**REPORT OF THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**TO THE REGULAR February 2019 SENATE**

**FOR DISCUSSION**

**QUALITY ASSURANCE - CYCLICAL PROGRAM REVIEW OF LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY’S**

**MA in HUMANITIES**

**FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT & IMPLEMENTATION PLAN, DECEMBER 2018**

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 MA PROGRAM**

**History**

The Humanities MA is the most recent incarnation of the interdisciplinary graduate humanities program offered at Laurentian University since 1995. Until 2013, it was listed as *Interdisciplinary MA in Humanities: Interpretation and Values* and it originally involved members of all four institutions in the Laurentian Federation from a variety of disciplines including English, Modern Languages and Literatures, Music, Philosophy, and Religious Studies.

In 2013, faced with a set of crises revolving around shrinking resources, lack of student interest, and the necessity of teaching courses unrelated to faculty research, the steering committee requested that admissions be suspended in the 2014-2015 academic year so that the program could be reconfigured into its present shape.

In 2015, the program started afresh under its current name and configuration. In addition to the required course in Academic Research Methods (HUMA 5117EL) a second course was created and also made obligatory, Academic Culture and Practice (HUMA 5266)[[1]](#footnote-1) Instead of a one-year program with Practicum, the program now extended over two years, Practicum now optional. All students were given a choice between writing a thesis or a research paper. Those who elected the former would be required to take **five** 3-credit elective courses, one of which could be a Practicum; those who elected the latter would need **seven** 3-credit elective courses, one of which could be a Practicum. Most importantly, students could specialize in a specific discipline, providing them with new opportunities to pursue doctoral level work in their chosen discipline and for the faculty, a chance to work with students in their own area of research.

Today, the program draws on faculty expertise at two universities on the Laurentian campus: Laurentian University (non-denominational), and Thorneloe University (Anglican). Its general goal is to offer students in north-eastern Ontario a graduate-level interdisciplinary learning experience in the Humanities.

The program’s members come from Humanities departments and programs: Ancient and Classical Studies (Thorneloe), Education (Laurentian), English (Laurentian), Modern Languages (Laurentian), Music (Laurentian), Philosophy (Laurentian), Political Science (Laurentian), Religious Studies (Thorneloe), and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (Thorneloe).

The program is offered in English, although students may write theses and submit written assignments in French where supervised and assessed by qualified faculty.

Students may complete the program either full-time (in a minimum of 24 months) or part-time. The degree is entirely campus-based.

The program’s website is <https://laurentian.ca/program/humanities>.

**IQAP Review**

In the fall of 2017, the program submitted its self-study to the Office of Vice-President Academic and Provost of Laurentian University.

Part 1 of the self-study presented an overview of the program and then reviewed the program’s self-perception of the faculty, physical resources, students, program regulations, and how the program harmonized with the strategic goals and mission of the University. It concluded with an overall assessment of the program’s and weaknesses. There were also five Appendices: A: Thesis Protocols; B: Library Resources; C: 2014 Restructuring Report; D: Course Outlines and E: Statistical Summaries of Student Course Evaluations. Part 2 of the self-study contained the curriculum vitae of the full-time faculty in the program.

On 28-29 2018, after reviewing the self-study, the Review Team conducted a site visit. The first external was [Dr. David Watt](http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/departments/English_theatre_film_media/faculty/watt.html), Associate Professor and at the time, Director, University of Manitoba [Institute for the Humanities](http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/departments/humanities/index.html). The second external was [Dr. Frances Garrett,](http://religion.utoronto.ca/people/faculty/frances-garrett/) Department for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto. In addition, as per IQAP procedures, the team also consisted of two Laurentian professors, Dr. Todd Webb from within the faculty (Arts) and Dr. Ann Dr. Ann Pegoraro from outside the Faculty (Health). Finally, there were two students in the program, Caitlin Heppner and Carmen-Solange Bertrand.

