

**REPORT OF THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE  
TO THE REGULAR November 2015 SENATE**

**FOR INFORMATION**

**QUALITY ASSURANCE - CYCLICAL PROGRAM REVIEW OF LAURENTIAN  
UNIVERSITY'S  
MBA PROGRAM  
FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT & IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

In accordance with the Laurentian University's Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the Final Assessment Report has been prepared to provide a synthesis of the external evaluation and Laurentian's response and action plan. This report identifies the significant strengths of the program, opportunities for program improvement and enhancement, and sets out and prioritizes the recommendations that have been selected for implementation.

The report includes an Implementation Plan that identifies who will be responsible for approving the recommendations set out in the Final Assessment Report; who will be responsible for providing any resources made necessary by those recommendations; any changes in organization, policy or governance that will be necessary to meet the recommendations; who will be responsible for acting on those recommendations; and timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations.

**SUMMARY OF THE CYCLICAL PROGRAM REVIEW OF THE MBA PROGRAM**

At Laurentian, the MBA has been offered on campus since 1983. In 2003, an on-line MBA was launched, although it was restricted to students and members of the Certified General Accountants (CGA) of Canada. Recently the on-line program was expanded to include members from the Insurance Brokers Association of Canada (IBAC). Generally Laurentian's MBA is a "terminal degree not designed to prepare students for academic research or a doctoral program." Rather it is set to "provide students with advanced academic and professional knowledge in business with research skills appropriate for management applications."

In 2009 the university began offering the MBA program on its Barrie campus but in 2013, the program was shut down at this site—a resource issue. It is also to be noted that recent agreements with 20 Chinese universities have expanded the number of full-time international students on campus. Meanwhile, the Faculty is preparing itself to obtain AACSB accreditation<sup>1</sup>.

On March 20, 2014, the Faculty of Management submitted its self-study to the Office of Vice-President Academic and Provost of Laurentian University. Part 1 of the self-study presented an

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<sup>1</sup> AACSB [Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business] "provides internationally recognized, specialized accreditation for business and accounting programs at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral level. The AACSB Accreditation Standards challenge post-secondary educators to pursue excellence and continuous improvement throughout their business programs. AACSB Accreditation is known, worldwide, as the longest standing, most recognized form of specialized/professional accreditation an institution and its business programs can earn." See: <http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/>

overview of the program and then reviewed the Faculty's perception of the faculty, physical resources, students, program regulations and courses, and overall strengths and weaknesses.<sup>2</sup> Included in Part 1 was one Appendix containing course outlines (on campus followed by online) for 2013-2014. Part 2 of the self-study contained the curriculum vitae of the full-time faculty in the program and Part 3 contained the curriculum vitae of the part-time faculty.

On September 8 and 9, 2014, the Review Team conducted a site visit. This was the second visit made by the external reviewers to the Sudbury campus. In October 2012, the externals undertook a preliminary review of the MBA program but because of concerns raised in that visit, their 2012 report was labeled preliminary, with the expectation that a subsequent visit would be planned. In light of the previous visit, some of the activities that should be incorporated within an external review (i.e. a tour of classroom facilities, a detailed discussion on student outcomes and support) were not scheduled for the 2014 visit.

At the head of the team were Dr. Julia Christensen Hughes, Dean of the College of Business and Economics at the University of Guelph<sup>3</sup> since May 2009 and Dr. Mary Kelly, a Professor in Finance and Chair of Insurance at Wilfrid Laurier University.<sup>4</sup> The two outside reviewers were joined by Dr. Anthony Church representing another program within the Faculty of Management and Dr. Ramesh Subramanian, representing a program outside the faculty. In addition, Lacy Caputo represented current students in the program whilst Tannys Laughren represented alumni. Ms. Laughren is also a sessional instructor in the undergraduate Management degree program.

During the review, the team met with the Dean of the Faculty of Management, Stephen Havlovic, Associate Dean, Maurice Grzeda, and the Provost and Vice President Academic, Robert Kerr. The external reviewers also met with the acting Dean of Graduate Studies, David Lesbarreres, as well as the Acting Vice President Research, Anne-Marie Mawhiney. At one point the whole team stopped by the library to meet the librarian supporting the program, Ashley Thomson. Finally, the team participated in a series of face-to-face group meetings and conference calls over a day and a half with various stakeholders including on-line MBA manager, Kelly Brennan, the MBA Coordinator, Barbara Millsap, several MBA faculty members and current MBA students (from the on-line CGA program, the full-time on-campus program and the part-time on-campus program).

