

Report of the Academic Unit Planning Panel for  
the Department of Economics  
Memorial University of Newfoundland

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	3
1.1	PROGRAM REVIEW MEETINGS	
1.2	MUN AND THE DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS	
1.3	PHYSICAL SPACE	
1.4	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	
2	UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM	6
3	GRADUATE PROGRAM	10
4	RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT	14
5	VISION, MISSION AND ACTIVITIES	19
6	RECOMMENDATIONS	21

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 PROGRAM REVIEW MEETINGS 12-14 MARCH

The Review Panel members met with the Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) APR Coordinator, Kim Myrick, with the Dean of Arts (Dean of Record), Dr. Lynne Phillips and the Head of the Department, Dr. Wade Locke. There were also scheduled meetings throughout the site visit with the two administrative members of staff (Susan Curtis and Barbara Philpott), most members of faculty, alumni, per-course instructors, graduate and undergraduate students, and various external stakeholders for the Department. These external stakeholders included people involved in government (including the current Provincial Minister of Finance), and advisors to the CARE (Collaborative Applied Research in Economics) initiative – discussed under research and engagement below. Exit meetings were held with the Dean of Arts, the Head of Department, and the administrative staff. Faculty were invited to the final exit strategy with the staff and Head of Department, but none were able to attend. As part of the site visit, the panel was also given a tour of the Department and its facilities.

The panel was satisfied with the arrangement of the site visit, and the range of people we were able to see. We were also able to talk to most of the faculty, and those members who we did not get to see were given an opportunity to meet with the panel during the visit, but declined the invitation. The Department prepared a very comprehensive self-study report under the leadership of the Department Head which was very impressive.

## 1.2 MUN AND THE DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

The profile of the Economics Department at MUN evolved within the context of the special conditions of both the University and the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. For reasons linked to the history of the University the Department is located within the Faculty of Arts, a home it shares with many other social sciences. Despite this, the Department has traditionally shared teaching and research synergies with other units, such as the Faculty of Business Administration (FBA) and with the Department of Mathematics. The Department also offers its majors the choice of completing degrees under either the University's BA or BSc regulations.

The Department's place in the Province has also influenced its research trajectory, with particular strengths being noted in public policy.

As well as its ties with the FBA and the Department of Mathematics, the Department also shares links with other Departments in the Faculty of Arts. These include the Certificate of Public Policy (with Political Science and Geography), and frequent joint seminars with other Departments.

Thus, the Department plays an active role in the life of both the Province and the University. It provides key linkages between MUN and the wider community in the Province, and also between several academic units within the University.

### 1.3 PHYSICAL SPACE

Most of the Department is located in offices on part of one floor of the Arts and Administration Building. Generally, the physical space is adequate for the Department, with a reasonably sized main office, small, but functional, faculty offices, a shared office for graduate students, and a small seminar room. There is also a small amount of public seating in the well-lit corridor, a room where students and faculty can access the Bloomberg Terminal, and a seminar room.

The Department makes good use of the space provided for it by the University. Of special note is the use of the seminar room as a help centre for students enrolled in Economics 2010 & 2020. The graduate student office was functional, and provided a number of computer stations.

Space was not brought up as a major issue during any of the site visit interviews.

### 1.4 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Panel's findings were:

- Undergraduates are presented with a good range of options, including co-operative education;
- The undergraduate programmes provided a good training;

- The problems that the Department were having with retention of students in the MA programme were not because of the structure or difficulty level of the programme. The lack of appropriate background in economics amongst some of the students admitted to the programme seemed the most likely explanation;
- The Panel commends the Department for striking a committee to assess the MA programme;
- The Collaborative Applied Research in Economics (CARE) initiative has had a very positive effect on undergraduate and graduate student resources, Department research, and engagement with institutions outside the University. It does, however, come with some increased administrative costs to the Department;
- Since the last review in 2001, the members of the Department have produced first rate research. The Department has particularly built on its links to institutions engaged in public policy;
- The visiting speakers series, primarily funded by the Scholarship in the Arts programme, has been a great success;
- Access to relevant research resources, such as the Bloomberg Terminal, are to be commended;
- While the Department has been the subject of past tensions and uncollegial behaviour between faculty, it is clear that members of the Department have put in much time and energy improving collegiality and the functioning of the Department.

