

Final Assessment Report Academic Review

MA in Social Justice and Equity Studies

A. Summary

1. The Program's Self Study was considered and approved by the Academic Review Committee of Senate on March 1, 2012.
2. The Review Committee consisted of two external reviewers: William Carroll (University of Victoria) and Stephen Slemon (University of Alberta), and an internal reviewer, Allison Glazebrook (Classics).
3. The site visit occurred on March 18-20, 2012.
4. The Reviewers' Report was received on May 4, 2012.
5. The Program's response was received on June 18, 2012.
6. The Dean of Social Sciences response from Tom Dunk was received on July 9, 2012.
7. The Dean of Graduate Studies response from Mike Plyley was received on October 3, 2012.

The academic program which was examined during the review was the MA in Social Justice and Equity Studies.

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

The reviewers assigned the program: Outcome Category 1, "Good Quality with National Prominence."

B. Strengths of the Program

The reviewers stated that “[t]he MA in Social Justice and Equity Studies (SJES) at Brock University is an academically rigorous, politically committed, and socially active degree program that combines genuine interdisciplinary with real community outreach.” They went on to say that “[i]n its combination of theoretical with experience-based learning, it places itself at the cutting edge of pedagogical innovation.” They noted that “Faculty members who work in SJES have earned national and international reputations for research output in their specific disciplinary fields.”

The reviewers found the statements regarding learning objectives “to be very clearly framed, appropriate to both institutional and program-specific visions, and linked to definite outcome assessment measures.” They stated that the program’s coursework combined with the thesis or major research paper incorporate all of the six graduate degree level expectations.

The reviewers noted that the Program “strives to create a strong community of students and faculty” and commented on “the large complement of excellent, dedicated faculty members associated with this program.” They found that the “program is successful in producing graduates who are accepted into PhD or professional degree programs, or who obtain employment in educational, public-sector, nonprofit or private-sector contexts.”

In conclusion, the reviewers stated that the program was of Category 1 (Good Quality with National Prominence) calibre because of its “singularity, its proven record in student training, its impressive social commitment, and the academic excellence of its participating faculty members.”

C. Opportunities for Improvement and Enhancement

The reviewers provided 16 discrete recommendations.

1. The program might consider reframing its learning outcomes with regard to the application of knowledge.

In its response, the Program pointed out that “other learning objectives articulated in the Self-Study do touch on the question of praxis,” but acknowledged “the need for additional program emphasis on an activist orientation connected to the application of knowledge.” It suggested that this recommendation would “very likely be addressed as the program explores developing an activist, community-oriented elective or summer course/practicum in response to other suggested recommendations.”

The Faculty Dean concurred, stating that he would encourage the Director to pursue “[e]ither one or both of a community-oriented elective or practicum component to the program.”

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation.

Implementation Plan (First Priority)

Responsible parties:	Program
Responsible for resources:	Dean of Social Sciences
Responsible for implementation:	Program
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of December 2013

2. The program needs to introduce measures, in the thesis stream in particular, which will help expedite most students' completion within the funded period.

The Program stated that “we see the issue of time to completion as complex and requiring a number of strategies, both by the SJES program and at the level of Graduate Studies.” It agreed with the reviewers' suggestion that it allow “for greater flexibility in MRP and thesis length, especially to allow for differences in scholarly writing practices across the disciplines.” The Program also proposed an “extension of the funded period” by one term for the MRP and thesis, because it is presently “simply of insufficient length to allow [students] to complete all program requirements.” Related to this, the Program suggested that a “less generous Graduate Studies deadline” might be helpful in maintaining student focus on completion. Finally, the Program recommended instituting “a regular fall term meeting between the Director and faculty who supervise in the program to discuss effective supervision of student research.”

The Faculty Dean noted that the MA in SJES might require extra time to complete, as it “often involves community involvement and qualitative research” and that it takes time to develop a “level of trust and familiarity between the researcher and the community members.” He stated that he was ambivalent about the suggestion regarding less generous Graduate Studies deadlines, but supported the idea of regular fall meetings between the Director and faculty.

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated that he agreed with the recommendation, and noted that there were “several excellent progress reporting schemes amongst the various Brock graduate programs to emulate.”

