

Final Assessment Report Academic Review

Studies in Comparative Literatures and Arts

A. Summary

1. The Program Self Study was considered and approved by the Academic Review Committee of Senate on January 9, 2012.
2. The Review Committee consisted of two external reviewers: Francesco Loriggio (Carleton University) and Jonathan Hart (University of Alberta), and an internal reviewer, Neta Gordon (English Language and Literature).
3. The site visit occurred on March 21-23, 2012.
4. The Reviewers' Report was received on April 25, 2012.
5. The Program's response was received on May 17, 2012.
6. The Dean of Humanities response from Douglas Kneale was received on May 31, 2012.
7. The Dean of Graduate Studies response from Mike Plyley was received on October 2, 2012.

The academic program which was examined during the review was the MA in Studies in Comparative Literatures and Arts.

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 2, "Good Quality."

B. Strengths of the Program

The reviewers stated that they “consider SCLA to be a rigorous and valuable program.” They noted that its “strong, pre-eminent focus on the relation between literature and the arts” makes it “a program whose primary aim is to take an interdisciplinary approach to the topics and issues it examines, and which at the same time is *about* interdisciplinarity.” The reviewers found that the program “has undoubtedly satisfied its objectives” as expressed in terms of the program’s overall intent and its degree level expectations.

The reviewers recognized that the program reflects “contemporary interest in interdisciplinary approaches” and positions SCLA directly within “the intellectual atmosphere at Brock and the institution’s priorities for the future.” They noted that the program is “a distinctive offering” in that it is “the only one that relates literature directly to the other arts, and the only one of two (together with the University of Toronto) that are one-year programs.”

The reviewers noted that student surveys “yielded highly positive responses to the courses” which provide evidence that “the program has been a success, as it is now structured.” They stated that “participation to conferences or the publications of individuals enrolled in [the program] or by the alumni confirm that SCLA has done an excellent job in doing what graduate programs are supposed to do, that is, to lead to some sort of expertise, some sort of professionalization.”

In conclusion, the reviewers stated that with “only a few modifications,” the program could “become the most cohesive program around” and was “well positioned to grapple with what will come next.”

C. Opportunities for Improvement and Enhancement

NOTE:

ARC wishes to flag the fact that this review has raised the issue of program viability due to low enrolment. Although recent enrolment levels have been reasonably robust [nine students (seven FT) in 2009-10; seven students (five FT) in 2010-11; eight students (six FT) in 2011-12], current (2012-13) enrolment is just three students (two FT). This matter is addressed in consideration of Recommendation 5 below.

The reviewers provided 16 discrete recommendations.

1. [That a] comparative literature stream be introduced into the MA in SCLA that focuses on comparative literature, which would allow students in SCLC (as well as others in comparative literature and modern languages elsewhere) to move into SCLA.

In its response, the Program stated that “The Graduate Program Director along with the Program Committee plan to review the current offerings in order to undertake curriculum mapping.” With respect to the specific recommendation, they noted that “[i]ntroducing different streams, would imply more course offerings at a time when it is already difficult to staff the minimum number of courses required for the degree.”

The Faculty Dean noted that “[c]urrent program enrolments do not warrant the introduction of a new stream.” He also stated that the “inclusion of the arts” in the program would not “prevent students in SCLC or any undergraduate comparative literature program from applying to or succeeding in SCLA.”

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated that “[i]f the Program decides to explore, and in the end pursue, this direction, then FGS would prefer a model that has one program, with two fields of emphasis.”

ARC considers this recommendation to be still under consideration and understands that the SCLA GPD and Program Committee will include this matter in the review process noted above.

Implementation Plan (2nd Priority)

Responsible parties:	Program and Deans of Humanities and Graduate Studies
Responsible for resources:	Deans of Humanities and Graduate Studies
Responsible for implementation:	Deans of Humanities and Graduate Studies
Timeline:	Deans to report by December 2014

2. [That as] an alternative [to recommendation #1] the MA be re-organized to include two compulsory theoretical courses, one of which devoted to the problems the question of interdisciplinarity poses, especially in relation to comparative literature. A third course dealing with literary topics from an intercultural perspective would complete the compulsory courses.

The Program considered this recommendation to be “less dependent on faculty resources and may be a more feasible option for the program.” They suggested replacing SCLA 5P03 with “a variable topic course, thereby addressing the students’ desire to “see” the comparative literary and interdisciplinary theory applied while also lightening the load of theory courses.”

