

**Interdisciplinary Studies, MA, Liberal Arts and Professional Studies**

**Cyclical Program Review – 2008-2014**

**Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan**

**Reported to Joint-Committee on Quality Assurance:** April 28, 2017

**Program Description**

The Graduate Program in Interdisciplinary Studies, offered by the Department of Humanities in the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies,

Program	Registrations 2014	Enrolment FTES 2014	Degrees Awarded 2014
Master's level	13	26	6

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

Dr. Hillel Goelman, Chair, Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program, The University of British Columbia

Dr. Thomas Loebel, Department of English, York University

**Documentation Provided to the External Reviewers**

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

- 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
- Dean's /Principal's Agenda of Concerns
- University, Faculty and Program planning documents

**Site Visit:** May 31, 2016

The reviewers conducted interviews with: Dr. Alice Pitt, Vice-Provost, Academic; Dr. Barbara Crow, Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies; Dr. Ananya Mukherjee-Reed, Dean, Liberal Arts and Professional Studies; Dr. Cheryl van Daalen-Smith, Graduate Program Director, Interdisciplinary Studies Program; Dr. Christopher Innes, Founding Director of the IS Program; Members of the IS Executive Committee, current students and alumni of the IS Program.



**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 in November 2018. The next CPR will begin in the Fall of 2022 and will align with programs in the Department of Humanities.

**Strengths:**

The reviewers identified the program's curriculum, structure and learning outcomes as representing the "state of the art" for interdisciplinary graduate programs, with its list of completed theses testament to the creativity of its students. They write: "The IS program is to be commended for the clarity of expectations and achievements which characterize the student's progress through the program, from the initial application process through to the final thesis defense and beyond. At every critical milestone students are assessed through a combination of course work, annual and interim progress reports, development of a thesis proposal, and creation of a scholarly research thesis."

The program requirements and learning outcomes are clear, appropriate and in alignment with the relevant provincially-approved degree level expectations.

Students cite the flexibility they have in designing individualized programs of learning as a major strength.

**Opportunities for Enhancement:**

Students face a number of challenges. On average full-time students complete their programs of study in eight semesters instead of the expected four semesters over two years. Students encounter difficulties in obtaining permission to enrol in courses offered other programs, leading to frustration and delays. Students find it difficult to bring together their supervisors for meetings. A significant number of students do not complete the thesis and therefore do not graduate. Efforts to address issues focus on clarifying expectations and resources in a new handbook and new website and the practice of having the graduate program director attend the initial meeting of the supervisory committee. However, these issues require continued exploration and attention; in addition to expectations for students, supervisory committees' responsibilities to students must be confirmed.

It is important to ensure sustainability for the core course in interdisciplinary studies, an essential course which addresses the theory and practice of interdisciplinary inquiry. Such a course also provides cohesion to the students in the interdisciplinary program.

The External Review Report followed up on the recommendations made in

the previous review in 2008, noting progress and providing suggestions where issues identified have not been fully resolved. While office space and student space have been provided, the reviewers note that students face difficulties securing studio space, and given the nature of the program as independent from departments, students have few opportunities to supplement their funding package.

### **Implementation Plan**

The review report specified three recommendations for the Graduate Program in Interdisciplinary Studies, two of which are addressed in the Dean's Implementation Plan. The third recommendation is the creation of a journal: "The creation and implementation of student-edited, online journal of interdisciplinary studies would yield important benefits for the students in graduate interdisciplinary programs at York and elsewhere." The Dean's Implementation plan notes that this would be a student led project and is outside of the Dean's responsibilities.

The Dean's Implementation Plan acknowledges "the thorough and considered response" on the part of the program to the Review Report. It notes that, while a formal policy to ensure that IS students have access to courses offered by other programs is not practical, earlier identification on the part of students would enhance the program's administration's efforts to secure space, and greater clarity on the web site would ensure that students better understand that access to courses cannot be guaranteed. The plan calls for a review of the process and information for students.

1. Core course: The Review Report strongly endorses the institution of an IS program core course: "This report strongly endorses the implementation of this course (3.0 credits). It is essential that graduate students participate in a core course which addresses the theory and practice of interdisciplinary inquiry."

The Dean's Implementation Plan notes that the following should be done in short order. This would involve the "transformation of the required course from a 6.0 credit Seminar course to a 3.0 credit Interdisciplinary Theory and Practice and 3.0 Seminar course."

2. The creation of a Doctoral Program in Interdisciplinary Studies was identified in 2008 and reaffirmed in this 2016 review: "This report strongly affirms this recommendation, which was voiced in interviews with current students, alumni and current Executive Committee members."

The Dean's Implementation Plan states, "The issue of the PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies is a complex one," and indicates that the Dean's

Office is not convinced of the merits of such a program. However, the Dean's Office is willing to discuss the idea of a doctoral program provided that, "Such a proposal, while in no guaranteed to ultimately gain support, would need to include clear data on perspective students, curriculum, budget, and rationale. It should also address the issue of declining graduate enrollments across York and how this program would not "cannibalize" enrollments in other programs."

The chart below outlines the actions and timelines related to recommendations 1 and 2 above and, in the first row, outlines actions and timelines for the improvement of course enrolment for students in this program.

<b>Action</b>	<b>First Responsibility</b>	<b>Final Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	
Review the process to enrol in, and information available for, IS students on the opportunities for access to graduate courses	IS Graduate Program in consultation with other GPD's	Associate Dean Graduate and Research with relevant graduate programs	August 2017	
Transform the "core" course of IS as suggested above	IS Graduate Program	LA&PS and FGS	July 2017	
Develop a IS Ph.D. proposal (Notice of Intent) which addresses the concerns outlined above	IS Graduate Program	Review by Dean's Office	December 2017	

The Follow-up report, due in November 2018, will report on progress related to all three of the items in the plan above.

Alice J. Pitt  
 Vice-Provost Academic  
 York University