The site visit was thorough and included the following facilities: Humanities Room (L-733, Parker Building); Centre for Humanities Research and [[2]](#footnote-2)Creativity (L-736, Parker Building); Director’s office (L-711, Parker Building); Department of English Office (L-716, Parker Building); Graduate student office (L-710, Parker Building); Seminar Room (L-712, Parker Building) and finally the J. N. Desmarais Library & Archives.

Stakeholders consulted include the following: Dr. Shelley Watson, Associate Vice-President Learning and Teaching; Dr. Elizabeth Dawes, Dean, Faculty of Arts; Mr. Brent Roe, University Librarian, Dr. Mrinalini Greedharry, M. A. Coordinator; Dr. David Lesbarrères, Dean of Graduate Studies; the following faculty members: Dr. Alain Beaulieu (Philosophy), Dr. Patricia Brace (English), Dr. Brett Buchanan (Philosophy and Environmental Studies), Dr. Norman Cheadle (Modern Languages), Dr. Hoi Cheu (English and Film Studies), Rev. Dr. R. Derrenbacker (Religious Studies), Dr. Ernst Gerhardt (English), Dr. Stéphanie Martens (Political Science) Dr. Philippa Spoel (English) and Dr. Michael Yeo (Philosophy). Students consulted included: Anne Boulton, Ph.D. Candidate/Alumna, Carmen-Solange Bertrand, Caitlin Heppner, Mike Sanders, Shawn Soderman, and Emmett Turkington.

In their report dated 20 April 2018, the reviewers noted that:

This program underwent a substantial reconstruction in 2014, and the changes have been highly beneficial…. Overall, the MA in the Humanities is an impressive program. Those interviewed shared their passion for the program, and it is clear that they are exceeding expectations in order to ensure it remains viable. It provides an exceptional opportunity for teaching and learning and seems to be contributing substantially to student success.

This program is clearly serving a need for the faculty, students, and the local community. It is providing faculty members with a chance to develop rich relationships with their colleagues and graduate students, it is providing students with an excellent graduate-level program, and it is providing members of the local community with a unique opportunity to engage with the program by taking courses or attending public lectures. The program is inspired by the special circumstances pertaining to a Northern university and it promises to serve that community well.

The program is unique and well designed. It provides students with the opportunity to take an interdisciplinary approach and to develop their competence within a particular discipline as they pursue curiosity-driven research. Its current structure makes it an attractive option for students seeking a terminal degree as well as those seeking to pursue advanced graduate study.

More specifically the reviewers noted:

* The program was consistent with Laurentian’s mission and academic plans
* The program requirements and learning outcomes are clearly articulated and in alignment with institutional expectations.
* Admission standards are high, ensuring that the student cohort is already well prepared to take on the intensive program of study required at the graduate level.
* The curriculum reflects the current state of the discipline or area of study. In fact faculty teaching in this program are themselves working on the innovative edges of humanities scholarship, with health care ethics, environmental humanities, queer studies, postcolonial feminism, and animal philosophies being just a few of the research areas that provide students with a diverse understanding of how the humanities touch issues of global, local, and personal importance.
* There is evidence of significant innovation or creativity in the content and/or delivery of the program relative to other programs. Aside from featuring innovative research, as noted above, the Humanities MA program core courses are distinctive, as compared to other similar graduate programs, in their ability to provide professional training to students.
* The modes of delivery are both flexible and scalable. The program is currently taking advantage of its flexibility in offering senior-level undergraduate classes and graduate courses together.
* The methods used to assess student achievement of the defined learning outcomes and degree level expectations appropriate and effective.
* The Humanities MA program is operating very successfully with very limited resources. Administrative staff is minimal, which places a high burden of responsibility on the faculty director of the program.
* A review of student thesis topics indicates a high level of performance and achievement for this program, with advanced research studies tying directly to Laurentian’s mission to provide “compelling solutions for society’s complex challenges.”
* Faculty members hold degrees from internationally recognized universities and publish in a variety of academic venues. Their publication records seem commensurate with their appointments and demonstrate that they remain engaged in current research in their fields.
* Attrition rates in this program are low, and students finish in a timely manner.
* Students appear to be well supervised throughout their programs. All students we spoke to reported excellent supervisory experiences, and faculty reported eagerness to engage with this program in a supervisory capacity.

