

Final Assessment Report for the Cyclical  
Review of the BA in Contemporary Studies

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**Part 1: Synthesis of Review Documents**

**a. Summary of Self-Study**

The program's self-study is extremely comprehensive. It freely acknowledges the cumbersome nature of the original program, which is largely a result of CT's historical role as a service program. The report notes that the new program, unencumbered of this role, will be able to organize its curriculum, resource allocations, and service and administrative duties, in a more focused, coherent, and thought-out manner.

The majority of concerns listed in the self-study can be grouped into three categories:

- 1) Program members: As the unit's response to the external reviewers acknowledges, due to individual histories of program development and restructuring, and changes at the level of Faculties, there are several programs and departments that count among their faculty individuals with unaligned competencies and lines of reporting. This is a perennial issue across the University. The self-study notes that the specific problem for CT was that the use of the program as a kind of "flag of convenience" meant that: a) their faculty complement was amorphous, with unclear faculty affiliations and, as such, b) it was difficult, if not impossible, to distribute work and resources equitably across the unit, and c) courses were sometimes not vetted as rigorously for their adherence to the program's learning objectives as they should have been. Consequently, certain committed members of the program were overtaxed and the ability of the program to meet its learning objectives was hampered. They note that, as a result of their current restructuring, a more accurate assessment of the complement will be undertaken, and that a full understanding of members' responsibilities will be encouraged.
- 2) Resources: The self-study notes that the single largest challenge for the CT program was its inadequate resourcing. The report suggests that the unit ceased to be a priority for recruitment early on in its existence, and that it therefore failed to attract either staff or faculty resourcing at a level commensurate with its size and role at Laurier Brantford. The unit argues in favour of the creation of promotional materials targeting prospective students interested in interdisciplinary studies and/or highlighting those fields in which such interdisciplinarity is most useful. It also requests that its staff and faculty complements be raised to a level equitable with programs of the same size elsewhere in the University.
- 3) Innovative teaching practices: The unit notes that despite the problems outlined in 1) and 2) above, faculty members take great pride and pleasure in their significant skill in applying high impact teaching practices. However, those practices, such as the Inquiry Based Learning courses, and the Grand River Forum, have recently become defunct, and the unit believes that the reinvigoration of those two high impact practices in particular, if properly supported, could greatly enhance the experience of both students and faculty within the program.

In response to these issues, the self-study lays out a series of objectives for a new core program (those details are not relevant here), which would then free CT from the heavy service teaching which has defined its existence from the beginning. That new core program has now been implemented.

#### **b. Summary of External Reviewer's Report and Recommendations**

The review committee for the cyclical review consisted of Dr. Regna Darnell from the Department of Anthropology and First Nations Studies at Western University and Dr. Eleanor Ty from the Department of English and Film Studies at Wilfrid Laurier. The site visit took place on October 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

The reviewers provided the following executive summary in their report, along with sixteen recommendations to the program:

The Contemporary Studies program is the largest program at Laurier Brantford and has served the needs of a growing campus very well. We are impressed by the program's capacity to change in keeping with institutional growth over the last decade. The amount of research, thinking, imagination, and collaboration that went into the development of the new program is to be commended. The new program is well-conceived, ambitious, and exciting. It remains a niche program, at the same time as it provides students with broad-based methodological tools, theories, and perspectives to view, understand, and participate in our contemporary society.

Administrative support is substantial as we learned from discussions at several levels of administration, at both the Brantford and Waterloo campuses. This program provides a very good fit with the overall Laurier Strategic Plan. A plan for Laurier Brantford is forthcoming; this is highly desirable in order to provide a guideline for additional planning as the new program comes on line over the next four years.

Faculty who have chosen to stay in Contemporary Studies are enthusiastic, committed to a program that is innovative in content and delivery. The new health science component will be a good addition to the social science and arts already in the program. Notwithstanding the indigenous component, if the program is serious about a "global" perspective, it might try to diversify its faculty and instructors. Research interests and sites of the present faculty are quite diverse, a good thing for an interdisciplinary program.

We do not see any problem in the movement forward. The major caution at present is to monitor adherence to the revised program and respond to challenges of staffing, changing student population, provincial and federal education policies and so on. None of those factors can be foreseen in detail so the openness of the program to innovation remains a powerful force in the likelihood of its success and growth. We are very optimistic and appreciate the opportunity to offer these evaluations and recommendations.