In its report, dated "Fall 2014," the team observed that "Much positive change has occurred in the Faculty of Management" since its preliminary report in 2012. "In particular, a new Dean has been hired who appears committed to revitalizing the Faculty of Management, to ensuring administrative processes are implemented with transparency and integrity, and to providing quality programs at the undergraduate and graduate level. To help realize these goals, the Dean recognizes that the faculty must be more actively engaged in strategic planning, decision-making and committee work, and has accordingly introduced some structural changes (e.g., introduced a

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<sup>2</sup> In its report, the Review Team observed that "evidence of student achievement, grades, time to completion and completion rates) were not provided to the review team. With respect to formal student feedback, only a summary of course evaluation scores were [sic] provided."

<sup>3</sup> The University of Guelph has not been accredited by AACSB.

<sup>4</sup> Wilfrid Laurier is AACSB accredited. See: [http://www.aacsb.edu/membership/listings/all-educational-members/?F\\_Country=Canada](http://www.aacsb.edu/membership/listings/all-educational-members/?F_Country=Canada)

departmentally-based organizational structure organized around area groups [i.e. academic disciplines] ) and made several new appointments. These changes have been aided by some faculty turnover in key positions.”

That all said, the Team had many concerns including:

- The Faculty of Management did not have a clear and distinctive mission;
- The MBA curriculum appears to be quite narrow in focus. Currently accounting is the only specialization that can be undertaken in the MBA program;
- The current focus of the MBA programs—the on-line CGA-MBA and the intentional marketing to Chinese undergraduate students—does not support the university’s Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) which commits Laurentian to enhance access to postsecondary education, particularly for first generation university goers, students who have disabilities and Indigenous learners;
- The merging of the accounting bodies in Canada will require LU to redefine its current on-line MBA, which is targeted towards CGA members, as this designation will soon cease to exist;
- There appears to be a marked difference between the quality of the on-line and on-campus courses, with the on-line courses having gone through a more rigorous course development process;
- Students are being admitted without English proficiency skills;
- The program does not appear to be relevant to the university community and the city of Greater Sudbury;
- There is little evidence of Work Integrated Learning [WIL] opportunities for MBA students—indeed the faculty has the lowest participation in WIL activities across all faculties on campus;
- Program learning goals for all business programs (undergraduate and graduate) need to be clearly articulated and metrics to assure that these goals have been met need to be defined, measured and tracked;
- There is a dearth of elective courses;
- The assessment activities in some courses appeared to have little connection to the stated learning outcomes;
- Library resources are inadequate;
- While (most) individual faculty are committed to teaching their assigned courses, there continues to be a serious engagement challenge with research and the administration of the Faculty of Management overall;
- There is a significant tension and lack of support from more senior faculty regarding both the new management team and AACSB accreditation;
- Research productivity and overall faculty engagement needs to improve if the program is to receive AACSB accreditation.

The reviewers concluded with “a tentative endorsement of the MBA program and the processes that are underway to improve it. In order to ensure the ongoing viability of the MBA program (and indeed the Faculty of Management), and that AACSB accreditation is successful, [they] recommend[ed] that LU’s MBA program should be reevaluated in 2017. This coincides with the ending of LU’s current fiscal plan.”

On December 15, 2014, the MBA Program Committee responded to the Reviewers' Report, sending its comments to the Dean of Management who himself submitted his own comments on January 9, 2015 to the Vice-President Academic and Provost. On February 24, 2015, the Acting Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies also submitted comments to the Vice-President Academic and Provost.

**SUMMARY OF THE REVIEW TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS (R) AND THE MBA COMMITTEE'S (P) RESPONSES AS WELL AS THOSE OF THE DEAN OF MANAGEMENT AND THE ACTING DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

The Review Team made eight recommendations to be implemented over a two-year period and four which it recommended be implemented immediately. The Dean of Management and the Acting Dean of Graduate Studies did not react to any specific recommendation but rather, reflected on the report and the program's response as a whole.