## 2. UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM

The courses offered by the Department cover both core theory and applied statistics and enough applied fields to provide students an opportunity to pursue a solid undergraduate education in economics. Students wishing to specialize in economics have a wide variety of program options including a Major (B.Sc. or a B.A), Honours (B.Sc. or a B.A), or a Minor. In addition students can pursue one of four Joint Majors offered under the B. Sc. Degree - Applied Mathematics and Economics, Computer Science and Economics, Economics and Pure Mathematics, and Economics and Statistics - or a Co-op option. The range of options is remarkable. Moreover, the Joint Programs signal the importance of mathematics, statistics, and computer science in Economics.

The courses offered are taught with sufficient rigor and students who do well in the undergraduate program do well in graduate programs at other universities. The students we talked to were generally happy with the program. The students did suggest that there was a need for a research methods course which covered material similar to Political Science 2010 Research and Writing in Political Science which provides an overview of the research and analysis skills used in Political Science. Students in that course can expect to learn about library research, electronic data gathering, and the elements of strong essay writing. We do not think a specific methods course is necessary in Economics. However, the Unit should recognize that students, even the best students, feel a little lost when asked to prepare a research paper.

We assume members of the Department believe students are exposed to basic research and writing skills in many courses. But there may be information and coordination problems with faculty assuming methods are taught in someone else's course. The Department has stated its intention to conduct a curriculum review. As part of the review the Department should carefully look at the content of courses offered and assure that all students have an opportunity for some basic training in research methods and writing. Indeed, we believe the Unit should undertake a regular curriculum review (every five years) to assure all students emerge with the diversified skill set needed for jobs in the public and private sectors and/or advanced academic pursuits and assure the curriculum reflects the current state of the economics discipline. The regular curriculum review would also make long term planning easier.

The curriculum review should also look beyond the Unit itself. Courses in other programs might be counted in the Major and Honours degree program. For example, History may offer Economic History courses (Economics does not currently offer courses in this important area); Medicine may offer courses with significant Health Economics content; the Marine Institute might offer relevant courses, etc. There may also be important opportunities for cooperation, coordination, and cross-listing with the business faculty. Indeed, the Department should work hard on improving and perhaps formalizing its relationship with business.

The curriculum review committee should also look at the relationship between the graduate and undergraduate programs. Some universities allow senior undergraduates to take graduate level courses (with special permission) as part of their undergraduate program. This would certainly benefit undergraduate students able to survive the graduate level courses and would give the Unit more flexibility in course offerings.

Finally, the curriculum review should take a critical look at course numbering. The first year introductory courses (2010, 2015, and 2020) might be changed to 1010, 1015 and 1020 to assure entering students do not interpret the 2000 designation as implying a second year course.

We were very happy to see the CARE initiative having a positive impact on the undergraduate experience. Not only does CARE provide summer research opportunities but also access to data which can be used in undergraduate research papers. Both CARE and the Co-op Program provide important experiential learning opportunities for undergraduates. We would note that there may be opportunities for Co-op placements with NGOs in the social development sector.

The self-study document indicates that the Department wants to improve undergraduate teaching. Given Memorial has strong teaching and learning support (DELTS) members of the unit should take advantage. New hires, in particular, should be strongly encouraged to take advantage of the resources provided through DELTS.

Questions:

- 1) How well is the unit performing its undergraduate teaching function?

All evidence we had suggests the unit is doing a good job. Students are happy. There are a wide variety of program options.

2) Is the curriculum sufficiently comprehensive and rigorous compared to similar programs in Canada and elsewhere?

Yes.

3) Are the grading norms consistent with those used in similar programs in Canada and elsewhere?

Yes.

4) Is the unit properly staffed to fulfil its undergraduate responsibilities?

Yes. But given the Unit offers both graduate and undergraduate programs with a small complement even a small reduction in staff would have serious adverse impacts.

5) Are classes the appropriate size to accomplish its teaching goals?

Yes. The pattern of enrolments is typical of Economics programs in Canada. Large first year classes are the norm. Upper year courses are generally much smaller although it not unusual for a Department to offer larger upper year courses which service students in other programs (as Money and Banking did in the past). Honours level courses generally range from 5-20.

6) Is there sufficient demand from students for the program?

Yes.

