S.22-45

OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT, ACADEMIC AND PROVOST

8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC
Strand Hall | 3100
Canada V5A 1S6

TEL: 778.782.5731
FAX: 778.782.5876

vpacad@sfu.ca
www.sfu.ca/vpacademic

MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION	Senate	DATE	March 10, 2022
FROM	Catherine Dauvergne, Vice-President, Academic and Provost and Chair, SCUP	PAGES	1 of 1
RE:	External Review Mid-Cycle Report for the Department of Economics (SCUP 22-09)		

The External Review of the Department of Economics was conducted in April 2018. As per Senate guidelines, the Unit is required to submit a mid-cycle report describing its progress in implementing the External Review Action Plan. At its March 9th meeting SCUP reviewed the Department of Economics' mid-cycle report.

The mid-cycle report, the Unit's assessment of its Educational Goals, and SCUTL's Feedback on the Educational Goals are attached for the information of Senate.

C: A. Kessler

SFU OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT, ACADEMIC

TEL +1 778 782 3925
FAX +1 778 782 5876
sfu.ca/vpacademic

Simon Fraser University
Strand Hall 3000
8888 University Drive
Burnaby BC
Canada V5A 1S6

MEMORANDUM

Attention: Catherine Dauvergne, Vice-President, Academic and Provost and Chair, SCUP

From: Wade Parkhouse, Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President, Academic

Re: External Review Mid-Cycle Report for the Department of Economics

Date: February 22, 2022

The External Review of the Department of Economics was undertaken in April 2018. As per the Senate guidelines, the Unit is required to submit a mid-cycle report describing its progress in implementing the External Review Action Plan and the assessment of its Educational Goals. The update on the Action Plan has been reviewed by the Faculty Dean. The Senate Committee on University Teaching and Learning (SCUTL) has provided feedback to the Unit on the assessment of its Educational Goals. The recommendations from SCUTL will be incorporated into the Unit's self-study report for the next external review.

The following documents are attached for the information of SCUP:

- Update on the Action Plan
- Assessment of Educational Goals
- SCUTL's Feedback on the assessment of Educational Goals

c: Anke Kessler, Chair, Department of Economics
Peter Hall, Dean pro tem, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

SFU FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES | DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

MEMO
Anke S. Kessler, Chair
Department of Economics

Mailing address
8888 University Drive
Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6

Tel 778-782-3443
Fax 778-782-5944

ATTENTION Bal Basi, Coordinator, Quality Assurance

FROM Anke Kessler, Chair of Economics

RE External Review Mid-Cycle Report for the Department of Economics

DATE November 30, 2021 TIME

Please find attached the report on progress that was made in the implementation of the Action Plan that resulted from the Department of Economics' external review in April 2018, to be submitted to SCUP and Senate. As requested, the report additionally includes an assessment of the department's Educational Goals.

Please contact me at econ_chair@sfu.ca if you have any questions regarding the submission.

Thank you,

Attach.

cc: Peter Hall, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

External Review Mid-Cycle Report for the Department of Economics	
Action	**Progress Made**
1. Programming **1.1 Action to be taken**	
1.1.1 Undergraduate	
1.1.1.1. **Improved grading guidelines:** The department will consider and vote on a proposal for formal and transparent undergraduate grading guidelines that enhance comparability with other departments at SFU and other Canadian economics departments.	▪ the department ratified new grading guidelines in the Spring of 2019 which came into effect in the Fall 2019 term ▪ the new guidelines comply with university grading policies, are consistent with university-wide interpretations on a letter-by-letter basis, and are more aligned with current norms at other SFU units
1.1.1.2. **New communications course:** The department will introduce a new second-year course on communications for economics. It will have the following distinctive characteristics: (a) small classes (around 40); (b) not eligible for college transfer credits; (c) required for all majors (with possible exceptions for joint majors and those who pass a qualifying exam); (d) taught by a mix of research faculty, teaching faculty, and sessional/term faculty; (e) supported by markers who receive training from CELLT R; (f) intended as a developmental course rather than a "gatekeeper" course.	▪ as part of a larger program wide communication initiative, the department created Econ 220W: Communication in Economics ▪ the course is required for the Major ▪ Econ 220W is offered in 4 sections each Fall and Spring, and 2 sections in the Summer, with a capacity of 40 students and two tutorial sections. It is typically co-taught by a sessional economics instructor and a term faculty member with a background in education and EAL skill development. The course is supported by TAs from Economics and other fields who receive training by the specialized term faculty prior to taking on their positions.
1.1.1.3. **Additional curriculum revisions aimed at skills development:** The department will revise its upper-division curriculum to greater reinforce communications skills, e.g., converting many 4th-year seminar courses to W courses, and adding a small writing component to most 3rd-year courses as well. The department will also enhance its offerings of upper-division electives that develop data analysis skills.	▪ the department recently approved new guidelines for our Undergraduate Program, which affirm that writing and communication skills form an important component of the learning goals for our Majors and specify that, with the exemption of some theory-heavy courses, all 300 level courses have a small (minimum 15%) and all 400 level courses have a larger (minimum 35%) writing component. ○ Communication skills will be added to course level learning outcomes for all affected courses if they are not already part of the learning outcomes

