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TO: Digvir Jayas
President and Vice Chancellor

DATE: June 6, 2024

FROM: Alan Siaroff
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

RE: Department of Economics Academic Quality Assurance Review

In accordance with the U of L *Academic Quality Assurance Policy and Process*, the Academic Quality Assurance Committee approved the review of the Department of Economics at its May 24, 2024 meeting.

The Self Study Committee for this review was comprised of: Duane Rockerbie (Program Review Coordinator), Kien Tran, and Michael Lanyi.

The review produced 4 documents:

1. Self Study Report. Written by the Self Study Committee. Received October 6, 2021.
2. External Review Report. Written by Dr. Hugh Grant (University of Winnipeg) and Dr. Louise Grogan (University of Guelph) based on a virtual site visit December 1 to 2, 2022 and a follow-up virtual meeting with students on June 7, 2023. Received February 26, 2024.
3. Program Response. Written by the Self Study Committee. Received March 14, 2024.
4. Dean's Response. Written by Matt Letts, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science Received May 6, 2024.

Self Study Report

The Self Study Report asked for External Reviewer feedback on several areas:

- Refer The suitability of the proposed course-based MA program.
- Guidelines for the provision of online undergraduate courses.
- Suggestions for modernizing the list of undergraduate courses in the university calendar and their sequencing.

The body of the report noted several strengths of the Department of Economics:

- The undergraduate program has seen a number of significant improvements since the last AQA review in 2012, including the creation of an Honours program and an Economics minor, as well as the addition of several new courses. The Department is very satisfied with the structure of the BA Economics program and sees little necessity for change, other than offering a greater number of 4000-level courses each year.
- The Department of Economics maintains an impressive publication rate for its relatively small size (there is no research requirement for the three Instructors) and most faculty members attend national and international conferences regularly and serve (or have served) as board members or in executive positions in various economics associations.
- The Department of Economics is frequently called upon to give expert opinions and advice to the external community. This is usually done through interviews conducted by local and national media on radio, television or internet and occurs on a weekly basis. The Department is strongly committed to communication with the external community on any issues that fall within our areas of expertise and faculty members are encouraged to do so.

The following weaknesses and challenges were mentioned in the body of the report:

- The Department of Economics has come under increasing pressure to offer sections of its principles courses (ECON 1010, 1012, 2900, 3030) online. This has introduced new workload issues and debates regarding teaching pedagogy. The Department is not opposed to online course offerings, however more direction from the Administration needs to be given to implement online courses effectively and equitably.
- Teaching and research can be enhanced and encouraged by inviting researchers from other institutions to give seminars on research and teaching topics. This was done frequently in the distant past and many undergraduate students attended. Unfortunately, resources have not been available for some time to cover the expenses of this beneficial practice that is widely used by other institutions. Our relatively small size also makes it difficult to locate willing researchers. The Department has made efforts to conduct seminars given by department members, but the number of these is quite limited, and is not an equivalent substitute for external researchers.
- The Department of Economics has lost two faculty member positions since 2010 with no replacements. Despite this, the Department launched a new MA program in 2016 that has placed a burden on the faculty members to supervise MA students. The undergraduate program has also been negatively impacted due to the inability to offer a necessary number of third- and fourth-year courses to allow BA Economics majors to graduate. This has resulted in the increasing use of independent study courses to service these students. The Department also faces the retirement of one faculty member and Administrative Support person on the horizon. The current budget crisis

facing the Faculty of Arts and Science makes it unlikely that this position will be replaced, and the likelihood of future new positions bleak.

- The necessary resources to operate effective BA and MA programs typically include a dedicated computer lab and software licenses, neither of which is currently available.