1. **(R):** This report provides a tentative endorsement of the existing program, given the process improvements that are currently underway. Significant progress still needs to be made. We recommend that the program be evaluated in 2017, to coincide with the University's fiscal plan.  
**(P):** The MBA Committee acknowledges the tentative endorsement of the existing program and expresses its commitment to an evaluation in 2017.
2. **(R):** Much work needs to be done to be ready for AACSB accreditation. There needs to be more support from tenured and senior faculty members for a successful accreditation. Unfortunately, it appears that the current accreditation champions are either primarily new tenure-track hires or staff members. Intentional hiring at a more senior level (and with a positive predisposition towards accreditation) should be considered for future faculty positions.  
**(P):** The MBA Committee fully agrees.
3. **(R):** Given the enormity of the accreditation undertaking, there needs to be a disciplined approach to project management. We recommend that terms of reference be developed for all associated departments and committees, detailing clear accountabilities, objectives and guidelines, with associated timelines, of what needs to be accomplished and by whom. This needs to be clearly communicated to all faculty members and progress reported on at key events and through various other communication mechanisms.  
**(P):** The MBA Committee fully endorses a project management approach to help steer the AACSB accreditation process.
4. **(R):** AACSB accreditation requires research-active faculty. Going forward, the research climate in the Faculty of Management will need to be strengthened. Some of this will occur organically with appropriate new senior faculty and tenure-track hires.

**(P):** The MBA Committee fully endorses the recommendation to strengthen the research climate in the Faculty and those involved actively engaged in this additional dimension of organizational culture change.

5. **(R):** Each distinct MBA offering should be identified and assessed as a unique program or offering. As part of this assessment, the marketing plan (e.g., target market, competitive analysis, unique value proposition) and business model (e.g., resources generated and required) for each program/offering should be clarified. This will be particularly important with respect to the rebranding of the on-line MBA program, which can no longer rely on the program's long-standing association with CGA. Care should be taken that new target markets reflect LU's SMA of attracting first time university goers, Indigenous learners and students who have disabilities.  
**(P):** The MBA Committee agrees with this recommendation.
6. **(R):** Program level learning outcomes need to be established, a curriculum mapping exercise undertaken, and opportunities for curriculum and pedagogical enhancement identified. While this is now underway, more attention is needed to the contributions of individual courses, with faculty being engaged in detailed discussions about what needs to be taught and how learning needs to be assessed on a course-by-course basis.  
**(P):** The MBA Committee agrees with this recommendation.
7. **(R):** Plans are underway to enhance the available space for the Faculty of Management with much of the third floor of the Fraser Auditorium building, being designated for this purpose. Current plans, however, suggest that this space is not going to be exclusively available for the Faculty of Management. It is essential that students are provided with space to work on team projects and that faculty have space to meet with the community and to participate in research projects. Our recommendation is that the entire floor be designated in support of the Faculty of Management and its MBA program (amongst other business programs).  
**(P):** While MBA Committee strongly endorses the recommendation of the review committee regarding space, it recognizes that this is an issue over which it has little control beyond assuring that its concerns are voiced and heard. The MBA Committee will continue to lobby for the size and quality of space that will enhance the Faculty's programs.
8. **(R):** The reviewers have concerns about the long-run viability of the current on-campus MBA program. The program needs to be aligned with the strategic direction of the University. For this reason, we highly recommend that joint programs with other areas of strength—environmental sustainability, mining innovation and exploration and rural and northern health and its regional needs in Indigenous relations and governance and northern economic development be explored. Alternately, direct entry from these programs, into the MBA, should be considered. These options should help in the recruitment of high quality faculty and students, with an interest in these areas of strength.  
**(P):** The MBA Committee endorses this recommendation.

The review team also had four recommendations that needed to be addressed immediately:

9. **(R):** Relevant fourth year undergraduate electives should be cross-listed as graduate courses so that students have more options in the courses in which they take. Alternatively, restrictions on the number of relevant senior level undergraduate courses that can be taken should be removed.  
**(P):** There is broad agreement that the MBA program lacks electives.
10. **(R):** In the immediate future, students without work experience should be required to complete a WIL course. Future programming that involves an accredited co-operative offering for students without work experience should be explored.  
**(P):** The MBA Committee endorses this recommendation.
11. **(R):** The research course should be recast to include a variety of possible experiential learning activities. These might include: consulting projects, case study development, and entrepreneurial ventures.  
**(P):** The MBA Committee endorses acknowledges this recommendation and supports an initiative that would expose students to a broader range of research methods and paradigms. This would also likely result in engaging more faculty in research activities and building a stronger research foundation for our graduate program.
12. **(R):** Thought should be given to a new capstone course for the on-campus program that effectively integrates learning from across the courses, and integrates students with the local business community. For on-line students, the major project could be implemented within their own organization.  
**(P):** The MBA Committee endorses this recommendation.