***Recommendations:***

**Faculty Resources**

1. The program should strengthen its full-time faculty complement in the area of Culture and Representation. The program is excellent on paper and balances the three foundational areas well. But success depends on adequate faculty complement for each area.
2. To consider regularizing faculty in key areas of the program. LTA faculty members are key to the program as now designed but there is a four-year limit on their employment. These are, of course, institutional issues not under program control, but the resources should be available for this program given its size relative to the Brantford campus.
3. Acknowledge heavy service and administration loads.
4. Internal research funding should continue as a means to encourage faculty productivity.
5. Attempt to find permanent positions for at least some of the CAS faculty (acknowledging constraints of financial exigency and job market).

**Student Progression/ Curriculum/ Program**

6. Careful tracking of the progression and needs of the two streams of students (Con Ed and CT Honours) will be needed. There are far more Con Ed students whose needs for interdisciplinary programming will be distinct.
7. Service teaching should remain secondary to program specific curriculum. CT courses that fill objectives for other programs should, however, remain open to students with appropriate prerequisites.
8. Care should be taken to balance growth in the Social Justice and Community Engagement (SJCE) graduate program and TA needs for the undergraduate program.
9. The SJCE graduate program is a strong step forward and is well integrated with the needs of the undergraduate program. Its needs should be seen as competing with those of CT.
10. Careful monitoring is needed if Indigenous Studies moves toward autonomous status. Its place in CT Foundations is significant and should be protected.
11. Need to monitor the progression from introductory to advanced courses as students move through the program. Further curriculum planning should not jeopardize this coherence.
12. Overlap across courses should emerge and is desirable as the capstone courses emphasize integration and interdisciplinarity.

**Class Sizes**

13. Pay attention to course caps and ensure that class sizes are manageable and fair for instructors, both full-time and CAS. Use TAs from the SCJE graduate program effectively.
14. Ratio of class size and level of class should be maintained.

15. TAs should be used to mitigate existing large class size.

**Other**

16. To ensure that the budget for the library increases at the same rate as the increase in costs of books and on-line subscriptions.

**c. Summary of Unit Response**

The Contemporary Studies Program, in its response, was pleased with the overall positive nature of the report, and indicated a keenness to work with senior administrators, as a program, to address the issues raised in the report, in order to further strengthen the program. They were particularly pleased that the reviewers noted the program's excellent fit with the University's mission and academic plan.

The program's response offered three corrections to the reviewer's report, the second of which is particularly significant. The unit notes that on page 6 of the report the program reviewers, while discussing the need for adequate full time faculty support for the Contemporary Studies program, note that the program serves 700-800 students and thus, given its size in relation to other programs, deserves to be fully supported. In fact, the unit points out that the number of students in the program is actually 1367 students. They argue that this is an important consideration in implementing the reviewers' recommendations.

The unit response lays out a plan for addressing each of the reviewers' recommendations. In terms of faculty resources, the unit agrees that the coordinator should actively pursue a tenure-track hire to address the reviewers' concerns about properly balancing the faculty complement in each of the three program areas, and that the coordinator should work with the senior administration to address the reviewers' concerns about the program's ability to function in the long-term given its reliance on semi-permanent and contract faculty. The unit also acknowledges the validity of the reviewers' concerns surrounding the heavy administrative load faced by many faculty in the area, but notes that the University has provided increased compensation for administrative work in recent years.

In terms of student progression, curriculum, and programming, the unit agrees that it must prioritize its own teaching over service teaching. In response to the reviewers' request for more careful tracking of the different streams, the unit notes that many of these issues have been worked out as part of the re-visioning process. The unit also commits to taking great care in balancing the growth of the relationship with the graduate program in Community Justice and Social Engagement; such work is already ongoing – for example, they note that in the summer of 2013, the CT Coordinator and the SJCE Director met to work out a mutually beneficial TA policy. They note that this consultation has increased even more since the initial visit by the reviewers. They also agree to support the move towards Indigenous Studies becoming an independent program. They further commit to carefully monitoring the progression of students through the program, and to continue to encourage the interdisciplinary teaching that makes them unique.