Amidst these encomiums, there were some concerns expressed about the program in the body of the report.

* The graduate student funding situation is the most significant threat to the program. Inadequate student funding makes recruitment very difficult, affects time to completion, and is demoralizing for both students and faculty.
* It is unfortunate that colleagues at the federated universities (Huntington and the University of Sudbury) could not be more fully involved with the program--especially since those faculty members have repeatedly indicated that they are interested in offering classes.
* There is some ambivalence about the way courses are currently offered. Students and faculty generally reported the core HUMA courses are valuable. They also reported benefits in the cross listing of HUMA courses with undergraduate seminars. However, they also expressed the hope that there would be some additional opportunities for some courses dedicated to graduate students.
* Library resources are slim at Laurentian generally, and researchers will feel these restrictions.

On 24 April 2018 the program submitted its comments on the Report and these were followed by a set of comments jointly from the Dean of Arts and the Dean of Graduate Studies on 25 May 2018. The two deans nicely summarized the Reviewers’ recommendations, the program’s reaction to those recommendations, (re-organized appropriately) and added their own reactions. Their report is synopsized below.

**SUMMARY OF THE REVIEW TEAM’S RECOMMENDATIONS (R) THE PROGRAM’S (P) RESPONSES AS WELL AS THOSE OF THE DEAN OF ARTS (D)**

**AND THE DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES (GS)**

**R1. We recommend that those involved in the program be acknowledged for their exemplary work, especially for their thoughtful re-conception of the program and their ongoing commitment to its continuing success.**

**P1**. We would welcome an acknowledgement of the HUMA faculty’s dedication, excellence, and resourcefulness.

**D1**. The faculty members in the program are to be commended for their commitment to the program and its students.

**GS1**. I concur in congratulating my colleagues in their continuous efforts to offer a quality graduate program in the Humanities.

**R2. We recommend that the Faculty of Arts form a committee comprised of faculty members in Arts who teach in graduate programs (including the MA in Humanities), a student enrolled in these programs, a member of the Faculty of Graduate Studies, and representatives from one or two other faculties in order to identify how graduate students are funded at similar universities in Ontario (both the level of funding and its source). The committee would then make recommendations designed specifically for the situation at Laurentian.**

**P2**. This is a recommendation that we believe is particularly important for the successful future of our program, and for graduate programs in the Arts more generally at Laurentian University. We request that the Dean of Arts take the initiative to compose the committee as soon as the academic year 2018-19 begins. We also request that the Dean of Graduate Studies attend this committee at least once a semester to remain informed about the committee’s findings.

In order to find solutions to the particular issue of funding humanities and social science graduate students, we propose that the committee focus its efforts on finding out how students in programs where SSHRC is the primary funding agency for the faculty members are financially supported directly by their institutions. There are Arts programs where the relevant funding agency could be NSERC or CIHR, which means that the funding is based on a model in which faculty who are awarded grants have funds available to support their graduate students from their grants (as for example Psychology or Sociology). The crucial question here is to find out how institutions fund graduate students in programs where individual faculty members’ research does not depend on large external grants, such as Philosophy or Literature.

**D2.** The Dean of Graduate Studies could gather the relevant information and present it to the proposed committee for review and discussion. The committee could then formulate recommendations.

**GS2**. I welcome the invitation to participate in a committee exploring funding opportunities for graduate students in the Humanities.

**R3. We recommend that the program director be offered additional administrative support.**

**P3.** We would welcome the restoration of a full-time, dedicated administrative assistant to the Humanities MA program. Without a full-time administrative assistant, it is possible for the program director and faculty to maintain the current program, but not to significantly grow or develop it. Since one of the strategic priorities for Laurentian University from 2018 to 2023 is to increase graduate enrolments, we need the proper resources to be able to meet and sustainably carry out that aim.