7) How competitive are the unit's undergraduate programs nationally and regionally in attracting qualified students and placing graduates in suitable positions?

Economics students at Memorial are in no way penalized relative to others who chose to attend another university.

8) Are recruiting and retention opportunities being maximized, both by the unit and by the University?

Students do not generally decide to specialize in economics before entering university. Thus recruiting economics students out of high school is unlikely to be an efficient use of resources. As a consequence, the first year course is critical given this course will either attract or repel students from economics. Assuring high quality teaching in the first year course is very important. Thus the units Objective #9 which includes "offer an exciting course delivery to our first year students" should be vigorously pursued.



9) Does the University supply the library resources, computing and laboratory facilities, and other resources necessary to support the undergraduate program?

Yes.

10) Is the unit fulfilling its service responsibilities to other units in the University?

Yes.

### 3. GRADUATE PROGRAM

The Master of Arts program in Economics at MUN was identified as a major issue/problem. The program attracts large numbers of applicants yet there have been serious retention problems. In the recent past, a significant proportion of students admitted to the program failed to complete. There are two competing hypotheses which might explain this outcome: (1) the program is too difficult or (2) admitted students lack the background required for success.

The first hypothesis is, in our opinion, easy to reject. The first semester courses in the MA program involve the same core (Microeconomic Theory, Macroeconomic Theory, and Econometrics) as other MA programs in Economics and the level of material covered is not out of line with what other universities offer. We would like to note that some MA programs allow students to cover the core over two semesters which allows students to spread out these difficult courses. But this spreading out of the core over two semesters does not seem an appropriate response to the retention issue. The program at Memorial has a coherent structure. The focus of the program is Applied Economics – the application of economic theory and econometrics to practical real world problems. Students cover the theory and econometrics in the first semester to provide the necessary basis for applications encountered in the second semester. This structure should, in our opinion, be not only retained but also strengthened by making successful completion of the micro, macro, and econometrics courses a requirement for admission to the second semester application courses.

The second hypothesis has more traction. However, it is difficult to understand why students lack the background. Student applicants must have an undergraduate degree in Economics (or a closely related field) and meet a minimum GPA requirement (second class standing). Moreover, the selection process involves careful scrutiny of the undergraduate courses taken by applicants to assure the necessary background in economic theory and statistics. The problem appears to be that despite having the necessary background on paper the admitted students do not possess the necessary background in reality.

Last year the Department began to interview applicants via Skype in hopes of securing information beyond that delivered in the paper application. Based on only one year of data, it

appears this initiative has helped improve retention. Not all applicants are interviewed. Nonetheless, Skype interviews take valuable time and it is not clear to us that the practice would pass a cost/benefit test given the availability of alternative screening instruments.

Given the problem appears to be the information base (it is hard to know what a grade means or what was covered in a particular course from a paper transcript) a retention strategy must address information. Standardized testing was developed to provide reliable information on aptitude and preparation when information on transcripts is unreliable. Requiring a GRE of international students would be an effective information generating mechanism. Canadian applicants would not need to take a GRE given courses and grading standards at Canadian universities are similar. Because most students in the MA program are not from Canada, a stronger TOFEL score for applicants who are not native speakers would assure students do not simultaneously struggle with math and English.<sup>1</sup>

The Department might also consider a placement test for incoming students which would determine if they are placed in the one year stream or a two year stream. Students without the necessary background would complete a two year MA with the first year having a prescribed program of undergraduate economics and/or math courses including mathematical economics and econometrics.

Objective #6 in the self-study document states that the Department wants to attract more students. Given the vast majority of students are from outside Canada and the number of applications is healthy, special effort should be devoted to attracting graduates of Canadian universities who would not only bring some balance to the student body but also help international students transition to a new culture and a new academic environment.

Given the number of international students in the MA program, expanding the course offerings in the second semester to include explicitly international courses (trade, finance, and

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<sup>1</sup> Admission to MUN's Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Master of Employment Relations (MER) programs require a higher standard than other programs at Memorial. Specifically: "Applicants whose prior university instruction was not in English must demonstrate completion of either the [Teaching of English as a Foreign Language \(TOEFL\)](#) or [International English Language Testing System \(IELTS\)](#) tests. Minimum TOEFL scores are: 580 for the paper-based test; 237 on the computer-based test; or 92 on the Internet-based test. The minimum IELTS score is an overall band score of 7.0."

development) is worth considering. The current list of field courses is dominated by applied topics of importance to Newfoundland and Labrador. This is not a problem given students applying should be aware of this focus (it is relatively explicit in the program description). Moreover, given the research possibilities for graduate students opened up by the CARE initiative all students will almost inevitably pay some attention to local issues while gaining transferable skills. Nonetheless, the absence of international courses should be addressed in the long term.

