

Implementation Report for the 2020-2021 Cyclical Review of the Department of Economics Programs

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INTRODUCTION

This is the first Implementation Report for the cyclical review of the Department of Economics undergraduate and graduate programs that took place in 2020-2021. The full language for each recommendation from the External Reviewers’ Report has been included, along with the corresponding information about implementation from the Final Assessment Report. For each recommendation, the unit has provided an update on the progress or action made toward the implementation of that recommendation, followed by comments from the relevant dean(s) and the Program Review Sub-Committee. Taking into account the updates provided by the unit and the comments from the dean(s), the Program Review Sub-Committee will review the report and determine if all recommendations have been implemented satisfactorily or if a subsequent report will be required.

RECOMMENDATIONS PRIORITIZED FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)	Responsibility for Implementation	Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)	Anticipated Completion Date
<p>Recommendation #1: Continue the successful practices that build a strong sense of community, engage the students effectively in a program that delivers on the degree-level expectations, and situates the department well in the current faculty.</p>	<p>Program directors, chair, faculty</p>		<p>Ongoing</p>

Unit Update: We noted in our initial response that this recommendation was to continue the Department’s successful practices in community building. Here we report on continuing progress on this front since the review.

All universities took something of a hit to their sense of community during the COVID pandemic, which occurred during the review. The Chair at the time worked to minimize these effects by holding regular department Zoom drop-in sessions, encouraging faculty members to participate in communities of practice to support remote teaching. We had several new faculty with young families join the department just before the pandemic, and

three new faculty were hired during the pandemic (via a fully remote job search). We have worked hard to ensure that these faculty were kept associated with the department despite not having met colleagues in person for their first months on the job, including by assigning faculty mentors to them. The department worked to maintain social activities for faculty – in particular through small outdoor get togethers and later larger outdoor picnics that include family members.

For students, we have also worked deliberately in the aftermath of the pandemic to reintegrate students into in-person learning, while maintaining flexibility for those with health or other concerns to study remotely. We were one of the first departments to return to in-person classes in Fall 2021, with smaller than usual class sizes in larger classrooms so students were able to spread out, but offering a remote section at the same time. Our first year classes have kept offering students the option of attending remotely – the classes have at least one section each term that is streamed (which the instructors have done with minimal additional support). We have also, individually in our classrooms and collectively as a department worked to increase our engagement with students. Individually in their courses, faculty have run scavenger hunts (to familiarize students with the campus), or had fun events in class such as a bring your own mug day, or stretching/activity breaks. Collectively, faculty have been active in attending Laurier Economics Club events including the Great Economics Debate, Trivia Nights, Research Symposia, and case competitions. As of 2023-24, our Undergraduate Director has begun to organize an econometrics/prediction competition, which attracted 23 teams, and a Student Awards event at which we recognize top performing students (those who won academic awards, Governor's Challenge participants, competition winners, etc). Also in 2023-24, the International Student Liaison in collaboration with Laurier International and the Laurier Cricket Club, began what we hope will be an annual Students and Faculty Cricket match, which attracted around 50 students and 30 staff/faculty. We included poster presentations by senior students in our annual Economic Outlook (at which the Deputy Governor of the Bank of Canada, Rhys Mendes, and alumnus and Research Director of Altus Group, Diana Petramala spoke), as well as an academic conference.

For the MABE program, in addition to the orientation in the fall term, we have held an informal lunch gathering at the beginning of the Winter term to socialize and get to know faculty and staff in the department. It builds a sense of community and also helps students look for potential supervisors for their research papers in the Spring term. Starting in 2024-25, all MABE students will be provided with memberships in the Toronto Association of Business Economists (TABE), which we hope will ease students' integration into the broader community of professional economists. In Winter 2024, we supported a team to enter the TABE Policy Brief competition, including a trip to Toronto to present as finalists. This competition not only allows our MABE students to network with leaders in the industry but also to share experiences and learn with graduate students from other universities in the province.

Lazaridis School Decanal Comments: The Economics Department continues to foster a strong sense of community for both faculty and students. Their commitment to this is demonstrated by their ability to adapt to changing circumstances to provide both faculty members and students with support and enrichment opportunities to stay connected and current in the field.