**D3.** A full-time administrative assistant for a small graduate program is not realistic in the current context. In the case of Psychology, Sociology, and History, the administrative assistant is responsible for undergraduate programs in English and French in addition to the graduate program.

**R4. The members of the program should work together and with the Faculty of Arts to articulate the ways that the MA program supports curiosity-driven research indirectly and directly.**

**P4.** The recommendation that we should communicate more effectively about the ways that HUMA is already exemplifying curiosity-driven research is well taken. Although we have a longstanding speakers’ series that is designed to provide a forum for visiting humanities scholars, we have not been as vigorous in communicating about the innovative research our own students and faculty do.

In response to this recommendation we propose to (1) review how we can organize our speakers’ series; (2) ensure that the annual thesis colloquium is an event that is more widely advertised and attended by faculty and students from outside the program; and (3) collaborate more closely with the Centre for Humanities Research and Creativity (CHRC) in order to showcase the variety of methods and practices humanities-based researchers employ.

**D4**. Graduate students should be encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity to present their work during Laurentian’s Research Week.

**GS4**. The annual Graduate Symposium held during Research Week has had very little attendance from the Humanities’ students and such event would be a good start to promote research from faculty and students widely.

**R5. The members of the program should work together and with the Faculty of Arts to articulate more clearly the ways that the MA program supports the University’s strategic plan.**

**P5.** As with recommendation number 6, we do see the value of communicating more visibly about how the work we already do is at the heart of the University’s strategic plan.

**D5.** The Humanities MA is very much aligned with the outcomes of the University’s Strategic Plan. As an interdisciplinary program, it is central to one of the five core areas of strength identified in the Plan. It is also strongly connected to the themes of well-being, environmental sustainability and Indigeneity. Members of the program will have no difficulty articulating the many ways in which it supports the Strategic Plan.

**GS5.** The new strategic plan also calls for an increase in graduate student numbers across programs. With funding support now available to international students (e.g. GTA, Dean’s scholarships), it will be expected that the Master’s in Humanities also grows and become a strong platform to advance research from the faculty in the Humanities.

**R6. In support of the previous two goals, the HUMA program may find it helpful to establish a formal relationship with the Centre for Humanities Research and Creativity.**

**P6**. We strongly support the recommendation that we should establish a formal relationship with the CHRC. At our program retreat, (held April 24, 2018), members present voted unanimously to pursue this recommendation. We will begin discussions with the incoming Director of the CHRC about how the program can formalize its collaboration with the centre as soon as the new academic year begins.

**D6.** A formal relationship between the Centre for Humanities Research and Creativity and the MA in Humanities would be natural and mutually beneficial.

**R7. Members of the program should be encouraged to work more closely with liaison librarians to ensure that all taught programs, thesis projects, and the program’s journal are adequately supported by library resources.**

**P7.** We welcome the recommendation to work more closely with our hard-working academic librarians. Both faculty and students remain deeply troubled by the fact that “library resources are slim at Laurentian generally, and researchers will feel these restrictions”; and we would like to draw attention to the fact that increasing library resources was one of the recommendations in the previous periodic review that was not acted upon by the institution. Nevertheless, we will work to coordinate in a timely way with the library to ensure that, at a minimum, each year we can order specifically what students need to complete their studies and thesis research. We will consider whether it might be helpful to have a dedicated faculty member working on library liaison for a 1- or 2-year period.

**D7.** Many Arts departments do not end up spending all of the funds allocated to them in their annual operating budget. It may be possible for departments participating in the Humanities MA to use some of their funds to support the purchase of library resources.