With regards to class sizes, and in response to reviewer concerns regarding class sizes and their pedagogical implications, they note that the coordinator is currently developing a course-cap proposal to be discussed by the unit, which proposal will also consider class sizes relative to the year-level of the course. They also agree with the reviewers that TAs must be used to mitigate existing large class sizes.

The unit also agrees to continue working towards ensuring adequate library resources for its students.

The unit also notes that in the past, it was quite difficult to accurately identify the degree to which faculty members belonged to the program, partly as a result of many cross-appointments, and of the fact that program had in the past served as a service program. The unit will work diligently to separate those tangled webs and develop cleaner structures moving forward. The unit also commits to supporting innovative teaching practices.

## **Part 2: Executive Response**

### **a. Identification of Program Strengths**

The strengths of the Contemporary Studies program, not surprisingly, lie both in its interdisciplinary nature, and in its commitment to goals which fit excellently within the University's mission and academic plan.

As noted by the reviewers, the program's primary strength lies in its crossing of, and commitment to research and teaching that connect across, traditional disciplinary boundaries. The program connects three overarching areas, namely the study of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences including, as noted by the reviewers, Science Studies. Students learn methodologies, intellectual histories, issues, and theoretical frameworks from multiple fields which are diverse, yet related. In particular, the reviewers lauded the program's commitment to the development of engaged citizens who have a keen awareness of social justice and environmental issues at both local and global levels. In this way, the program fits excellently within the University's commitment to producing students who are engaged with their communities and the larger world, and who work to enact positive change in the world.

The revamped curriculum, and the program's close ties with the SJCE MA are also notable strengths. The new curriculum looks to be, as noted by the reviewers, well designed to meet the designated learning outcomes of the program. The program has been redeveloped with more focus, coherence and forethought, and with a clearer structure of progression and prerequisites which will make it easier both to track students as they progress, and to plan courses and hires. As noted by the reviewers, the revised curriculum provides a synergy across the three areas that ultimately define the program's uniqueness. There is a good balance of theoretical/academic components and the practical components, both in CT and its closely connected graduate program, SJCE. These close ties will be mutually rewarding. CT, as an interdisciplinary program, trains precisely the kind of students who would naturally progress to a degree like SJCE; thus,

the existence of SJCE should, as the reviewers note, help to grow CT; at the same time, SJCE also provides TAs which benefit the CT program.

Finally, one of the most important strengths of this program is its faculty complement. As noted by the reviewers, the research records of the faculty are very impressive, and junior faculty are engaged in exciting, engaging research which will benefit their students and the university. This research record is particularly impressive given the commitment to service evidenced by many faculty, both junior and senior, in the Contemporary Studies program. Having expanded significantly in the past few years, the faculty is particularly strong in the areas of gender studies, indigenous studies, globalization, cultural analysis, environmental studies, and media studies (particularly social media).

### **b. Opportunities for Program Improvement and Enhancement**

Many of the recommendations in various places throughout the external reviewers' report make sense, and provide opportunities for program development and enhancement; however, as the reviewers make clear in their executive summary (p. 10), many other factors cannot be foreseen in detail – those are not addressed here.

The reviewers recommend that sufficient resources be allocated to allow the program to function as envisioned, and to be sustainable. The Faculty is committed to doing everything it can, within current budget constraints, to provide these resources, as the strength of this program has implications for the enhancement of other degree programs on campus as well, including, significantly, the concurrent BEd program. These resources would also allow the program to adequately staff each of the three program streams.

The reviewers also suggest careful tracking of the progress of students through the new program. Such tracking will provide useful data to help the faculty improve its programming, hiring, and staff allocations. This, along with the streamlined nature of the new curriculum, will help to create a strong, coherent program whose projected student outcomes and goals can be tracked. This will enhance all areas of the program's planning and delivery.

The close relationship between CT and SJCE also provides opportunities for growth and improvement. As well, a second related graduate program, the MA in Cultural Analysis and Social Theory, will be offered on the Brantford campus beginning in 2014/15. The synergies that exist among these three programs provide excellent opportunities for all of them. Undergraduate students in CT will have two graduate programs on campus, which are tailored to the interdisciplinary nature of their undergraduate degree, and which represent natural progressions of their academic work. The existence of both of these programs should also help to recruit students to CT, and to provide additional TAs to CT.

