2015-2016
Cyclical Program Review of the North American Studies Program

PROGRAMS:
Honours Bachelor of Arts (Combined) in North American Studies

Final Assessment Report

Submitted by: Dr. Richard Nemesvari, Dean, Faculty of Arts; Dr. Kathryn Carter, Associate Vice-President: Teaching & Learning; Dr. Deborah MacLatchy, Provost & Vice-President: Academic

Date: October 11, 2016
PART ONE: EXECUTIVE RESPONSE

A) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REVIEW DOCUMENTS
(SELF-STUDY, REVIEWERS’ REPORT, UNIT RESPONSE)

Self-Study

- This was the first cyclical review of North American Studies (NAS) which evolved from the Canadian Studies program. Writing of the self-study was coordinated by Debora Van Nijnatten in consultation with the program’s core faculty, North American Studies coordinating committee, and program members. The program is highly interdisciplinary and draws its faculty and courses from across the Faculty of Arts. The program sought advice from the external reviewers on ways to grow enrolments, enhance internationalization, maximize contributions to indigenization at Laurier, and how to best leverage the program’s administrative amalgamation with Political Science.

- The self-study document clearly articulates the program’s learning outcomes and degree level expectations, which were developed collaboratively by program members. There is close alignment with Laurier’s current Strategic Academic Plan (2015-2020) and with the university’s core academic principles noted in the former Strategic Academic Plan (2010-2015) such as civic engagement, diversity, integration, global citizenship, and justice. Since North American Studies isn’t a direct entry program, admission requirements are set by the Faculty of Arts. Curriculum is well organized and designed to purposefully introduce, reinforce, and master concepts, as well as ensure a balance between continental and national foci. The program’s strategic plan is well articulated and was developed collaboratively.

- The curriculum has been revised recently to remove geographically based streams and extend analysis beyond the boundaries of nation states. The program incorporates various High Impact Practices such as first-year seminars, leveraging active learning classrooms and blended learning, writing intensive courses and study-abroad opportunities at partner institutions. Teaching evaluations and student focus groups have shown that the program revisions have been well received. The program offers courses in person, online, and in a blended model. Students are rigorously assessed through written work, exams, class participation, and capstone seminar courses. The introductory course’s low-risk, relative high-reward assessment structure and blended learning model helps first-year students to transition successfully into university and reinforces positive study skills.

- The administration of the program has been merged with Political Science and administrative support staff for the Department of Political Science was reduced to one position in 2015; the impact of which has been felt by faculty and students. In anticipation of budget constraints, the program pro-actively revised its curriculum to achieve greater efficiency with respect to how to deploy fewer resources.

- The two full-time faculty members cross-appointed with NAS have been highly research-productive, and the program was able to secure a major North American mobility grant with partners in Mexico and the
United States. The program prides itself on exemplary and innovative teaching and its teaching evaluations reflect an above-average satisfaction across the program.

- The North American Studies program has solidified its role in the Faculty of arts as a key interdisciplinary program with strong connections across the university, is closely aligned with Laurier’s goals and strategic plans, and will continue its commitment to academic excellence through curricular and pedagogical innovation.

External Reviewers’ Report

Executive Summary

Laurier’s North American Studies program occupies a unique, interdisciplinary niche within the university, and is effectively aligned with the university’s strategic goals and priorities. Having undergone a significant curricular renovation in recent years, the program is well-designed and well-run, and delivers efficient, high-quality, and cutting-edge instruction to a growing number of combined-honours students. In our view, the program is also well-positioned to attract a growing number of majors: its course offerings are topical and engaging, and its instructors are among the university’s best. While the program’s growing reputation alone should generate more majors, efforts to build links with other academic units, especially the Lazaridis School of Business (LSBE) and the two Brantford faculties, should also help grow interest in the program. Our sense, more generally, is that the program is moving from a phase of re-organization to one of consolidation, requiring only modest and incremental changes and adjustments. In addition to continuing to build linkages beyond the Faculty of Arts, our recommendations emphasize enhancements to the program’s Indigenous studies stream, support for further internationalization of the student experience, and the judicious expansion of the program’s online offerings. At the same time, we highlight the risks of the program becoming ‘too lean’, both in terms of the erosion of the wider students’ experience (through administrative or CAS reductions that cut too close to the bone) and in terms of future research productivity of core faculty. Overall, however, we consider the program at present to be in a healthy state, with committed faculty, a relevant and engaging curriculum, and a clear direction for the future.

List of Recommendations

1. An effort should be made to make the electives for a NASP joint major clearer and more transparent for students either on the calendar or web page (the new WLU ‘student’ website should facilitate this).

2. The program should consider substituting or adding an elective relating to Indigenous peoples for the required course at the second year level. The identified ‘gap’ in Indigenous course offerings might be temporarily solved by using electives already taught by full-time faculty.

