

**Communication Studies, Undergraduate, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies**

OFFICE OF THE  
 VICE-PROVOST  
 ACADEMIC

**Cyclical Program Review – 2008 to 2015**

**Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan Executive Summary**

**Reported to Joint-Committee on Quality Assurance: December 4, 2017**

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**Program Description**

The Program in Communication Studies began in 1980/81 and the Department of Communication Studies was founded in 2009 in the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies.

	Registration (new intake) 2015/16	Enrolment FTES 2015/16	Degrees Awarded 2016
Communications Studies	142	649	Hons 165

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

Brenda Austin-Smith, Associate Professor and Head of English, Film and Theatre, University of Manitoba  
 Darin Barney, Grierson Chair and Associate Professor, Communication Studies, McGill University  
 Annie Bunting, Associate Professor, York University

**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
- 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



## **Cyclical Program Review Process**

An Undergraduate Program Review Committee was struck in July 2015 to take responsibility for the requirements of the self-study. The committee met with the Office of Vice-Provost (Academic), the Institute for Social Research (ISR), Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis (OIPA, representatives of the Teaching Commons and alumni officers in the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies (LA&PS), to map out data collection strategies, timelines, and expectations for the self-study and cyclical program review. Inputs from the Program's faculty members were sought through verbal and email correspondence including monthly Departmental meetings from September 2015 on, and these were incorporated into the self-study. A full-day Undergraduate Program Retreat was held on 3 May, 2016 to assess the strengths and weakness of the Program's curriculum, course delivery and overall program directions.

### **Site Visit:** January 11- 13, 2017

The site visit for the Communications Studies program and the York/Ryerson Joint Program in Communication and Culture spanned three days and took place on both the York University campus and at Ryerson University. The undergraduate program was the focus of meetings on January 11 and the reviewers began with a meeting with Alice Pitt, Vice-Provost Academic and Barbara Crow, Dean of Graduate Studies. Meetings followed with the Chair of the Department, David Skinner, Undergraduate Program Director, Mary-Louise Craven, members of the undergraduate program committee, Associate Dean McMurtry, university librarians, undergraduate faculty and undergraduate students.

### **Outcome:**

The Joint-Committee on Quality Assurance concluded that the Decanal response adequately addressed the review recommendations. Progress on the recommendations will be included in the Follow-up Report due June 2019. The next CPR will begin in the Fall of 2023.

### **Strengths:**

The Reviewers noted the following in their summary statement, "Communication Studies provides its students with excellent instruction in the history, theory, and application of communications. The focus of the program is solidly academic, though experiential learning is a part of every level of instruction. Faculty are highly regarded researchers with impressive dossiers of publications, funding, and student supervision."

### **Opportunities for Enhancement:**

The Review Report indicates that the reading done before the site visit allowed them to identify the following as the most pressing issues:

- Program identity
- Student enrolment
- Student learning experience --Curriculum
- Facilities and staffing

With regards to the first item above, the Reviewers noted that based on their discussions with the program and the Dean's Office, "The program is free to decide what approaches constitute its distinctiveness. But whatever it decides must be clear in all of its public communications, including its website and program literature, which can still create the impression that the program has a strong professional, even vocational, cast."

The Reviewers were of the opinion that student enrolment and retention may continue to decline if the program determines that it will maintain its exclusive four-year degree as communications programs in other institutions increase. The reviewers provided some suggestions for open enrolments to non-majors but noted it will depend on what the faculty members determine about the program.

The reviewers noted that based on their meetings with students, that they "are indeed often unable to make connections between their program learning, and the "real world" use of their critical skills." The International BA (IBA) degree offers added complexity for students trying to complete degree requirements. The Review Report states "students do not have a strong sense of the shape of the program, and of how the three streams take shape within it," and that there is too much repetition in courses and assignments as they move from first year to upper year courses.

The reviewers noted that, "the program is suffering from the replacement of retired faculty with contract faculty."

The Reviewer Recommendations are listed below:

Recommendation #1: that Communication Studies take steps to re-articulate its identity and its strengths as a program stressing a liberal arts ethos and critical analysis of communications and media.

Recommendation #2: that the program re-visit its enrolment goals and expectations in tandem with its re-articulation of identity.

Recommendation #3: that the department continue to work on communicating the program's currency and intellectual relevance to students.

Recommendation #4: that improvements be made to the academic advising of students in the iBA program, including, if possible, offering on-line degree audits to iBA students.

Recommendation #5: that the curriculum committee actively review and approve syllabi for all courses to guard against repetition of material and assignments.

Recommendation #6: that the curriculum committee consider assigning more introductory and 2nd year courses to contract academic staff, and assigning the preponderance of upper-year courses to permanent faculty.

Recommendation #7: that the department provide more formal TA orientation.

Recommendation #8: that the Faculty provide funds to hire a computer lab technician to support teaching in Communication Studies.

Recommendation #9: that the Communication Studies program be given new tenure-track hires in order to maintain its program coherence and quality.

### **Dean's Implementation Plan**

The Dean's Implementation Plan offers a careful consideration of the Review Report and the recommendations, as well as the Program's response. The Office of the Dean encourages the Communications program to decide about its focus and direction. This is, as has been noted, essential for students as they make decisions about which program to pursue. The Dean's Plan states, "We would first, however, encourage Communications Studies to engage internally in a discussion about future direction while reflecting on the potential long-term consequences of the direction they choose. Careful attention should be paid as well to how the Program's direction, whatever it may be, avoids duplication with other programs and departments in LA&PS in terms of curriculum and topic areas."

The plan notes that careful planning of enrolment and resourcing desires will

follow a decision about the pathway forward. Opportunities the program may wish to consider will be the option of a minor program or opening some courses to non-majors, as well as pathways from College partners such as Seneca College.

Students are not clear about the goals of the program as a whole and provided comments that highlight their confusion about the nature of the program. Students also identified repetition in courses, instructors and assignments as they progress through the program. A review of the curriculum would ensure “coherent ‘laddering’ of skills and knowledge and to avoid duplication.”

The Dean’s Implementation plan includes the chart below outlining actions and timelines to be followed.

<b>Action</b>	<b>First Responsibility</b>	<b>Final Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Undertake a thorough review of the strategic academic direction of Communication Studies	Communication Studies Department	Communication Studies Department submitting a report to the Dean	May 2018
Develop a clear five-year enrolment and resource plan	Communication Studies	Review of the five-year plan by the Associate Dean Programs	May 2018
Build clear in-program (and external) communication, student support, as well as relevant experiential education options for students	Communication Studies	Submission of appropriate learning outcomes and courses to the curriculum committee of LA&PS	June 2018
Hold a “curricular retreat” to inform all teaching staff of the curricular goals of Communication Studies	Communication Studies	Report to the Associate Dean Programs on the results and usefulness of this retreat	April 2018

A report on the progress of these initiatives will be provided in the Follow-up Report which will be due in June 2019.

Alice J. Pitt  
Vice-Provost Academic  
York University