

# Final Assessment Report

## Economics

### Graduate and Undergraduate Programs

(reviewed 2023/24)

#### A. Summary

1. The Department's Self-Study was considered and approved by the Senate Academic Review Committee December 15, 2023.
2. The Review Committee consisted of two external reviewers: Arthur Sweetman (McMaster University) and Herb Emery (New Brunswick University), and one internal reviewer, Aaron Mauro (Brock University).
3. The site visit occurred February 29-March 1, 2024.
4. The Reviewers' Report was received April 9, 2024.
5. The Senate Undergraduate Program Committee response was received April 24, 2024.
6. The Senate Graduate Studies Committee response was received May 3, 2024.
7. The Department response was received May 8, 2024.
8. The Vice-Provost and Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs response was received July 16, 2024.
9. The Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, response was received July 22, 2024.
10. Annual Implementation Reports will be submitted from 2025-2028.
11. The next Cyclical Academic Review is scheduled to take place in 2031/2032.

The review was conducted under the terms and conditions of the June 2023 IQAP. The Self-Study was prepared prior to the ratification of the 2023 IQAP.

## Program Outcome Categories:

Based on their knowledge of the discipline, the content of the Self-Study and the interviews conducted during the site visit, the Review Committee gave the programs the following Outcome Categories:

Program(s)	Excellent Quality	Good Quality	Good Quality with Concerns	Non-Viable
BA in Applied Economics Analysis, Co-op (Honours)		X		
BA in Economics (Honours)		X		
BA in Economics with Major		X		
BA (Pass) in Economics		X		
BA in Economics, Co-op (Honours)		X		
Bachelor of Business Economics (Honours)		X		
Bachelor of Business Economics, Co-op (Honours)		X		
Master of Business Economics		X		
<i>If you have chosen 'Good Quality with Concerns', please summarize the specific concern(s) briefly below. If you have chosen 'Non-Viable', please summarize the specific reason(s) below.</i>				

## Executive Summary:

### The Reviewers wrote:

The Economics Department at Brock University is performing well but faces some headwinds. We (the Review Committee) encourage the Department to take advantage of the Institutional Quality Assurance Processes (IQAP) process to identify current and predicted future challenges, consider best responses, and implement recommended changes. We believe the Department would benefit from an ongoing evaluation process that accounts for future amendments to these core recommendations.

The Department has benefited from several years of hiring. It has a faculty complement that is concerned about the teaching program, interested in research, and willing to put effort into supporting the Department's future success. Overall, faculty members seem satisfied with the Department's programs and available resources. Similarly, the students seemed generally satisfied with the undergraduate and graduate programs. Of course, some concerns were raised regarding the specific composition of programs and courses. In what follows, we will turn to these issues by focusing on teaching, research, and service to further itemize these concerns:

#### Teaching

Both faculty and administrators expressed concern about recent enrolment declines over the past five (5) years, especially in undergraduate programs. Since undergraduate enrolment is the lifeblood of any department, this is an extremely important issue. There are clearly issues related to student recruitment and retention that the Department needs to address going forward. The Department will want to consider factors beyond the post-COVID drop in overall enrolment as well as the low rate of students continuing to a fourth (honours) year.

While enrolment is the key concern for this department, there are other key features of this review to consider while addressing the larger recruitment and retention issues. (1) Students from both the undergraduate and graduate programs expressed a specific concern related to the mathematical treatment of course content and, especially for the undergraduates, its relationship to their progression across years in program and choice of major. (2) Several students offered comments regarding frustrations with the lack of integration of economics and business content in the MBE program. We make a couple of recommendations on this front. (3) There has been a university-wide change in funding for non-thesis graduate students that will impact the MBE. This will likely require modifications to the structure of the MBE program.

### **Research**

The research intensity of the Department is trending in a positive direction. However, it appears that the rate of application of faculty members for external research funding (esp., but not only, SSHRC) should be improved.

### **Service**

The Department has benefited from having a long serving Chair, in terms of competent leadership and administration. We have observed that the stability has led to weak communication from the Chair to the Department members, including both BUFA and CUPE members, and a weak culture of committee engagement for curriculum and other programmatic matters that challenge the Department.

