FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT
Institutional Quality Assurance Program (IQAP) Review

Master of Communications Management

Date of Review: February 19th and 20th, 2013

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 graduate program delivered by Communication Management. This report identifies the significant strengths of the program, 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.

<u>**Executive Summary of the Review**</u>
The Communication Management program submitted a self-study to the School of Graduate Studies February 2013. The self-study presented the program descriptions and learning outcomes, an analytical assessment of these two programs, and program data including the data collected from a student survey along with the standard data package prepared by the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis. Appended were the CVs for each full-time faculty member in the Department.

Three arm's-length external reviewers from Ontario (Canada), North Carolina (USA) and Massachusetts (USA) and one arm's length internal reviewer examined the materials and completed a site visit February 19 - 20, 2013. The visit included interviews with the Provost and Vice-President (Academic); Dean of the Faculty of Humanities; Dean of School of Graduate Studies; Chair of the Department of Communication Studies & Multimedia, the Program Director and meetings with groups of current students, full-time and part-time faculty and support staff.

In their report the review team found that the concept, design and delivery of McMaster University's Master of Communications Management (MCM) program appears to be consistent with McMaster University's academic strategic plan and supports the self-study conclusion that "The MCM does in professional communication what McMaster University programs in health sciences and engineering do for their fields." The Review Team agreed with the program self-study conclusion suggesting that the MCM program "delivers an innovative-graduate experience that connects research and teaching directly to the needs of the professions and the communities it serves." The program also met the standards identified in the October 2012 report of the Commission on Public Relations Education, *Standards for a Master's Degree in Public Relations: Educating for Complexity*. It was their assessment that the MCM curriculum is appropriate, is consistent with professional standards in communications management, both in Canada and globally, and indeed is stronger than most masters' programs in communications management. A major concern is what will happen when the large number of current first-year students in the program progress to their capstone or thesis projects. Will there be enough MCM faculty members to adequately teach and assess these projects? Even before these students reach the capstone

level, their numbers will force a change in the way that courses are currently taught (e.g., group discussions) and how assignments are evaluated (teaching assistants probably will be needed).

The head of the Master of Communication Management program and the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities submitted responses to the Reviewer's Report (August/September 2013). Specific recommendations were discussed and clarifications/corrections were presented. Follow-up actions were included. McMaster's Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) reviewed the documentation associated with the review and determined the program proceed with their 18 month report and in light of serious concerns raised around the governance model that the program should have another external review in 4 years instead of the normal cyclical review.

- **Strengths**
    - Program Delivery
    - Curriculum
- **Weaknesses**
    - Governance
    - Logistics of reading lists/textbook availability
    - Management of relatively large class sizes

Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations with the Program's and Dean's Responses
Recommendations
1.   Governance
It is the unanimous opinion of this Review Team that governance is the most pressing problem being faced by the MCM program. Despite the huge success of this program in all of the above categories, and despite the program's ability to sustain itself without any financial assistance from the provincial government, the MCM program lacks its own home within the University.

Program Response: The program agrees with the review team's recommendation that the most pressing issue for the MCM program is its lack of a clearly defined and stable institutional home. They believe it is clear from the information that is presented in this report that the MCM program is not wanted or welcome in the Communication Studies and Multimedia department. Therefore it is incumbent that the governance of the MCM be rectified immediately. Failing to do so puts both the students and untenured faculty at risk. The MCM should be nurtured and developed so that McMaster's leadership position can be maintained and strengthened.

Dean's Response: As the reviewers rightly point out, the institutional position of the MCM program is confusing, and needs to be clarified. They received conflicting information as to its relationship to the Department of Communication Studies and Multimedia (CSMM), and concluded: "Understandably, the lack of clarity about MCM's administrative relationship within the University is a source of uncertainty, frustration, strained relationships and tension among faculty and staff." The fact that the Dean's Office invited the director of the program and not the Department Chair to respond to this IQAP review suggests that it is an independent program, yet this policy has not been clearly communicated or even consistently applied by the Dean's Office.

The MCM IQAP reviewers were not the first to note organizational problems and confusion in CSMM. The University's Quality Assurance Committee already had recommended that the Faculty of Humanities

initiate a Department Review, following the IQAP review report of the undergraduate and graduate programs in Communication Studies (CMST) and Multimedia (MM). The Department has been reviewed, and the report as well as the response of the Department and Faculty, are being submitted to the Departmental Reviews Committee.

