

Economics, Graduate, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies

Cyclical Program Review – 2008-2014

Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan

Reported to Joint-Committee on Quality Assurance: April 28, 2017

Program Description

The Graduate Program in Economics at York University offers graduate programs leading to two degrees: MA in Economics and PhD in Economics. The Graduate Program in Economics at York University began with the Master’s program in 1971. The Doctoral program began in 1978.

Program	Accepts 2014	Enrolment FTES 2014	Degrees Awarded 2014
Master’s level	38	57	47
PhD	8	24	1

Reviewers appointed by the Vice-Provost Academic:

Rose Anne Devlin, Professor, Department of Economics, University of Ottawa
 Chris Robinson, Professor, Department of Economics, Western University, Ontario
 Peter Victor, Professor, Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University

Documentation Provided to the External Reviewers

Prior to the site visit, the external reviewers are provided with the following:

- Program Self-Study Brief, which includes program structure, curriculum and learning outcomes, program reflection, enrolment and retention data, resources, student input and quality enhancement opportunities
- Dean’s /Principal’s Agenda of Concerns
- Faculty CVs
- University, Faculty and Program planning documents

Site Visit: Wednesday, April 20, 2016

The Reviewers began the site visit with Vice-Provost, Alice Pitt. Through the rest of the day the reviewers had the opportunity to meet with the Dean of FGS, Barbara Crow; Associate Dean of LA&PS, John-Justin McMurtry; Economics Chair, Mahmudal Anam, Graduate Program Director, George J. Georgopoulos, University Librarians, program faculty



members and a group of students. The Reviewer's Report notes that "a lively lunch meeting" was held with about 25 graduated students, followed by meeting with 20 faculty members.

Outcome:

The Joint-Committee on Quality Assurance concluded that the Decanal response adequately addressed the review recommendations. Progress on the recommendations will be included in the Follow-up Report due September 2018. The next CPR will begin in the Fall of 2021 and will align with the undergraduate program.

Strengths:

About the faculty complement in the Economics graduate program, the Reviewers made the following comment, "The faculty complement provides for high quality PhD supervision and recent hires suggest that this will only increase in the future."

According to the Self-Study Report, 97% of master's students complete their one year program within the expected time. With regards to completion times for the doctoral program, the Reviewers noted, "The introduction of the ECON7000 workshop-type course, in which students present their dissertation work, was considered by the graduate students as a positive improvement for the program. Several students spoke about the importance of this course in helping them to develop topics and stay on track."

The Reviewers observed that "clear and ambitious learning objectives" have been developed for the MA and PhD programs that are in alignment with OCAV degree level expectations. The also noted that student funding for PhD students is generous.

Recommendations for Enhancement

The External Reviewers noted in their report, that while the MA program is functioning well, "Our impression of the PhD program is that it is a program in flux." They note that over the past few years there have been changes for the better; however, improvements are still necessary to meet the program's potential.

The Reviewers recommendations focused on the PhD program and commended "the recent initiatives and the research active faculty responsible for them, together with the recent hiring" as providing a good foundation for the future. They urged that the "Department make changes that will protect and build on the(se) assets."

The suggestions included the following:

- The department should encourage and support involvement of the

recent hires in the PhD program in obtaining grants and publishing their research. More generally, the department should encourage their faculty members to apply for internal funds designed to provide seed money for larger, external, funding opportunities. These funds often finance research assistantships, which may have the added benefit of helping PhD students looking for thesis topics.

- The department should continue with the recent changes in the program and encourage research communication and collaboration between the students, the recent hires and other active research faculty.
- A challenge that is often faced by programs that follow a reasonably standardized regime concerns the ability to maintain curriculum currency and freshness. Standard graduate programs in Economics often adjust slowly. The Reviewers recommended that some thought be given to increasing the program's attractiveness by providing a greater opportunity for interdisciplinary study: by "[s]trengthening links to other units through cross-listing courses, joint seminars, collaborative research and joint appointments, which is comparatively easy at York, the Department would be able to distinguish itself in a positive way from Departments of Economics in other universities."
- The department was urged to investigate the possibility of collaboration with faculty at other area universities at the level of supervision of PhD students when the topic permits in cases of particularly promising students; and to consider the possibility of a more active workshop program with full involvement of the PhD students. (This could even take the form of a requirement for the students in terms of certain tasks connected with the workshop.)
- The Reviewers recommended supporting the formation of research groups for informal presentation of research by students and faculty, as well as ensuring graduate students are aware of funding for conferences.
- A mentoring program to help junior people supervise should be formalized.

Implementation Plan

The Dean's Implementation Plan commends the program for a thoughtful self-study document and the reviewers for thoughtful consideration of opportunities for enhancement. The Plan notes, "There are many helpful suggestions in both reports (collaboration with other faculties and faculty members, research workshops and groups, more research and publishing opportunities for graduate students, etc.), and this Dean's Implementation Plan will address those appropriate to its form, but it is hoped that the Economics graduate program reflect on these reports as it works forward and continues to evolve and implement these helpful suggestions."

The Dean notes, “The first, and consistent, issue raised in the review was a concern around the consistency and support for graduate supervision and, perhaps relatedly, the timely completion of the Ph.D. The Dean’s Office is in support of the graduate programs examining what can be done to improve supervision from within program culture (as opposed to providing release or other individual rewards) and to ensure consistency as much as possible for graduate students.”

The first row in the chart below outlines the action item, responsibilities and timeline for an action item to address this issue.

The second and third items in the chart highlight how to action two recommendations made by the reviewers. With regards to the third item, an exit survey, the Dean’s Implementation Plan notes the following, “This seems like a good idea, and one that might well be extended to other graduate programs in LA&PS in the future.”

The final item on the chart below responds to the Reviewers’ observation that there is a “disturbing downward trend in the tri-council funding” of graduate program faculty research. In the Dean’s Office’s opinion, “this situation needs to be addressed strategically and with some urgency.”

Action	First Responsibility	Final Responsibility	Timeline
Review and report on the supervisory culture and time to completion for the Ph.D.	GS Economics	GS Economics with the Associate Dean Graduate Studies & Research	September 2017
Proposal for the creation of a graduate placement officer	GS Economics	Review by the Dean’s Office	September 2017
Development of an “exit survey” for graduates	GS Economics	GS Economics with consultation of the Associate Dean Graduate Studies & Research	Constructed by November 2017 and distributed for all 2018 graduates
Retreat and report on tri-council funding	GS Economics	GS Economics in concert with the Associate Dean Graduate Studies & Research	November 2017

The Joint Sub-Committee noted at its April 28, 2017 meeting that changes to the curriculum for the PhD program have been approved in February 2017 and hopes this will address the issues above. In addition the Joint Sub-Committee urges that the Dean's Office and Program be sure to pay particular attention to the decrease in Tri Council funding (and acknowledges that this is an item in the Dean's Plan). The Follow-up Report, due in November 2018, will provide an update on the plans outlined above.

Alice J. Pitt
Vice-Provost Academic
York University