	▪ in collaboration with the Departments of Linguistics, Philosophy and Political Science, the Economics Department introduced a new interdisciplinary degree program, the Social Data Analytics (SDA) Minor, which offers students courses in statistical and computational methods with an emphasis on the privacy, ethical, and societal issues surrounding technology and big data ▪ since 2018, we introduced a number of courses targeted to incorporate data analytics skills into the curriculum: ○ ECON 233 Introduction to Economic Data and Statistics (part of the SDA Minor) ○ ECON 334 Data Visualization and Economics Analysis (part of the SDA Minor) ○ ECON 335 Introduction to Causal Inference and Policy Evaluation (part of the SDA Minor) ○ ECON 329 Experimental Economics (part of SDA minor) ○ ECON 434 Applied Market Design
1.1.2 Graduate	
1.1.2.1. **Enhanced PhD support:** The department will continue to use its FIC funds to offer financial support for PhD students, and will use its current balance of those funds to expand its support, subject to considerations of sustainability.	• Up until 2021, the department offered two $26,000 FIC funded entrance scholarships per year, up from one offer of $20,000 as of 2015 and two offers of $25,000 as of 2018. In 2021, only one FIC funded scholarship was offered, partly due to significant decreases in FIC revenue due to the pandemic, partly because a large donation (from the family of former faculty member Peter Kennedy) meant a comparable new scholarship could be offered instead. We intend to continue to provide at least this level of annual FIC funded support as a priority as long as it is financially sustainable. • FIC funds have also been utilized on an ad hoc basis when unanticipated graduate funding needs arise, for example to fund students who were unable to travel to Canada (and therefore work TAships) during the pandemic. • The department recently introduced a new policy to incentivize faculty to provide SSHRC support for PhD scholarships.

	• The department set up a new fund, and is aiming its fundraising efforts towards graduate scholarships – with success: alumni Shiva Nada and his wife recently committed over .5 Mill to establish an endowment fund for two graduate entrance scholarships.
1.1.2.2. **Increased tracking of Research Assistantships:** The department will more systematically track use of SSHRC funds by faculty to employ Research Assistants, so that this information can be more easily used in salary reviews, and to increase the incentives for faculty to hire graduate RAs. Note: due to a misstatement in our self-study, the external review report is in error about the number of Research Assistants within the department: in the 2017-18 fiscal year the department's faculty employed graduate RAs for the equivalent of 9.5 one-semester TA positions (about $65k}, and undergraduate RAs as the equivalent of 7.9 TA positions (about $41k).	• The department now produces an annual internal report on faculty use of research funds to employ Research Assistants. This report has been used to inform salary reviews in 2020 and 2021, and we intend to continue this practice moving forward. • Our funding for Research Assistants has seen a dramatic increase since the 2017-18 fiscal year. In 2018-19, the department's faculty funded Research Assistantships totaling $135K for graduate students and $53K for undergraduate students; in 2019-20, $182K for graduates and 42K for undergraduates; in 2020-21, $200K for graduates but no funding for undergraduates (likely due to fewer opportunities for undergraduate involvement due to the pandemic).
1.1.2.3. **Increased PhD teaching:** The Department will reserve sessional instructor appointments for its graduate students in its departmental teaching plan to the maximum extent allowed by the TSSU contract.	• Since fall 2019, the department has taken a more active stance when it comes to the recruitment of graduate students as Sessional Instructors, approaching individual students and their supervisors to find matches between student teaching capacity and departmental teaching needs. Graduate students who teach for us are assigned a faculty mentor during the semester they teach and receive a small scholarship in addition to their normal salary. • Since implementing this new approach, over the last two fiscal years (2020-21, 2021-22) we have hired eight graduate students as Sessional Instructors—almost the maximum allowable by the TSSU collective agreement—compared to one or no graduate students hired as Sessional Instructors in the years just preceding this.
1.1.2.4. **PhD curriculum revisions:** The GPC will consider proposals to revise the structure of the PhD microeconomics sequence and its	• In academic year 2018-19 the Graduate Program Committee voted to eliminate the Second Field Comprehensive Exam from the PhD program. The program now includes only one field exam,

