

Senate Committee on University Planning

Academic Unit Review Summary: DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

Site Visit	14 March 2013
Informal Response to Planning	24 May 2013
Formal Response to Planning	19 September 2013
Implementation Update	15 April 2015
Midterm Review	2016-17 (8-year cycle)

Summary of Departmental Self-Study: Economics has been taught at Mount Allison University for over a century. The department at present is small (5 FTE) but enjoys healthy enrolments (approximately 1,000 course enrolments in total per year). Traditional curriculum in the discipline is offered, including microeconomics, macroeconomics, methods and econometrics, economic theory, and policy and applied economics.

The department has a well-established history of providing undergraduate students with an enriched program that allows students to excel when they enrol in advanced degrees. Each year, several upper-year students have the opportunity to serve as teaching assistants in 1000 and selected 2000 level courses, to the benefit of the students enrolled in those courses and the teaching assistants.

The department has undertaken a curriculum review in recent years, and as a result has rationalized its prerequisite structure. Although the department does not have a formal strategic plan, it has established a practice of offering a core set of courses annually, with cycling of other elective courses to ensure that students at various stages of their academic programs have access to a range of courses.

The department has structured its program to provide, on the one hand, a high quality, rigorous program for students completing honours and majors in economics, and on the other hand, a program that serves the broad needs of non-specialist students. With respect to the latter group, a significant number of students in programs such as Commerce, International Relations, and Environmental Studies enrol in economics courses at the 1000, 2000, and 3000 levels. The more open prerequisite structure of the economics program (for non-majors) informs how the department will serve students in the newly created Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) program.

Summary of Program Review Report: The executive summary of the external review offers a succinct picture of a department: “the Economics Department of Mount Allison University is very close to being as good as a five-full-time-faculty-member department at a university with Canadian-level revenues can be expected to be.” The reviewers offered praise to the department for:

- its collegial environment;
- its commitment to undergraduate teaching that includes flexible prerequisites designed to increase students' access to economics courses, a willingness to increase class sizes to accommodate student demand, effective use of summer student awards and other student support to give students research and conference experiences; and
- its research output which, in the aggregate, is large and well-placed in good journals in the discipline.

The program review team offered a number of comments about future directions for the department and the University, all of which are designed to build on the strengths of the department. The review team was emphatic that these comments were “not offered as recommendations, but proffered for the purposes of enriching the discussion at MTA about how to maintain program quality.” Included were:

- arranging for honours students to have a semester away through university exchange programs at other universities in Canada or internationally or with major international organizations;
- identifying high quality online courses that students might be directed to as a supplement to the courses offered in the department; and
- increasing the use of visiting lecturers to provide Mount Allison economics students with exposure to leading economic thinkers.

The program review team did recommend that resources be identified and committed to the department to supplement existing support for teaching assistants and visiting speakers, and to support faculty research. As well, they encouraged members of the department to seek opportunities to engage with graduate students through adjunct appointments at other universities.

Summary of Departmental Response: The department was pleased with the conclusions of the program review team. Its response highlighted the ways in which the department has become highly integrated with other programs on campus, and suggested that new opportunities for inter-institutional collaboration may exist especially, though not only, with the institutions of the U4 League. The departmental response identifies a goal of securing long-term and stable funding for the TA program within the department.

Planning Committee and Provost Response: The Planning Committee and the Provost agreed with the tenor and substance of the reflections contained in the department's self-study and its response to the external reviewers' report. The department was encouraged to continue its efforts in providing an exceptional experience to students.