

FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

Institutional Quality Assurance Program (IQAP) Review

School of Labour Studies (Labour Studies, BA and Honours BA, Work and Society M.A)

Date of Review: March 30 - 31, 2017

*In accordance with the University Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), this final assessment report provides a synthesis of the external evaluation and the internal response and assessments of the undergraduate and graduate programs delivered by the **School of Labour Studies**. This report identifies the significant strengths of the programs, together with opportunities for program improvement and enhancement, and it 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 entailed by those recommendations; any changes in organization, policy or governance that will be necessary to meet the recommendations and who will be responsible for acting on those recommendations; and timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations.

Executive Summary of the Cyclical Program Review of the Undergraduate and Graduate Programs in the School of Labour Studies

In accordance with the Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the School of Labour Studies program submitted a self-study in February 2017 to the Associate Vice-President, Faculty to initiate the cyclical program review of its undergraduate programs. The approved self-study presented program descriptions, learning outcomes, and analyses of data provided by the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis. Appendices to the self-study contained all course outlines associated with the program and the CVs for each full-time member in the department.

Two arm's length external reviewers, one from Ontario and one from British Columbia and one internal reviewer were endorsed by the Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, and selected by the Associate Vice-President, Faculty and Associate Vice-President and Dean of Graduate Studies. The review team reviewed the self-study documentation and then conducted a site visit to McMaster University on March 30 - 31, 2017. The visit included interviews with the Provost and Vice-President (Academic); Associate Vice-President, Faculty, Associate Vice-President and Dean of Graduate Studies, Associate Dean, Grad Studies and Research, Director of the School of Labour Studies and meetings with groups of current undergraduate students, full-time faculty and support staff.

The Director of the School and the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences submitted responses to the Reviewers' Report (May 2017). Specific recommendations were discussed and clarifications and corrections were presented. Follow-up actions and timelines were included.

Strengths

In their report (May 2017), the Review team stated that they found the School of Labour Studies to be a vibrant centre of innovative teaching, productive faculty, dedicated support staff and enthusiastic students. The reviewers highlighted the following strengths of the program:

- This is a Program that has healthy and steady enrolments for their BA and MA degrees; and the PhD has a good number of applications for the first year.
- There is a good record of student success at BA and MA levels; student placements seem to have gone well.
- There is a positive record of completion rates.
- The faculty all have good all-round records: teaching, publications, research, funding, administration, supervision, and engagement in current issues.
- There is a continuing and positive alumni connection thanks to the administrative staff in the School.

Areas of Improvement

The review team had no major concerns but did identify some minor suggestions for alterations and a few observations on the program as a whole.

Undergraduate:

As we expected, the Reviewers had suggestions to make regarding our course offerings. We welcome such suggestions from these seasoned researchers and teachers and we are already in the process of addressing them. At our mini retreats at the beginning of May, we discussed our undergraduate program from top to bottom, and, as a start, have agreed to change the titles, content and scheduling of our first year courses for the 2018-19 academic year. (It is too late to make such changes for the 2017-18 academic year.) Moreover, with regard to their suggestions regarding offering courses – existing and new – with more labour studies content, e.g., collective bargaining, employment standards, and the like, we are very enthusiastic about the possibilities that such courses hold for us in terms of meeting student interest and in terms of how they could assist students in later employment.

In making such recommendations the Reviewers were aware of the difficulties we have in providing our students with a rich and diverse range of courses. Speaking to an issue that also has profound implications for our graduate programs, the Reviewers note our faculty complement is such that we are strained to offer even the bare minimum of required courses at each level, each year. As the Reviewers write: "Some students noted they were doing joint majors not single majors in Labour Studies, precisely because they did not feel there were enough course options for a single major." One of their "solutions" to this set of problems, they write, "is the addition of courses taught by other units to the Labour Studies list of courses." While this "solution" is worthy of discussion, we would point out that our

undergraduate students already have this option, hence, it is not clear if the Reviewers, in making this suggestion, were contemplating that we reduce the number of required courses of our degrees. To date we have not considered this to be a desirable fix for this ongoing issue which in some ways produces a chicken and egg situation: we can not increase the number of our undergraduate courses because we do not have the student enrolment numbers but we do not have the student enrolment numbers because we do not attract enough students. At bottom, we are an interdisciplinary program and would welcome, with open arms, pedagogical and institutional/administrative arrangements with other Departments and Faculties if such arrangements promised to strengthen and deepen our programs without weakening and/or watering down our core mission to study and understand the changing worlds of work.

Graduate:

While our MA in Work and Society was also reviewed very positively, as with our undergraduate programs, there were a number of suggestions regarding changes to our course content and offerings. Consistent with comments from our undergraduate students, our graduate students spoke of their desire for courses with more 'labour studies' content. The Reviewers wonder if this comment stems from students having "fairly traditional definitions of labour studies." Regardless, they recommend that any revisions/additions to our graduate curriculum include "the development of a graduate 'foundation' course, with more material on existing labour problems, policies, and legislation." With regard to this recommendation, we can reply that the Reviewers seem to have missed the change we made last year that increased the number of required Work and Society courses from three to four precisely to expose our MA students to more "labour studies" content. That said, we will keep this recommendation in mind when we next refresh our course offerings.