The Department has struck a committee to examine the graduate program. This is an opportunity to gather data to more accurately refine hypotheses and to assess the costs and benefits of alternative strategies. For example, one could look at data on language and performance, background preparation and performance, etc. The committee should also look at the time spent by the administrator on processing the large number of applications (filing, summarizing, organizing interviews, etc.). The current process seems very expensive and could be streamlined.

Questions:

- 1) How effective is the unit in performing its graduate teaching and supervisions?

*Problems in the graduate program are not a consequence of poor teaching performance or inadequacies in supervision.*

- 2) Is the research and scholarly productivity of the unit's faculty appropriate to its graduate responsibilities?

*Yes*

- 3) Are the graduate program's admissions criteria appropriate

*As discussed above, we believe the Unit should strengthen its admissions requirements for international students,*

- 4) How successful are the unit's graduate programs nationally and regionally in attracting qualified graduate students and placing graduate degree holders in professional employment?

*The Unit should develop a recruitment strategy to recruit more graduates of Canadian universities. The Unit has made a choice to specialize in applied economics (and more specifically, environmental economics, renewable and non-renewable resource economics, and public policy). This niche may be an asset to emphasize in the recruiting strategy.*

*We did not have data on post graduate employment experience. However, we did meet with high profile individuals who argued that graduates they have hired are well trained and that they would be happy to hire more when positions are available.*

- 5) Is the curriculum sufficiently comprehensive and rigorous compared to similar programs in Canada and elsewhere?

*The program is not designed to be comprehensive. Specialization is a good strategy given the size of the unit. The program does involve the standard core (advanced microeconomics, advanced macroeconomics, and econometrics) found in North American MA Economics programs. The level of rigor is also in line with other programs.*

- 6) Are assessment standards consistent with those used in graduate programs in Canada and elsewhere?

*Yes.*

- 7) Is financial support for students at a level appropriate for the scope of graduate education activities desired within the unit?

*Yes. Indeed, the unit is in a position to be very competitive in funding students as a consequence of the CARE initiative.*

- 8) Is the unit appropriately resourced to action its responsibilities with respect to graduate programs?

*The unit is relatively small but effectively allocates its scarce resources in a way which allows it offer a credible graduate program. It is not clear that the unit could do this if it faced a reduction in resources.*

- 9) Does the University supply the library resources, computing and laboratory facilities, and other resources necessary to support the graduate program?

*Yes. Moreover, CARE has provided some infrastructure (eg. Access to Bloomberg data) not available in other programs.*

#### 4. RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT

One of the objectives the Department has set for itself is to increase its research intensity, and as stated in its vision and mission statement, particularly in applied fields in order to enhance the research contribution of the Department to MUN's diverse community and thereby strengthen the Department's special obligation to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the region of Atlantic Canada more generally.

In the view of the Panel, the Department of Economics is already fully engaged in the pursuit of this objective. The Collaborative Applied Research in Economics (CARE) initiative, which provides basic funding for a wide range of curiosity-driven research projects that reaches beyond applied research in economics on the provincial economy, is an innovative initiative that supports the development and production of high-impact basic and applied academic research. During the site visit, the Panel heard several testimonies from students, Department faculty members, and a number of other faculty members as well, about the high value and quality of the research being produced and funded through CARE. The Panel also witnessed emphatic support for its critical importance to the province from a number of the Memorial University's key business, government, NGO and professional organization community leaders.

In the view of the Panel, CARE constitutes a key component of the Department's efforts towards improving its academic program, enhancing its collaboration with other academic units, engaging the University community, and ultimately renewing and revitalizing its University citizenship. These efforts by the Department of Economics should be strongly supported by all levels of the University administration since it contributes to great extent to its own mission and strategic objective.