FGPS Decanal Comments: I appreciate the efforts of the department to re-establish (following Covid) community building through various activities and practices among its faculty, and undergraduate and graduate students. This is critically important not only to help ensure a positive student experience but is no doubt also highly valued by faculty members.

Program Review Sub-Committee Comments: The committee appreciates all of the examples provided by the Department of the ways in which it is maintaining and building on the successful community-building practices identified by the external review committee during the last cyclical program review. No further reporting on this recommendation is required.

Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)	Responsibility for Implementation	Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)	Anticipated Completion Date
<p>Recommendation #2: Consider implementing a structured review of the personal statements of students with marginal grades through an Equity/Diversity/Inclusion lens, for both the undergraduate and graduate programs.</p>	<p>Program directors, Recruitment & Admissions, Vice Dean</p>		<p>Fall 2022</p>

Unit Update: For the graduate program, the applicant’s personal statements are reviewed by a graduate committee consisting of two faculty members and the graduate program director. Admission decisions are made based on academic performance as well as information provided by the personal statements. A three-member committee ensures equity/diversity/inclusion are part of the decision-making process.

At the undergraduate level, we regularly review any student who has a grade just below the required high school cut-off average and who submitted a statement requesting special consideration. Without that additional statement, we do not have the requisite information for an EDI-informed decision. EDI-relevant characteristics, in particular parental background, have been included in the discussion of these reviews.

More broadly on the EDI front, we have recently begun to appoint a departmental EDI Liaison, an Indigenous Liaison and an International Students Liaison. Members of the department are also on the CEA/CEDC Best Practices Subcommittee and CWEC/CEDC Mentoring Subcommittee, and are participating actively in professional bodies that are considering matters of EDI in the student body. In response to some of the Best Practices recommendations, we have for the past three years ensured that we have a female Professor teaching one of our two first year economics courses, and she has been deliberately incorporating some of the practices that have been recommended as a result of research into encouraging under-represented students to continue in Economics. Three department members (Christine Neill, Ke Pang, Christos Shiamptanis) attended the lunch session at the CEAs organized by the CEDC Best Practices and Data Subcommittees to discuss EDI and climate issues for graduate students. We will consider implementing any recommendations that arise from this meeting in future years.

Lazaridis School Decanal Comments: The Economics Department has made a concerted effort to increase activities and implement processes in support of EDI. Their admissions procedures effectively support EDI within the boundaries of the university’s admissions system.

FGPS Decanal Comments: I agree with the Dean of Lazaridis – efforts have been made to ensure that applications to the graduate program are considered through an EDI lens. Departmental appointments listed will help to ensure EDI is considered in other departmental matters.

Program Review Sub-Committee Comments: The activities described by the Department align with the intent of this recommendation while adhering to university procedures. The committee appreciates the additional information provided by the Department about the ways in which it is striving to incorporate principles of equity, diversity and inclusivity into its operations. This recommendation speaks specifically to the admissions process, but the Department could also consider ongoing follow-up with these students in support of student retention. No further reporting on this recommendation is required.

Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)	Responsibility for Implementation	Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)	Anticipated Completion Date
Recommendation #3: Consider whether two math courses are necessary for admission into the portfolio of Economics programs and specifically, whether it might be coming at the expense of some otherwise strong students.	<i>This recommendation was not prioritized in the 2020-2021 Final Assessment Report.</i>		

Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)	Responsibility for Implementation	Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)	Anticipated Completion Date
Recommendation #4: Consider adding a first year (second semester) course designed for students majoring in Economics programs portfolio.	<i>This recommendation was not prioritized in the 2020-2021 Final Assessment Report.</i>		

Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)	Responsibility for Implementation	Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)	Anticipated Completion Date
Recommendation #5: Explore ways to increase the number of elective courses available for upper-year undergraduate and graduate students.	Program Directors, Chair, Faculty members	Program Directors, Chair, Faculty members	Ongoing

Unit Update: The undergraduate Economics program continues to make progress on this front. In 2022-23, we offered an elective in the Fall term, which has traditionally had no EC elective courses available to MABE students. Unfortunately, low enrolments and budgetary pressures meant we had to cancel it in 2023-24. Reinstating a course in the Fall is something we think is a priority for making the MABE program more attractive. Options that might allow us to do that are being explored. For instance, we are in the process of proposing a new joint program with the Master of Science in Management Analytics, which would likely increase the number of graduate students taking electives in the Fall term, and therefore make it more viable to offer electives in that term. Changes to the Research Specialization (see response to Recommendation #7) may also increase demand for fourth year electives at the undergraduate level in the Fall term, which again would make it viable to offer a combined fourth year/MABE elective in that term.