**R8. We recommend that the program maintain its current practice with respect to the following three areas:**

**a) The program should maintain a mix of courses as they currently offered to different levels of students: two core courses that help establish the cohort, a variety of courses cross listed with undergraduate seminars, and courses that are cross listed with other graduate seminars (in Human Studies, for example).**

**P8a.** We are pleased to note that for 2018-19, the curriculum is indeed a varied one, making good use of the program faculty’s full range of interdisciplinarity. Electives for 2018-19 include mixed undergraduate and graduate courses in Music, Philosophy, and English Literature; and standalone graduate seminars in Political Science and Environmental Humanities. It is certainly our aim to keep up this standard of multidisciplinary teaching.

However, it is also important to note that with the continuing decline of the faculty complement in the humanities, it is going to be increasingly difficult to provide such a varied curriculum and standalone graduate seminars. We are already reliant on a successful, but informal, collaboration with the Department of History’s graduate program to provide one of our core courses. Ensuring that faculty at the federated universities can regularly participate in graduate teaching and supervision will be key to maintaining the quality of the students’ experience.

**D8a.** Programs in the Faculty of Arts have become interconnected over the past decade. There are very few programs in Arts that do not rely on courses from other Arts programs in related disciplines.

**GS8a**. The Graduate Council officially encouraged all programs to share their courses, not only to offset the shortage of faculty in some disciplines but also to increase the breadth of knowledge within each program, enlarge and diversify the pool of attendants and enrich class discussions. The role of federated universities have played in supervising students has fluctuated over the years and it would be important that the HUMA program plays a leadership role in making these relationship stronger.

**b) We recommend that the program maintain its lecture series, perhaps working more assertively with departments in related disciplines to fund speakers in a variety of disciplines.**

**P8b**. As noted under recommendation number 4, we will retain the speakers’ series and, in collaboration with the CHRC, work to improve the understanding and visibility of humanities research across our campus.

**D8b**. Activities such as the speakers’ series are an important part of the training and mentoring of graduate students.

**GS8b**. Several graduate programs run an invited speakers series for their students and in some cases, attendance is mandatory. Inviting external reviewers of Master’s thesis to attend the defence and provide a seminar is also common practice on campus.

**c) We recommend that the level of space afforded to the program be maintained at the current level as an absolute minimum.**

**P8c.** We do agree that the current level of space is the absolute minimum that we require to run the program. Any additions—especially in the form of working space for graduate students—would be well used.

**D8c**. There is no plan to reduce the space available to the program.

**GS8c.** The modernisation of the campus has provided several informal and formal spaces available to graduate students. The latter could be booked and serve the needs of the HUMA students.

**ACAPLAN’S RESPONSE**

ACAPLAN endorses the recommendations of the Review Team but notes the following recommendations will not be followed up:

**R1. We recommend that those involved in the program be acknowledged for their exemplary work, especially for their thoughtful re-conception of the program and their ongoing commitment to its continuing success.**

Reason: This review, including this specific recommendation, will be made publicly available both to members of Senate and the Board of Governors and further will be posted on the [University’s public website](https://laurentian.ca/policies-accountability/academic-accountability) for all to read. Program members should feel very proud about what they have accomplished.

**R3. We recommend that the program director be offered additional administrative support.**

Reason: The Dean of Arts said it best: A full-time administrative assistant for a small graduate program is not realistic in the current context

**R8. We recommend that the program maintain its current practice with respect to the following three areas:**

**a) The program should maintain a mix of courses as they currently offered to different levels of students: two core courses that help establish the cohort, a variety of courses cross listed with undergraduate seminars, and courses that are cross listed with other graduate seminars (in Human Studies, for example).**

**b) We recommend that the program maintain its lecture series, perhaps working more assertively with departments in related disciplines to fund speakers in a variety of disciplines.**

**c) We recommend that the level of space afforded to the program be maintained at the current level as an absolute minimum.**

Reason: No one is disputing any of these recommendations and recommendations to “keep doing what you are doing” can hardly be followed up.

That all said, members of ACAPLAN are concerned about the departures by death or resignation—impending and actual—by key professors teaching in the program. This fact gives urgency to ACAPLAN’s first and second recommendations.