comprehensive exam, and to eliminate the comprehensive field exam requirement.	the content of which is flexible depending on students' research interests. • In 2019-20, the Graduate Program Committee approved a change in the PhD comprehensive exams to now give students admitted in or after Fall 2020 the option to write any two out of three possible exams: in econometrics, microeconomics, or macroeconomics. Prior to this, students had no option to take an econometrics exam, having to take both microeconomics and macroeconomics. The change allows students to focus on their academic strengths and treats each of economics' major fields equally.
2. Research	
2.1.1. **Research chair:** The Dean of FASS will work with the department to secure a Canada Research Chair within the economics department.	▪ the Dean of FASS approved a faculty position for junior (Tier 2) CRC in Applied Microeconomics in 2020, which was advertised for the 2020/21 academic job market ▪ the department hired Dr. Serena Canaan, who specializes in labor economics and the economics of education, for the position ▪ the application for CRC Tier 2 stipend has been submitted and is currently pending
3. Administration	
3.1.1. **Consultation on strategic priorities:** The department will move from its historical pattern of one annual department meeting to two, with the spring meeting designated for consultation on strategic and hiring priorities in advance of the department's FRP and other planning submissions. The increased meeting time will also allow additional consultation on curriculum matters.	▪ the department held two departmental meetings between July and November 2021 ▪ two departmental meetings are scheduled for the Spring 2022, one of which will be devoted to a discussion on hiring and other strategic priorities ▪ moving forward, the plan is to regularly schedule at least two departmental meetings in each of the Fall and Spring term
4. Working Environment	
No actions reported.	• The department is setting up a committee to address teaching workload issues, as laid out in the collective agreement.

5. Enrollment and CFL Complement	
5.1.1. **Undergraduate enrollments:** The department commits to stabilizing undergraduate enrollments at 1100 AFTE, and will review and revise its entry CGPA annually as needed to maintain this target.	▪ After revising the entry CGPA to its minor in fall 2018, the department has had an average of 1149 AFTEs in the three fiscal years since its review (1077 in 2018-19, 1152 in 2019-20, 1219 in 2020-21) and is on track to meet its AFTE target in the current fiscal year as well. ▪ No further revisions to the entry CGPA for any programs are anticipated, though the department will continue to review this matter annually in light of enrollment trends.
5.1.2. **CFL complement:** The Dean commits to stabilizing the department's continuing faculty complement to maintain an undergraduate AFTE /CFL ratio of no greater than 30:1. As the action plan commits the department to maintaining an undergraduate enrollment of 1100 AFTE, this translates to 37 CFL {35 research and 2 teaching).	▪ The current faculty complement om Economics is 37 CFL. ▪ However, the department operates in a very competitive environment, with a large and steady number of unpaid Leaves of Absence of faculty members (see 5.1.3. below) which has resulted in a steady state of about 35 CFL, significantly impacting teaching capacity. In the academic year 2020/21, for example, 48.7% of undergraduate students in Economics were not taught by Continuing Faculty.
5.1.3. **Prioritization of replacements:** The Dean recognizes that economics has high turnover due to a robust job market and that it is not unusual for the department to simultaneously have both actual departures (retirements/resignations) and planned departures (planned retirements or positions accepted elsewhere that have not yet resulted in a resignation). While planned departures cannot normally be replaced until the resignation or retirement occurs, the Dean will take these planned departures into account when prioritizing the replacement of retirements and resignations across the faculty.	▪ The anticipated turnover in Economics continues to be high: ○ The department has one planned retirement at the end of Spring 2022 ○ Two full time research faculty who are on unpaid leave, are unlikely to return to SFU as they either already hold or have recently been offered very attractive positions at other institutions. ○ One further faculty member is considered to be a planned departure due to family considerations.

SFU SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Mid-Cycle Assessment Plan Reporting Template

Unit: Economics

Contact Person: Anke Kessler, Department Chair

Date: December 1, 2021

This template is designed to help units report on their Educational Goals Assessment for the mid-cycle reporting period. *(Textboxes will expand as you type)*

1) Who were the members of your Educational Goals Assessment team? Please outline who has worked on the assessment.

Anke Kessler (Department Chair)
Brian Krauth (former Department Chair during the 2018 External Review)
Sepideh Fotovatian (Coordinator, Curriculum Development)
Steeve Mongrain (Undergraduate Chair).

2) Did your unit revise or update your Educational Goals and/or your Curriculum Map? Please outline any changes you made.

Yes.

We added two new required courses (ECON 220W and ECON 233) to the curriculum map.

