

**Humanities Department, Graduate and Undergraduate Programs, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies**

OFFICE OF THE  
 VICE-PROVOST  
 ACADEMIC

**Cyclical Program Review – 2007-2015**

**Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan**

**Reported to Joint-Committee on Quality Assurance: December 12, 2016**

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**Program Description**

The Department of Humanities is an interdisciplinary unit in the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies (LA&PS), first established in 1965 as the Division of Humanities. The Department is home to eleven programs: Canadian Studies, Children's Studies, Classical Studies and Classics, Culture and Expression, East Asian Studies, European Studies, Hellenic Studies, Individualized Studies, Jewish Studies, Religious Studies and US Studies. Children's Studies was reviewed separately in this same period.

At the graduate level students may pursue an MA and PhD in Humanities or in Interdisciplinary Studies. (The Interdisciplinary Studies program, which is not related to an undergraduate program, was reviewed separately in this same period.)

<b>Program</b>	<b>Accepts 2014</b>	<b>Enrolment FTES 2014</b>	<b>Degrees Awarded 2014</b>
Canadian Studies	0	4	3 (Hons)
Classical Studies and Classics	12	40	5 (Hons); 5 (90-Credit)
Culture and Expression	10	31	6 (Hons); 6 (90-Credit)
East Asian Studies	26	64	13 (Hons)
European Studies	0	n/a	0
Hellenic Studies	1	3	0



Humanities	84	429	57 (Hons); 99 (90-credit)
Individualized Studies	1	4	0
Jewish Studies	3	7	4 (Hons)
Religious Studies	15	46	14 (Hons); 6 (90-credit); 1 Certificate
US Studies (new in 2014)	0	0	0
MA – Humanities	19	17	14
PhD - Humanities	16	61	4

### Review Process

Undergraduate programs offered in the Department of Humanities are interdisciplinary and interdependent. The department provides a significant number of general education courses, and many of its courses serve as electives for students across the university.

All but two of the undergraduate programs completed an independent self-study report that referred to their individual prior reviews, where applicable, provided degree requirements and learning outcomes, discussed quality indicators and identified specific areas of concern.

US Studies was approved in January 2013 and was not included in the review; Canadian Studies does not have a co-ordinator and was not included in the review. The Department provided an overview of its programs that described its commitment to core principles and enduring values of an interdisciplinary humanities based education for a diverse, inclusive and democratic society. A common set of *curriculum vitae* was provided; however, individual self-studies identified expertise of individual faculty members as appropriate.

### Reviewers appointed by the Vice-Provost Academic:

Zeba Crook, Full Professor, Religious Studies, College of Humanities, Carleton University

Kathryn Lofton, Full Professor, Religious Studies, American Studies, History and Divinity, Yale University

Rob Wilson, Full Professor, Literature, Creative Writing, and Cultural Studies, University of California Santa Cruz

### Documentation Provided to the External Reviewers

Prior to the site visit, the external reviewers are provided with the following:

- Dean's /Principal's Agenda of Concerns
- Department/Program Omnibus Statement (where applicable)

- Program Self-Study Brief, which includes program structure, curriculum and learning outcomes, program reflection, enrolment and retention data, resources, student input and quality enhancement opportunities
- Faculty CVs
- University, Faculty and Program planning documents

**Site Visit:** March 2-4, 2016

The first day of the site visit focused on the Graduate Program in Humanities and included consultations with Vice-Provost Academic, Alice Pitt, AVP and Dean of Graduate Studies, Barbara Crow, University Librarians, faculty members in the graduate program and a group of students.

The second and third days of the visit focused on the under graduate programs. The reviewers met with the Associate Dean Programs as well as faculty members (both full-time and contractual) and students from the various undergraduate majors.

**Outcome:**

The Joint-Committee on Quality Assurance concluded that a meeting with the Department and the Dean should be called in order to ensure that there is a shared understanding about the need to revise the curriculum and to discuss the supports necessary to enable the process.

The meeting between the Associate Dean Programs, the Humanities Chair, Graduate and Undergraduate program directors and members of the Joint Sub-Committee on Quality Assurance was held on January 26, 2017. The conversation about the challenges outlined above was constructive. Members of the Joint Sub-Committee were confident that the Dean's plan provided enough structure to allow the Department to advance discussions and decisions about future directions.

