

Final Assessment Report

Name of Program

Economics

Degrees Offered

BA (honors); BA (four year); BA (three year)

External Consultants

Gillian Hamilton, Assoc. Professor and Assoc. Chair (Undergraduate) - University of Toronto, Economics
Anke Kessler, Professor and Undergraduate Chair - Simon Fraser University, Economics

Internal Reviewers

Jeff Hutter, Assoc. Dean (Academic) - Western University, Faculty of Science
Craig Rodrigues, student - Western University, BMSc program

Date of Site Visit

Mar 7, 2016

Evaluation

Good Quality

Approved by SUPR-U

Sep 28, 2016

Approved by SCAPA

Oct 5, 2016

Executive Summary

The review team met with faculty, staff, and students involved with the Economics program, as well as with senior administrators and library representatives. The external reviewers noted that the Dept. of Economics places a large emphasis on promoting its research strength. Elements of its strategic plan pertaining to undergraduate education include commitments to enhance its program “to attract high quality domestic and international students, provide an excellent learning environment and achieve high quality placements.” Teaching of transferable skills and providing experiential and international experiences were cited as priorities.

The reviewers concluded that the program “succeeds in offering an excellent learning environment,” particularly for students in Honors Specialization modules. They were particularly impressed with the experience offered by the honors capstone thesis, as well as the flexibility of the program overall. They also noted that students were very satisfied with the learning experience as evidenced by Instructor & Course Evaluations, as well as by departmental surveys. It was apparent that number of instructors was sufficient for the teaching mission, though the reviewers noted that more might become necessary if enrolments continue to increase.

A concern expressed by the reviewers was that the bulk of first- and second-year teaching in the program is performed by “semi-permanent” lecturers, and they suggested that the quality of education would benefit from lecturers with more training. However, the Department notes that these represent a dedicated group of instructors doing a demonstrably excellent job. Another concern was the students’ mathematical preparation, which the department has already been discussing. The reviewers wrote at length about the dichotomy in programming offered to students in the honors and non-honors streams, noting that not only did the latter group not reach the same level of training, but they also were also not assessed by the same diversity of methods. The reviewers also recommended an expansion of 3rd- and 4th-year course offerings, particularly in applied areas emphasizing research, data analysis and writing. It was noted that students experienced some bottlenecks in course selection, as well as gaps in advising services. The reviewers recommended that the Department encourage instructors to update their teaching methods to incorporate more active learning (e.g., flipped classrooms) and technology (e.g., online and blended learning). A final concern raised was the high workload of the Undergraduate Coordinator, with a recommendation of providing additional resources or redistributing some of the load to other staff members.

Significant Strengths of Program

- strong research department, providing students with instructors at the forefront of the discipline
- flexible degree paths
- high degree of student satisfaction
- well-subscribed and growing
- exemplary capstone thesis course

Suggestions for improvement & Enhancement

- ensure adequate and uniform math preparation, perhaps by introducing a "mathematics for economists" course, required for honors students
- expand the 3rd- and 4th-year course offerings, particularly in applied areas such as research, data analysis, programming and writing
- increase the number of 3rd-year topics for students in the Specialization module
- consider including tools beyond multiple-choice exams in assessing non-honors students
- examine staff support of the undergraduate program

Recommendations required for Program sustainability:

Recommendation	Responsibility		