The biggest issue raised by the Reviewers was, as with the undergraduate programs, the rather limited number of courses offered each year. For the Reviewers, this problem, like the similar problem noted for the undergraduate programs, stemmed directly from the too few faculty members available to offer more courses. Their primary solution to hire more faculty will be addressed below. Additional fixes, they wrote, could possibly be found in developing courses, e.g., methods courses, with other Departments within and outside Social Sciences. Labour Studies faculty discussed this option at our May retreat and it is one option that will be pursued. Another possibility, the Reviewers wrote, was to become involved with online courses.

We are prepared to investigate each of these options. With regard to online courses, we believe that the online option is more applicable to undergraduate education. That said, we are generally quite skeptical of such courses given the research that shows poor completions rates. With regard to being able to offer our graduate students a wider range of graduate courses, we cannot do so with our present faculty complement. This leaves adding courses from outside Work and Society. This is something that we already do – both at the MA and in our new PhD program. As the Reviewers write, however, "the problem with this recommendation in terms of electives is that other units have course caps which means that LS MA students sometimes cannot secure spaces in them, and they do not know this until a couple of weeks into the term." This is not a new problem for our Work and Society students and

requires a solution. The Reviewers rightly note that the “solution should come at the chair and administrative level.”

The Reviewers make other recommendations geared toward augmenting the richness and attractiveness of our MA and PhD programs. One is to open our supervisory roles and responsibilities to faculty beyond Labour Studies. This would, the Reviewers argue, serve to expose our students to the knowledge and expertise of such faculty while simultaneously lessening the burden of supervision at both the MA and PhD levels. The other recommendation was to give some thought to the development of an “Executive program, credit and/or non-credit, for trade unionists and perhaps others in various social movements.

The first of these recommendations has already been a subject of discussion among Labour Studies faculty. We continue to wonder about the perception of an academic unit that farms out PhD supervisory responsibilities to other faculty members. With regard to the development of an “Executive MA in Labour Studies, we, like the Social Sciences as a whole, need time to further discuss what would constitute a major departure from our established mandates.

Finally, the Reviewers indicate that the relative controversy regarding the name of our program should be resolved by changing the MA in Work and Society to MA in Labour Studies. In our May retreat we decided to follow that recommendation.

The Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, in consultation with the Director of the School of Labour Studies shall be responsible for monitoring the recommendations implementation plan. The details of the progress made will be presented in the progress report and filed in the Associate Vice-President, Faculty’s office.

Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations with the Department's and Dean's Responses

Recommendation	Proposed Follow-Up	Responsibility for Leading Follow-Up	Timeline for Addressing Recommendation
Review 1st year courses for topical interest and content	Issues discussed at May mini retreat and recommended changes will be implemented	First year course instructors; Undergraduate Committee Chair; Director	Fall 2017
Add "labour studies" content to current courses at both undergraduate and graduate levels	Issues discussed at May mini retreat and recommended changes will be implemented	Undergraduate and Graduate Committee Chairs	Fall 2017; Winter 2018
Add new courses with "labour studies" content, e.g., labour policy	Issues discussed at May mini retreat and recommended changes will be implemented when possible	Undergraduate and Graduate Committee Chairs	Dependent on additional faculty resources
Change name of MA in Work and Society to MA in Labour Studies	Issue discussed at May mini retreat and recommended change will be implemented	Graduate Chair; Director	Fall 2017
Expand space to accommodate School of Labour Studies	Issues discussed with Dean of Social Science and new space has been allocated to School of Labour Studies	Director; Staff	Summer/Fall 2017
Senior Administration and School of Labour Studies enter discussions to promote Labour Studies	Forward this recommendation to Senior Administration	Director	
Additional Faculty Resources	Forward this recommendation to Senior Administration	Director	

Dean's Response, Faculty of Science:

Overall, the reviewers provided a resounding endorsement of the programs, while noting some areas for improvement and recommending some specific actions to undertake in response. The reviewers emphasized the pioneering nature of Labour Studies' educational programs both nationally and internationally, and that the school continues to enjoy a leadership role internationally within labour studies. They also noted the dedication and commitment of faculty and staff in the School, which has been instrumental to maintaining strong programs over the last few years during which the School has experienced the loss of senior faculty through resignations and retirements. This commitment is exemplified by its openness to the recommendations of the reviewers and the speedy implementation of a number of them, which were discussed and approved at the School's May retreat.

The response by the School makes clear that it is taking the recommendations seriously and developing concrete, feasible plans for responding as soon as is feasible to those recommendations that are under its full control, and that it will work with the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) and the university on those recommendations that require broader consideration and action. The Dean's response focuses on those observations and recommendations in the reviewers' report that call for consideration and action by the Faculty of Social Sciences.