The Faculty Dean responded that “The addition of another compulsory course would have an impact in the number of variable topics courses that could be offered in any year. Given current enrolments, additional courses are not warranted.”

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated that [t]he Program is encouraged to explore this possibility, and to develop such a course; it would seem that the course of action would be to develop the course as an on-line course, which might generate student enrolment, and provide revenue for the Program.”

ARC considers this recommendation (that there be three compulsory courses) to be still under consideration and understands that the SCLA GPD and Program Committee will include this matter in the response to Recommendation # 1.

Implementation Plan (2nd Priority)

Responsible parties:	Program and Deans of Humanities and Graduate Studies
Responsible for resources:	Deans of Humanities and Graduate Studies
Responsible for implementation:	Deans of Humanities and Graduate Studies
Timeline:	Deans to report by December 2014

3. [That] SCLA retain its own budget line, as well as its own GPD, but should be administratively housed in MLLC. This would allow for synergies between MLLC and SCLA and permit more flexibility in hires and planning.

The Program noted that it was “already housed in MLLC” and “has only a roster of participating faculty; there are no appointments or cross-appointments in the program.”

The Faculty Dean noted that the recommendation reflected the situation as it currently exists, but that “[t]o allow for greater flexibility in the administration of the SCLA the program committee should consider removing the provision in the program handbook that the GPD...be a tenured faculty member in...(MLLC).” The Dean also noted that “[a]llowing a GPD from another unit will help to increase the profile of the program among other units in Humanities, and could encourage faculty participation and alleviate the deployment problems which the program members and the reviewers have identified.”

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated that “any arrangement that improved the Program’s ability to deliver courses without additional funding would be supported.”

ARC considers this recommendation to be aligned with current practice and thus implemented. No further action is deemed warranted.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation implemented.

4. [That the] units (such as French, Italian, German, Spanish) as well as programs such SCLC (Studies in Comparative Literature and Cultures) within MLLC, become feeder programs for SCLA.

The Program indicated that the suggestion was something the program was already doing, and so did not “appear to be a recommendation.”

The Faculty Dean noted that “co-ordination between the undergraduate and graduate programs makes sense,” and that it was desirable to “expand the applicant pool in both raw numbers and disciplinary scope.” He suggested that “other undergraduate programs in Humanities, such as LART, DART and, to a lesser extend, CLAS, are also good potential feeder programs for SCLA.”

ARC considers this recommendation to be aligned with current practice and thus implemented. No further action is deemed warranted.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation implemented.

5. [That] some positions be added to MLLC.

The Program strongly endorsed the recommendation.

The Dean of Humanities stated that an “[i]ncrease in the faculty complement is unlikely in the current financial situation. When units in the Faculty of Humanities do hire new faculty members, candidates are apprised of the opportunities for teaching in the interdisciplinary graduate programs in the Faculty, and new faculty are encouraged to participate in these.”

For ARC, this recommendation is untenable given the Program’s current enrolment situation (noted above). Further, it leads more generally to the issue of program closure due to unsustainable enrolment levels. ARC is of the view that the Program should monitor enrollments over the next few years to ensure program viability. The related issue of faculty resources also needs to be addressed, but not just for SCLA. When all the faculty involved in a program have workload tied to their home departments, problems arise. This larger issue will be addressed in a further report by ARC to Senate. The issue of the specific number of students required to ensure a program’s viability should be referred to the Senate Graduate Studies Committee for consideration.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation NOT accepted. ARC asks that the Dean of Humanities provide an annual report on enrolment in the SCLA program. ARC also asks that the Senate Committee on Graduate Studies provide advice on what constitutes a minimum sustainable enrolment level for graduate programs.

6. [That in] the short term, there should be more stipends for the undergraduate program (e.g. MLLC) to release faculty to teach on load. This step should help to address the problem of overload and the exhaustion it may cause.

The Program stated that they welcomed the recommendation “because any additional stipends would allow the program to offer a greater selection of courses and make the program more appealing - a comment made by various students.”

The Dean of Humanities stated that the “[o]ffering extra stipends only to MLLC would tend to discourage participation from other units, exacerbate the deployment issues, and adversely affect the trans disciplinary nature of the program.” He also noted that “[i]n any case, increase in the number of course stipends provided is unlikely in the short term.”

ARC considers this recommendation to be not relevant to the program under review and, therefore, not accepted.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation NOT accepted.