ARC considers the recommendation to address the issue of “time-to-completion” to be accepted and in the process of implementation. The Committee believes that the Program, in consultation with the Dean of Social Sciences and the Dean of Graduate Studies, is best positioned to determine appropriate strategies to deal with this issue.

Implementation Plan (First Priority)

Responsible parties:	Program
Responsible for resources:	Deans of Social Sciences and Graduate Studies
Responsible for implementation:	Program
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by end of December 2013

3. The various components of SJES should be integrated into a single space.

The Program stated that “[w]e wholly endorse the recommendation” and suggested that “such designated space will help support the culture of the program.” It noted that the issue is “partly being addressed with the new allocation of a designated graduate room for SJES students in Walker Complex Room 262,” but that the program still required a lounge space as well as room for the Director. On an institutional level, the Program proposed that the “University needs to address this larger [lack of] space issue to support the development of a graduate student culture at Brock.”

The Faculty Dean stated his support for this recommendation, saying “[s]pace is a major problem within the Faculty of Social Sciences.” He endorsed the recommendation for both larger cohesive space for SJES and the “call for a graduate student space” in the University.

The Dean of Graduate Studies noted that “[a]ny graduate program will be stronger, and will better support the students if all resources, especially the human resources are located in a certain location.”

ARC acknowledges that a central location would assist the program to build the collegiality necessary for it to flourish. The recommendation must be considered in the context of a general lack of space at the university, which is affecting many units. The Committee considers this recommendation to be accepted, but recognizes that implementation will require further consultation with the administrative units responsible for space allocation and management.

Implementation Plan (Second Priority)

Responsible parties:	Dean of Social Sciences
Responsible for resources:	Dean of Social Sciences, Senate Committee on Information Technology and Infrastructure, Special Advisor on Buildings and Space, Provost
Responsible for implementation:	Dean of Social Sciences
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by end of December 2014

4. The Faculty of Graduate Studies should review its recruitment package for both Canadian and international students to the MA in SJES, with a view to bringing the program into alignment with comparable programs in the region, and in light of the potential for the SJES MA to attract world-class applicants.

The Program stated that it “strongly agreed with the need for the University and Graduate Studies to enrich the recruitment packages offered to potential graduate students.”

The Faculty Dean agreed that “funding for graduate students at Brock must be compatible with competitor institutions,” but added that “more faculty members need to recognize their responsibility to try to generate money to support graduate students through research grants.”

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated that his Faculty would be willing to examine this issue, but needed more information regarding the lack of alignment in terms of specifically identified comparable programs and the “steps required, and potential costs of bringing such ‘alignment’ into reality.”

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted.

Implementation Plan (First Priority)

Responsible parties:	Program
Responsible for resources:	Program, Deans of Social Sciences and Graduate Studies
Responsible for implementation:	Program
Timeline:	Dean(s) to report by end of December 2013

5. The Faculty should review its teaching-release allocation to the SJES director, and review the part-time capacity of the SJES administrative assistant.

The Program argued strongly that a .5 course release “is not sufficient for the GPD of an interdisciplinary program” to “meet his/her obligations.” It also stated that the “program needs a full-time Administrative Coordinator to assist the Director” and to handle “the additional load attached to exploring and implementing program change.” The Program also raised the issue of the budgetary aspects of many of the recommended changes, saying that funds were needed to implement these recommendations as well as to improve the daily operations budget.

The Faculty Dean stated that he would be willing to consider the course-release recommendation, but pointed out “that in relative terms the level of administrative support provided for the program, given the number of students involved, is comparable or more generous than other units.” He noted that “there is no room in the Faculty base-budget to add more permanent support staff to SJES in the current budget climate.”

The Faculty Dean also addressed the budgetary aspects which were raised by the program, saying that “[t]he ‘daily operations budget’ referred to is developed according to a formula agreed to by the Chairs and Directors of FOSS. There is no clear evidence that the budget is insufficient and it is certainly as generous as that allocated to any other program in FOSS.”

