

**DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS AUR 2018-2019
RESPONSE AND PROGRESS REPORT
ON EXTERNAL REVIEWERS RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Economics Department has worked diligently to implement reviewers' recommendations that require departmental actions. The department is also looking forward to know the position of senior administration and Dean's office regarding a number of recommendations (R8, part of R11, R12, R17, R18, R19) directed to them. The following presents the departmental response and progress on implementing each recommendation.

R1: There needs to be proactive, effective, and tailored academic advising available to students

R2: Economics be assigned a dedicated academic advisor. The academic advisor should be responsible for reaching out to stakeholders each year, identifying areas of concern, and consulting with respect to what advice should be given to students.

As indicated in the verbal response of Department Head Dr. Çule and Dean Kleer, who appeared at CCAM meeting on Dec 5, 2019 the department found these recommendations very important and worked diligently in implementing them swiftly. After exploring various funding models, the department got Dean's approval to redirect funding from its budget in creating a half-time advisor position for 2 years, commencing on Feb 2020.

Working closely with the Arts Program Coordinator, Joni Borne, the department decided that a position dedicated to Economics advising would serve the student needs better if it were embodied within the Arts Student Services team. We have reached out to advising offices in Science, and Federated Colleges to better coordinate the advising while acknowledging the separate jurisdictions.

Since March 2020, the advisor has attended all departmental meetings. The Head Dr Çule and the Undergraduate Coordinator Dr. Guliani hold regular virtual meetings with her to discuss the progress in advising activities and have tried to identify potential concerning patterns in student program completion that require attention and action.

Despite the remote operation due to Covid-19, we have reached out to students with reasonable success. More specifically, to date the advisor has produced and updated each

new term program outlines for more than 185 students, accounting for over 300 program outlines; She has reached out to 153 ECON majors enrolled with Arts at U of R and has arranged individual appointments with 124 students, 25% of whom have met with her multiple times at their request. We hope that in the future as we return to working on campus, with direct in-person interaction with students as well as with additional availability for drop-in meetings, we will further improve the efficacy of advising services.

Lastly, the department is pleased to report that it has been able to commit funding for extending the position for additional 3 years. The department is grateful for the continued support from Dean Dea on this project.

R3: Require a minimum grade of C- on all prerequisite courses in the microeconomics /macroeconomics/ quantitative methods sequence. So, for example, the pre-requisite for ECON 307 would be ECON 301 with a grade of C- or better, and the pre-requisite for ECON 301 would be ECON 201 with a grade of C- or better.

The department acted swiftly to implement R3, but decided to approach this incrementally. We decided to first implement it for Part I of the Intermediate micro/macro courses (Econ 301 and 302), closely monitor its effect on enrollment and student preparedness and then consider extending the requirement for Part II micro/macro courses (Econ 307 and 310) and courses in the quantitative sequence. In November 2019, the department approved changes for Econ 301 and 302, requiring a minimum grade of 60 for their respective prerequisites of 201 and 202. Given the lengthy approval process at the university, the changes came into effect in Winter 2021 term.

R4: Consider introducing second-year courses with minimal pre-requisites, similar to the “Economics of Beer” and “Economics of Sport” courses currently offered, but which appeal to other demographic groups in the student body. We would suggest policy type courses such as dealing with the non-profit or volunteering sectors, community and regional economic development, gender, indigenous issues, or economic and social inequality.

As indicated with the unit’s verbal response at CCAM December 5, 2019 meeting, Econ did not have the resources and expertise to take on R4 immediately. At the time the Head and the Dean appeared at the meeting, the department had received approval for recruiting two tenure track positions (one to replace a recent resignation and another new position), commencing in July 2020. As indicated at the CCAM meeting, the department intended to prioritize recruitment in the areas specified in R4.