We also revised our educational goals as part of a discussion with faculty on detailed course-level educational goals. For comparison, the original goals in the 2018 Action Plan were:

1. Knowledge of microeconomic theory
2. Knowledge of macroeconomics
3. Ability to analyze economic data
4. Apply economic theory and econometrics to multiple applied fields
5. Communications skills
6. Critical thinking skills

The revised goals are:

1. Analyze and interpret economic models
2. Analyze and interpret economic data
3. Critically assess economic arguments, assumptions, and evidence
4. Use oral, written, and graphical methods to communicate economic insights
5. Use economic concepts to understand real-world human activity and public policy
6. Describe and analyze important economic institutions, events, and results

The detailed course-level goals themselves are still in development, with the discussion process having been suspended in March 2020. We hope to restart this process in early 2022 and have detailed course-level goals in place by Fall 2023.

3) Did you change any aspects of your Assessment Plan from your Action Plan? Please outline any changes you made.

Yes.

The Action Plan gave limited details on *how* we planned to assess achievement of our educational goals. It also had an unclear timetable for the assessment process. Our revised assessment plan is significantly more detailed, at a cost that the timeline is somewhat long. Simply put, we need high-quality reliable data to have credibility with our own faculty and to make good decisions. There have been several barriers to collecting adequate data: inconsistency in the role of written work in our fourth-year seminar courses, a need to clarify detailed goals in our core courses, availability of faculty resources to work on "extra" assessments, and finally the unreliability of remote assessments in our department due to endemic cheating. Our return to full-time in-person learning will be complete by January 2022, and we have spent the past few years removing or minimizing the curricular barriers. Availability of faculty time remains a barrier.

We can think of our direct assessments of educational goals as falling into three priority groups:

1. Our top priority is tracking the development of communication skills over the course of our major. With the assistance of our Dean, we have invested substantial resources into increasing the role of writing and communications in our major through the introduction of ECON 220W and the opening of a daily drop-in writing lab for economics students. To that end, we have developed a brief **Prior English Language Assessment (PELA)** and have been collecting it systematically since Fall 2019.

2. The driving force behind our emphasis on communications was dissatisfaction by both students and faculty with the results in our 4th year seminar courses. For background, each economics major is required to complete at least one of these courses. Our seminar courses usually include a term paper and often include oral presentations as well. Over time, instructors have found that an increasing and alarming number of our majors (an overwhelming majority of whom speak English as an additional language) simply cannot write an adequate term paper or give an adequate oral presentation. To that end, our next priority for assessment is to do a **systematic review of submitted term**

papers from these seminar courses. One current barrier to such a review is that not all our seminar courses include term paper or oral presentation components (instructors currently have discretion here). Because students with weak communications skills gravitate towards those courses, the current stock of submitted term papers is not representative of the achievement of economics majors in general. We have addressed this barrier by passing a motion at our most recent (Oct 25 2021) UCC meeting directing all instructors in seminar courses to include a term paper and/or oral presentation component worth at least 35% of the course grade, effective in Fall 2023. We can therefore use the 2023-24 academic year to implement this systematic review. As part of this systematic review, we will ask each instructor in these courses to provide a report evaluating aggregate student achievement relative to our stated educational goals. We have created a draft of the assessment form and attached it to this report as a supporting document. We welcome comments on the draft assessment form.

3. Our final priority is to do a **systematic review of final exams in third-year core courses**. This is a lower priority item for us and is likely to happen after our Spring 2025 external review.

When direct evidence collection is infeasible or the evidence is unclear, we may supplement or substitute with indirect evidence from an **exit survey of graduating students** in the 2023-24 academic year. We have previously done exit interviews and exit surveys to inform our program choices but have not yet asked students to self-assess their own progress relative to these specific learning outcomes.

We also have some existing indirect evidence from student self-reports in the *BC Baccalaureate Graduates Survey* (BCBGS) and SFU's own *Undergraduate Student Survey* (UGSS). The BCBGS is a survey of graduates 2 years after graduation, and its 2019 report (2017 graduating class) for SFU economics is available at https://bit.ly/3oUOJCx. The UGSS is a survey of current students, and IRP has provided us a custom report of responses by economics majors going back to 2013.

4) Please use the table below to outline the assessment you have done to date. Add or delete any rows as needed.

Educational Goal 1: Analyze and interpret economic models		
Description of Assessment Method(s): Indirect evidence from student self-reports in the (2019) BCBGS and (2013-2020) UGSS. **When did you collect the data?** November 2021.	**Describe Key Findings, Analysis and Interpretation:** 90% of BCBGS respondents reported being "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the comprehensiveness of core courses in SFU economics. 87% of BCBGS respondents rated SFU economics as "helpful" or "very helpful" in developing use of mathematics. Among Economics UGSS respondents in 2020:	**What improvements have been made, or potential improvements considered, as a result of this assessment?** None.