The Department has produced first-rate quality research since the last APR (2001), well within the norms of comparable non-U15 economics departments of similar size and focus, providing basic and applied research informing regional, provincial and national stakeholders with evidence-based quantitative technical analysis and research in economics. The quality of the basic and applied research produced fits within the norms of the discipline in Canada with several basic and applied research publications in first-rate academic journals such as the *Review of Economics and Statistics*, the *Journal of Econometrics*, and the *Canadian Journal of Economics*, along with other high-impact academic journals that focus on Canadian public policy

issues such as the *Canadian Public Policy*, and the *Canadian Journal of Regional Science*. At the time of this review, 13 more papers are under review which represents more than 10% of the total *cumulative* refereed publications since 2001. The number of recent hires suggests that the overall research production will likely increase over the next few years with more publications of refereed articles and books, book chapters, book reviews and other scholarly presentations at professional conferences and meetings. This demonstrates the vitality of the research and scholarship activities by the Department.

With 30 to 50 participants in each session, the highly attended *Visiting Speakers* program, funded primarily through the *Scholarship in the Arts* program, is also viewed as a first-rate knowledge mobilization and research dissemination activity with demonstrated results (validated in interviews) that broaden and diversify the Department's contribution to the community at large and contributes to MUN's mission and goals. The broad range of topics presented by various scholars from Canadian and international universities and organizations also contributes to introduce students to the professional community and provide a broader and more accurate perspective on future employment and career opportunities.

Research activities have yielded various scholarly recognitions through high-profile awards, appointments, and nominations over time that reflect positively on the Department's contribution to the profession and community. The research also resulted in concrete opportunities for the external funding of a number of potential Research Chairs in applied areas that are of specific interest to the University community such as fisheries, energy and non-renewable resources, productivity, innovation and standards of living, health economics and regional economic development.

With the support of the Faculty of Arts and the University, the Department was diligent to secure the basic resources to support an increase in research intensity in the short term. The facilities, computing equipment and library resources, along with other specialized research resources such as the Bloomberg terminal, effectively provide first-rate research installations and resources to faculty, graduate and undergraduate students compared to other academic units across Canada.

In the view of the Panel, this applied research focus, which promotes the development and mobilization of research and knowledge in applied economics, clearly fulfills a need of the University's diverse community, who solicits applied research contributions and partnerships on

a wide range of economic and interdisciplinary issues. This promotes successful teaching and learning outcomes for students, encourages the development of interdisciplinary and external partnerships that produce research, scholarship and creative activity by Faculty, and promotes public engagement at large, which reinforces the mission and goals of other academic units and the University as well.

Notwithstanding all the positive features and outcomes that can be associated with the focus on applied research, a number of factors also suggest that the Department should seek to strike the right balance between basic and applied research recognizing their complementarity within a thriving Department.

First, while universities are generally supportive of research partnerships that provide external research funding and demonstrate faculty engagement with the community, it is not clear that they are fully supportive when it comes to tenure or promotion adjudication because external contracts for high-impact and publicly valued applied research on major regional, provincial and national public policies often don't carry the same weight as SSHRC research grants and peer-reviewed publications.<sup>2</sup> Recent empirical research suggests that this problem is important in economics in Canada. Despite a growing perception by practitioners and scholars that public policy in Canada needs to move back towards economics,<sup>3</sup> economists at Canadian universities are doing less and less research.<sup>4</sup> Pressure to publish in international journals is a major factor.

This trend may challenge the ability of the Department to recruit, tenure, promote and retain first-rate faculty in their strategic areas of interests in the medium and long term (e.g. Research Chairs). Young faculty will generally want to undertake cosmopolitan (as opposed to provincial) research and too narrow a focus might affect the quality of the Department. Moreover, young faculty will need incentives to become involved in the type of applied research which provides policy relevant information valuable to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Again, balance is critical. Too narrow a focus on provincial issues can affect quality. But it is important

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<sup>2</sup> See Crago, Martha (2015). "Partnering with Industry: Opening Doors and Windows in the Ivory Tower," *University Affairs—Affaires universitaires*, vol. 56(4), April, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> Drummond, Don (2011). « Personal Reflections on the State of Public Policy Analysis in Canada, » in F. Gorbet and A. Sharpe (eds.), *New Directions for Intelligent Government in Canada: Papers in Honour of Ian Stewart*, Centre for the Study of Living Standards, Ottawa (ON), pp 337-352.