We are pleased to report that the department was in fact successful in recruiting colleagues that not only will make a contribution in delivering existing courses in our program, but who will also be able to expand teaching in two of the specified areas. More specifically, Dr. Moeeni specializes in family and gender economics, while Dr. Mirzaei specializes in economic development of indigenous communities. These new colleagues both are excited about the prospect of developing new courses in these areas in the coming academic years.

In addition, having a new colleague who conducts research and teaches about economic issues pertaining indigenous communities, the department is better positioned to contribute to indigenization, as one of the strategic directions at U of R.

R5: Work with other units to develop joint graduate programs in areas where the department has research strength and student demand is strong, such as big data, data analytics, sustainable energy, financial economics or health economics.

As reported at the CCAM December 5, 2019 meeting, the department will explore opportunities of the nature recommended as they arise organically in the future. As members with expertise in areas specified in R5 will build and cultivate research collaborations with other colleagues housed in other academic units of interest, we would like to further capitalize in those productive collaborations and seriously explore opportunities for participation in graduate education.

We are particularly keen in engaging with JSGS and have expressed our interest in pursuing collaborative work to the new leadership. In preliminary discussions with the JSGS Regina Director Dr. Jim Farney we have agreed to explore possible participation in their current programs, particularly in the high demand program of Master for Health Administration. Please note that we also have available and intend to make use of the option of admitting Master students on a special case basis.

R6: Explore the possibilities of partnering with the business or policy faculties to deliver Executive Education programs.

In principle we like the idea of participation in such collaborative initiatives and will be open to any opportunity that may arise. However, it is important to note that in practice we have limited capacity to participate. Executive programs of good reputation that generate demand and interest tend to enlist instructors that have practitioner experience with the public sector. Most of our current in-house members do not have such history. Of those who did at the time of review, one retired in 2020 and the other holds a part-time and limited term, “teaching only” appointment.

R7: Explore the possibility of affiliating research active Department of Economics faculty with the Faculty of Business or the Johnson-Shoyama School, and promote exchanges of teaching resources between the units.

In more recent discussions with Dr. Jim Farney, Director of JSGS (Regina Campus) we have agreed in principle to pursue this for colleagues that have expressed interest and have a good fit of their research agenda with the school’s existing research capacity.

R8: Resources directed at improving Tri-Council grant success rates should be directed to faculty pursuing collaborative research projects both within and external to the university.

This recommendation is directed to University’s senior administration and Dean’s office.

R9: There needs to be clearer articulation of unit level standards in research and promotion.

The department has taken the implementation R9 seriously and the process is ongoing. The department struck a subcommittee of two colleagues to compile an initial draft and bring it for discussion to the group. In our Sep 2020 meeting we had a thoughtful and thorough conversation about the proposal. Seeking best practices, the Head solicited documents of similar nature from other Economics departments across Canadian universities and received a number of them. These were further discussed in the January 2021 departmental meeting. We aim to produce a final document by the end of June 2021 and in time for the next performance review cycle.

R10: A hire at a senior level may be required to help build the research profile of the department, and provide leadership to junior faculty.

Although we fully appreciate the rationale for R10, we decided that pursuing its implementation would most likely be a fruitless effort. Having gone through the process of requesting market supplements, the comparative analysis for salaries in Economics departments revealed a considerable gap in compensations in all ranks. Given the comparative disadvantage in compensation at the U of R, it is the department's position that it would be extremely unlikely that the department could attract a candidate of the calibre implied in R10.

Instead, we would like to focus our energy on continuing to renew the research culture in the department in two major ways. First, by supporting the existing faculty members at the Associate rank in their success pursuing in the next few years the full Professor rank. Second, by recruiting and supporting productive, energetic and promising scholars at the starting rank of Assistant, who are well positioned to maintain an active research agenda and further enhance the research environment within the department.

Given R9 and R10, it is important that there is no monetary disincentive for members to seek promotion. Some additional planning should be conducted in order to make the market supplements flow smoothly throughout the ranks - there should be no drop in salary due to different rate supplements in the different ranks when one is promoted from assistant to associate, and from associate to full professor ranks.