	• 82% were satisfied (“somewhat satisfied” or “very satisfied”) that SFU provided a “sound foundation in their specific academic discipline” (an increase from 61% in 2013). • 88% were satisfied that SFU provided “analytical problem solving skills” (no substantial change from 2013).	
Educational Goal 2: Analyze and interpret economic data		
Description of Assessment Method(s): None yet **When did you collect the data?**	**Describe Key Findings, Analysis and Interpretation:**	**What improvements have been made, or potential improvements considered, as a result of this assessment?**
Educational Goal 3: Critically assess economic arguments, assumptions, and evidence		
Description of Assessment Method(s): Indirect evidence from student self-reports in the (2019) BCBGS and (2013-2020) UGSS. **When did you collect the data?** November 2021.	**Describe Key Findings, Analysis and Interpretation:** 93% of BCBGS respondents rated SFU economics as “helpful” or “very helpful” in developing critical analysis skills 91% of BCBGS respondents rated SFU economics as “helpful” or “very helpful” in developing skills for learning on your own. Among Economics UGSS respondents in 2020: • 87% were satisfied that SFU provided “critical thinking skills” (no substantial change from 2013).	**What improvements have been made, or potential improvements considered, as a result of this assessment?** None
Educational Goal 4: Use oral, written, and graphical methods to communicate economic insights		

Description of Assessment Method(s):	Describe Key Findings, Analysis and Interpretation:	What improvements have been made, or potential improvements considered, as a result of this assessment?
Indirect evidence from student self-reports in the (2019) BCBGS and (2013-2020) UGSS. Direct evidence from basic writing test (PELA) given to students in ECON 201 (entry to major) and ECON 4xx (completion of major) **When did you collect the data?** BCBGS and UGSS: November 2021 PELA: ECON 201 data collection started Fall 2019 and is ongoing. ECON 4XX data collection started Spring 2021 and is ongoing.	90% of BCBGS respondents rated SFU economics as "helpful" or "very helpful" in developing written communication skills. 74% of BCBGS respondents rated SFU economics as "helpful" or "very helpful" in developing oral communication skills. This is substantially lower than the SFU average (81%) or the average of other economics programs in BC (80%) Among Economics UGSS respondents in 2020: • 70% were satisfied that SFU provided "oral communications skills" (an increase from 52% in 2013). • 74% were satisfied that SFU provided "written communications skills" (no substantial change from 2013). Findings to date from PELA are: 1. On entry to the program, students have clear needs for further skill development. In Fall 2021, 26% of ECON 201 students were rated as "inadequate" and 31% as "marginally adequate" in overall writing skill. 2. Skills on entry have a positive trend since the beginning of PELA testing in Fall 2019, when 38% of ECON 201 students were rated as having "inadequate" skills and 30% as having "marginally adequate" skills. The reason for this positive trend is unclear. As part of our communications initiative, we worked with FIC to add BUS 216 (Introduction to essentials of business communications) to their course plan for ECON-intended students. Since FIC is our largest source of	The PELA results to date have been shared with the instructors in ECON 220W to aid in their teaching choices. We view the PELA results as part of an eventual evaluation of our communications initiative. This initiative is resource intensive, and a serious evaluation will be necessary to confirm that those resources are being well-spent. Initial results are promising, but we will need more data before reaching a strong conclusion or taking any major actions. The student reports on *oral* communications skills suggest we should look for practical ways to further reinforce those skills more specifically. ECON 220W currently includes an oral presentation component, so it might make sense to expand that component. Our broader capacity in this area is somewhat limited due to large classes, but we could possibly leverage tutorials for this purpose.

	economics majors and FIC students typically have weaker English skills than those who enter the major through other pathways, this could be an important factor. Other potential factors that may explain this trend include: (1) students with writing difficulties moving away from economics as writing expectations in the program increase; (2) changes in SFU or FIC admissions practices; (3) changes to the testing environment during the remote learning era. 3. There is also tentative evidence of improvement over time in our program. In Summer 2021 results for the 4xx courses, 17% of students are rated as having inadequate skills and 32% as having marginally adequate skills. This is only a little better than the Summer 2021 results for ECON 201, but it is much better than the ECON 201 results for this student cohort. This could be the result of students improving over time, or it could be caused by attrition of students with weaker skill levels. As additional semesters of data become available, we will be able to construct student-level longitudinal records and clarify the mechanisms involved. We will also be able to compare improvement of students with and without ECON 220W.	
Educational Goal 5: Use economic concepts to understand real-world human activity and public policy		
Description of Assessment Method(s): None yet	**Describe Key Findings, Analysis and Interpretation:**	**What improvements have been made, or potential improvements considered, as a result of this assessment?**

When did you collect the data?		
Educational Goal 6: Describe and analyze important economic institutions, events, and results		
Description of Assessment Method(s): None yet **When did you collect the data?**	**Describe Key Findings, Analysis and Interpretation:**	**What improvements have been made, or potential improvements considered, as a result of this assessment?**

5) Please use the table below to update your assessment plan for the coming period before your next External Review. Add or delete any rows as needed.