3. Future hires within the Faculty of Arts take should take into consideration the needs of the NASP program, particularly regarding the need to strengthen faculty expertise on Mexico.
4. Given the absence of program-specific courses in theory and methods, the program should strive to ensure that the key theoretical and methodological perspectives that it seeks to impart in all of its students are continuously offered through its core courses at each year of study.

5. The program should explore the possibilities for using Desire2Learn as a tool for measuring learning outcomes.

6. The program should ensure that all course syllabi contain a statement of course objectives, with specific reference to the relationship between these objectives and broader learning outcomes.

7. NASP should continue to pursue collaboration with other academic units, specifically the Business school and the Brantford campus. The Dean should take a leadership role in these initiatives, trying to overcome past roadblocks in order to create a minor in NASP in Business and to facilitate the integration of Indigenous themes into the NASP joint major.

8. There is no allotted meeting space to aid NASP student and faculty engagement and community building. This is always important to the creation of a positive scholarly environment and finding space should be considered.

9. A judicious blend of online with in-person courses should be planned, with careful strategic planning relating to audience and goals.

10. The administration should consider some strategies to encourage research time for the two full-time faculty members to avoid a burn out situation. Growth in the number of NASP majors should be monitored, and the administration should remain open to re-visiting the issue of administrative course releases if numbers warrant.

11. A strategy for maintaining relations with NASP alumni might be developed, as a means of future recruiting and as a means of measuring the impact of the program though student successes.

12. The level of contract faculty should be at the very least maintained, or enhanced if at all possible. Marking funds should be considered for the NO105 course.

13. Ongoing internationalization should be encouraged and aided with resources, whether this is for the course for international students, the creative use of technology to have joint seminars, or the encouragement of student learning-travel abroad.

Unit Response

The Unit Response was authored by the Chair of the Department of Political Science in collaboration with the two full-time faculty members in North American Studies, and provides responses to the recommendations made in each section of the External Reviewers’ Report. There were no clarifications or corrections to the External Reviewers’ Report noted.
The program responded to each recommendation and was in agreement with all of the reviewers’ suggestions for improving the quality of the program. For each recommendation, the response identified the rationale for agreement, proactive steps that had already been taken toward implementation, clear steps for future action that would be taken, and any barriers to implementation or decisions outside of the program’s control. In particular, the program’s willingness to collaborate with other programs and departments both within and outside of the Faculty of Arts in order to achieve goals and objectives was noted, and both this and the thorough response to each of the reviewers’ recommendations is appreciated.

The Unit Response concludes by noting that the review was a constructive one and that they are appreciative of both the reviewers’ acknowledgement of the quality of the program as well as their suggestions to further improve it.

B) IDENTIFICATION OF PROGRAM STRENGTHS

1. The Program’s academic goals and learning outcomes align with the 2015-2020 Strategic Academic Plan.

2. The interdisciplinary nature of the Program provides a balanced mixture of knowledge, skills, and analysis.

3. The Program has successfully negotiated a phase of re-organization, and through it achieved an efficient method of delivering its courses.

4. The Program has successfully initiated a first-year course employing a blended model of pedagogy.

C) OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT

1. Program-specific courses in theory and methods could be developed.

2. Indigenous content for study needs to be increased on the Waterloo campus.

3. Course syllabi could be updated and made more consistent concerning objectives and learning outcomes.

D) PRIORITIZATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS APPROVED FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Several of the External Reviewers’ recommendations (Recommendations #3, #8, #10, #12) entail resource or space allocations that cannot be addressed outside of the wider context of budgetary and/or physical plant constraints in the Faculty of Arts, and in the university as a whole. They are therefore not included in the prioritization list, since they may not be implemented outside of wider institutional processes.

Recommendation #1: An effort should be made to make the electives for a NASP joint major clearer and more transparent for students either on the calendar or web page. The Program response notes that this
recommendation has been achieved through the need to populate the new student website. New program information and updated course lists and degree requirements are now available.

Recommendation #2: The program should consider substituting or adding an elective relating to Indigenous peoples for the required course at the second year level. The identified “gap” in Indigenous course offerings might be temporarily solved by using elective already taught by full-time faculty. The Program agrees with this recommendation, and notes that it is committed to retaining NO230: Decolonizing North America as a core course offered to all majors in at least a two-year rotation. It also observes that it has filled a gap in its third-year offerings by creating a new 300-level course in Indigenous Politics and Policy, while continuing to offer NO211: Canadian Cultures and Identities, which remains a required course for majors in the program, and which offers the opportunity for significant Indigenous content. The Program is likewise committed to continuing to expand its offerings in this area of study.

Recommendation #4: Given the absence of program-specific courses in theory and methods, the program should strive to ensure that . . . key theoretical and methodological . . . are continuously offered through its core courses at each year of study. The Program intends to undertake an audit of its core courses in order to address this recommendation by determining how students are introduced to the study and practice of interdisciplinary subjects. In particular the Program will examine NO211 and NO401 in order to revise those courses with respect to theory and methods.