The Senate Graduate Studies Committee stated that it was:

especially concerned with the widespread inadequate resourcing for interdisciplinary programs such as Social Justice and Equity Studies. We recommend that ARC consider the needs of this Program in the context of the broader need to provide sufficient and stable support for these interdisciplinary initiatives, in a manner that will allow these programs to engage in effective long-term planning, relieve the intense pressure experienced by participating faculty, and provide needed academic and financial support for graduate students.

ARC deems the recommendation to provide these resources to the program to be worthy of consideration and acknowledges that there are existing processes and policies for negotiation of these arrangements. ARC expects that the Program will proceed through normal channels of advocacy for these resources.

Implementation Plan (First Priority)	
Responsible parties:	Director, Dean of Social Sciences
Responsible for resources:	Director, Dean of Social Sciences
Responsible for implementation:	Director, Dean of Social Sciences
Timeline:	Dean to report by end of December 2013

6. SJES participants should meet with senior Administrators at the Faculty and University level to investigate ways of maintaining the Niagara Social Justice Forum, or equivalent to it, as an ongoing form of community-university partnership in the region.

The Program stated that “monies are needed, but also the people power to bring the event to fruition.”

The Faculty Dean stated that he would be “happy to discuss ways of maintaining the Niagara Social Justice Forum or some equivalent,” but noted that “there is no evidence that funding for the event has been insufficient.” He went on to point out “that involvement in NSJF would represent ‘service’ as defined in the Collective Agreement, and that service is supposed to comprise 20 percent of a members’ workload (approximately 48 days a year) so what and why additional support is required needs to be clarified.”

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated that the “Faculty of Graduate Studies would be agreeable to partner in this.”

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted and in the process of being implemented. Further discussion between the Program and the Deans will be required to review measures which might serve to facilitate the success of the Niagara Social Justice Forum (or its equivalent).

Implementation Plan (Second Priority)

Responsible parties:	Program
Responsible for resources:	Deans of Social Sciences and Graduate Studies
Responsible for implementation:	Program
Timeline:	Dean(s) to report by end of December 2014

7. The University needs to seek ways to enable an increased capacity for faculty members to seek teaching assignments outside their home units.

The Program stated that “SJES needs affiliated faculty to be able to teach the program” and that “a university-wide understanding that a faculty member’s request for release is acceptable and supportable is needed.” It suggested that the “Dean of Graduate Studies and the University need to signal support for this practice.”

The Faculty Dean noted that “it is not just administration that needs to signal support for this. This is an issue of collegiality within departments and centres and requires encouragement from faculty members and the Faculty Association as well.”

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated that he agreed with the recommendation and that it was an “ongoing issue for all interdisciplinary programs.”

ARC recognizes the potential (and real) consequences of faculty members deciding to teach outside of their home units. This is a larger issue which must be carefully considered by the appropriate university bodies. With this in mind, the Committee included this issue in its Semi-Annual Report to Senate at the meeting on January 16, 2013.

Implementation Plan (First Priority)

Responsible parties:	Provost, Senate
Responsible for resources:	Provost, Senate
Responsible for implementation:	Provost, Senate
Timeline:	Provost to report by end of December 2013

8. SJES should consider introducing team-teaching as a way of enhancing interdisciplinary content and perspectives

The Program stated that it saw “merit in an emphasis on team-teaching” and envisioned “instituting a pilot with two faculty members team-teaching the methods course,” provided “structures are in place to support them (e.g., reasonable teaching load expectations).”

The Faculty Dean stated that he agreed with the recommendation in principle but pointed out “that unless we can find ways to parse teaching assignments into units of less than 0.5 FCE this is practically hard to implement as part of load or very expensive as two (or more?) faculty are credited for teaching the same course.”

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated that he agreed with the recommendation and that it was an “ongoing issue for all interdisciplinary programs.”

ARC considers that the recommendation to enhance interdisciplinary content and perspectives is accepted.

Implementation Plan (First Priority)

Responsible parties:	Program
Responsible for resources:	Program, Deans of Social Science and Graduate Studies
Responsible for implementation:	Program
Timeline:	Dean(s) to report by end of December 2013

9. The University should investigate ways of providing SJES graduate programs with greater autonomy in course time-tabling.