Recommendation: *The School and McMaster recruitment officials should discuss how to acquaint high school students with the degree because labour studies is not a 'teachable' subject in high schools.*

This past year, with support from the Provost, the FSS (joint with Humanities) hired a recruitment coordinator, for which high school outreach is a central element of the Faculty's recruitment strategy. Beginning this fall, the Dean would encourage Labour Studies to work with the recruitment coordinator to develop ways to highlight the program and the kinds of career opportunities it offers graduates as part of the high school outreach.

Recommendation: *With the new PhD program there will be a need for more TAs; these provide invaluable experience for graduate students at both the MA and PhD levels.*

The FSS recently adopted a new, needs-based approach to allocating TA resources to departments and schools. Labour Studies' TA allocation for 2017-18 explicitly took into account the new Ph.D. program, and in the future the TA allocation will automatically adjust to reflect the enrolment of graduate students in the MA and Ph.D. graduate programs.

Recommendation: *Labour Studies might consider adding "adjuncts with dissertation/MRP supervisory privileges" to its list of faculty, although the listed 'Associate members' of the School may serve this purpose; the parameters to these privileges can be listed elsewhere.*

The FSS is happy to work with Labour Studies to examine the role such appointments could play in strengthening the MA and Ph.D. programs.

Recommendation: *There is a request for more physical space for the program, particularly in light of the coming Ph.D. program. It was not clear to us that a final decision had been made on the use of seemingly available space on the 7th floor. We would encourage this expansion so that the Ph.D.*

program can begin with the possibility of more space for graduate students and perhaps a lounge and meeting room that comes under Labour Studies' jurisdiction.

With good reason, a number of observations and recommendations in the report centre on the theme of faculty resources. The School is small ---even in 2014 the total faculty complement was 5.35 FTE faculty members; further, it has experienced losses and turnover in the last few years as senior faculty have retired or resigned to take up positions at other institutions. This challenge will continue into the future – within the next few years it is expected that the two remaining senior faculty with roots dating back to the founding of the School will retire. This creates challenges of both quantity and historical continuity.

Since its founding, the School has had a strong preference for its faculty to hold joint appointments between Labour Studies and a disciplinary department in the FSS. Indeed, last year marked the first full-time appointment to the School. Because most Labour Studies faculty hold joint appointments, discussion of the faculty complement can be quite confusing when using headcounts, as the review did. For the sake of clarity, here is the recent history of the FTE faculty complement for the School:

2014-15: 5.35 FTE (4.35 tenure stream; 1.0 teaching stream)
2015-16: 4.85 FTE (2.85 tenure stream; 1.0 teaching stream; 1.0 CLA)
2016-17: 5.55 FTE (3.55 tenure stream; 1.0 teaching stream; 1.0 CLA)
2017-18: 5.30 FTE (4.30 tenure stream; 1.0 teaching stream)

This coming year, therefore, the FTE faculty complement is only 0.05 FTEs below its size in 2014. So the faculty complement effectively has been restored to its 2014-15 level. This situation is not accurately represented in the report, which relies on faculty headcounts rather than FTE counts.

This is not to deny that Labour Studies faces legitimate challenges with respect to faculty resources. It does face real challenges offering courses beyond those required for program completion and, as the review notes, the proposal for the Ph.D. program called for an increase of faculty FTEs as the Ph.D. program grows, which will be a challenge in the current fiscal environment. The FSS will continue to work with Labour Studies to address these challenges within the constraints it faces.

Recommendation: *University Advancement should be involved in a significant effort to promote and aid Labour Studies as the new Ph.D. program is launched. Advancement should work with the Labour Studies program to develop a plan for raising funds for specific projects that would highlight the international leadership of McMaster in the study of work. While an endowed chair might be too expensive, other projects could be entertained: a post-doctoral fellowship, specific graduate scholarships, or a visiting professorship for a global scholar, who would come to McMaster on a sabbatical and receive office space and a research allowance (a similar research fellowship at McGill is worth \$25,000) annually. All such efforts would raise the profile of Labour Studies, aid the recruiting of graduate students, and also potentially add to the curriculum if a post-doctoral fellow or visitor taught a course.*

This reflects a broader theme that the university administration needs to be aware of the international calibre of the School, and to work with the School to promote it. With respect to this specific recommendation, the re-organization of University Advancement, under which the Faculty of Social Sciences has an advancement officer dedicated to FSS alone, should create greater scope to highlight

and promote advancement opportunities associated with the School of Labour Studies. The Dean notes that he will work with both the advancement officer and the School on such initiatives.

Quality Assurance Committee Recommendation

McMaster's Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) reviewed the above documentation and the committee recommends that the program should follow the regular course of action with an 18-month progress report and a subsequent full external cyclical review to be conducted no later than 8 years after the start of the last review.