

## Final Assessment Report Academic Review

### General Studies

#### A. Summary

1. The Programs' Self Study was considered and approved by the Academic Review Committee on January 5, 2012.
2. The Review Committee consisted of two external reviewers: Gillian Siddall (Lakehead University) and Jonathan Finn (Wilfrid Laurier University), and an internal reviewer, Nancy Francis (Kinesiology).
3. The site visit occurred on January 18-20, 2012.
4. The Reviewers' Report was received on February 24, 2012.
5. The Program response from Mathematics and Science was received on February 28, 2012.
6. The Program response from Humanities was received on May 4, 2012.
7. The Program response from Social Sciences was received on May 8, 2012.
8. The Dean of Mathematics and Science's response from Ejaz Ahmed was received on February 28, 2012.
9. The Dean of Humanities' response from Douglas Kneale was received on May 17, 2012.
10. The Dean of Social Sciences' response from Thomas Dunk was received on May 18, 2012.

The academic programs which were examined as part of the review included:

Bachelor of Arts: Pass

Bachelor of Science: Honours and Pass

This review was conducted under the terms and conditions of the IQAP approved by Senate on Jun. 6, 2011.

The reviewers assigned the following Outcome Categories:

Bachelor of Arts program: Outcome Category 3, "Good Quality With Concerns"

Bachelor of Science programs: Outcome Category 2, "Good Quality"

## B. Strengths of the Program

The reviewers stated that the “General Studies Program currently serves a critical programmatic role for a large cohort of students.” They noted that the Bachelor of Arts program “graduates roughly 100 students each year. This makes General Studies one of the largest [programs] in the Humanities and Social Sciences”.

With regards to learning outcomes in the Bachelor of Arts program, the reviewers suggested that:

[degree level] expectations need to be modified to make reference to the social sciences and humanities, rather than to a “discipline”. In other words, we would recommend focusing more on breadth than on depth...and celebrating that as a strength of this degree.

They went on to say that the General Studies Programs in Arts and Science serve students:

from many different academic backgrounds and with many different goals. This diversity is clearly the most challenging aspect of the General Studies Programs, but it also makes them sites of great potential...General Studies must remain a flexible program option for its diversity of students while at the same time offering a rigorous, challenging and rewarding choice for students who do not pursue traditional degree paths.

With regards to the Bachelor of Science degree, the reviewers stated that the program serves the “relatively few” students who are enrolled quite well and “see no pressing need for any substantial change to the Program”. They noted that the DLEs “do a good job of reflecting the experience of students taking that degree.”

## C. Opportunities for Improvement and Enhancement

The reviewers provided eight discrete recommendations for the **General Studies: Arts** program (hereafter Humanities and Social Sciences - HUSS). As there is no Chair or Director of the General Studies program, the Unit responses were submitted by the Associate Deans of the Faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences. The recommendations of the reviewers are considered as follows:

HUSS 1. General Studies be made a recognized major.

In his response, the Associate Dean, Humanities noted that this recommendation cannot be implemented under current Senate regulations as found in the Faculty Handbook (III.6.8) with regards to the definition and organization of major programs. He suggested that the FHB be amended to allow General Studies students to declare minors, which would:

give their programs more structure and logic as they would be following courses of study prescribed by Departments and Centres, would facilitate their registration in upper year courses, and would provide a groundwork for a four-year degree program in General Studies.

The Associate Dean, Social Sciences concurred stating:

a minor in the degree opens the door to register prior to the date published in the Registration guide for non-majors and can provide a mini focus to their program as it does for people registered in major degrees. Changes would have to be made to the language surrounding 'minor' in the Faculty Handbook.

The Dean of the Faculty of Humanities stated, "We do not have the resources to mount a Major in General Studies", but supported discussing the possibility of a minor.

The Dean of Social Sciences responded, "Our intention is to reframe the regulations for taking a minor at Brock".

UPC suggested that a minor (or two minors), "would allow for a suite of focused courses and would also ease some of the pre-requisite pressures."

ARC accepts that this recommendation cannot be implemented as stated. The Committee recognizes that the issue of proposing a minor in General Studies is pending.

### Implementation Plan

Recommendation NOT accepted.

HUSS 2. General Studies be renamed to remove “general” from the title.

The Associate Dean, Social Sciences responded to this recommendation by saying that, “Changing the designation from General Studies to BA Social Sciences provides a better image for the degree being sought and removes the stigma of general studies as a default program.” She also suggested that it is “more attractive for admissions in that the designation is more marketable to incoming students.”

The Associate Dean, Humanities responded, “we heartily agree with this recommendation, and ... suggest that there be instituted a degree program Bachelor of Arts in Humanities.”

The Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences stated that he concurred “with Associate Dean Corman’s proposal for a BA Social Sciences”.

The Dean of the Faculty of Humanities responded that, “We shall have to give some thought to a new name (for the degree) that avoids the stigma of “General” but does not trespass on “Humanities” from a future recruitment perspective.”