7. [That] recognition be provided for overload teaching when overload cannot be avoided. If for example, there are 6 courses taught on overload, then a research assistant (RA) should be provided to the faculty member teaching overload for 20 hours each.

The Program stated that “this money [would] be better spent in providing an extra stipend.”

The Dean of Humanities stated that “faculty members from across the Faculty of Humanities participate in overload and unscheduled teaching in a number of different programs.

Providing extra assistance and recognition to those serving in only one of many interdisciplinary programs would be problematic.”

ARC deems the recommendation to be not accepted for the reasons noted.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation NOT accepted.

8. [That] a dedicated administrative assistant be part of the structure of SCLA, so that the director receives sufficient administrative support.

The Department stated that “[a]t present we receive basic, but crucial, assistance from the Administrative Assistant from MLLC.”

The Faculty Dean stated that “MLLC currently has 1/3 of the time of an administrative assistant who serves as the Graduate Assistant in another program (CLAS). Perhaps some reconfiguration of workloads would be possible so that her time in MLLC could be more focused on SCLA and support for its GPD.”

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated that at present “the size of the SCLA program is not nearly sufficient to warrant a full-time Administrative Assistant,” but that the Faculty of Graduate Studies supported any and all graduate programs having a “dedicated Administrative Assistant.”

ARC considers this recommendation to be not accepted for the reasons noted.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation NOT accepted.

9. [That] a professional skills course be established. The GPD should be given this course to teach and it should be added to the six other courses and should be given for credit. Funds for the professional skills course should not come from funds related to the delivery of the other courses in the program.

The Program stated that the “current GPD is prepared to introduce such a course for fall 2012 inspired by the [Department of] English model.” It went on to note that “[t]his would entail an additional stipend to be assigned to the SCLA budget.”

The Faculty Dean stated that “[s]uch a course is a good idea” but added that “current enrolments in SCLA make the provision of an additional stipend to the program unwarranted at the moment.” He noted that in “some other programs, the professional skills course is team-taught by participating faculty members. Such courses are usually taught *gratis*, whether by the GPD or by a team of faculty members.”

The Dean of Graduate Studies suggested that “the Program might contact Dr. Phil Wilson in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences to see if the organization of AHSC 5P00 would meet the Program’s needs.” He also stated that the FGS professional skills program “GRAD *PLUS*” might “be useful to students in this Program.”

The Senate Graduate Studies Committee also noted that “students may be able to achieve these skills through participation in the Grad Plus program...This alternative would have the advantage of not further taxing the already stretched resources of the SCLA program.”

ARC considers that this recommendation has not been accepted on the grounds that enrolment does not warrant an additional course and an existing professional skills course may be made available to SCLA students.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation NOT accepted.

10. [That] if recommendation 9 is not adopted, for lack of funds, SCLA organize at least two meetings with students during orientation week to ensure that they are fully aware of program requirements and deadlines. Moreover, written materials pertaining to this information should be distributed to students and follow-up reminders about deadlines be sent to them with proper advance notice.

The Program responded by saying that “the current GPD meets with all graduate students twice per term as part of the student progress interviews in order to ensure that students finish their MRPs within the 12-month period. This student supervision by the GPD was implemented in 2010-11 and all students completed in the 12-month period.”

The Faculty Dean noted that the “program was working at ensuring that students have opportunities to learn professional skills.” He also suggested that workshops offered by the Humanities Research Institute for graduate students in Humanities will cover “[s]ome of the professional skills that graduate students need.”

ARC considers this recommendation to be aligned with current practice and thus implemented. No further action is deemed warranted.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation implemented.

11. [That] ideally, more variable topics should be available.

The Program stated that offering “more than the bare minimum number of courses each year would not be realistic due to the already onerous task of trying to get faculty to be deployed to teach the minimum required courses.” It currently allows students “to take a half-credit graduate course in another graduate program at Brock University provided that it fulfills the requirements of the SCLA degree (as per the discretion of the GPD).”

The Faculty Dean stated that “[o]ffering more variable topics courses would be ideal, if financial circumstances permitted and SCLA enrolments warranted.” He applauded the Program’s efforts to provide more options for the students, and suggested that another possibility might be to “include the cross-listing of courses...or the co-ordination at the faculty level of courses that cover similar material or have a similar theoretical basis.”