The Program stated that greater autonomy “would help the program organize team-teaching and coordinate student courses so that they are reasonably scheduled.” It also noted that a “designated seminar room for SJES teaching would help in timetabling matters and support various configurations for teaching courses.”

The Faculty Dean noted that this recommendation would need “to be discussed with Brock Scheduling.” He explained that a seminar room would have to be shared with other units “given that in any given term there are only three or four SJES courses (9-12 hours a week).” Finally he suggested that he “would also like to see a thorough review of reserved space across the university to determine how efficiently it is all used.”

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated that the “Faculty of Graduate Studies has requested previously that a number of spaces across campus be designated as Graduate Studies teaching spaces, and that graduate courses be booked into these spaces.”

ARC acknowledges that there are existing processes and policies for negotiation of these arrangements. ARC expects that the Program will proceed through normal channels to request greater autonomy in course time-tabling.

Implementation Plan (Second Priority)

Responsible parties:	Program
Responsible for resources:	Program
Responsible for implementation:	Program
Timeline:	Dean to report by the end of December 2014

10. SJES participants should examine further the possibility of establishing a course-work MA.

The Program stated that “support exists for further discussion to explore the possibilities of implementing such a stream within our program.” Previous discussions on this subject examined how the course-work MA could “further develop the activist component of the program” and support “timely completion of the program,” but also raised concerns about “upholding the academic rigour of the program.”

The Faculty Dean stated that he supported “further discussion of the possibility of a course work MA and agree[d] with the positive aspects such an option offers.”

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated that his Faculty “would agree to work with the Program in looking into the feasibility and efficacy of adding a course work only stream to the existing Master’s degree.

ARC considers the recommendation (to examine the possibility of a course-work MA) to be accepted and in the process of implementation.

Implementation Plan (First Priority)

Responsible parties:	Program, Deans of Social Sciences and Graduate Studies
Responsible for resources:	Program, Deans of Social Sciences and Graduate Studies
Responsible for implementation:	Program, Deans of Social Sciences and Graduate Studies
Timeline:	Deans to report by end of December 2013

11. SJES should examine multiple forms of bringing community activism into the MA curriculum, one of which might be a course-based summer practicum in SJES.

The Program stated that it agreed “in principle” and was “interested in discussing this recommendation.”

The Faculty Dean agreed with the recommendation and the unit’s response.

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated that his Faculty would “work with the program in looking into the feasibility and efficacy of adding a component of this nature. Perhaps there is a co-op opportunity here for the Program.”

ARC considers the recommendation (to examine forms of bringing community activism into the curriculum) to be accepted and in the process of implementation. The Committee also believes that the Program is best positioned to determine appropriate strategies to achieve this objective.

Implementation Plan (First Priority)

Responsible parties:	Program, Deans of Social Sciences and Graduate Studies
Responsible for resources:	Program, Deans of Social Sciences and Graduate Studies
Responsible for implementation:	Program, Deans of Social Sciences and Graduate Studies
Timeline:	Deans to report by end December 2013

12. The University should consider marking the MA program in SJES as a focal point within the University's composite profile, one that exemplifies the University's commitment (as expressed in the Integrated Strategic Plan) to serving the wellbeing of the communities at the local, national and global level, to encouraging trans-disciplinary initiatives, and to promoting internationalization.

The Program agreed with the recommendation and stated that "[m]any of the recommendations made would support this goal."

The Faculty Dean noted that the program "certainly does exemplify several university priorities as described in the University's integrated plan," but that he was "not certain what being marked as a focal point means in practice, apart from such things as improved advertising."

ARC views the recommendation, while laudable, cannot be accepted. The allocation of status to this program relative to other programs at Brock University is not within ARC's jurisdiction. It is expected that all programs will promote their alignment with the Integrated Strategic Plan and wider university goals through their own initiative.

Implementation Plan

This Recommendation is NOT accepted.

13. The SJES program should be better advertized and better represented on the program's website and in the social media.

The Program responded that it was in agreement and "would appreciate access to the expertise and resources that could help us build and maintain a more compelling online presence. We also wish to have more visibility at real-time events on and off campus."