Educational Goal 1: Analyze and interpret economic models			
Description of Assessment Methods: Exit survey of graduating students. and/or[1] Review of one year of ECON 302 and ECON 305 final exams. This would be implemented either by the collection of reports from a course instructor, or by collecting a random sample of exams for review by an assigned faculty member.	**What would indicate that students had met the EG?** Exit survey respondents self-assess that they have met the EG. Answers to questions on core models show a clear understanding of the models and their interpretation.	**Is this direct or indirect?** Direct indirect	**When do you plan to collect the data?** Exit survey: during the 2023-24 academic year. Exams: after the 2024 external review. This item is lower in priority than some other items.
Educational Goal 2: Analyze and interpret economic data			

[1] Our plan is to assess all educational goals either through an exit survey (direct student self-assessment) or through instructor's reports on term papers and exams (indirect assessment through instructors), or both. We realize that those assessment methods are commentary – however, it may not be feasible to do both for each goal. In addition, how well the data collected measure (progress in) educational achievement may depend on the assessment method and the goal to be assessed; it is thus important remain flexible on the method of assessment at this point.

Description of Assessment Methods: Exit survey of graduating students.	**What would indicate that students had met the EG?** Exit survey respondents self-assess that they have met the EG.	**Is this direct or indirect?** Direct	**When do you plan to collect the data?** Exit survey: during the 2023-24 academic year.
and/or			
Review of one year of ECON 333 final exams. This would be implemented either by the collection of reports from a course instructor, or by collecting a random sample of exams for review by an assigned faculty member.	Answers to questions on core methods models show a clear understanding of the methods and their interpretation.	indirect	Exams: after the 2024 external review. This item is lower in priority than some other items.
Educational Goal 3: Critically assess economic arguments, assumptions, and evidence			
Description of Assessment Methods: Exit survey of graduating students.	**What would indicate that students had met the EG?** Exit survey respondents self-assess that they have met the EG.	**Is this direct or indirect?** Direct	**When do you plan to collect the data?** Exit survey: during the 2023-24 academic year.
and/or			
Review of one year of reports from ECON 4XX instructors on term papers in those courses.	Term papers display a sophisticated and critical understanding of their subject matter.	Indirect	Term papers: papers from 2023-24 academic year, review to be conducted during Fall 2024.
Educational Goal 4: Use oral, written, and graphical methods to communicate economic insights			
Description of Assessment Methods: Exit survey of graduating students.	**What would indicate that students had met the EG?** Exit survey respondents self-assess that they have met the EG.	**Is this direct or indirect?** Direct	**When do you plan to collect the data?**

and/or Review of one year of reports from ECON 4XX instructors on term papers in those courses.	Term papers are clear and compelling to read, with proper handling and citation of external sources	indirect	Exit survey: during the 2023-24 academic year. Term papers: papers from 2023-24 academic year, review to be conducted during Fall 2024.
Educational Goal 5: Use economic concepts to understand real-world human activity and public policy			
Description of Assessment Methods: Exit survey of graduating students. and/or Review of one year of reports from ECON 4XX instructors on term papers in those courses.	**What would indicate that students had met the EG?** Exit survey respondents self-assess that they have met the EG. Term papers thoughtfully address the core ideas of economics that are relevant to their subject matter.	**Is this direct or indirect?** Direct indirect	**When do you plan to collect the data?** Exit survey: during the 2023-24 academic year. Term papers: papers from 2023-24 academic year, review to be conducted during Fall 2024.
Educational Goal 6: Describe and analyze important economic institutions, events, and results			
Description of Assessment Methods: Exit survey of graduating students. and/or	**What would indicate that students had met the EG?** Exit survey respondents self-assess that they have met the EG.	**Is this direct or indirect?** Direct	**When do you plan to collect the data?** Exit survey: during the 2023-24 academic year.

Review of one year of reports from ECON 4XX instructors on term papers in those courses.	Term papers address institutions, events, and results that are relevant to their subject matter.	indirect	Term papers: papers from 2023-24 academic year, review to be conducted during Fall 2024.

6) How do you plan on sharing your findings within your unit?

Preliminary PELA results have already been shared at department meetings. Additional PELA results and results from goal assessments will be provided as part of the self-study process for the Spring 2025 external review.

7) Assessment Timeline

Next External Review: Spring 2025.