The Decanal Response (FGPS) noted a need to effectively manage twinned courses by communicating different expectations for undergraduate compared to graduate students in the same class. Having now had some significant experience in offering these courses, and with undergraduate students who enrol in these courses generally among those planning to continue on to graduate school themselves, the Department believes instructors are managing this well.

Lazaridis School Decanal Comments: The Economics Department has responded to this recommendation in a prudent and creative fashion. Although it may be desirable to offer additional electives, the current fiscal environment requires that this be accomplished without additional resources while paying close attention to enrolment.

FGPS Decanal Comments: Introducing more elective courses at the graduate level, while desirable, is indeed challenging given our current budgetary constraints. In fact, some graduate programs are, by necessity, undertaking curriculum reform to ensure their course requirements are as efficient as possible while still offering a high-quality and attractive program. Nonetheless, the department is actively exploring ways to feasibly increase course options for their graduate students.

Program Review Sub-Committee Comments: It is recognized that responding to this recommendation has resource implications and the comments provided indicate that the Department is creatively finding ways to ensure that its senior undergraduate and graduate students have choices in elective courses as is feasible. The Department is encouraged to collect feedback from students on their experience in twinned courses, to ensure that it is serving both audiences appropriately. No further reporting on this recommendation is required.

Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)	Responsibility for Implementation	Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)	Anticipated Completion Date
Recommendation #6: Consider exploring the possibility of blended learning options to enhance the overall learning experience and engagement of students.	Program Directors, Chair, Faculty members	Teaching & Learning, Department, Dean	Fall 2023

Unit Update: The Economics department does encourage faculty members to innovate on pedagogical fronts as appropriate to their courses. Since the COVID pandemic forced a move to online learning, our first year Economics courses have all had a synchronous remote/recorded option available for students who are unable to attend class in person at the scheduled time for whatever reason. Our fourth year Honours Research Paper and Seminar course has also had at least one remote section offering in each term since 2020, enabling students to finish up the Honours program while working full-time or living outside the Waterloo commuting region – this has been very popular with students and has helped to facilitate program completion. We also offer a range of online asynchronous (OC) courses, including our first year courses (in every term) and a range of second year electives, which are particularly helpful for students working full-time, including co-op students. In 2023-24 we updated our EC250 and EC260 OC courses (Intermediate Micro and Macro for BBA students), and in 2024-25 will update two second year elective OC courses (EC239 and EC249).

MABE courses are generally only offered on an in-person basis, but there has been considerable innovation in pedagogy in our elective courses. In particular, in the past two years EC639 International Trade has offered course projects that are related to current important issues provided by Global Affairs Canada. This collaboration allows our MABE students to gain hands-on experience in solving economic problems with real-world data. We have also incorporated a certificate program with Career Development Office to improve students' leadership and communication skills and provide support for job search, with many elements of the certificate available online or remotely.

Lazaridis School Decanal Comments: In a relatively short period of time, the Economics Department has made several changes to its program delivery in line with this recommendation. Their ability to learn and innovate in the current environment based on what was implemented by necessity during COVID is to be commended. Moreover, these innovations are clearly in support of student success rather than faculty convenience.

FGPS Decanal Comments: I support the department's continued intention of delivering courses in person in the MABE program. The addition of the hands-on project for EC639 sounds like an excellent curricular enhancement. Note that in addition to certificates offered by the Career Development Centre, last year we launched the ASPIRE Professional Development Certificate that would be of interest to your graduate students. For details, see: <https://students.wlu.ca/academics/graduate-and-postdoctoral-studies/aspire/assets/resources/aspire-professional-development-certificate.html>.