Our recommendations are of the nature that we are proposing ways to improve an already good department and to help the unit develop the administrative and governance capacity to address the curricular, pedagogical, and funding challenges that may be coming to the Department should institutional resources become constrained.

## **B. Program Strengths**

### **The reviewers noted the following strengths:**

The Brock University Department of Economics has good quality undergraduate and graduate programs and provides an excellent work environment for research. It has competent and stable leadership, while the faculty members of the Department have good collegial relationships and enjoy interacting with each other.

While most of the courses offered in the program are standard for economics programs in Canada, the Department has had members take the initiative to develop new, topical courses aimed at appealing to the wider student body at Brock with the aim of increasing service teaching, retaining economics students. These new courses are an excellent way to inspire more students to pursue studies in economics. The well-functioning co-op options at the undergraduate and graduate levels are advantageous in recruiting and in assisting students in transitioning to the labour market.

At this time, the MBE program with a Major Research Paper and a co-op option is appropriately resourced in terms of internal sources of financial support (including the provision of teaching assistantships) for students, and course offerings. The combination economics with business studies makes it an attractive degree for potential students. The integration with the Goodman School of Business is not the norm for Master of Arts programs,

which are more commonly offered in economics departments in Canada. However, it will be important for the unit to develop with attention to other interdisciplinary programs in Canada, such as Wilfrid Laurier, the University of Alberta, and to some extent St. Mary's in Halifax. Guelph offers a minor in business economics that also share similarities with this program.

The research profile of the Department's faculty is on a positive trajectory. Faculty members expressed enthusiasm regarding the recently started visiting speaker series. The collegial relationships among faculty in the department, and their positive attitude towards department and university service bodes well for continued administrative success.

### **C. Opportunities for Improvement and Enhancement**

Note: Supporting/clarifying text was provided for each recommendation.

**Recommendation #1: Evaluate historical changes in mathematical content of programs implemented since the previous review to determine how enrolment and graduation rates have been impacted.**

#### **The Department responded:**

The Department will evaluate historical changes in the mathematical content of programs implemented since the previous review to determine how enrolment and graduation rates have been impacted. However, we foresee challenges in identifying and isolating any impacts, which date back to two reviews ago in 2009, as other factors have also altered over this period. Despite this, the Department will attempt to achieve a similar effect by creating core stream curriculum committees (Micro, Macro, Econometrics, and Math Econ) that will examine the mathematical content within each individual streams and provide input to the undergraduate program committee to reevaluate our current program offerings along with the integration of the material across our offerings.

#### **The Dean of Social Sciences responded:**

The Dean's Office is in support of the Department's plan to evaluate the mathematical content within the various streams of Economics, particularly as they relate to enrolment and graduation rates, and to assess current program offerings in that light. Through the Dean's office, Institutional Planning, Analysis and Performance (IPAP) is available to assist the Department in obtaining data on retention and graduation rates in Economics.

#### **The Vice-Provost and Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs responded:**

This recommendation refers to UG program and is therefore outside of FGSPA to comment.

#### **ARC Disposition of the Recommendation**

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted. The Committee encourages the Department to work with the Dean's office and Institutional Planning, Analysis and Performance (IPAP) to determine appropriate strategies to evaluate historical changes in mathematical content of programs to determine how enrolment and graduation rates have been impacted.

<b>Implementation Plan (1<sup>st</sup> Priority)</b>	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department/Dean
Responsible for implementation:	Department/Dean with support of IPAP
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2024-25.

**Recommendation #2: Evaluate changes in course offerings and student flow through to graduation since the previous review to determine how enrolment and graduation rates have been impacted by specific courses.**

**The Department responded:**

The Department foresees challenges in trying to isolate impacts on enrolment and graduation rates from changes in course offerings. That said, the overall student experience has certainly improved from the flexibility provided through our course offerings throughout the year given the rigidity of the programs we offer.