Recommendations from the body of the report:

- The MA Economics program needs to offer a greater number of required and elective courses in order to achieve comparability with MA programs at other Canadian institutions that offer course-based MA degrees. The necessary resources to operate effective BA and MA programs typically include a dedicated computer lab and software licenses, neither of which is currently available.
- The Department of Economics does have positive prospects for the future, but these cannot be reached in the Faculty of Arts and Science. It is imperative that a move to the Dhillon School of Business be given the serious consideration it deserves by all stakeholders. The 2012 External Reviewers Report recommended that discussions be initiated for such a move (to the then Faculty of Management) but the recommendation was not acted on by the Dean of Arts and Science. The time is ripe to revisit this issue for many good reasons.
- It would be beneficial to offer new 3000- and 4000- level courses as an effort to acquire more Economics majors and combined and double majors, but resource constraints have made this very difficult.
- A move to a course-based MA degree could alleviate the resource problem by reducing supervising duties, but would require a larger number of dedicated graduate courses that need to be staffed. The revenue potential is promising and could assist in new hiring. One of the benefits of a successful graduate program is the reputation it creates for the undergraduate program. The graduate program needs to progress to be comparable with programs at other Canadian institutions.

External Review Report

The External Review Report contained 5 (five) recommendations for improving the Department of Economics program.

Recommendations from the body of the report:

- Recommendation 1. that the department be encouraged to develop its three-semester, course-based MA and be given greater control over admission/acceptances and scholarships/bursaries without which the potential of a net-revenue generating program cannot be realized.
- Recommendation 2. that the department be given greater control over resource allocation. It does not require a large allotment of new resources, or a redistribution of existing resources, to stimulate a more vibrant teaching and research culture in the department.
- Recommendation 3. that the department be relocated from the Faculty of Arts & Science to the Dhillon School of Business.
- Recommendation 4. The department should consider the suitability of.
 - moving Intermediate Micro and Macro to the 2000-level;
 - moving some 3000-level field courses to the 2000-level (since the only the Principle courses are prerequisites);

- adding courses on topics such as Behavioural Economics (possibly as a 3000-level theory course) and Data Visualization (if this also supports the Business degree);
- creating one or two “Special Topics” courses at the 4000-level and rotate the fields covered in existing 4000-level courses as the special topics.
- Recommendation 5. Contingent upon being able to expand the MA program, the department should consider reintroducing lab sections to some undergraduate courses and to make them mandatory.

Challenges discussed in the report:

- Faculty members are well-trained in their particular fields of teaching and research, but there is need for faculty renewal. The last faculty hire was in 2012. New hires are a catalyst for research and curricular initiatives. They bring with them first-hand knowledge on the latest developments in the discipline based on their graduate school training, access to research networks and opportunities for research collaborations with existing academic staff.
- The limited autonomy that the department has over resource allocation is striking. It is our understanding that there is little or no department budget over which it exercises discretion with the exception of a small scholarship and tutoring fund.

Opportunities discussed in the report:

- It is our understanding that the Calgary campus plays an important role in undergraduate Business, Executive and Continuing Education programs. There is a role for the department to contribute; however, clear direction is required on the role of the department as the Calgary campus evolves.
- Economics departments are a significant vehicle on Canadian campuses for attracting more international students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The department at UL is no exception. With the international market shifting to countries where English is the language of instruction and where good mathematics and statistics training is common, the department can play an important role in developing a more global student body and in generating tuition revenue.
- All Canadian universities have been quick to declare indigenization as a strategic priority but have been slow to develop an implementation plan. With the growing proportion of indigenous students among high school cohorts, developing a relevant curriculum is not only the right thing to do but also an important aspect of financial sustainability. The department has indicated its willingness to contribute but, again, needs direction on how indigenization is to be achieved across the university.
- The Department of Economics is at a crossroads. The Self-Study report describes the department as being in “a survival mode.” Given the shifting patterns of university enrollment at both UL and across the country, its current role is as a social science that supports a variety of other programs. So, most likely, does its future. An overarching question is in what Faculty it can best serve this role...