<sup>4</sup> Simpson, W. and Emery, J. H. (2012). "Canadian economics in decline: Implications for Canada's economics journals," *Canadian Public Policy – Analyse de politiques*, 38(4):445–470.



not compromise the sustainability of Department's focus on applied research that currently underpins most of the external financing opportunities and garners much deserved praise.

This issue is not unique to this Department. Other non-U15 departments are struggling with similar challenges, albeit in different regional and provincial contexts. Given the importance of economics in developing public policies that build resilient and sustainable regional economies, it is only a matter of time before other universities in Atlantic Canada develop strategies and implement initiatives to secure resources for applied research that contribute and inform communities of their economic prospects and well-being. The CARE initiative model provides Memorial University's Department of Economics the necessary base and leadership to pursue medium and long term solutions to these issues. Efforts to leverage this initiative into SSRHRC funding could mitigate some of the less favorable perceptions about the quality of the applied research funded by CARE.

Second, it is also not clear that the Department and the University administration appreciate the importance of the resource investment and overhead administrative costs associated with the opportunities for external funding and research partnerships offered by CARE. The extensive accounting, monitoring and reporting burden that ensure the ethical, transparency and accountability standards of public administrations that need to be met at every stage of a project imply substantive administrative costs on the Department of Economics.

Given the importance of the CARE initiative for the Department of Economics, other academic units, and the University at large, the Panel is of the view that the Dean's office should continue to support this initiative through the provision of one-course remission per year over the next three years because it yields substantial benefits to the entire University community. The Dean could also consider allocating additional administrative resources as required to strengthen this initiative that promotes the University's own mission and objectives.

These issues will need to be addressed for the Department of Economics to continue improving its program and attain its full potential over the medium and long term. Strategies will need to be developed and implemented for the Department of Economics to espouse its vision to become the "go-to" department in eastern Canada for applied technical economic analysis that is of special interest to both the province of Newfoundland and Labrador and Atlantic Canada.

Another related issue the Panel considered was for the Department to examine the need for a succession plan adapted to its main objectives with the approaching retirement of faculty that have been key in building trust and engaging partners, and nurturing personal and institutional relationships between the Department of Economics and external funding partners. Given the importance the Department of Economics attributes to securing a number of Research Chairs and hiring strategically, the Panel considers that these objectives could be pursued under the common long term objective of developing and nurturing the institutional trust that produces high-impact socially beneficial applied research. Further, the Panel is of the view that if any of these opportunities for additional Research Chairs materialize, that they should not be considered as replacement for positions that are vacated, not renewed or become available because of a retirement.

In terms of public engagement, the Department of Economics was able to overcome many of its perceived shortcomings and effectively engage the University community through high-quality applied research. Given the acknowledged quality of the research funded, produced, and disseminated by the Department of Economics with CARE, the Panel considers that the University administration and community could stand to benefit from more direct support to the Department of Economics in terms of communication and public engagement activities. In particular, the recognition, promotion and support by the President, Vice-President Research and Dean's office, particularly in terms of promoting and supporting communication and public engagement activities, would do well to promote the mission and objectives of all academic units and the University simultaneously and instill the cohesion and recognition that is necessary to nurture institutional trust.

Lastly, it is was apparent to the Panel that Department of Economics is very efficient, focused and committed in its public engagement activities with external organizations such as various business, provincial and federal government organizations. The Panel considers that the Department may benefit from similar engagement activities with other academic units, and particularly with the University administration.

## 6. VISION, MISSION AND ACTIVITIES

The Department of Economics identified a number of strategic objectives in the areas of vision and mission as part of the self-study report.

The first objective relates to defining collective values, vision and a strategic framework for development. The Department considers this objective the most important as it relates to the role of the Department within the University and the Province. The Department has vision and mission statements which are robust and consistent with the vision and mission statements of Memorial University. The self-study acknowledges that in order to advance the goals and objectives of the Department, however, there has to be a culture of collegiality and collective focus.