The Department strongly believes that the required core courses need to be offered multiple times throughout the fall and winter terms. A significant draw of our program is the co-op option and because students participate in co-op at different times of the year, it is important to offer core courses in both the fall and winter to ensure these students graduate on time. There is also an inherent dependency of upper year courses within economics, and entry into our program occurs at multiple points in a given year, so multiple sections of our core courses offered throughout the year allow us to accommodate students in terms of time to completion and maintain retention along with graduation rates.

The Department will continually monitor enrolment in courses and eliminate identified redundancies by combining multiple sections of elective courses which we have done in recent years such as ECON 1P95 and ECON 4P06 to name a few.

**The Undergraduate Programs Committee responded:**

The UPC Committee noted that in the case of Recommendation #2, UPC will expect to see some items submitted regarding course offerings, leading to additional work. This will not be problematic.

**The Dean of Social Sciences responded:**

The Dean’s Office supports the Department’s response to the reviewer’s recommendations, in particular, the departmental commitment to monitor course enrolments and graduation rates, and to eliminate redundancies by combining multiple sections of elective courses. The Dean’s office also emphasizes the need for the Department to monitor required core course enrolments and to reduce redundancies by eliminating multiple sections where enrolments are in decline.

Through the Dean’s office, IPAPs is available to assist the department in obtaining data on retention and graduation rates in Economics.

**The Vice-Provost and Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs responded:**

This recommendation refers to UG program and is therefore outside of FGSPA to comment.

### ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers this recommendation to be to be accepted. The Committee encourages the Department to work with the Dean’s office and Institutional Planning, Analysis and Performance (IPAP) to determine appropriate strategies to evaluate changes in course offerings and student flow through to graduation to determine how enrolment and graduation rates have been impacted by specific courses.

#### **Implementation Plan (1<sup>st</sup> Priority)**

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department/Dean
Responsible for implementation:	Department/Dean with support of IPAP
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2024-25.

**Recommendation #3: Conduct a review of all degree required courses with a high failure rate from students and make changes required to scaffold content and experience as needed.**

#### **The Department responded:**

The Department will review all degree required courses particularly those with a high failure rate. Additionally, the Department will create core stream committees to review the delivery of material in the core streams and make recommendations on scaffolding content and experience as needed.

#### **The Dean of Social Sciences responded:**

The Dean’s office is in support of the Departmental plan, in response to the Reviewer’s recommendation, to review all required courses, particular those with high failure rates, and to make adjust in order to improve retention and graduation rates.

Through the Dean’s office, IPAP is available to assist the Department in obtaining data on retention and graduation rates in Economics.

#### **The Vice-Provost and Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs responded:**

This recommendation refers to UG program and is therefore outside of FGSPA to comment.

### ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted. The Committee recognizes that the Department will undertake the necessary review and determine appropriate strategies, to make changes required to scaffold content and experience; this may be pursued in conjunction with Recommendation #8.

<b>Implementation Plan (1<sup>st</sup> Priority)</b>	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department/Dean
Responsible for implementation:	Department/Dean with support of IPAP
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2024-25.

**Recommendation #4: Re-invigorate committee structures and activities to enable greater delegation of work from the Department Chair.**

**The Department responded:**

The Department will re-invigorate committee structures and activities.

**The Senate Graduate Studies Committee responded:**

This recommendation relates to human resource management and departmental procedures within the purview of the Department, Dean, and within the BUFA collective agreement. Though, in general, SGSC supports the idea of committee structures that balance service loads.

**The Dean of Social Sciences responded:**

The Dean’s office is in support of the Departmental response to the reviewer’s recommendation to re-invigorate its committee structure.

**The Vice-Provost and Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs responded:**

This recommendation is outside of FGSPA’s purview - although we support the recommendation and the Department’s response.

**ARC Disposition of the Recommendation**

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted and believes that the Department is best positioned to determine appropriate strategies to re-invigorate committee structures in order to move forward on this issue.

<b>Implementation Plan (1<sup>st</sup> Priority)</b>	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2024-25.