Program Review Sub-Committee Comments: Newly approved [course- and program-level modes of delivery](#) may provide the Department with a broader range of delivery options to consider in the future, but all comments provided that the current approach is appropriate to the discipline and supported by the Deans. No further reporting on this recommendation is required.

Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)	Responsibility for Implementation	Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)	Anticipated Completion Date
Recommendation #7: Explore ways to increase the scheduling flexibility of the Advanced Research Specialization course (491).	Chair		Fall 2022

Unit Update: As of 2023-24 the Research Specialization no longer requires EC491, which satisfies this recommendation. As noted in the Cyclical Review, the course did not have large enrolments, making it difficult to schedule flexibly. This may have impeded students' willingness to take the Research Specialization. Consequently, we have made the decision to replace the requirement of EC491 in the Research Specialization with a requirement of one of either Mathematical Economics (EC345) or a fourth year elective (one of those that is cross-listed at the MABE level). Mathematical Economics will be offered in the Fall term, and fourth year electives are currently offered in Winter and Spring. This achieves the goal of scheduling flexibility for students in the Research Specialization, as well potentially for the MABE program (see Recommendation #5), and we believe will improve preparedness for graduate school for undergraduate students undertaking the Research Specialization.

Lazaridis School Decanal Comments: The department has made curriculum changes that speak to the spirit of this recommendation, while also making it a moot point. They have more than satisfied the recommendation as the changes seem to increase flexibility for students exceeding that suggested by the recommendation.

Program Review Sub-Committee Comments: It sounds like this issue raised by the review committee has been resolved, and no further reporting is required.

Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)	Responsibility for Implementation	Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)	Anticipated Completion Date	Additional Notes
Recommendation #8: Consider ways to increase the enrollment of economics students in the co-op option.	Chair, Undergraduate Program Director, Co-op Office, Dean	Co-op Office, Dean	Fall 2023	Implementation of this recommendation will be considered as part of faculty-level discussions within the Lazaridis School.

Unit Update: In the MABE program, we have been able to increase the number of offers of co-op places to students entering in 2024-25, with the help of the co-op office. In the past, the number was limited to ensure the quality of the program and the co-op office was conducting all interviews which delayed the decision process. For the 2024-25 entry cohort, with the information and training provided by the co-op office, the Graduate Program Director was allowed to conduct interviews for the co-op program, which allowed us to speed up the decision-making process and send out admission offers in a timely manner, resulting in a higher acceptance rate.

At the undergraduate level, Economics students remain eligible for co-op on the same basis as BBA students. As noted in our initial response, having asymmetric requirements between Business and Economics for co-op might create incentive issues/challenges. For example, students might switch programs from BBA to Economics simply to seek a better chance to get into co-op. This may not be desirable for students or from a Faculty perspective.

Lazaridis School Decanal Comments: As alluded to in the unit response, this recommendation, although well-intentioned, does not reflect the complexity of the way co-op works at Laurier. Co-op is incredibly resource-intensive and any increase in enrolment in one program either comes at the expense of enrolment in other programs or through increased resources. This is a discussion that is happening institutionally and goes well beyond Economics programs and the Lazaridis School. The realistic and nuanced response from the department is appreciated.

Program Review Sub-Committee Comments: The committee understands and agrees with the comments provided by the Department and the Dean; it is typical for entry into a co-operative education stream to be competitive and the number of placements for a particular academic unit must take into consideration the number of jobs available in related industries. It is anticipated the further discussions about the expansion of co-op across the institution will continue, but no further reporting on this recommendation is required.

Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)	Responsibility for Implementation	Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)	Anticipated Completion Date
<p>Recommendation #9: Consider whether there could be more flexibility in the progression requirements that would enhance student retention and reduce the bouncing of students in and out of the economics-related majors as their majors GPA rises and falls.</p>	<p>Undergraduate Program Director, Chair</p>		<p>Fall 2023</p>

Unit Update: The Honours Economics program considers flexibility to be a key benefit of the program. Students ‘bouncing in and out’ of the program is an almost inevitable by-product of that flexibility, though it does make it harder to think about defined cohorts of students in the program and to create a sense of community amongst them. We are working to balance the goal of retention with the goal of ensuring that students do learn the key elements required of an Honours Economics graduate.

