



**Cyclical Review of the *General BA and General BSc Without Designation Programs*
Final Assessment Report**

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Part I: Synthesis of Review Documents

a. Summary of Self-Study

The General BA without Designation and General BSc without Designation belong to the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Science but have no departmental affiliation. Academic departments complete program reviews but, there being none in this case, the Registrar was asked to complete the Self-Study. The Self-Study was written over the fall of 2011 with the assistance of the Office of Institutional Research and Planning, the Quality Assurance Office, the Dean of Science, and the Dean of Arts.

Two separate reports were submitted: one for the General BA without Designation and one for the General BSc without Designation. Due to the overlap and similarities between the programs, the External Reviewers chose to submit one Report to cover both programs. This Final Assessment Report will cover both programs as well.

It was noted that the General BA and BSc without Designation were once programs that were sought out by students. They offered a quicker route to obtain a degree at a time when not many people held degrees. For reasons explained in the Self-Study, General Degrees have become less desirable and in fact have primarily become “default” degrees for students who do not meet Honours Degree progression and graduation requirements.

There is an acknowledgement in the Self-Study and in the External Reviewers’ Report that students who do fall short of Honours Degree progression and graduation requirements but have otherwise met minimum progression requirements and completed the requisite credits deserve some recognition from the university. The General Degree offers this recognition.

It is also acknowledged that there is a small but nonetheless important group of academically-proficient students who choose to complete a three-year rather than a four-year degree. The most obvious reason for doing so is that it can be completed in less time. These students have good academic records, even great academic records in some cases. However, they are a small minority of the students registered in General programs.

As was suggested in the Self-Study, there have been recent attempts to bring some rigour to the General Degrees in terms of an increase to GPA requirements in General Science and a

tightening up of course requirements for General Arts. As the External Reviewers' Report suggests there is more work to be done in this regard.

b. Summary of External Reviewers' Report and Recommendations

The internal reviewer of the programs was Dr. Kim Morouney, Associate Dean: Academic Programs in the School of Business & Economics. The external reviewer was Dr. Brook Taylor, Dean of Arts and Science at Mount Saint Vincent University.

The External Reviewers' Report provided a summary of the meetings held during the two-day site visit, the background and structure of the degrees, and the two main groups of students who graduate with a General BA/BSc Without Designation. The reviewers acknowledge the necessity of the General Degree as a credential for students who do not fully meet Honours Degree requirements but have otherwise met minimum progression requirements and completed the requisite credits. However, the reviewers note that "the present lack of structure in the two General degrees would not ensure students attain any of the eleven worthy objectives suggested in the two Self-Studies." In advocating for an increase to the structural requirements of the degrees, the authors further acknowledge that a new credential might be considered to recognize students who cannot meet this standard but who wish to restrict their degree to 15 credits: a Bachelor of General Studies.

Under the heading of "Observation," the reviewers noted that the General BA is currently the only online degree offered by Laurier, which presented opportunities to the university that had not been fully leveraged.

The report outlined eight recommendations for the General BA and BSc without Designation Programs, organized into the categories of Degree objectives and structure, admission standards, advising standards, and reducing the stigma of the degree.

Recommendation #1: Turn the eleven objectives outlined in the two Self-Studies from objectives that *should* be representative of the General degrees into objectives that *are* representative of the General degrees.

Recommendation #2: Establish a requirement that students graduating in either General degree complete a 4-credit concentration in a selected discipline or area of study.

Recommendation #3: The University should monitor closely the consequences of establishing more coherent General degrees in the Arts and Sciences, and consider a Bachelor of General Studies as an additional option should student needs require.

Recommendation #4: No matter what revisions of the present General degree structures are undertaken, more comprehensive analyses are urgently needed to track students in the degrees and measure their rates and kinds of success.

Recommendation #5: The University should reexamine entrance requirements in order to ensure that those admitted have a real chance to benefit from an honours-level education.

Recommendation #6: We encourage the University to find ways to ensure students are clearly informed not just of their formal relegation to a General degree but also of their realistic prospects of being so relegated before graduation.

Recommendation #7: Assuming the concentrations in our Recommendation #2 are accepted, we urge individual departments and programs to embrace students in the General degrees and reduce impediments to those who wish to concentrate in a program.

Recommendation #8: We support the present proposal from the Faculty of Arts Curriculum Committee to remove the word “General” from the degree received by students who have completed 20 credits but have not met the GPA required for graduation with Honours.

c. Summary of Unit Response

As noted in 1.a, there is no defined “unit” for the General BA/BSc Without Designation, so the views of the Self-Study author, the Acting Dean of Arts and the Dean of Science have been integrated in the Executive Response.

Part 2: Executive Response

We want to thank the reviewers for their careful attention to detail in providing a concise overview of the history and purpose of the three-year degree. Their careful analysis reveals the central inconsistency associated with this degree.

On the one hand, the three-year degree is associated with a number of learning outcomes. On the other hand, as the reviewers point out, while there are several categories of students who end up with a three-year degree, the largest category consists of those students who fall into three-year degrees by default because they lack the GPA that would allow them to obtain a four-year degree. This is not unintended and it is a way of recognizing the achievements of

students who meet the three-year degree requirements. For the students who are in the three-year degree program by default, it is highly unlikely that their programs of study will have been structured to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

One core question that needs to be answered is this: does the University want to continue to offer a “default” degree? It is our view that the answer is “yes” — to allow students who have been here for three years or more and have reached an acceptable standard of achievement to graduate with a degree that recognizes their level of accomplishment is reasonable.