**Recommendation #5: Encourage faculty members to develop more sustainable and self-reliant external funding resources for research, student support, and other activities like visiting speakers.**

**The Department responded:**

The Department will continue to encourage faculty members to apply for external funding to support research, students, and other activities.

**The Senate Graduate Studies Committee responded:**

This recommendation relates to faculty member, departmental, faculty funding purview of the Department, Dean, and within the BUFA collective agreement. Though, in general, SGSC supports the idea of sustainable funding and appreciates the financial constraints in the current budgetary context.

**The Dean of Social Sciences responded:**

The Dean's office is in support of the Departmental response to the Reviewer's recommendation to encourage faculty to apply for external funding to support research and students. The Associate Dean Graduate Studies and Research for the Faculty of Social Sciences is available to assist faculty with grant applications, as is the Office of Research Services and the Vice-President Research Office.

**The Vice-Provost and Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs responded:**

Research funding is critical to support a thriving graduate program. While I appreciate the Department's response, I would like to see how they propose to increase external funding. It would also be helpful to see the plan for increasing engagement with other units on campus.

**ARC Disposition of the Recommendation**

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted. The Committee encourages the Department to work with the Dean's office and the Office of Research Services (ORS) to determine strategies to encourage faculty members to develop more sustainable and self-reliant external funding resources.

**Implementation Plan (1<sup>st</sup> Priority)**

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department/Dean
Responsible for implementation:	Department/Dean with support of ORS
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2024-25.



**Recommendation #6: Develop and implement a strategy to increase award funding, within appropriate disciplinary norms and expectations.**

**The Department responded:**

The Department will develop and implement strategies to increase award funding. Previously successful applicants from the department will mentor and offer help for those who are in the process of applying for funding. In addition, a repository of successful applications will be created so that current and future members of the department may review them.

**The Senate Graduate Studies Committee responded:**

This recommendation relates to faculty member funding and falls within the purview of individual faculty within the BUFA collective agreement. Though, in general, SGSC supports the proliferation of research funding at Brock.

**The Dean of Social Sciences responded:**

The Dean's office supports the Departmental strategies to increase award funding, noting that assistance is available from the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research in the Faculty of Social Sciences as well as the Vice-President Research Office and the Office of Research Services.

**The Vice-Provost and Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs responded:**

As with Recommendation #5 above, external funding is important to support a graduate program. I appreciate the strategy proposed by the Department, but it would be good to have concrete goals set for the department around the number of new applications for external funding.

**ARC Disposition of the Recommendation**

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted. The Committee encourages the Department to utilize the resources mentioned by the Faculty Dean in order to move forward on this issue; which may be pursued in conjunction with Recommendation #5.

**Implementation Plan (1<sup>st</sup> Priority)**

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department/Dean
Responsible for implementation:	Department with support of ORS
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2024-25.

**Recommendation #7: Develop and hold events and opportunities tailored for 4<sup>th</sup> year students to assist in retaining Economics students beyond the minimum PASS degree expectations.**

**The Department responded:**

The Department will strategize and attempt to develop and hold events and opportunities tailored for 4<sup>th</sup> year students to assist in retaining Economics students beyond the minimum PASS degree. Initial ideas such as coding workshops, alumni events, or employment nights have been suggested.

**The Dean of Social Sciences responded:**

The Dean's Office supports the Departmental plan to increase events and opportunities for 4<sup>th</sup> year students.

**The Vice-Provost and Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs responded:**

This recommendation refers to UG program and is therefore outside of FGSPA to comment.

**ARC Disposition of the Recommendation**

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted. The Committee believes that the Department, in consultation with the Dean's office, is best positioned to determine appropriate events and opportunities tailored for 4<sup>th</sup> year students.

**Implementation Plan (1<sup>st</sup> Priority)**

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department/Dean
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2024-25.

**Recommendation #8: Work with Centre for Pedagogical Innovation (CPI) to review current pedagogical practices within the Department.**

**The Department responded:**

The Department will continue working with CPI to review current pedagogical practices within the Department including the scheduling of 3-hour lectures and the best environments to learn and retain complex concepts and mathematics.