The Follow-up Report, due in June 2018, will provide a progress report on how the various undergraduate programs will achieve distinctive program expectations and learning outcomes in relation to a core of Humanities-based education. The report should address the status of Canadian Studies and US Studies, as well as European Studies and Hellenic Studies, based on the Joint Sub-Committee's assumption that these may no longer exist as distinct majors.

The report should address the graduate programs plan to require completion of comprehensive exams by the end of the second year of enrolment. The program should address the distribution of supervisions, and the reliance on independent studies should be addressed as an indication of a need for curriculum review.

The next cyclical program reviews will occur after eight years or before, depending on deliberations about how best to organize the programs for review.

**Strengths**

Members of the Humanities Department are highly committed to teaching and scholarship and the value of the humanities in a diverse society, and students appreciate their passion.

**Graduate Program:**

- The review report states, “The faculty complement of those who contribute to the Graduate Program in Humanities is a broad, diverse, and stunningly productive and innovative collection of scholars.”
- The learning outcomes are clear, appropriate, and in alignment with the relevant degree level expectations.
- the Scott Library admirably supports scholarship in the Humanities at York and the scholarly output of graduate studies is impressive

**Undergraduate Programs:**

- Faculty teaching in the Humanities programs provide excellent opportunities for study via cultural and intellectual horizon-widening and skill-building experiences rather than via technical training in a traditional discipline.
- The review report states, “There is a remarkable fervor for humanistic teaching.”
- The review report states, “We agree with the previous review that Humanities faculty provide a curriculum that is inclusive and interdisciplinary; upper-level courses challenge students appropriately, and there are opportunities for self-directed intellectual and scholastic growth in areas of interest and importance for all types of students with diverse backgrounds and career trajectories where broad and deep study of the Humanities is necessary and in demand....”

**Opportunities for Enhancement:**

The reviewers, in the External Reviewers Report, provided four specific recommendations for the Graduate Program to consider:

1. With respect to the timing of the Comprehensive Exams, we would encourage the Program to revisit the question of timing: is it indeed the case that students are best served (intellectually, academically, and professionally) by keeping the comprehensive exams in the 3rd year?
2. The Directed Studies clearly benefit individual students, but does their high number negatively impact the program (in terms of enrollments in other courses) or individual professors (in terms of unacknowledged work-load)? We encourage the Department to look into this.
3. We strongly encourage the university to treat the host of up-coming retirements seriously. Replacing at least some of the retirements is the surest way of securing the well-wrought quality of this program.
4. We encourage the department to investigate the cause of the imbalance in graduate supervisions and committee work, and to consider whether the opportunity to work with graduate students in this variety of ways might be spread more evenly.

**The review report offered suggestions as well, of which the following is noted:**

- The self-study refers to an ongoing lack of student interest in “The Cultures, Technologies and Sciences of the Modern,” and students expressed confusion about the category itself. We encourage the Program to continue its work in re-evaluating the structure of those divisions.

**The review report provided eight recommendations for the Undergraduate Program, summarized as follows:**

- A reliable, consistent, and clear system for allocating faculty resources within the Department must be established in light of long term prioritization.
- The Department should review the process by which TA assignments are made for Humanities course and consider a Humanities level training program for the TAs.
- Decision making about courses to be offered by the various undergraduate programs should be reviewed. In particular, the role of Classical studies within the University and its relation to Humanities should be reviewed.
- The Department should explore online and blended delivery modes for some courses.
- Certificates and other options for collaboration for programs should be explored (example: culture and expression with marketing).
- Humanities is integral to the university and should continue to be supported with new full-time faculty members appointments.

**Implementation Plan**

The Department provided a robust response to the review report recommendations that took into account individual programs' response to the review report. The Department has established a new process for discussing program needs that is aimed at encouraging collaboration among programs. The unit response clarified that graduate student TA alignment between their areas of study and teaching assignment is very high; the unit is committed to work with programs to ensure placement of highly qualified TA's in all Humanities courses. A training program has been developed and, after initial success in 2015-2016 (program appended), will seek to expand. Guidelines have been developed for on-line and blended courses (appended), and a university funding program supports the conversion of three courses to online format. Recommendations for new certificates will be explored. The Department will work with the Faculty to improve students' access to degree checklists.

The PhD program in Humanities planned to discuss recommendations regarding the comprehensive exam in September, and encourages the department to examine in greater depth the impact of the high number of independent studies and the uneven distribution of supervisory roles. The program is committed to reviewing the third area, 'The Cultures, Technologies and Sciences of the Modern', and will also initiate a process for culling courses that are not being offered.