SFU FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES | DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

TEL +1 778 782 3508
FAX +1 778 782 5944
sfu.ca/economics

Simon Fraser University
West Mall Complex, Room 3602
8888 University Drive
Burnaby BC
Canada V5A 1S6

(DRAFT)
September 1, 2023

Dear colleague:

The Economics Department is asking the instructors in all 400-level seminar courses in the 2023-24 academic year to provide information on student achievement of the department's educational goals through the attached form. Your response is greatly appreciated and will be important in informing the department's strategic planning for our undergraduate program.

For background, the economics department has an external review scheduled for the 2024-25 academic year. For those who have not participated in an external review, they occur every 7 years and provide an opportunity for the department to identify and discuss the most important issues affecting our core research and teaching mission. The external review is conducted by senior economics faculty members from other universities and follows three stages.

- In Fall 2024, we will engage in a **self-study**. This involves collecting data, holding a one-day department retreat to discuss issues and potential solutions, and preparing a self-study report that will go to the external review team. The self-study will identify major issues facing the department and ask the review team.
- In Spring 2025, the external review team will **visit the department** for two days. All department members will have the opportunity to talk with the review team.
- In late Spring or Summer 2025, we will receive the external review team's **report** which will give an overall assessment of our department and specific advice for moving it forward. We will then negotiate an **action plan** with the Dean that provides a mutually agreeable strategy for addressing the issues raised by the report. The action plan also typically includes explicit resource commitments from the Dean and action commitments from us.

External reviews are the department's key mechanism for collective strategic planning, so it is important that they be done well. For example, our most recent external review led directly to our recent CRC hiring, as well as significant changes to our graduate and undergraduate programs.

In our most recent external review (2017-2018 academic year) the department identified the inadequate communications skills of our majors as a key issue affecting our undergraduate program. This issue was raised most forcefully by instructors in our 400-level seminar courses, who reported that many of our students simply could not write an adequate term paper. Since then, the department has addressed this issue in various ways: changes to course requirements at our feeder college FIC, a new required communications course (ECON 220W), and an increased role of writing in our upper-division electives. Another part of the 2017-18 external review was the development of six program-level educational goals, and a plan for assessing how well our students are achieving them.

As part of that plan, we are asking the instructors in all 400-level seminar courses in the 2023-24 academic year to provide information through the attached form. The seminar course typically represents the conclusion of a student's time in our program, and so it represents a good point to see where our students have

The Undergraduate Chair will use the submitted forms to develop a summary report for review and discussion at the Fall 2024 department retreat. Our goal here is to see where we stand relative to seven years ago, and to have an informed discussion of the options going forward.
If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me.

Regards,

Anke Kessler
Department Chair

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES | DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

Educational goals evaluation form (DRAFT)

Economics department, 2023-24 academic year

Instructions

Please review all term papers submitted for your 400-level seminar course, and comment in detail on how well (or poorly) the papers demonstrate achievement of the department's educational goals.

Your main source of information for your assessment should be the term paper, but you can also use information from student oral presentations if that is a component of your course.

Course information

Basic information	
Your name:	
Course number and name:	(e.g., ECON 443: Seminar in International Trade)
Semester:	
Course background	
Questions you might address: What is the subject matter of your course, if it is not obvious from the course title? How is the term paper assignment structured? Are there drafts and revisions? How do students choose topics? Do you have student oral presentations? If so, how are they structured? How do academic integrity concerns affect your evaluations? Is there any other background on the course that may be relevant to your answers below?	**Your comments:**

Educational goals

For each of the six educational goals below, comment on how well (or poorly) the students demonstrated achievement of those goals. In providing comments, please:

- Be honest but be reasonable in your expectations. Your evaluation should be relative to what it is reasonable to expect from an average student after 2-3 years in our program.
- Be as detailed and specific as possible.

Note that some goals may or may not apply depending on the subject matter of the course. Most seminar courses should address Goals 4-6 and at least one of Goals 1-3. If a goal is not applicable to your course, answer "Not applicable."

Educational Goal 1: Analyze and interpret economic models	
Questions you might address: Does the student demonstrate awareness of the key economic models that are relevant to the topic? Does the student correctly interpret the relevant economic models? If the student solves or otherwise analyzes a model, is it done correctly?	**Your comments:**

Educational Goal 2: Analyze and interpret economic data	
Questions you might address: Does the student demonstrate an understanding of the data being analyzed?	**Your comments:**

Does the student follow correct statistical procedure when analyzing data? Does the student address causal inference in a clear and consistent manner?	
Educational Goal 3: Critically assess economic arguments, assumptions, and evidence	
Questions you might address: Does the student identify and discuss competing explanations or theories? Does the student identify and discuss the relevant evidence? Does the student clearly state assumptions and their implications?	**Your comments:**
Educational Goal 4: Use oral, written, and graphical methods to communicate economic insights	
Questions you might address: Is the student's paper well organized, with a clear topic/thesis, a logical flow of information, and a clear conclusion? Is the student's writing clear and coherent? Are economics and econometrics terms used correctly? Is the tone of the paper appropriate to academic writing in economics?	**Your comments:**

<table>
<tr><td>Are tables and graphs used effectively?