A move to the Management Faculty/DSB has been under consideration since at least 2012 when the AQA external reviewers raised the possibility. The suggestion to initiate discussions of such a move was not acted upon at the decanal level. Further, it is our understanding that the Faculty Realignment Task Force, struck to consider relocating departments across Faculties, concluded

its deliberations without offering any recommendations. During this time, the department has observed the opportunities for growth pass by.

Relocating to the DSB is not without its risks to the department. It means a potential loss of social science “identity” and of being submerged as one field within a Business program; however, the status quo provides few promising alternatives. Joint programs, such as the Oxbridge PPE (Philosophy, Politics and Economics) have some marketing appeal, but we are unaware of any instances at other Canadian institutions where such programs are thriving. Moreover, there is no reason why the department could not contribute to such a program from within the DSB. As the Self-Study report makes the case, relocation is “not just an opportunity for growth, but a matter of survival.”

[There is an] argument...that there is a better alignment between the department and the DSB. We concur with the reasons cited by the Self-Study report why this is the case from the perspective of the department (and without having had the opportunity to speak with the DSB Dean).

Program Response

In their Program Response, the Self Study Committee addressed the recommendations from the External Review Report:

Recommendation 1. that the department be encouraged to develop its three-semester, course-based MA and be given greater control over admission/acceptances and scholarships/bursaries without which the potential of a net-revenue generating program cannot be realized.

The paperwork for the proposed new course-based MA is nearing completion. The next step is to require the necessary internal approvals before submitting the materials to the provincial government for its study and approval. The Department is looking forward to initiating the program in the future to make its graduate program conform with the programs offered at competing institutions. However, there has been little to no discussion of the resources necessary to operate an effective program and how they will be funded. The administration avoids these discussions while pushing ahead with the approvals process. These resources include:

- A dedicated computer lab. Economic analysis relies heavily on the use of real-world data, statistical methods, and optimization techniques that require the power of computers.
- Software licenses to run these types of analyses.
- A space where graduate students and faculty may meet socially to establish and maintain informal communications.

It is the norm for graduate students in Economics to receive funding, particularly if they are expected to tutor undergraduate students. Tutoring is a valuable service to the Department and provides graduate students with teaching experience when applying for Ph.D. programs or entering the workforce. Currently the Department has little to no part in the funding process – instead relying on higher parties who are disconnected from the Department to make these decisions. In fact, the SGS has indicated that students in the proposed course-based MA program will not receive any funding. A reading of the external reviewer’s report makes the point that students in course-based programs are provided funding support at other universities. We will continue to push for greater participation in these decisions and for partial funding of our MA students in the thesis-based and course-based programs.

Recommendation 2. that the department be given greater control over resource allocation. It does not require a large allotment of new resources, or a redistribution of existing resources, to stimulate a more vibrant teaching and research culture in the department.

The external reviewers are correct in noting that we have no line items in our department budget for expenses other than office supplies and telephones. Our speaker’s fund is self-supporting but not large enough to offer any meaningful reimbursement of expenses for visiting speakers. The University of Winnipeg is a comparably sized institution with a smaller Economics department than Lethbridge, yet it receives financial support for its ongoing professional and social activities that would be extremely generous here. The practice at Winnipeg is the norm at other institutions, not an outlier. We agree with this recommendation, however it is beyond the Department’s control. This recommendation is