More specifically, since its last review in 2010, **HUMA’s faculty membership has declined by 43%** as over dozen faculty members have retired from or left Laurentian University without being replaced. At its last review in 2010, the program had 30 members. In its most recent self-study, the program listed 20 members, 3 of whom have left since the self-study was written.

The decline from 30 to the current 17 members warrants further analysis. Of the 30 members identified in the 2010 review, 5 belonged to departments housed in the federated universities (Thorneloe and Huntington), meaning that 25 members were from Laurentian Humanities departments.

Of the 20 members listed in the recent review, 5 again belonged to departments housed at Thorneloe, meaning that 15 members were from Laurentian departments. Moreover, of these 15 Laurentian members, 3 have departmental homes outside the Humanities (Education and Political Science), meaning that only 12 faculty members belong to Laurentian Humanities departments. Of these 12, 1 faculty member has since passed away.

In net terms, the number of Laurentian Humanities faculty members participating in the Humanities M.A. has declined from 25 to 11 (i.e. a 56% reduction) since 2010.

Alarmingly, ***at least another three faculty departures are anticipated in the next two years***, and, without replacements, HUMA’s membership will decline to 8. This will represent an effective 68% cut to Laurentian Humanities-based faculty members.

Alongside these losses, HUMA’s full-time practicum co-ordinator position (an administrative assistant position) was cut; the program is now allocated 20% of an administrative assistant’s time (the other 80% is allocated to the Department of English). In addition, the teaching release allocated to the program’s director was cut from 6 cr to 3 cr.

**LAURENTIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR THE M.A. PROGRAM**

**in**

**HUMANITIES**

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| **Recommendation** | **Proposed Follow-up** | **Responsibility for Leading Follow-up** | **Timeline** |
| **1. Replace departed faculty—at the very least, ensure at least 17 faculty continue to be involved in the program** | Decanal budget submission | Dean of Arts | Ongoing |
| **2. Explore possibility of adding faculty from Huntington and U. of S. as program participants. Request additional funding for overloads and sessional appointments from the Budget Committee** | Discussion with the two federated presidents affected.Request additional funding for overloads and sessional appointments from the Budget Committee. | Program coordinator with VP Academic | Spring 2019 |
| **3. Improve funding of Graduate Students in the Arts** | To goal should be a $5,000 scholarship per student to bring Arts students near level of students subsidized by grants available to individual faculty in the Sciences | Dean of Arts with Dean of Graduate Studies | June 2019 |
| **4. Work with the Faculty of Arts to articulate the ways that the MA program supports curiosity-driven research indirectly and directly**. | 1) Review how the program can organize its speakers’ series; (2) Ensure that the annual thesis colloquium is an event that is more widely advertised and attended by faculty and students from outside the program;  (3) Collaborate more closely with the Centre for Humanities Research and Collaboration (CHRC) in order to showcase the variety of methods and practices humanities-based researchers employ. (4) Encourage students to present at the annual Graduate Symposium held during Research Week | Program coordinator | January 2019 and ongoing |
| **5. Expand available electives *at the graduate level*** | Identify additional opportunities for some courses dedicated to graduate students | Program coordinator and Dean of Arts | January 2019 and ongoing |
| **6. Establish a formal relationship with the Centre for Humanities Research and Collaboration** | Determine possible aspects to relationship and then formalize these in a MOU | Program coordinator and Director | June 2019 |
| **7. Work more closely with liaison librarians to ensure that all taught programs, thesis projects, and the program’s journal are adequately supported by library resources.** | Identify a faculty member who could continue to liaise with the librarian responsible for Arts programs, including this one | Program coordinator | January 2019 and ongoing |

The Dean of Arts 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 MA in Humanities program in is approved to continue and it will be reviewed in the fall of 2026.

1. The course calendar description reads: This course introduces students to the academic culture of humanities-based graduate studies. Students will be guided in the development of curriculum vitae, graduate seminar presentation preparation and delivery, grant proposal writing, book reviewing, academic society participation, and preparing papers for publication. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Now the Centre for Humanities Research and Collaboration [↑](#footnote-ref-2)