of the Faculty of Public Affairs and the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs in a response to the report of the External Review that was considered by CUCQA on May 25th, 2016. An Action Plan detailing how, when and by whom the recommendations will be implemented was received and approved by CUCQA on December 14th, 2016.

The institute was generally pleased with the report and agreed to implement a number of recommendations. The Institute unconditionally agreed to take action on recommendations #2, #4,

#6, #7, and #13. The Institute also agreed to implement recommendation #1 contingent on support from the University to conduct the exit survey.

The response to the remaining recommendations provided justifications for the Institute's decision to decline taking action. The reasons for such decisions were related either to issues of resources that are beyond the Institute's control (recommendations #3, #8, #9, #11 and #12), or to the Institute's opinion that the status quo is satisfactory and that no action need be taken (recommendations #5, #10, and #14). CUCQA accepted the Institute's rationale regarding recommendations that were declined.

It is to be noted that Carleton's IQAP (7.7.1) provides for the monitoring of action plans: 'A report will be filed with the Office of the Vice-Provost by the Faculty Dean(s) and academic unit(s) when the timeline is reached for the implementation of each element of the Action Plan. This report will be forwarded to CUCQA for its review.'

In the case of Political Economy, the majority of monitoring will be achieved by means of regular updates on the Action Plan, the first of which being expected by June 30th, 2017.

The Next Cyclical Review

The next cyclical review of the Political Economy graduate programs will be conducted during the 2021-22 academic year.