UPC “expressed some support for this sentiment, but had no suggestions for an alternative name for this program.”

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation. ARC notes that a name change would constitute a major modification of the program in either or both Faculties.

**Implementation Plan (First Priority)**

Responsible for approving:	Deans of Social Sciences and Humanities
Responsible for resources:	Deans of Social Sciences and Humanities
Responsible for implementation:	Deans of Social Sciences and Humanities
Timeline:	Deans to report by end of academic year 2012/13

### HUSS 3. General Studies should combine the Humanities and Social Sciences.

The Associate Dean, Social Sciences did not concur completely with this recommendation, saying that a combined degree would “have to be **in addition to** the existing degree option for the students currently registered in General Studies.” In her view, an interdisciplinary major degree would be an appropriate starting point:

to attract high-achieving students to Brock and to develop an innovative interdisciplinary curriculum to position these high achieving students for graduate school and entry into the Faculty of Education.

Such a new major degree would not, however, address the needs of most of the students in General Studies who are struggling to “attain a major average even of 60”, and “would likely discourage [new students] from accepting admission to an Interdisciplinary major with the proposed required courses.”

The Associate Dean, Humanities responded that a combined degree would “accommodate and support a genuine interdisciplinarity” while separate degrees “may make it difficult for people who wish to study in subject areas across the Faculties to gain sufficient credits in either Faculty”. Having said this, he stated that “the University would gain little by insisting on a collaborative program” when Social Sciences is opposed.

The Dean of Humanities noted that his “preference would be to keep the two Faculties combined in one General program and under one name”, but was “prepared to say adieu to Social Sciences if they truly wish to forge a different and more specialized destiny.”

The Dean of Social Sciences concurred with the statement from the Associate Dean that the degrees remain separate “[d]ue to unrecognized complexities” of the issues facing these students.

ARC considers that this recommendation has not been accepted as there is no consensus among the key parties on a preferred solution.

#### **Implementation Plan**

Recommendation NOT accepted at this time.

**HUSS 4. Centralize the administrative and advisory structure.**

In his response, the Associate Dean, Humanities asserted that they “do not see this as viable in the absence of a fully developed program with assigned faculty and a program committee.” He suggested instead that “there be a General Studies Committee for the two Faculties together or, if we proceed with two degrees, for each Faculty.”

The Associate Dean, Social Sciences responded to this recommendation by saying, “Moving to this administrative structure is an unnecessary expense at this time.”

Both the Dean of Humanities and the Dean of Social Sciences agreed with this assessment.

In light of the responses to Recommendations 2 and 3, ARC considers that this recommendation has not been accepted.

**Implementation Plan**

Recommendation NOT accepted.

HUSS 5. The program should be administered by a faculty member.

The Associate Dean, Social Sciences did not agree with this recommendation, but preferred to continue with the present method, saying:

The intention was that the Associate Dean would administer these degrees within their respective faculties...Advising would continue to be shared by the appropriate faculty-based advisor and by the Registrar's Office.

The Associate Dean, Humanities suggested that “[w]ithout the weight of a Centre and a program committee, the faculty member would, were the university able to find a suitable volunteer, be a lonely voice with little institutional sway”. He also suggested that at times the administration of the program “needs significant decanal persuasive power”, as well as “decanal consultation and permissions” and therefore benefitted from close proximity to the Dean's Office.

The Dean of Humanities and the Dean of Social Sciences both agreed with this assessment.

As ARC understands it, the nature of the problem which the reviewers wished to address was the displacement/alienation of students from an academic “home” and the need for a sense of ownership on the part of General Studies students. However, given existing conditions and ongoing developments of the program, it is not possible to accept the recommendation as it has been articulated.

#### **Implementation Plan**

Recommendation NOT accepted.

## HUSS 6. Creating capstone/cohort experiences.

The Associate Dean, Humanities responded that this would work for only a “certain segment” of General Studies students. In his view it would:

increase the chance that the General Studies degree program was seen as a significant and honourable course of studies. However given the fluidity and the widely varied pattern of studies of people who end up in (or leave) General Studies, capstone/cohort courses could not work as requirements, they would have to be optional.

The Associate Dean, Social Sciences stated that she “would consider including the option of taking a capstone course were resourcing of a 20 credit degree [made] available in the future.” The Dean of Social Sciences concurred.

The Dean of Humanities stated that “the proposal to make such a course mandatory is problematic. I support the optional route.”

UPC was mainly supportive of this recommendation (as well as HUSS 8, below), but suggested that “overall curriculum development in this program...would likely open up capstone and 20 credit discussions in addition to other possible developments.” UPC encouraged “the General Studies program to consult with curriculum planners in CPI [the Centre for Pedagogical Innovation] for assistance on future developments.”

ARC considers that this recommendation is still under active consideration and that its fate will depend on further developments with regard to the future of the program.