Are sources properly cited?

If oral presentations are part of your assessment, are they well-organized, well-informed, clear, and appropriate in tone?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Educational Goal 5: Use economic concepts to understand real-world human activity and public policy</td></tr>
<tr><td>Questions you might address:

Does the student fluently speak the language of economics and address the relevant ideas?

Does the student use economic ideas to develop insight on the activity or policy issue?

Does the student identify the most important considerations in the policy question under analysis?</td><td>Your comments:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Educational Goal 6: Describe and analyze important economic institutions, events, and results</td></tr>
<tr><td>Questions you might address:

Does the student demonstrate awareness of the key economic institutions, events or facts that are relevant to the topic?

Does the student interpret those facts in a clear and consistent manner?</td><td>Your comments:</td></tr>
</table>

SFU OFFICE OF THE
VICE-PROVOST, LEARNING & TEACHING

Strand Hall 3034
8888 University Drive
Burnaby B.C. Canada V5A 1S6

TEL + 1 778 782 5433
avplt@sfu.ca
SFU.CA/vpacademic/learnteach

MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION:	Anke Kessler, Chair, Economics
FROM:	Elizabeth Elle, Vice-Provost, Learning & Teaching (for SCUTL) Elizabeth Elle
RE:	ECON Mid-cycle Educational Goals Assessment
DATE:	February 11, 2022

The Senate Committee for University Teaching and Learning has recently been charged with providing feedback to units in their mid-cycle assessment of Educational Goals. Here we note a number of positive things your department is doing, along with some suggestions for how you might leverage this process to support your departmental goals without the work becoming burdensome to faculty.

ECON has taken a collaborative approach to setting and assessing educational goals, with a number of leaders involved in the work along with the UCC, and clearly an effort to discuss EGs at department meetings (examples of motions passed and other decisions were included). This has resulted in improvement of the EGs for the unit, making them stronger and moving them to higher level skills, eg from "knowledge" to "analyze and interpret". The department has emphasized the collection of high quality, reliable data from which to make decisions, another strength, and has shared data with relevant faculty to help inform their teaching practices.

Economics is clearly motivated to address challenges identified by faculty, specifically written and oral communication, and have invested significant time and resources in doing so. They've also made some changes to course requirements (adding a second-year communication course) and specifically to the kind of assessment used in 4th year seminar courses to help them improve the communication skills of undergraduates. These are all commendable actions.

There are a few items where we'd recommend some further thought.

- The unit is currently using a fair amount of indirect evidence from the BCBGS and UGSS. While useful, it is not currently clear how you are linking these data to potential actions for your program. It may be that the surveys being used are too general to assist you in this endeavor, and if so it may be that the LEAP group can help (see below).
- There is significant data from the PELA presented, but in your report you note that you still do not have clarity on taking action. It would likely be helpful to decide on what information or metric would put you in a position to take action, as you've made a significant investment over multiple years already, and learned quite a bit about your students' abilities.
- Currently there is interest in but not yet data from courses. The description of next steps (a systematic review of all final exams; detailed analysis of writing in seminar courses) seems overly cumbersome and likely to increase instructor workload. A curriculum map could help you identify a smaller number of key courses to consider for assessment, and the department should

remember that not all EGs (much less all courses) need to be assessed each year. You may want to identify an additional EG beyond communication that is of interest, and for which existing data in courses (from exams, assignments, etc) could be used without faculty needing to do additional analysis or assessment on top of what they are already doing.

- The proposed evaluation form to be used in the 4th year seminar courses is very detailed but it's not clear to the SCUTL subcommittee that all of those program EGs would reliably be assessed in all the 4th year seminar courses. It's also not clear that your expectation is that the faculty members would be doing the assessment for your program (not their course) and for students collectively (questions in the form are written about "the student" in singular). A related concern is that completing these forms would potentially take significant time for your faculty. It may be possible to use existing information from a grading rubric to get the information you are interested in, rather than having instructors do additional work. And, you might consider piloting this assessment in just one or two courses to ensure the department is getting the information it needs, and to better understand the workload and process from the perspective of your faculty.

Finally, if you could use any additional support, please reach out to the Learning Experiences Assessment and Planning group in my portfolio (email them at: leap@sfu.ca). I've added people to the team with expertise in assessment and survey analysis, and they are here to help you. You mention that you'd like to design an exit survey; LEAP can help, and student self-assessment data are better than other forms of indirect information (like satisfaction surveys) in providing insight to your program.