In this context, then, we would like to address the specific recommendations made by the Reviewers.

We agree with Recommendation #1, and we see this recommendation complementing Recommendation #7. In order for the 11 learning outcomes expressed in Recommendation #1 to be fully realized, however, particularly the first two (“demonstrate a broad understanding of key concepts, ideas, theories, and methodologies in at least one arts or science discipline” and “demonstrate specialized knowledge in selected areas of concentration”), departments would need to ensure that students enrolled in a three-year degree have taken particular courses and/or particular levels of courses in the discipline, not simply a certain number of university credits as required by the University. This expectation would at times require departments to “reduce impediments to those who wish to concentrate in a program” (Recommendation #7).

The complication with this scenario is twofold. First, for some departments this change would be difficult to implement because their core senior courses are already oversubscribed with Honours students. Second, the change would require every department to make curricular changes in regard to their expectations for General students. Currently in Arts, for example, calendar Program Information for each department focusses on Honours and Minors; there are no specific requirements for three-year General students. To fully implement Recommendation #7 especially would require fairly significant curricular discussions across the Faculty of Arts, with the added possibility that some departments might not be able to reduce the impediments.

The following are thought to be feasible for implementing the spirit of the recommendations made by the reviewers:

a) That the 11 objectives to which Recommendation #1 refers be clearly identified as goals for both General and Honours students in each program.

b) That Arts and Science programs develop curricular expectations for their General students that take into consideration those 11 objectives. It is expected that not all departments will identify the same expectations.

c) That Recommendation #7 be interpreted as hortatory rather than prescriptive, i.e. that to the extent that they are able departments open their second and third year courses to General students and consider them bona fide members of their unit.

Recommendation #2 is that students earning a three-year degree should have at least 4.0 credits in a particular concentration in order to introduce more coherence into the degree. While it would be useful to know how many students earning a three-year degree already have 4.0 credits in a concentration, we see the advantage in raising the percentage to 100%. The Registrar's Office will propose a motion to this effect. After being circulated to the Deans of Arts, Science and Brantford for comment, and assuming the motion is supported, it will be presented to the Senate Academic Planning Committee (SAPC) and Senate during the 2012-2013 academic year.

Recommendation #3 would see Arts and Science create a BA in General Studies for students who cannot achieve the three-year BA requirements. This would seem to create another default degree, again marked by a lack of coherence, recreating the problem. We are not in agreement with this recommendation.

The Registrar, in discussions with the appropriate Faculties, will develop a tracking mechanism to gain more data about three-year General students, including "their rates and kinds of success" (Recommendation #4).

The reviewers suggest (Recommendation #5) that we raise admission standards so as to ensure that as few students as possible enter University unprepared and unable to complete a four-year program. The University is committed to enrolling students who are able to be successful and to providing the supports needed to engender success. It has recently increased entering averages (e.g., from 72% to 74% for 2012-13 in the Faculty of Arts, with a further increase to 75% in 2013-14), changed first-year curriculum to increase student/faculty interactions (e.g., first-year seminars; residential learning communities), and provided learning and advising support through the Faculties and Learning Services. Recently, we have instituted a First-Year Student Success and Transition Task Force, to be co-chaired by the VP Academic and the VP Student Affairs, to review in a holistic fashion our goals, approaches, and outcomes related to successful student

transition to university. The recommendations of this Task Force will further our goals related to supporting students to be academically successful at Laurier.

We support Recommendation #6, that each Faculty develop ways to ensure that students throughout their time at Laurier are clearly informed of progression and graduation requirements in order to ensure that their expectations for success accord with their academic record.

The Report also supports (Recommendation #8) reviving a Faculty of Arts proposal to remove the word “general” (seen as stigmatizing) from the four-year non-honours degree with designation (e.g., in Political Science, or Biology, etc.). We agree that this would be useful. This proposal was turned back at SAPC last year because it was felt that it should come not just from Arts but also from Science, Economics and Brantford. The Associate Dean of Arts (Curriculum and Research) will take the lead in discussing this proposal with his counterparts in Science, Economics and Brantford over the Fall term. If a consensus can be reached, and the resulting proposal passed by each relevant Divisional Council, the proposal will be presented to SAPC early in the Winter term.

Part 3: Implementation Plan

Recommendation to be Implemented	Responsibility for Implementation	Implementation Date	Additional Notes
Develop learning outcomes for General students in all programs, and for departments to make every effort to open their second- and third-year courses to General students (#1 & 7)	Associate Deans Department Chairs Registrar	May 2013	
Require all General students to have at least 4.0 credits in a particular concentration (#2)	Registrar Associate Deans and Deans	February 2013	

<p>Develop a tracking mechanism to follow General students through their program (#4)</p>	<p>Registrar Faculty Advisors</p>	<p>January 2013</p>	
<p>Continue examining entrance requirements and university supports to ensure that those admitted have a real chance of succeeding in an honours-level education (#5)</p>	<p>Registrar Deans VP Taskforce</p>	<p>Ongoing To begin Winter 2013</p>	<p>In progress</p>
<p>Advise General students of their realistic prospects of graduating with an Honours degree (#6)</p>	<p>Faculty Advisors Department Undergraduate Advisors Central Advising</p>	<p>January 2013</p>	
<p>Remove “General” from any four-year degree (#8)</p>	<p>Arts, Science, & Brantford Associate Deans Economics Chair Registrar</p>	<p>March 2013</p>	