Overall, the Dean of the Faculty of Management supported the Review Team's recommendations and the program's reaction to them. More specifically, he wrote: "I concur with the External Reviewer's that the MBA program needs to be redesigned and aligned for AACSB accreditation which includes innovation, engagement, and impact. MBA elective courses and internship opportunities need to be expanded. The "tentative endorsement of the MBA program" with a three year review in 2017 is warranted given the current program weaknesses. The External Reviewers state that "...the MBA must transform quickly to become more relevant...". Developing an Assurance of Learning process for the MBA is critical. New senior faculty hires are needed for the MBA program to provide "...proven teaching talent, research output and administrative expertise." The *ABI Inform* electronic library resource has been purchased as recommended. MBA students without prior managerial work experience should be required to complete a relevant internship. An integrative capstone course or major project is warranted. The MBA program needs a "distinct identity" and a "strategic vision".

The MBA faculty acknowledge the short comings identified by the External Reviewers and commit to a program evaluation in 2017. The MBA faculty are supportive of changes needed to attain AACSB accreditation including increased research productivity. Only faculty meeting academic scholarship criteria will be permitted to teach in the MBA program. The MBA faculty acknowledge that a marketing plan is needed for the MBA program, and the MBA Coordinator

has already met with the Liaison Office to improve marketing the MBA. The faculty endorse the development of an Assurance of Learning process that complies with the AACSB standards. Mission alignment and internal recruitment for the MBA program will be pursued. Increasing MBA electives will be advanced by the faculty. The MBA faculty endorse requiring a mandatory relevant work experience (i.e., internship) for students with less than two years of work experience. The faculty are committed to developing a mandatory MBA "capstone project" involving "real business" activities. The MBA faculty have developed draft "Terms of Reference" documents for (1) the MBA Committee and (2) AACSB Accreditation which are consistent with the External Reviewer's recommendations."

The Acting Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies responded in a similar vein. "I have reviewed the self-study, the external report as well as the response from the program and can attest to the important role of this program for the academic community and beyond. This year and the ones to come represent a pivotal time in the history of the program and it will be critical that it does not miss this turn. The reviewers have highlighted a number of qualities that are intrinsic to our MBA and made very useful suggestions to move beyond a status-quo that may have prevented growth and excellence in recent years. Implementation of such recommendations will be critical as the program is seeking the prestigious AACSB accreditation which includes innovation, engagement, and impact. For instance, the faculty will need to:

- work as a team to improve their cohesion, sharing of responsibilities and interdisciplinarity
- augment their research output both from senior and junior faculty in order to foster a research climate that is attractive to students
- ensure that the distinct streams of the MBA offer stand-alone curriculum and learning opportunities for all students using the current resources
- think outside of the box to provide integrated learning opportunities to the MBA students as well as students from other graduate programs on campus in areas of strength delineated in the Laurentian SMA."

### **ACAPLAN'S RESPONSE**

ACAPLAN endorses the recommendations of the Review Team and notes that much progress has already been made—indeed on April 23, 2015, the Council of English Language Programs (CELP) approved a major revision to the MBA program which reflected faculty consideration of a number of the Review Team's recommendations.

Accordingly ACAPLAN will not be including these recommendations—or in some instances, parts of these recommendations—in its own report. More specifically the following recommendations have not been included:

1. "Relevant fourth year undergraduate electives should be cross-listed as graduate courses so that students have more options in the courses in which they take. Alternatively, restrictions on the number of relevant senior level undergraduate courses that can be taken should be removed."

Reason: The revised program does not allow for the cross-listing of any undergraduate courses and has been structured in such a way as to set up elective concentrations after compulsory courses have been completed. The first set of electives is in the area of General Management.

2. “In the immediate future, students without work experience should be required to complete a WIL course. Future programming that involves an accredited co-operative offering for students without work experience should be explored.”

Reason: COM5901 (3 credits), “Work Integrated Learning,” is now “required...for students assessed with less than 2 years of work experience at the time of admission.”

3. “The research course should be recast to include a variety of possible experiential learning activities. These might include: consulting projects, case study development, and entrepreneurial ventures” and “Thought should be given to a new capstone course for the on-campus program that effectively integrates learning from across the courses, and integrates students with the local business community. For on-line students, the major project could be implemented within their own organization.”

Reason: The revised program includes COMM 5131, “Consulting Project” and this course, offered late in the program, is the capstone course required for all students.

4. “Rebrand the on-line MBA program, which can no longer rely on the program’s long-standing association with CGA.”

Reason: The MBA program may be taken on campus or on-line; there is now no difference in the requirements of either option.

5. “Program level learning outcomes need to be established, a curriculum mapping exercise undertaken, and opportunities for curriculum and pedagogical enhancement identified. While this is now underway, more attention is needed to the contributions of individual courses, with faculty being engaged in detailed discussions about what needs to be taught and how learning needs to be assessed on a course-by-course basis.”

