

Implementation Report for the 2020-2021 Cyclical Review of the Department of Communication Studies Programs

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INTRODUCTION

This is the first implementation report for the cyclical review of the Department of Communication Studies undergraduate and graduate programs that took place in 2020-2021. The full language for each recommendation from the External Reviewers' Report has been included, along with the corresponding information about implementation from the Final Assessment Report. For each recommendation, the unit has provided an update on the progress or action made toward the implementation of that recommendation, followed by comments from the relevant dean(s) and the Program Review Sub-Committee. Taking into account the updates provided by the unit and the comments from the dean(s), the Program Review Sub-Committee will review the report and determine if all recommendations have been implemented satisfactorily or if a subsequent report will be required.

RECOMMENDATIONS PRIORITIZED FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

| Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report) | Responsibility for Implementation | Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable) | Anticipated Completion Date |
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| Recommendation #1: The six areas of concentration implemented in the last program review are successful. The students recognize the areas and their usefulness. This is a success; this organization of the program should continue. To enhance undergraduate recognition of and awareness of the concentrations, a webpage with more information is recommended. This webpage would also assist with student navigation through the program. | Department | | September 2021 |

Unit Update: This recommendation has been completed. The Department website now contains information

about the program concentrations. Students continue to report that they find Communication Studies’ concentrations to be helpful and useful. The department continues to review the concentrations and continues to update its website to reflect the most up-to-date program information. The department will make changes to program information on its website in summer 2024, once the Curriculum Committee concludes its current review.

Arts Decanal Comments: This has been successfully completed.

Program Review Sub-Committee Comments: The comments provided indicate that this recommendation has been completed by publishing information about the program’s concentrations; no further reporting is required.

| Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report) | Responsibility for Implementation | Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable) | Anticipated Completion Date |
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| <p>Recommendation #2: A greater linkage in the methods course to the qualitative methods used in the program and a reciprocal mention/emphasis on these methods in the third- and fourth-year courses would reinforce learning in the program.</p> | <p>Department</p> | | <p>April 2022</p> |

Unit Update: This recommendation is currently in progress. Communication Studies has struck a committee to consider significant revisions to its methods curriculum. The committee will report its recommendations to the Curriculum Committee by September 2024, with the aim of making any necessary curriculum changes in time for September 2025.

Arts Decanal Comments: The Dean of Arts looks forward to working with the Dept. as it introduced changes to its curriculum to meet this recommendation.

Program Review Sub-Committee Comments: It sounds like this recommendation has been considered by the committee and that changes to the program curriculum (if needed) are in progress. No further reporting is required.

| <p>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers’ Report: There was a suggestion made that the first-year courses, while effective and informative, could do a better job of foreshadowing the concepts that will be examined in later years. It appears that there may, at present, be a slight disconnect between first-year content and the subject matter of subsequent courses.</p> | | | |
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| Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report) | Responsibility for Implementation | Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable) | Anticipated Completion Date |

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| <p>Recommendation #3: There was a suggestion made that the first-year courses, while effective and informative, could do a better job of foreshadowing the concepts that will be examined in later years. It appears that there may, at present, be a slight disconnect between first-year content and the subject matter of subsequent courses.</p> | <p>Department</p> | | <p>April 2022</p> |
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Unit Update: This recommendation has been completed. Communication Studies has made changes to its introductory curriculum to better foreshadow its senior curriculum and is considering formal changes to the title and description of one of the introductory courses to reflect this approach. A departmental committee met to review the CS introductory curriculum, and the committee recommended specific changes to CS101 (one of the two required introductory courses in the program). The regular CS101 instructor has already incorporated one of the changes: to foreshadow upper-level courses in the major by structuring CS101 according to the department’s six concentrations. In the updated syllabus, all weeks’ topics fall under the heading of one of the six offered concentrations, with two weeks per concentration. The regular instructor is considering adopting a second suggestion from the committee in the upcoming AY: to include short research talks by CS faculty throughout the term in CS101, to further enhance connections to upper year courses. The department expects both changes will help students make connections between this first year course and the upper year courses in the undergraduate program. The committee made further suggestions that are pending review by the Curriculum Committee: to consider revision of the course title, and to consider revision of the course description to reflect the above-mentioned changes. The Curriculum Committee will be reviewing these suggestions in summer 2024 for potential revision to the course calendar. Regardless of the Curriculum Committee’s decision on the course title and description, the department expects the already incorporated changes are resulting in better student understanding of connections between the junior and senior curriculum.