R11: The department start a newsletter which is circulated to current students, alumni and the broader university community and celebrates departmental achievements. There should also be a university and faculty wide initiative to promote economics research and accomplishments. Note of major media contributions should also be included in this type of communication and recognition.

Regarding the part of R11 that involves departmental actions, given the information overload through email communications, it was suggested that we explore other means to recognize our successes and improve the communication with our alumni and current majors such as social media platforms. For various reasons, to date there has not been

much progress in acting on that particular suggestion. Upon further reflection, the department has returned to implement R11 with the intent of circulating a newsletter per term, starting this term. With a particular focus on reaching out and maintaining communication with our alumni, we are working to maintain and expand a contact list of recent graduates.

R12: Given the revenue streams generated by the Department of Economics for the University, consideration should be given for investments in course release, conference travel and data resources and statistical research support for faculty in the Department.

The department greatly appreciates this recommendation which is directed to University's senior administration and Dean's office.

R13: Explore the possibility of cross-listing selected policy school and business courses as electives in the program for fourth year honors economics students.

The department is not pursuing R13 for a number of reasons. First, there are real limitations in cross-listing undergraduate and graduate courses and FGSR has normally discouraged the practice, perhaps something that reviewers were unaware of. Second, the rationale provided namely "Deepen course offerings for majors at lower department resource costs" implies that the department's elective course offerings for economics majors may not be adequate. Please note that the 4-year Econ programs requires 4-5 elective econ courses; we offer at least 15 elective courses each academic year all of which are well subscribed by econ and non-econ majors.

R14: Students who take public policy school courses as undergraduate electives as per recommendation 5 be fast-tracked into the Master of Public Policy program.

R14 involves decision by JSGS, and is out of Econ purview. However, given the Econ approach with R13, there is limited scope to pursuing R14.

R15: That there be a frank and open discussion at the Department and University level of whether the program, teaching and research needs of the Department of Economics could be better met in an alternate configuration than that which currently exists with its home in the Faculty of Arts.

In the initial discussion of this recommendation members had various degree of interest in pursuing this conversation. To date the department has not undertaken any deliberate process for such discussion. This is an item "to be continued."

R16: That future Academic Unit Reviews at the University of Regina schedule a visit between reviewers and department-level administrative support staff in order to gain insight on the departmental administrative support environment.

The department has taken note of R16 and will follow through as recommended. Some context to why such interview was not scheduled. At the time of campus visit, the admin assistant was fairly new to the department and shared her appointment 50-50 with the Dean's Office. Given her short history with the department, she did not feel very comfortable to participate and our understanding was that such participation was not mandatory. Please note that reviewers met with the Faculty Administrator in order to gain insights in the administrative processes involved.

R17: That administrative staff in the Department of Economics report directly to the Economics Department head as their principal supervisor.

This recommendation is for the University's senior administration and Dean's office. We fully appreciate the rationale for R17 and see potential benefits of such reporting structure in enhancing efficiency in operations and the promise of building effective working relationship with admin staff. We are however, cognizant of the reality of overall administrative organizational structure in Arts and University and are committed to work as effectively as possible within it.

R18: Compensation is an issue in trying to attract faculty. Along with ensuring that offers are competitive with similarly placed universities, there is a continued need for market supplements given Regina's location in attracting and retaining faculty.

The department greatly appreciates this recommendation which is directed to University's senior administration and Dean's office. We hope that R18 is considered seriously in future decisions pertaining market supplements.

R19: The Department of Economics should be encouraged and allowed to generate and retain a larger percentage of revenues from current and future revenue generating activities for own use in order to enhance its internal research and travel support.

The department greatly appreciates this recommendation which is directed to University's senior administration and the Dean's office. We remain hopeful that in the future revenue sharing arrangements of Arts and University, beyond the current pilot, Economics will continue to receive at least the same share (3.75%) of total CCE revenues generated in Econ courses that it currently receives.

Submitted on January 22, 2021

by

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