Reason: This has been completed by the Program Coordinator who worked in consultation with the Executive Director of the Centre for Academic Excellence.

6. “An entire floor [should] be designated in support of the Faculty of Management and its MBA program (amongst other business programs).”

Reason: While the office responsible for Capital Projects was prepared to make this happen, at the last minute the Faculty elected not to proceed for two reasons—the disruption to faculty offices over the summer and second, because the relocation did not add any extra space to its operations.

In addition to the Review Team’s formal set of recommendations, it also made, *en passant*, several others that in ACAPLAN’s view needed to be followed up. Several now been acted upon:

7. “Require English proficiency of all international students.”

Reason: All such students must meet English language requirements as set out on <https://laurentian.ca/international>

8. “Provide pedagogical refresher workshops to faculty teaching on campus>”

Reason: These have now started—an early example is a workshop offered in “Action Learning.”

What follows is the Implementation Plan set out in order of priority.

**LAURENTIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR THE MBA PROGRAM  
MAY 2015**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Proposed Follow-up</b>	<b>Responsibility for Leading Follow-up</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
1. To prepare for AACSB accreditation, develop terms of reference for all associated departments and committees, detailing clear accountabilities, objectives and guidelines, with associated timelines, of what needs to be accomplished and by whom.	Conduct annual reviews of the terms of reference for the MBA Committee and quarterly reviews of accreditation plans  Report to Faculty after each review	Program Coordinator and Associate Dean of Management	September 2016 and ongoing
2. Identify and assess each distinct MBA offering as a unique program or offering	Clarity the marketing plan (e.g., target market, competitive analysis, unique value proposition) and business model (e.g., resources generated and required) for each program/offering	Program Coordinator working as appropriate with Laurentian’s marketing team	December <b>2015</b> and ongoing

	Ensure new target markets reflect LU's SMA of attracting first time university goers, Indigenous learners and students who have disabilities	Program Coordinator with Liaison Office	Ongoing
	Develop new courses such as business ethics & corporate social responsibility, global management, Management and information systems, leadership, and supply chain management	Program Coordinator and Associate Dean of Management	Ongoing
3. Align program with the strategic directions of the University.	Develop joint programs with other areas of strength— environmental sustainability, mining innovation and exploration and rural and northern health and its regional needs in Indigenous relations and governance and northern economic development	Program Coordinator and Associate Dean of Management	September 2015 and ongoing
	Consider direct entry into MBA from these programs	Program Coordinator and Associate Dean of Management working with Admissions Office	September 2015
4. Intentional hiring at a more senior level (and with a positive predisposition towards accreditation) should be considered for future faculty positions.	Once budget committee approves hires, positions get posted explicitly seeking such candidates	Dean of Management	Ongoing

		Dean of Graduate Studies verifies candidates selected can be accredited to the faculty	Ongoing
5. Strengthen research climate in Faculty of Management	VP Research to meet with faculty to promote research, explore joint research projects; Support development of internal research centres;	VP Research	September 2015 and ongoing
	Facilitate work integrated learning and cross-pollination of courses among graduate programs;  Provide financial support when students present their research at national and international conferences;  Ensure appropriate space be set aside for MBA students	Dean of Graduate Studies	Ongoing
	Program to explore research colloquia with Chinese colleagues	Associate Dean of Management	Ongoing
	Encourage participation in research methods webinars sponsored by the Consortium for the Advancement of Research Methods and Analysis (CARMA)	Program Coordinator	Sept. 2015
6. Re-evaluate program in 2017-2018	Program undertakes self-study	Dean of Management	Spring 2017 to be concluded by Spring 2018

	Same external reviewers are approached for re-review	Vice-President Academic and Provost	March 2017
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In addition to the Review Team's formal set of recommendations, it also made, *en passant*, several others that in ACAPLAN's view need to be followed up:

9. Enhance on-line library support	Benchmark Laurentian resources with peer AACSB-accredited schools (Brock, Carleton, Ryerson, St. Mary's and the University of Victoria) and develop a plan to purchase same, assuming such resources would support anticipated curricular and research needs	Commerce librarian in consultation with Program Coordinator, Dean of Management and University Librarian	September 2015
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The Dean of the Faculty of Management shall be responsible for monitoring the implementation plan. The details of progress made shall be presented in the Dean's Annual Report and filed with the Vice-President Academic and Provost. The executive Summary and the monitoring reports will be posted on Laurentian University's web site.

### CONCLUSION

The MBA program is tentatively approved to continue and it will be reviewed starting in the fall of 2017.