Arts Decanal Comments: The Dean of Arts appreciates the efforts made to adjust first-year CS curriculum to better prepare students for what is to come in subsequent years.

Program Review Sub-Committee Comments: The committee appreciates the thorough updates provided by the Department about how this recommendation has been implemented in order to ensure that students are introduced to the necessary knowledge and skills in 100-level courses. No further reporting is required.

| <p>Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)</p> | <p>Responsibility for Implementation</p> | <p>Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)</p> | <p>Anticipated Completion Date</p> |
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| <p>Recommendation #4: The merger of Women and Gender Studies into the Communications program would be challenging, and a curriculum benefit is</p> | <p>Department, Dean of Arts</p> | | <p>December 2021</p> |

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| <p>not easily identifiable. The experience with Cultural Studies indicates that the resulting loss of staff and support, especially for advising, has diminished the impact of the program. It appears that the only gain to be realized by merging Women’s Studies with Communications would be a burden on the staff and reduced support to that program, putting a further strain on Communications. There are some curricular benefits, but they may be realized without the merger.</p> | | | |
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Unit Update: After significant departmental discussion and consideration, the CS Department decided against a merger with the Women and Gender Studies program, which is in line with this recommendation. One consideration was the Department’s intention to focus on its core strengths and challenges without diluting its focus. Another consideration was, as reviewers noted, the administrative burden that would come with supporting another major without further resources. WGS administrative support was later placed with CS. At that, time the department had one full-time and one part-time administrative assistant. Later, upon the unexpected resignation of the department’s part-time administrative assistant with no replacement, WGS administrative support was again moved out of the department. The department’s remaining administrative assistant has reconfigured her workload to adjust to the loss of part-time support and will not be able to take WGS administration back into her workload. FOA and CS have agreed that WGS should remain with its external administrative team, and CS will not be merging with WGS academically or administratively. Communication Studies also could use further administrative support.

Arts Decanal Comments: This is no longer a matter under consideration.

Program Review Sub-Committee Comments: The comments provided indicate that this recommendation is no longer a relevant one for the Department; no further updates are required.

| Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report) | Responsibility for Implementation | Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable) | Anticipated Completion Date | Additional Notes |
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| <p>Recommendation #5: The MA program could be promoted by emphasizing the core strengths within the program, crystallized in the undergraduate program with the six areas of concentration as well as in the distinctive research specialties of the faculty members of the department. The faculty</p> | <p>Department, Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies</p> | | <p>December 2021</p> | <p>Contact FGPS Communications Coordinator for assistance.</p> |

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| members of the department have a very active research practice. Their work should also be highlighted to promote the MA program, as potentials supervisors, committee members, employers of research assistants, and primarily as specialists in their field. | | | | |
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Unit Update: This recommendation – to better promote the MA program – has been completed. Communication Studies has strengthened the profile of its MA program through collaborating for the last 2 years in a cross-Canada workshop for applicants interested in communication studies and cultural studies programs. This, along with other promotional efforts, have emphasized aspects of the MA program that sets it apart: particularly, the co-op program stream. In addition, as per Recommendation 5, the department also built a Research and Creation website for the department, highlighting departmental strengths including external funding that might used to employ graduate RAs, as well as a developing archive of department-associated publications, shows, events, and calls for papers for future projects. The department believes these promotional efforts have been and will continue to successful, and particularly looks forward to the impact the new Research and Creation website may have on recruitment of future graduate cohorts.

Arts Decanal Comments: The CS Graduate Program continues to be strong and to attract high quality students.

FGPS Decanal Comments: The Unit has undertaken several initiatives to promote the MA program. In addition, a multi-year initiative led by Recruitment and Admissions and the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies to produce new future student program pages received a prestigious 2023 Gold Hermes Creative Award. See: <https://hermesawards.com/> and <https://enter.amcpros.com/hermes/entry/wilfrid-laurier-universityfuture-student-program-pages/>. Congratulations on the development of the Research and Creation website. That looks like a great resource and means to showcase research and creative efforts by the faculty and graduate students. I suggest linking the Research and Creation website to the new future student program page for the MA program – probably best positioned at the top of the Research section.