ARC considers that the spirit of this recommendation has been achieved through revenue-neutral means such as cross-listing or other avenues of access to courses on variable topics. No further action is deemed warranted.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation implemented.

12. [That] there should be long-term curriculum planning: instructors should coordinate theory courses. The program and its faculty needs to facilitate further discussion about what constitutes interdisciplinarity and comparative studies. More specifically, 5P02 should follow the same model as 5P03 (only three instructors). Each course should connect with the other.

The Program stated that “[l]ong-term curriculum planning can succeed only with the assistance of the Dean’s Office.” It also noted that faculty “participation could be affected by the needs of their home department.”

The Faculty Dean stated that “co-ordination of courses within the program, and even across program boundaries...does not require the assistance of the dean’s office.” The Dean went on to make a number of suggestions that the Department might consider to facilitate long-term planning and ensure the viability of the program.

ARC considers this recommendation to be still under consideration and understands that the SCLA GPD and Program Committee will include this matter in the review process noted above in connection with Recommendation 1.

Implementation Plan (2nd Priority)

Responsible parties:	Program and Dean of Humanities
Responsible for resources:	Dean of Humanities
Responsible for implementation:	Dean of Humanities
Timeline:	Deans to report by December 2014

13. [That] meetings of the program committee, including the core teaching group, should be separate from admissions committee, so that time is used most efficiently and each meeting can have focus.

The Program stated that “[t]here are not enough faculty members attending meetings to have two separate committees, as called for by this recommendation.”

The Faculty Dean noted that the “program committee, including the core teaching group, should meet regularly, and not just as the admissions committee. At least once per term (in addition to admissions meetings) seems a good place to start.”

The Dean of Graduate Studies supported the recommendation, stating that the Faculty of Graduate Studies “would be available for discussion on governance and/or admissions models that might work for the Program.”

ARC considers this recommendation to be an example of “micro-managing” and not necessary. ARC has full confidence in the SCLA Program Committee’s ability to conduct its affairs in an appropriate manner.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation NOT accepted.

14. That a concerted effort be made to recruit from outside Ontario.

The Program responded that the “GPD and Program Committee are currently exploring new recruitment strategies.”

The Faculty Dean accepted this recommendation as “a very good idea” which “could benefit all Humanities graduate programs.” He noted that a “co-ordinated effort by the Humanities graduate programs to attract attention outside the normal Brock catchment area would be beneficial.”

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated that the Faculty of Graduate Studies was “available to discuss potential recruitment plans with the Program.” He went on to describe a new initiative on recruitment in which “the Faculty of Graduate Studies has planned with the Associate Dean, Faculty of Humanities to spend time at several universities in both Eastern and Western Canada.”

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

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)

Responsible parties:	Program and Deans of Humanities and Graduate Studies
Responsible for resources:	Deans of Humanities and Graduate Studies
Responsible for implementation:	Deans of Humanities and Graduate Studies
Timeline:	Deans to report by end of the 2013-14 academic year

15. [That] there be more recognition for faculty and students and more support from the institution for symposia.

The Program responded by stating that the “program has received continued support for its Colloquiums and for the *Image and Imagery* Conferences from: Dean of Humanities, Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies, Humanities Research Institute, Vice-President of Research, Vice-President of Academic, to name a few, and we are very grateful for their support.”

The Faculty Dean stated that “the Humanities Research Institute provides support for conferences and colloquia within the Faculty of Humanities.”

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated that the Faculty of Graduate Studies “has organized a graduate student centred research conference” for the past seven years, but has received “few abstract submissions from the SCLA students to date. We will encourage their participation in this year’s conference.”

ARC considers this recommendation to be aligned with current practice and thus implemented. No further action is deemed warranted.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation implemented.

16. That Brock maintain its commitment to library resources for SCLA and Comparative Literature.

The Program agreed “wholeheartedly with the recommendation...but recognize[d] the program’s limitations in influencing the size of library budget for the program.”

The Dean also agreed with this recommendation, stating “that library support for the program should be maintained, and, if possible, increased.”

ARC considers this recommendation to be aligned with current practice and thus implemented. No further action is deemed warranted.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation implemented.

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:

Recommendation 14

Second Priority:

Recommendations 1, 2, 12

Recommendations Already Implemented

Recommendations 3, 4, 10, 11, 15, and 16.

E. Recommendations that Will Not be Implemented

Recommendations 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 13.

January 25, 2013