	<p>directed to the administration that controls the allocation of these resources – a strong statement that evokes concern over our budgeting model. Resources were more forthcoming in the distant past, but the allocation has devolved more recently to the accepted practice of zero budget line items.</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 3. that the department be relocated from the Faculty of Arts & Science to the Dhillon School of Business.</i></p>	<p>This is a decision that is beyond the control of the Department, although the Department is a willing participant. The external reviewers are correct in noting that a discussion with the DSB was initiated in the recent past with some positive response. The Covid-19 crisis moved Department operations mostly online, and discussions were not continued. The creation of the Faculty Realignment Task Force removed the Department from the decision process altogether. Its subsequent failure has left this issue unresolved. The Department will explore re-opening these discussions with the DSB and the Dean of Arts and Science. Both Economics departments of the external reviewers are housed in business schools so their insights should be taken seriously. The rationales they give are persuasive and provide a momentum to restart talks.</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 4. The department should consider the suitability of:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o <i>moving Intermediate Micro and Macro to the 2000-level;</i> o <i>moving some 3000-level field courses to the 2000-level (since the only the Principle courses are prerequisites);</i> o <i>adding courses on topics such as Behavioural Economics (possibly as a 3000-level theory course) and Data Visualization (if this also supports the Business degree);</i> o <i>creating one or two “Special Topics” courses at the 4000-level and rotate the fields covered in existing 4000-level courses as the special topics.</i> 	<p><i>•moving Intermediate Micro and Macro to the 2000-level.</i></p> <p>The committee agrees that this recommendation makes sense for the reasons the external reviewers provide. The current numbering of these two courses is somewhat inconsistent and is largely a historical artifact of other curriculum changes made years ago. It will be taken to the next Department meeting.</p> <p><i>•moving some 3000-level field courses to the 2000-level (since the only the principles courses are prerequisites).</i></p> <p>This recommendation is not consistent with the suggested course numbering in the university calendar. The 3000 level courses are to be “senior courses usually taken during the third year”. It is also somewhat inconsistent with Economics course numberings at other institutions. We will discuss this recommendation at the next Department meeting. A possibility is combining course re-numberings with a new undergraduate two-year certificate/diploma Economics program that could contain several online course offerings (online courses could be given their own distinct course numbers to distinguish them clearly from their on-campus equivalents).</p> <p><i>•adding courses on topics such as Behavioural Economics (possibly as a 3000-level theory course) and Data Visualization (if this also supports the Business degree).</i></p> <p>A new course titled “Behavioral Economics” was offered in the fall 2023 semester with great success. It will be added as a permanent course offering to the university calendar. The addition of a course in Data Visualization will be discussed at the next Department meeting.</p> <p><i>•creating one or two “Special Topics” courses at the 4000-level and rotate the fields covered in existing 4000-level courses as the special topics.</i></p> <p>This possibility has been discussed several times in the past at Department meetings with no resolution. Adopting a rotating set of topics courses is attractive and entirely feasible with existing resources, however it could introduce a conflict with course requirements for our majors. We will discuss this recommendation at our next Department meeting.</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 5. Contingent upon being able to expand the MA program, the department should consider reintroducing lab sections to some undergraduate courses and to make them mandatory.</i></p>	<p>Lab sections were offered in many of our Economics courses in the distant past, but after lengthy discussions at several Department meetings, were removed for two reasons: attaching labs to courses creates many scheduling conflicts for students resulting in difficulties for students to complete degree requirements (for both Economics and Business majors); due to scheduling conflicts, course enrolments were lower than what would otherwise be and lab attendance was poor as it was not required. A third consideration was a necessary workload adjustment to allow the three Instructors to deliver lectures in courses, severely reducing their abilities to deliver labs sections.</p> <p>The Department introduced a Help Desk when the new MA program was launched approximately ten years ago. The Help Desk is staffed by MA students who are paid wages from TA awards provided by the SGS from a competition process upon admission.</p>

Unfortunately, the Help Desk currently provides support for a few undergraduate courses, far fewer than when lab sections were offered. The course-based MA program will provide a larger number of MA students to staff the Help Desk, allowing for a larger number of courses to be serviced, and providing valuable teaching experience for the MA students. This will require funding these MA students, a point that the administration has so far avoided discussing.

Dean's Response

The Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science responded to the 5 (five) recommendations from the External Review Report:

Recommendation 1. that the department be encouraged to develop its three-semester, course-based MA and be given greater control over admission/acceptances and scholarships/bursaries without which the potential of a net-revenue generating program cannot be realized.