**The Senate Graduate Studies Committee responded:**

This recommendation is a pedagogical issue for the program to consider relating specifically to the mode of delivery (3-hour lectures) for their courses based on student feedback. It was unclear if this recommendation related to graduate or undergraduate coursework or both. SGSC encourages all programs to consider the alignment of their modes of delivery to student learning needs.

**The Dean of Social Sciences responded:**

The Dean’s office supports the Departmental commitment to continue to work with Centre for Pedagogical Innovation (CPI) to reviews its current practises.

**The Vice-Provost and Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs responded:**

If this recommendation refers to UG program, then it falls outside of FGSPA to comment. However, determining the best learning environment - at both the undergraduate and graduate levels - is important for retention and student success. We commend the Department for their willingness to undertake a review of pedagogical practices.

**ARC Disposition of the Recommendation**

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted. The Committee recognizes the importance of the Department engaging the Centre for Pedagogical Innovation (CPI) as they undertake the necessary review of current undergraduate and graduate pedagogical practices.

<b>Implementation Plan (1<sup>st</sup> Priority)</b>	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department/Dean
Responsible for implementation:	Department with the support of CPI
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2024-25.

**Recommendation #9: Develop recruitment and orientation events.**

**The Department responded:**

The Department currently has a student recruitment committee which is dedicated solely to attending events such as the Ontario University Fair as well as the Fall and Spring Preview days on campus. That members of the Department outside of this committee lack awareness or interest in such events should not be surprising. That said, the Department will, in the future, involve more members on the committee in the hopes of spreading interest and awareness of such events amongst Department members. The committee will also explore developing additional recruitment and orientation events. Using student ambassadors to tour regional high schools, as well as other areas such as their hometowns, will be pursued by the student recruitment committee.

**The Senate Graduate Studies Committee responded:**

This recommendation, as written, emphasizes undergraduate recruitment and falls under the purview of UPC. That said, SGSC encourages all departments to consider graduate recruitment efforts, especially in light of MRP funding changes.

**The Dean of Social Sciences responded:**

The Dean’s Office supports the Departmental plan to increase and develop its recruitment and orientation activities. Assistance to the Department is available through the Faculty of Social Sciences Communications Officer in the Dean’s office as well as the Faculty of Social Sciences Associate Dean Undergraduate Student Affairs.

**The Vice-Provost and Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs responded:**

Refers to UG program and is therefore outside of FGSPA to comment. However, the MBE program is welcome to engage with the graduate recruitment coordinator in FGSPA for support, as well as our engagement team, to learn about our onboarding initiatives if they have not already done so.

**ARC Disposition of the Recommendation**

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted. The Committee encourages the Department to utilize the resources mentioned by the Deans to determine appropriate strategies to increase and develop its recruitment and orientation activities for both for the undergraduate and MBE programs.

**Implementation Plan (1<sup>st</sup> Priority)**

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department/Dean
Responsible for implementation:	Department/Deans
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2024-25.

**Recommendation #10: Consider offering economics courses in the MBE, and the undergraduate Business Economic streams, that are more in line with the advertised business emphasis.**

**The Department responded:**

The Department will consider offering more courses in both the MBE and BBE programs that have a business emphasis and to integrate business concepts into the curriculum where possible.

**The Senate Graduate Studies Committee responded:**

This recommendation is a pedagogical issue for the program to consider. SGSC supports the general expectation that courses be aligned with the stated emphasis of the program.

**The Dean of Social Sciences responded:**

The Dean's Office supports the Departmental response to the Reviewer's Recommendations to add more business emphasis to courses and programs where appropriate.

**The Vice-Provost and Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs responded:**

Curricular decisions lie with the program, however FGSPA agrees with the recommendations and supports the Department's response.

**ARC Disposition of the Recommendation**

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted for consideration. The Committee expects that the Department will consider offering more economics courses with a business emphasis in the MBE and the undergraduate Business Economic streams in conjunction with Recommendation #8.

**Implementation Plan (1<sup>st</sup> Priority)**

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department/Dean
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2024-25.

**D. Summary of Recommendations:**

First Priority:

Recommendations: 1-10