Program Review Sub-Committee Comments: The comments provided indicate that actions have been taken place in support of this recommendation. No further reporting on it is required. The Department is encouraged to consider the FGPS Dean’s suggestion about linking the webpages.

| Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report) | Responsibility for Implementation | Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable) | Anticipated Completion Date |
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| Recommendation #6: Communication Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University is a highly successful Department from the standpoint of student success, the high-quality faculty research, and teaching | Department, Dean of Arts, Provost and Vice-President: Academic | Faculty of Arts, Provost and Vice-President: Academic | Ongoing |

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| <p>achievements of the faculty members. The Department is a successful component of the university, overall. To assure this continued success, it is recommended that four new full-time faculty positions be created. This action would help to alleviate some strains in the department, support the graduate program, increase the ratio of full-time professors teaching courses, and allow for some of the projects such as designing additional information pages to come to fruition.</p> | | | |
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Unit Update: The completion of this recommendation is not fully within the department’s control, but we are pleased to report that progress on it has been made since the cyclical program review. Since the cyclical program review took place, CS received two full-time-faculty positions via Laurier’s university-wide Inclusive Excellence Initiative. As noted in this and prior responses, the department remains understaffed with tenure-track faculty. To manage the unmet need for more faculty, the department previously took measures to limit its growth and focus on academic excellence. At the time, this meant pursuing structural changes with the support of the Dean to restrict the growth of undergraduate majors. However, in 2023, working with the Dean’s office, Communication Studies reassessed its goals and determined that its new goal is now maintaining or slightly growing the major, a directional change for the program. In concert with FOA advisors and the Dean’s office, Communication Studies worked to make the major more accessible to prospective majors by lowering minimum grades for progression requirements and simplifying requirements for undergraduate majors. As it navigates these shifts, the department has assessed that it still needs more tenure-track faculty and maintains a goal of faculty renewal, as some faculty renewal is still pending. The FoA decanal response suggests working with the department to develop a plan to resolve this issue, and Communication Studies invites the opportunity to create that plan. Recent discussions with the Dean’s office suggest that further faculty renewal should be based in new visions of departmental specialization and offerings, which are a planned topic for future faculty retreats. Increased staffing of Communication Studies would best enable the department to design and sustain a Doctoral program per the FGPS response to the review. A committee has been struck on the possibility of a doctoral program, and a departmental vote is forthcoming.

Arts Decanal Comments: As Communication Studies increases the number of Majors, it will be possible to make a case to the Provost for additional salary lines to support the growing teaching load.

FGPS Decanal Comments: If the Unit decides to proceed with the development of a PhD program, FGPS would be pleased to provide support and assistance. Certainly, this would be in line with Goal 2.2. of the Strategic Academic Plan (*Laurier will strategically grow the diversity and capacity of our professional and research-based graduate programs.*) and Laurier’s aspirations to thrive as a comprehensive university.

Program Review Sub-Committee Comments: The committee is pleased to hear that the Department has been able to grow its faculty complement since the cyclical program review took place and is encouraged to continue its visioning conversations. No further reporting is required, and the Department can reach out to the Quality Assurance Office for more information about the new program development process and timelines if it wishes to pursue the creation of a doctoral program.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Vice Dean of the Faculty of Arts: The Communication Studies department is doing very well with implementing proposals and continuing to navigate the challenges of the present day. We will do our best to support long-term planning and to try to ensure that faculty have the resources they need to succeed.

Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies: A continued strength of the graduate program, as recognized by the External Reviewers and I agree, is the professional development opportunity via the co-op option and flexibility to complete the degree via the MRP, thesis or coursework, all supported by a strong contingent of research-active faculty. I commend the Unit in their diligent efforts to implement recommendations from the External Reviewers.

Program Review Sub-Committee: The committee appreciates the updates provided by the Department on the ways in which it has implemented the recommendations made by the external review committee during the last cyclical program review. There was evidence in the comments provided by both the Department and the Dean(s) that all recommendations were underway or already successfully completed. Communication Studies is to be commended for this work and the committee wishes the Department good luck on the curriculum review ideas that are in progress. No further Implementation Reports will be required in advance of the unit's next scheduled cyclical program review in 2027-2028.

Subsequent Report Required: No