The Dean's Implementation Plan notes that the review report expressed a high level of satisfaction with the graduate program and encouraged additional resources.

The Dean's Agenda of Concerns raised the issue of the graduate program's curricular coherence, to which the Review Report responded, "The appearance of a lack of program coherence, because the array of topics offered in courses is so broad or seemingly unrelated (implied in the Decanal Agenda of Concerns), is in fact an illusion that does not hold up under pedagogical or conceptual scrutiny." The implementation plan seeks "clearer understanding of 'pedagogical or conceptual scrutiny' of the

curriculum from the program’s perspective,” with a view to providing a curriculum plan, as has been done in other interdisciplinary programs at York. The plan asks the program to take a second look at graduate times to completion and encourages exploration of supervisory and curriculum collaboration with other programs.

Finally, the plan asks that the review of course offerings be conducted on grounds of curricular and pedagogical considerations and not, as the program response suggests, solely on the wishes of faculty. The Associate Dean expressed a strong interest in participating in the review and planning exercise jointly with the program.

<b>Action</b>	<b>First Responsibility</b>	<b>Final Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Curricular Review Report and development of a three year curriculum plan	Graduate Program	Dean’s Office in conversation with the Graduate Program	January 2017
Report on Program and Supervisory Student support to improve time to completion	Graduate Program	Dean’s Office review	January 2017
Initiate curricular collaboration process	Graduate Program along with other interdisciplinary graduate programs	Dean’s Office with the AD Graduate and Research	March 2017

The Dean’s Implementation Plan draws attention to the Review Report’s praise for the undergraduate program offerings: “Although administrators refer repeatedly to these eleven undergraduate degree programs as a sign of the problematic, even confusing, diversity of Humanities at York, for the faculty who teach within these programs—as well as for the students who learn in them—such confusion is not easy to find. Instead, what one finds is a profound connectivity and interdependency; what one finds is depth, creativity, and an unusual level of alacrity among all contributors about why Humanities is so special at York.”

The Dean’s Implementation Plan sees a contradiction between the high number of degrees (majors) and the quality of integrated study: “We are unclear as to logic underlying the claimed equivalency between the number of programs and the depth of study of humanities as a subject. Could the Department of Humanities not continue to offer a broad and exciting range of courses without the need for eleven separate degrees?” The Plan goes on to ask, “Do the many programs within Humanities lead to good learning outcomes for students?”

The Dean’s Implementation Plan asks the Department to go beyond improving access to degree checklists to address this question.

It would seem clear that if the Department believes that what it offers in terms of curriculum is of value, then that value should be clearly articulated to students. A clear curriculum map developed by the Department and Programs would seem to be an obvious solution and would provide a quick visual overview of the various degree types offered.

The Plan concludes with an expression of commitment to an “ongoing conversation about the best ways in which to provide quality curriculum within the Department of Humanities into the future. We are particularly interested in hearing about any new directions the Department would like to consider that reflect recent advances in the study of the Humanities.”

<b>Action</b>	<b>First Responsibility</b>	<b>Final Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Departmental Report on the value and learning outcomes of its Programs	Department	Review by the Dean's Office	April 2017
Clear curricular maps for all degrees within the Department with clear learning outcomes	Department	Review by the Dean's Office	April 2017
Examination of opportunities for TA training and more efficient placement	Department and Graduate Program	Dean's Office with the help of AD Graduate and Research	March 2017
Department retreat to discuss the future direction of the Department in terms of Governance and curricular innovations	Department	Dean's Office and appropriate committees	May 2017
Meeting between the Dean's Office and the Department	Department and Dean's Office	Department and Dean's Office	January 2017

**Vice Provost's note on the review process:**

The decision to review the collection of undergraduate programs, along with the Humanities graduate program, housed in the Department of Humanities was based on the understanding that the interdependency of the programs and the involvement of faculty members appointed to the Department in many, if not all, programs precluded independent reviews. A third external reviewer was added to the team in order to account for the complexity of the self-study brief. The site visit was scheduled over 3 days instead of the customary 2 when the review includes a graduate program. Phone conversations with the review team, prior to the site visit, allowed me to describe the Quality Assurance Framework and its emphasis on a curriculum design oriented by

degree level expectations and program level student learning outcomes mapped onto courses.

Alice J. Pitt  
Vice-Provost Academic  
York University