The progression requirements for our undergraduate programs differ between the Honours Economics program and the Honours Economics and Data Analytics Program (each requiring a cumulative GP of 5.0 in Economics courses, and an overall GPA of 4.0), and the Economics and Accounting and Economics and Financial Management programs (each requiring a cumulative GPA of 7.0 in Economics and Business courses combined, and an overall GPA of 6.0).

The challenge with student retention is primarily with the progression requirements of the Honours Economics program since students who do not meet progression in the other programs are transferred to Honours Economics. Our progression requirements for this program are identical to the University minimum requirements. As of Spring 2021, the University Senate approved a reduction in the minimum progression requirements for Honours BA programs to a 4.0 overall GPA (keeping the GPA required for the major at 5.0). This may enable some students performing adequately in Economics courses to maintain continuous enrolment in an Economics program despite some GPA issues in courses outside the major.

In addition, university moves to re-introduce a General BA with a major may be helpful for students who have had some struggles with the Honours program. One argument against this is that some students may benefit from leaving Economics and finding another major earlier, and this might slow that process down. We have also recently introduced undergraduate Certificates in Intermediate Economics which are available to non-honours graduates, including as standalone programs, that can be completed in a single term, which again may provide alternative credentials for those who take different paths.

Lazaridis School Decanal Comments: The department seems to have given considerable thought to this recommendation and I support the idea that flexibility continues to be a value proposition for Economics undergraduate programs. In addition, the institutional changes regarding Honours BA progression mentioned in the unit response should help with retention.

Program Review Sub-Committee Comments: The helpful comments provided by the Department and Dean indicate that progression requirements for the undergraduate Economics programs are appropriate and aligned with university regulations and practices in other faculties. No further reporting on this recommendation is required.

Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)	Responsibility for Implementation	Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)	Anticipated Completion Date
Recommendation #10: Monitor additional enrolments of international students from the Navitas program for addressing resource requirements including student supports.	Chair, Dean, Vice Dean	Chair, Dean	Ongoing

Unit Update: At this point there are only a small number of students who have entered the Economics program from the Navitas/WLIC first year program. We would like a more systematic reporting system on students entering from that program, but to date this has not been available. It will be a priority going forward if the

program continues to grow as forecast. Support from the Registrar's Office/Institutional Research on this will be key. Ensuring we understand the progress of students from this pathway through the Economics program is a priority.

Should student numbers from this channel increase as projected (which may depend on government policies), there may be additional supports required. Our International Student Liaison position is intended in part to help keep an eye on this channel for international student entry, and on any resourcing implications.

Lazaridis School Decanal Comments: The initial concern over Navitas/WLIC potentially overwhelming Economics enrolment at the time of the cyclical review has thus far not been realized. The suggestions made by the department regarding improved reporting are good ones. In addition, the agreement between WLIC and the Lazaridis School is reviewed each year. As such, should enrolment increase, additional policies and safeguards can be developed to ensure enrolment is in line with departmental resources and student success.

Program Review Sub-Committee Comments: The Department and university are both encouraged to continue evaluating the success of Wilfrid Laurier International College (Navitas) students as the initiative grows and matures. The Dean has suggested that monitoring mechanisms are already in place to ensure that WLIC students are supported in their transitions. No further reporting is required.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Unit: No additional comments.

Dean of the Lazaridis School of Business and Economics: The Department of Economics continues to innovate its programs and processes, responding to both opportunities and challenges. These innovations are conceived and implemented with student success and academic standards at the forefront. The department is to be commended for responding thoughtfully and successfully to the recommendations while also paying close attention to preserve the sense of community it has developed.

Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies: The department has given considerable thought to and implemented to the degree possible recommendations from the review. Ongoing efforts to support, improve and deliver the graduate program are very much appreciated.

Program Review Sub-Committee: The committee appreciates the clear and thorough comments provided by the Department and responses by the Deans on the actions that have taken place since the 2020/2021 cyclical program review to implement the recommendations made by the external review committee. Many of the recommendations have been completed or represent ongoing areas for monitoring which the committee is assured will take place. No further Implementation Reports will be required in advance of the Department's next scheduled cyclical program review in 2027-2028.

Subsequent Report Required: No