### **Implementation Plan**

On hold pending further discussions. Dean of Humanities and Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of the 2012-13 academic year.

HUSS 7. Develop a General Studies methodology requirement.

The Associate Dean, Social Sciences responded that “In the proposed Bachelor of Arts Social Science degree, consideration will be given to building an inquiry component into the program plans”.

The Associate Dean, Humanities responded that the recommendation is “a good idea in promoting the program as serious and honourable option for students” but “not perhaps entirely workable as a requirement given the variety of students with differing academic paths the degree program serves.”

The Dean of Humanities stated that the course “should be optional, not mandatory.”

The Dean of Social Sciences concurred with the Associate Dean, Social Sciences.

UPC stated that “methodology aspects would be adequately addressed in the courses available, albeit recognizing that a minor would likely allow for this to be much more likely.”

ARC considers that this recommendation is still under active consideration and that its fate will depend on further developments with regard to the future of the program.

**Implementation Plan**

On hold pending further discussions. Dean of Humanities and Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of the 2012-13 academic year.

HUSS 8. Develop a 20-credit degree program.

In his response, the Associate Dean, Humanities stated:

Were students able to have minors and so be in a position to advance to more senior levels in some subjects, and with the options of capstone, methodology and inquiry courses, a 20-credit degree program is feasible and would improve the image and impact of the degree program. We consequently support moving in this direction.

The Associate Dean, Social Sciences noted that the “FOSS is seriously considering this proposal. Future research will be undertaken to determine the demand for such a degree.”

The Deans of Humanities and Social Sciences both supported the recommendation.

UPC supported this recommendation for the same reasons given in support of recommendation Arts 6.

ARC considers that this recommendation is still under active consideration and that its fate will depend on further developments with regard to the future of the program.

#### **Implementation Plan**

On hold pending further discussions. Dean of Humanities and Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of the 2012-13 academic year.

The reviewers provided four discrete recommendations for the **General Studies: Science** program. As there is no Chair or Director of the program, the Associate Dean, Undergraduate, Mathematics and Science provided the unit response. The recommendations of the reviewers are considered as follows:

Science 1. General studies to be renamed to remove “general” from the title

The Associate Dean, Mathematics and Science responded:

We are currently considering possible name changes for this program and will consult with the Recruitment Office and the Faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences in order to select a title that is compatible with all Brock’s General Studies programs.

The Dean of Mathematics and Science concurred.

ARC considers that this recommendation has been accepted and is in the process of being implemented.

<b>Implementation Plan (First Priority)</b>	
Responsible for approving:	Dean of Mathematics and Sciences
Responsible for resources:	Dean of Mathematics and Sciences
Responsible for implementation:	Dean of Mathematics and Sciences
Timeline:	Dean to report at end of academic year 2012/13

Science 2. Advising should be done in-house.

The Associate Dean, Mathematics and Science responded that in the short term responsibility will remain with the Associate Dean, Undergraduate and the Faculty Academic Advisor, as there is a very small number of students in the program. He added that “additional sources of advising may need to be found”, due to a significant increase in student offers for the 2012-2013 academic year.

The Dean of Mathematics and Science concurred.

ARC considers that this recommendation has been implemented. No further action is deemed warranted.

#### **Implementation Plan**

ARC notes that the Department has implemented the recommendation and no further action is required at this time.

Science 3. Compile statistical information on General Studies students.

The Associate Dean, Mathematics and Science responded that they would present the Office of Institutional Analysis with this request, “given their ready access to the relevant data and systems necessary to collect and compile relevant information pertaining to these students.” They added that the “Office of the Dean is agreeable to assisting with this task as needed.”

ARC considers that this recommendation has been accepted and is in the process of being implemented.

**Implementation Plan (Second Priority)**

Responsible for approving:	Dean of Mathematics and Sciences
Responsible for resources:	Dean of Mathematics and Sciences
Responsible for implementation:	Dean and Institutional Analysis and Planning
Timeline:	Dean to report at end of academic year 2013/14

Science 4. Channel more students into General Studies Science.

The Associate Dean, Mathematics and Science responded that “This recommendation has been implemented in the Offers of Admission for the 2012-13 academic year”.

ARC considers the recommendation (to channel more students who enrol in General Studies into General Studies Science) to have been implemented. No further action is deemed warranted.

**Implementation Plan**

ARC notes that the Department has implemented the recommendation and no further action is required at this time.

## **D. Recommendations to be Implemented**

The IQAP requires that ARC “set out and prioritize the recommendations that are selected for implementation.” Using the specific ARC proposals enunciated above, the following priorities are proposed:

First Priority:

Recommendations HUSS 2 and Science 1

Second Priority

Recommendation Science 3

Already Implemented

Recommendations Science 2 and Science 4

On Hold

Recommendations HUSS 6, HUSS 7 and HUSS 8.

## **E. Recommendations that Will Not be Implemented**

Recommendations HUSS 1, HUSS 3, HUSS 4, and HUSS 5.

November 27, 2012