The course-based Masters of Arts in Economics proposal was developed and brought forth to Arts and Science Council and then through all levels of internal approval, including GFC. The approved proposal is currently at the financial approval stage and will be sent to the Ministry. The Dean's Office is very supportive of this initiative, which represents our first foray into course-based graduate programming in the Faculty of Arts & Science. We commend the hard work of the Chairs and department members in bringing this very close to fruition.

Funding processes for master's students fall under the auspices of the School of Graduate Studies. In the Department Response, it is noted that the intention was not to allocate student support funds to the course-based program. Such funds tend to be directed more toward students in thesis-based programs, but we would be interested in what the Department has in mind with respect to the potential for GTA support or scholarships within the overall context of Economics graduate programming.

The Dean is grateful to be notified through the quality assurance process that there is a need for the use of computer laboratory facilities, software licenses and a request for growth to the tutoring program with the launch of the new course-based MA program. Please provide details on these specific needs to the Dean or Associate Dean, who will assess the request with the assistance of our financial analysts, Information Technology and SGS.

With respect to the Faculty and Graduate Student lounge space, we could consider what spaces may or may not be available in the short term, with a view to making the necessary request to Facilities. Please let us know the details of the signage needs. We acknowledge that the current space on the northernmost portion of the 8th floor of University Hall is less than ideal in terms of promoting cross-disciplinary collisions in vibrant social spaces, especially given the Department location at the end of the hallway in the vicinity of the closed labs. Proper faculty and graduate student lounge spaces, as well as teaching spaces appropriate to the needs of Departments, will need to be highlighted as part of a broader proposal for Destination II renovations.

The Dean and/or Dean's designate would be pleased to meet with the Chair of the Department of Economics to discuss Recommendation #1. I note that the computer laboratory, and possibly the tutoring expansion request, are suitable for a Strategic Priority Fund request. Furthermore, there exists the potential for mutually beneficial collaboration with the Department of Mathematics & Computer Science in terms of computer laboratory facilities.

Recommendation 2. that the department be given greater control over resource allocation. It does not require a large allotment of new resources, or a redistribution of existing resources, to stimulate a more vibrant teaching and research culture in the department.

The Dean's team shares the Department concern about resource availability for our academic units in the aftermath of several years of budget reductions. Resources are indeed very limited, but available funds for Departments have been discussed at DAC and in the sustainability exercise and do go beyond the office supplies and telephone costs noted in the Department response letter. There is some marker funding available to each Department, as well as \$500 in annual assistance for visiting speakers and funding for small events involving students. The Dean encourages open communication about such needs and would be pleased to meet with the Chair about deficiencies and / or visit Department meetings upon invitation.

The University of Lethbridge currently operates with a highly centralized funding model, but we do try to support requests that come from Departments as much as possible from our restricted budget. There are ongoing discussions at the institutional level about whether and how to adjust our financial model, with the possibility of some degree of decentralization.

Recommendation 3. that the department be relocated from the Faculty of Arts & Science to the Dhillon School of Business.

The potential move of the Department of Economics to the Dhillon School of Business was discussed by the Dean among Chairs at Dean's Advisory Committee in the Faculty of Arts & Science and was also discussed at DSB Council in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. If the Department wishes to move to the Dhillon School of Business, the two Faculty Councils must receive motions recommending the relocation of the Department from the Faculty of Arts & Science to the DSB, with the Department holding the authority to deliver programs and the new Faculty to offer degrees to undergraduate and graduate students, including the B.A., B.A./B.Sc. combined degrees, the Minor in Economics and the M.A. programs in Economics and other related programmes. This would be a big change, as it would be adding Arts degrees to the DSB. Recommendations should come from the Department of Economics itself, though the Dean's Office can assist with the process. After passage at Faculty of Arts & Science Council and DSB Council, the recommendation would be considered by General Faculties Council. GFC would then make a recommendation under Sections 26(1)(l) and 26(1)(o) of the Post-secondary Learning Act for consideration by the Board as per PSLA Section 19(e).