The MCM IQAP reviewers suggested that the program be given a separate institutional home, and the program director makes an impassioned case for it to be an autonomous program. In contrast, the Department reviewers suggested that the MCM program be separated from the Department, but only on a temporary basis, with the intention that the program might eventually return to the Department. I have reached a somewhat different conclusion. As the MCM IQAP reviewers noted, the lack of organizational clarity appears to have contributed to the tension in the Department, breeding misunderstanding and mistrust. So, as an experiment, the Dean's Office intends to clarify the position of the MCM program by clearly establishing and treating it as a graduate program run within the Department of Communication Studies and Multimedia. Its director will report to the Department Chair and the Department, just as the director of the MA in CSMM does. The staff of the MCM will report to the administrative coordinator of the Department, and will be part of the staff of CSMM.

It is the Faculty's hope that, while MCM continues to develop its own program identity, it will also become an integral part of what both IQAP and Department reviewers have identified as a Department housing a very strong group of researchers and teachers. We are hopeful that the MCM IQAP reviewers were correct in thinking that administrative confusion bred mistrust in the department. Those who expressed hostility to the program to the IQAP reviewers will come to appreciate the program once they better understand and have responsibility for it, and those members who have been teaching in the MCM program will come to appreciate just how much colleagues within their own Department can contribute to the program.

Responsibility for Leading Follow Up: Dean/Department Chair/Program Chair
Timeline for Addressing Recommendation: Update at 18 month follow-up report

2.   Logistics
Logistical issues concerning reading lists and textbook availability need to be addressed.
Program Response: We have already begun to address the logistic challenges. The dramatic
increase in class sizes has caused both instructors and administrators to review the manner in which learning materials and instruction are delivered to the class. The hiring of teaching assistants and of additional administrative staff has relieved this situation. However, staff resources remain stretched.

Responsibility for Leading Follow Up: Faculty/Department Chair/Program Chair
Timeline for Addressing Recommendation: Update at 18 month follow-up report

3.   Timely Feedback to Students
Now that instructors are serving larger classes for the first-year students, more attention should be directed to providing feedback earlier when possible and to managing the logistics of large discussion groups. The first-year students, themselves, have suggested that it might be desirable to split their large class into smaller groups for discussion purposes and that perhaps certain "rules of engagement" could be agreed upon to avoid situations where everyone's email inboxes become flooded with discussion threads.
Program Response: One of the innovations this year was the hiring of TAs for each of the first

year classes. This helped the instructors to more effectively deliver the content and respond to student questions in a timelier manner. They are also actively examining how to scale up the MCM pedagogy to meet the increasing popularity of the program. The MCM Retreat we have planned will be the beginning of a research and development project to gather evidence and then evaluate that evidence within their process of continuous improvement. We will also compile a guidebook of best practices, roles and responsibilities for the various aspects of the MCM student and faculty experience the three components of the MCM pedagogy: in-class learning during residency, webinar tutorials (Adobe Connect), asynchronous on-line learning (A2L)

Responsibility for Leading Follow Up: Faculty/Department Chair/Program Chair
Timeline for Addressing Recommendation: Update at 18 month follow-up report

4.   E-Learning Tools
The use of A2L and Adobe Connect should be re-evaluated.

Program Response: They are actively re-evaluating the value of the e-learning solutions that we use in the MCM, with a view of optimizing the student and faculty experience within our hybrid learning model.
Responsibility for Leading Follow Up: Faculty/Department Chair/Program Chair
Timeline for Addressing Recommendation: Update at 18 month follow-up report

Dean's Response to Recommendations related to Teaching:
The proposal to develop a guidebook on best practices, particularly directed to assisting instructors and students in making the most of the in-class, webinar and asynchronous sessions, is a good one. The program members are also proposing to review the platform used to deliver online education; the Faculty will ensure that, in undertaking this review, they work closely with the expert support staff in the Humanities Media and Computing Centre as well as the McMaster Institute for Innovation in Teaching and Learning. The program director has responded to some of the issues raised by hiring teaching assistants and additional staff. The Faculty will work with the Department Chair and director of the program to review and monitor these solutions, to ensure that resources are allocated effectively, and to ensure that students are receiving the educational experience that they expect from this program.

<div align="center">

Quality Assurance Committee Recommendation
</div>

McMaster's Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) reviewed the documentation associated with the review and determined the program proceed with their 18 month report and in light of serious concerns raised around the governance model that the program should have another external review in 4 years instead of the normal cyclical review.