The Department was very forthright in the self-study regarding past conflicts and tensions within the Department. The self-study did also note that the Department has made some positive progress in dealing with these issues. The panel concurs with this assessment based on the site visit as it was noted in many of the meetings that collegiality had improved and this was a supportive environment to work in. The panel believes that it is important that this positive momentum continue so that the Department can further succeed within the University and community. To assist with this objective the Department might want to consider the following:

- Strategic planning retreat for all faculty and staff with an external facilitator
- Team building/effectiveness workshop for all faculty and staff with an external facilitator
- Social activities (e.g. organized once a month coffee breaks with refreshments)

The second departmental strategic objective relating to the vision and mission involves receiving direction from “administration” regarding the role of the Department within the University. The panel believes that the Department should be proactive with this objective in defining its own direction. The panel believes that the Department of Economics has done an outstanding job in engaging with the public and private sectors in the province. The value of the work done by the Department (in particular through the CARE initiative) was attested to by the high profile external parties the panel met with. The panel believes that this successful strategy of external engagement by the Department be used to develop a similar model of internal engagement. The

panel question's whether all the great work of the department is well known to the University's administration and other units on campus. Enhanced promotion of departmental activities within the university would strengthen the role and mission of the Department of Economics.

The third departmental objective relates to hiring strategically at the faculty level. The self-study identified that the Department had a retirement in December 2014 which should be replaced. The panel agreed with this statement. The panel also agrees with the self-study that it is critical to hire faculty that are interested in research that is strategically important to Memorial University and the Province. This is particularly imperative given that there are impending retirements of faculty who are very engaged in research of this nature. The panel strongly believes that succession planning should be undertaken in the Department to ensure that there is development of junior faculty and recruitment of new faculty that will support realization of the Department's vision and mission.

While the Department has not included staff as part of this strategic objective, the review panel offers the following comments with respect to the staff complement. The Department currently has one and a half full-time equivalents. The panel met with the two staff members and were very impressed with their dedication and work ethic. This is a busy department and it is clear that the one full time and one part time staff members are stretched to the limit with respect to workload. While the self-study report did not request that additional staff be hired, it was evident that the Department could not function adequately with less staffing resources. The panel does recommend that the staffing level in the Department of Economics be increased to two full-time positions to ensure that their undergraduate and graduate programs and the CARE program are well supported administratively.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, we were impressed by the progress that the Department has made since the last review in 2001. The overall sense we gained of the Department was that it is, despite earlier troubles, both successful and functional. We have the following recommendations for the Department:

### *Teaching:*

- That the Department give consideration to research methods training at the undergraduate level. This does not have to be through a designated course, although the new BA requirement for discipline-specific Critical Teaching and Learning (CRW) courses might be an opportunity for the Department to develop a course specific to the practices of Economics. Generally, though, methods training could be worked into existing undergraduate offerings;
- The Department should set in motion a formal process for reviewing its undergraduate programmes. Part of this review should include exploring whether courses offered by other units could be incorporated into the Department's programmes. An example of this might be a history course on Economic History;
- The Skype interviews used to assess the capabilities of some applicants to the MA should be continued. Although too early for a final judgement, these do appear to have made a difference to the retention problem;
- Consider using the GRE and/or stronger English proficiency test scores (e.g. TOEFL, IELTS) scores for students accepted onto the MA programme;
- A two-year MA programme could be offered to students without the necessary background for the current one-year MA programme.
- Actively recruiting students from within Canada might also address concerns about students not having the necessary background for the MA programme;
- Expand offerings in the second semester of the MA programme;
- The Department is encouraged to seek out possibilities for external funding for research chairs. Research chairs, however, should not be hired at the expense of the regular faculty complement, but rather as additional resources;

- The Faculty of Arts should continue to support CARE through an annual course remission;
- The Department should engage in succession planning for the large number of possible retirements in the Department;
- The research carried out by the Department, especially its applied and policy-relevant research, needs to be promoted more by the University. There needs to be greater recognition of the Department's role in informing policy debates relevant to the life of the Province and elsewhere;
- The Department could benefit with continuing and enlarging its research collaboration with other units in the University;
- The Department needs to build on its successes in improving collegiality. These could include: a strategic planning retreat, externally facilitated teambuilding workshops, social activities;
- Currently the Department has 1.5 staff positions. Given the size and the work of the Department the Panel advises that this be increased to a total of 2 staff positions (this might mean increasing the current 0.5 to 1, or hiring a further 0.5 position).