The Faculty Dean stated that "FOSS is ... looking at ways of providing support for improving web sites throughout the Faculty. There is also need at the level of the university to enhance the visibility of programs such as SJES." He suggested that "University marketing and communications should consider adjusting its priorities to align better with the priorities described in the Brock integrated plan and the totality of programs and activities at Brock."

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated that the "Program's website is the Program's to develop and oversee. The Faculty of Graduate Studies, the Office of Research Services, and Brock University Communications are all willing and able to assist the program in getting out various 'stories' through social media. The first step lies with the Program."

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation.

Implementation Plan (First Priority)

Responsible parties:	Program, Deans of Social Sciences and Graduate Studies, Marketing and Communications
Responsible for resources:	Program, Deans of Social Sciences and Graduate Studies
Responsible for implementation:	Program
Timeline:	Deans to report by end of December 2013

14. SJES participants should work collaboratively with Brock University Library personnel to build a digital repository for Social Justice and Equity.

The Program welcomed this idea, but stated that “[o]perationalizing this idea requires financing for a special server and software, a part-time systems administrator, and a digital archivist and, if it were designed to serve the SJES program, the time of faculty members to work on that design. If the University decides to fund this project, the SJES program will be an enthusiastic participant.”

The Faculty Dean stated that he supported the recommendation and the unit’s response.

ARC considers this recommendation to be under consideration pending further discussion between the program and Library personnel of the rationale for a digital repository at Brock and the identification of the resources which would be required for implementation.

Implementation Plan (Second Priority)

Responsible parties:	Program, Library
Responsible for resources:	Program, Library
Responsible for implementation:	Program, Library
Timeline:	Dean to report by end of December 2014

15. SJES administrators should consider expanding their Community Liaison Committee into a Community Advisory Council.

The Program stated that it had “no objection in principle to this recommendation,” but that “creating a committee that reflects the suggestions of the reviewers means finding faculty members, students, and community members willing/able to commit the necessary time and effort.” It suggested that the idea could be explored in the coming year.

The Faculty Dean agreed with the unit’s response to the recommendation. He noted that “questions about selections, representatives, and the logistics of running a potentially diverse, interdisciplinary, and large (to be representative) committee are complicated and indeed can become very time consuming.”

The Dean of Graduate Studies indicated his support.

ARC considers this recommendation to be under consideration and notes that it will require further discussion between the Program and the Faculty Dean.

Implementation Plan (Second Priority)

Responsible parties:	Program, Dean of Social Sciences
Responsible for resources:	Program, Dean of Social Sciences
Responsible for implementation:	Program, Dean of Social Sciences
Timeline:	Dean to report by end of December 2014

16. The University, in conjunction with SJES participants, should plan for how it might, now or in the future, create a PhD in SJES.

The Program responded that “we are willing to begin an exploration of the possibilities of developing a PhD program” and that we “will strike a sub-committee to discuss this recommendation in detail in the fall.”

The Faculty Dean stated that the development of a PhD in SJES was not envisioned in the new FOSS Strategic Plan and that the “concern about resources for such a program is a significant issue.” He noted that he would “support the unit’s decision to strike a sub-committee to discuss this recommendation and w[ould] lend what support the Dean’s Office is able to investigating the viability of the idea,” but wished to “reserve opinion about the idea of a PhD in SJES until a thorough analysis is complete.”

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated that his faculty “wholeheartedly supports this recommendation.”

ARC considers this recommendation to be under consideration pending discussion between the Program and the Dean of the Faculty and Dean of Graduate Studies.

Implementation Plan (First Priority)

Responsible parties:	Program, Deans of Social Sciences and Graduate Studies
Responsible for resources:	Program, Deans of Social Sciences and Graduate Studies
Responsible for implementation:	Program, Deans of Social Sciences and Graduate Studies
Timeline:	Dean to report by December 2013

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 1, 2, 4, 8, 10, 11, and 13.

Second Priority

Recommendation 3, 6.

Under Consideration

Recommendations 5??, 14, 15, and 16.

E. Recommendations that Will Not be Implemented

Recommendations 7, 9, 12.

January 25, 2013