Finally, the research strength of the CT faculty members provides an excellent opportunity for program improvement and enhancement. As the reviewers noted, more attention must be given to encouraging faculty to apply for internal (and I would add, external) grants. This would encourage faculty to remain engaged and at the forefront of their research areas, which in turn

would provide direct benefits to both undergraduate and graduate students. Faculty would then be ready to develop new courses in relevant, contemporary areas as the program expands and its needs grow. As noted by the reviewers, the openness of the program to innovation is “a powerful force in the likelihood of its success.” Engaged faculty will be ready to provide and lead that innovation, for the improvement and benefit of the program.

**c. Prioritization of Recommendations Approved for Implementation**

The Dean’s Office will review program needs with an eye to providing additional resources, if possible, as recommended by the reviewers. These resource needs will be examined in conjunction with the needs of other programs. This will potentially include the development of longer-term budgeting models. These issues will be considered within the larger context of integrated planning and resource management across the university, and in conjunction with senior administration.

The Dean’s Office will work with the program to ensure careful tracking of students and program outcome objectives as the program moves forward, to encourage carefully balanced growth and a continued relationship with SJCE, and to ensure that service teaching remains secondary to the program’s specific curricular objectives

The Program Coordinator and the PCC are encouraged to review the service and administrative responsibilities of members of the unit with a view to distributing them equitably, and where possible, reducing them.

The Dean’s Office is committed to working with the program to ensure that course sizes and class caps are managed in a way that is fair to the instructors and the students, while conforming to University policies in this area. The Office will also work with the program to ensure that ratios of class size and level of class be maintained, and if necessary, to help with the equitable distribution of TAs.

The Program Coordinator will keep the Dean informed of proposed content changes to the program and the potential impact these changes may have on resource needs.

The Dean’s Office will work with faculty to ensure greater awareness of available internal and external grants in order to encourage further productivity among CT faculty, as recommended by the reviewers. This will be done in conjunction with the Office of Research Services.

The Program Coordinator will work with the Library to review the resources available to the program and ensure that, within the overall needs of programs at Laurier and available resources, the needs of the program are adequately addressed

**Part 3: Implementation Plan**

<b>Recommendation to be Implemented</b>	<b>Responsibility for Implementation</b>	<b>Implementation Date</b>	<b>Additional Notes</b>
<p>1. Review the teaching needs of the program and make recommendations for further resources, if necessary.</p> <p><i>(Reviewer Recommendations 1, 2, 5)</i></p>	Office of the Dean, Faculty of Liberal Arts, and Program Coordinator	Academic year 2014-15	
<p>2. a) Track students and projected program outcomes; b) carefully monitor program growth and relationship with SJCE; c) maintain the integrity of the program's curricular objectives.</p> <p><i>(Reviewer Recommendations 6,7,8,9,10,11,12)</i></p>	Program Coordinator and PCC, with administrative support as necessary	Beginning Fall 2014, and ongoing thereafter	
<p>3. Review service and administrative workloads and work towards an equitable distribution, and alleviation if deemed necessary.</p> <p><i>(Reviewer Recommendations 3)</i></p>	Dean, Program Coordinator, and PCC	Beginning Fall 2014, and ongoing thereafter	
<p>4. Work to ensure that course sizes, class caps, and appropriate ratios be maintained at equitable levels for faculty and students.</p> <p><i>Reviewer Recommendations (13,14,15)</i></p>	Dean, Program Coordinator, and PCC	Beginning Fall 2014, and ongoing thereafter	

<p>5. Facilitate knowledge of, and participation in, grants programs, both internal and external.</p> <p><i>(Reviewer Recommendation 4)</i></p>	<p>Dean and Program Coordinator in conjunction with the Office of Research Services</p>	<p>Beginning Fall 2014, and ongoing thereafter</p>	<p>VP: Research to be made aware of this recommendation to support implementation</p>
<p>6. Review library resources to ensure adequacy.</p> <p><i>(Reviewer Recommendation 16)</i></p>	<p>Program Coordinator, Librarian, and PCC</p>	<p>Beginning Fall 2014, and ongoing thereafter</p>	
<p>7. Ensure that the Dean is aware of all relevant program changes and their resource implications.</p> <p><i>(Decanal Recommendation)</i></p>	<p>Program Coordinator</p>	<p>Beginning Fall 2014, and ongoing thereafter</p>	