Recommendation #5: The program should explore the possibility of using Desire2Learn as a tool for measuring learning outcomes; Recommendation #6: The program should ensure that all course syllabi contain a statement of course objectives, with specific reference to the relationship between these objectives and broader learning outcomes. The Program is willing to undertake a pilot project utilizing Desire2Learn in one course during the 2016-2017 academic year. The implementation of both of these recommendations relies on the Program’s ability to identify more clearly appropriate learning outcomes and disciplinary objectives.

Recommendation #7: NASP should continue to pursue collaboration with other academic units, specifically the Business school and the Brantford campus. The Dean should take a leadership role in these initiatives. Wider collaboration generally between the FoA and the LSBE in terms of course offerings will soon be under discussion, and the NASP will certainly play a role in those deliberations. Similarly, the need to bring offerings in Indigenous studies to the Waterloo campus is being discussed with the Faculty of Liberal Arts (FLA) and the Office of Aboriginal Initiatives, and the NASP will be included as those discussions proceed.

Recommendation #9: A judicious blend of online with in-person courses should be planned, with careful strategic planning relating to audience and goals. The Program notes that it already has a number of courses under development for on-line delivery, and that it would like to offer a fully on-line Minor in North American Studies. The recommendation emphasizes, however, the need for careful strategic planning. Under the RCM budget model on-line initiatives will need to be rigorously vetted before implementation, so that their pedagogic purpose and financial viability are clearly established.

Recommendation #11: A strategy for maintaining relations with NASP alumni might be developed as a means of future recruiting and as a means of measuring the impact of the program through student successes. The Program agrees with this recommendation, and notes that administrative support is required to
develop alumni relations. The expansion of alumni connections is a wider goal of the FoA, and all units, including the NASP, will be aided in this effort by the Office of the Dean, and the Development and Alumni Relations Office.

Recommendation #13: Ongoing internationalization should be encouraged and aided with resources, whether this is for the course for international students, the creative use of technology to have joint seminars, or the encouragement of student learning-travel abroad. The Program notes that it already has a strong record of student exchange opportunities, and is working on a new travel bursary for NASP students. The Program may also wish to engage with the Arts Travel Abroad Program, in order to create opportunities to generate individual study-abroad courses.

SIGNATURES

Dr. Richard Nemesvari  October 11, 2016  

Dr. Kathryn Carter  October 16, 2016  

Dr. Deborah MacLatchy  October 16, 2016
### PART TWO: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation to be Implemented</th>
<th>Responsibility for Implementation</th>
<th>Anticipated Completion Date</th>
<th>Additional Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation #1: An effort should be made to make the electives for a NASP joint major clearer and more transparent for students either on the calendar or web page.</td>
<td>Coordinator and Program</td>
<td>January 2017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation #2: The program should consider substituting or adding an elective relating to indigenous peoples for the required course at the second year level. The identified “gap” in Indigenous course offerings might be temporarily solved by using elective already taught by full-time faculty.</td>
<td>Coordinator and Program</td>
<td>September 2018</td>
<td>This may require further discussion between the Dean of Arts, the Dean of Liberal Arts, and the Office of Aboriginal Initiatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation #4: The program should consider substituting or adding an elective relating to indigenous peoples for the required course at the second year level. The identified “gap” in Indigenous course offerings might be temporarily solved by using elective already taught by full-time faculty.</td>
<td>Coordinator and Program</td>
<td>September 2017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations #5 and #6</td>
<td>Coordinator and Program</td>
<td>September 2017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
objectives and broader learning outcomes.

Recommendation #6: NASP should continue to pursue collaboration with other academic units, specifically the Business school and the Brantford campus. The Dean should take a leadership role in these initiatives, trying to overcome past roadblocks in order to create a minor in NASP in Business and to facilitate the integration of Indigenous themes into the NASP joint major.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Coordinator and Program, Dean of Arts</th>
<th>January 2018</th>
<th>Discussion will need to take place between the Program, the Dean of Arts, the Dean of FLA, and the Dean of LSBE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Recommendation #7: NASP should continue to pursue collaboration with other academic units, specifically the Business school and the Brantford campus. The Dean should take a leadership role in these initiatives, trying to overcome past roadblocks in order to create a minor in NASP in Business and to facilitate the integration of Indigenous themes into the NASP joint major.

Recommendation #9: A judicious blend of online with in-person courses should be planned, with careful strategic planning relating to audience and goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coordinator and Program, Dean of Arts</th>
<th>April 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Recommendation #11: A strategy for maintaining relations with NASP alumni might be developed, as a means of future recruiting and as a means of measuring the impact of the program through student successes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coordinator and Program, Dean of Arts, Development and Alumni Relations Office</th>
<th>September 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Recommendation #13: Ongoing internationalization should be encouraged and aided with resources, whether this is for the course for international students, the creative use of technology to have joint seminars, or the encouragement of student learning-travel abroad.

| Coordinator and Program | September 2017 |