This process is always available and was planned for consideration by Arts & Science Council in early 2021 with the full support of the Dean's Office in the Faculty of Arts & Science, until we were instructed that it would be best to hold off on the recommendation during the restructuring task force discussions. There was also a need for additional consultation with DSB faculty. With the restructuring task force completed, the Department is again free to move forward with a move recommendation for approval by Arts & Science and DSB Council. We would be pleased to be involved in discussions about the pros and cons of such a move and to assist with the process. We note that we feel the external reviewers, hailing from institutions in which Economics falls within Business programs, downplayed both the interdisciplinary advantages of operating within a Faculty of Arts & Science founded on the principle of Liberal Education, as well as the significant impact on many student programs, owing to the different policies of the two faculties. However, the reviewers did identify some clear advantages as well and concluded that the move should occur. The decision is ultimately best left to the disciplinary experts and we will be supportive of the Department's wishes, whatever that turns out to be.

Recommendation 4. The department should consider the suitability of.

- o *moving Intermediate Micro and Macro to the 2000-level;*
- o *moving some 3000-level field courses to the 2000-level (since the only the Principle courses are prerequisites);*
- o *adding courses on topics such as Behavioural Economics (possibly as a 3000-level theory course) and Data Visualization (if this also supports the Business degree);*
- o *creating one or two "Special Topics" courses at the 4000-level and rotate the fields covered in existing 4000-level courses as the special topics.*

- We do not recommend moving Microeconomics and Macroeconomics to the 2000-level while the Department is within the Faculty of Arts & Science, as this will complicate the ability of DSB students to take these courses and impact enrolments.
- Due to competing resources across units, the Dean's Office would find it challenging to justify the addition of more 4000-level courses until enrolments in these courses are more consistently greater than 10 per course. Currently, there are times when it is even difficult to achieve the minimum of 5 students.

Recommendation 5. Contingent upon being able to expand the MA program, the department should consider reintroducing lab sections to some undergraduate courses and to make them mandatory.

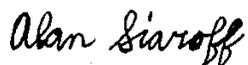
We support the Department's preference to maintain a good Help Desk rather than re-establishing the lab sections.

While the External Reviewers' Report contained 5 (five) recommendations for improving and/or maintaining the Department of Economics, Dean Letts and the Academic Quality Assurance Committee each felt that the recommendations were too narrow in focus and were better presented as broad goals to be met before the next review. The committee modified and consolidated the 5 (five) recommendations into the following 5 (five) recommendations:

1. The Provost will meet with the Deans of the Faculty of Arts and Science and the Dhillon School of Business and consult with the program area to discuss the feasibility of the Economics program moving to the Dhillon School of Business.
2. The Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science will meet with the Department of Economics to discuss the outcome of the meeting with the Provost and Dhillon School of Business and what steps might be required to move the program to another faculty including required changes to degree structures.
3. The Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science will meet with the Department of Economics to clarify available resources and graduate funding.
4. The Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science and the Department of Economics will continue to work on the creation of a course-based masters program in Economics.
5. The Department of Economics will consider the suitability of:
 - a. moving Intermediate Micro and Macro to the 2000-level, given the issues this will cause for students in the Dhillon School of Business;
 - b. moving some other 3000-level field courses to the 2000-level (since only the Principles courses are prerequisites);
 - c. adding courses on topics such as Behavioural Economics and Data Visualization;
 - d. creating one or two "Special Topics" courses at the 4000-level and rotate the fields
 - e. covered in existing 4000-level courses as the special topics.
 - f. reintroducing lab sections to some undergraduate courses and making them mandatory.

The Academic Quality Assurance Committee is satisfied that the Department of Economics academic quality assurance review has followed the U of L's academic quality assurance process appropriately, and acknowledges the successful completion of the review.

Sincerely,



Dr. Alan Siaroff
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee
Professor, Department of Political Science

cc Michelle Helstein, PhD.
Provost & Vice-President (Academic)