



FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT
Executive Summary
March 2017
Bachelor of Arts in Legal Studies
Program Review
Dean: Dr. Nawal Ammar

Under UOIT's Quality Assurance Framework, all degree programs are subject to a comprehensive review every eight years to ensure that they continue to meet provincial quality assurance requirements and to support their ongoing rigour and coherence.

On the completion of the program review, the self-study brief together with the reviewers' report and the assessment team's response are reviewed by the appropriate standing committee of Academic Council, and are subsequently reported to Academic Council, the Board of Governors and the Quality Council.

In 2014-15 a program review was scheduled for the Bachelor of Arts in Legal Studies program. This is the first program review for this program and the internal assessment team is to be commended for undertaking this assignment in addition to an already challenging workload and within very tight deadlines. The following provides a summary of the outcomes and action plans resulting from the review. A report from the program outlining the progress that has been made implementing the recommendations will also be put forward in eighteen months' time.

External Reviewers: Dr. Annie Rochette (Université du Québec à Montréal) and Dr. Richard Chaykowski (Queen's University)

Site Visit: November 18-19, 2015

The Legal Studies program focusses on the critical exploration of the social roles of law and its connections with community, government, and society, as well as the ways that both formal and informal law addresses socio-legal and social justice issues. Students can complete the degree in the comprehensive program, or elect one of three specializations: Alternative Dispute Resolution, Human Rights Law, or Information Law.

Significant Strengths of the Program

- Integrating Project and Practicum is substantive and adds considerably to the outcomes of the program
- The faculty employ a wide range of active learning approaches and methods, some of which display a high degree of innovation
- The faculty complement demonstrate a very high degree of expertise in their subject areas, and exceptional enthusiasm for teaching in the Program

Opportunities for Program Improvement and Enhancement

- Turnover in sessional faculty has the potential to impact teaching outcomes and continuity of desired learning outcomes
- The Faculty's pool of Teaching Assistants (TAs) rarely includes individuals with sufficiently strong background in law or legal studies.

The Program Review

The external review of the Bachelor of Arts Legal Studies program was conducted by Dr. Annie Rochette and Dr. Richard Chaykowski. The Review Team examined the Program's Self-Study report and conducted a site visit (November 18 and 19, 2015), during which it toured the facilities and met with various stakeholders, including the Dean of the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Associate Deans, Legal Studies faculty, students and Teaching Assistants. The Review Team concluded that the Legal Studies Program was "strong and vibrant," with high quality curriculum, teaching methods and outcomes.

Summary of Reviewer Recommendations and Faculty Responses

Recommendation

The Legal Studies program would benefit from a major program curriculum review, including:

- A comprehensive strategic and functional assessment of the required core skills and competencies that Program graduates should have;*
- A translation of these core skills and competencies into a coherent set of measurable, learning-centered program learning objectives or outcomes and degree expectations;*
- A review of the actual skills and competency objectives and outcomes of all the current courses that comprise the Legal Studies Program;*
- A plan to align the actual with the required skills, competency and learning objectives and to align course level objectives and outcomes with program level objectives and outcomes.*

Response

The Faculty will undertake a major curriculum review as set out in the Action Plan below. The Faculty is currently working with UOIT's Centre for Teaching and Learning to align the learning objectives and outcomes with the degree level expectations.

Recommendation

Especially in relation to the Honours Thesis, it may be worthwhile focusing greater attention on the Integrating Project and the Practicum – both of which are accessible and provide excellent educational value-added in the Program.

Response

The Integrating Project already occupies an important place in the Program. In their 4th year, students are required to take either Integrating Project or Honours Thesis. Significant attention and resources are devoted to the Integrating Project. The Practicum is under review by a Faculty Committee. This committee will design and conduct the first practicum program review for the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities. The Faculty agrees that the Honours Thesis is typically suitable only for a small subset of students. The Review Team noted that the theses are supervision-intensive, the current rules regarding supervision in which each faculty supervises no more than two students per year addresses this. Therefore, this supervision does not take away the time and resources from the Integrating Project or other courses. The Faculty feels that the Honours Thesis is an important tool for preparing the best students for graduate or professional study. Thus, it should be continued in the present form.

Recommendation

The Program should consider introducing a first year Legal Studies course.

Response

The Social Science and Humanities Faculty is currently working on developing a common 1st year for all students, with an “Introduction to...” each program area (e.g., Legal Studies, Communication, Political Science, etc.) included in the first year. The development of a course “Introduction to Legal Studies” will respond to this recommendation (see Action Plan for implementation deadlines).

Recommendation

Legal Studies Program should examine ways in which to achieve a consistently lower acceptance rate over time, in order to increase standards.

Response

Given current budgetary constraints and general decrease of enrolment in the Faculty, the Program is not in a position to lower acceptance rates at this time. Nevertheless, this recommendation will be re-examined in the future.

Recommendation

While undertaking the Program Curriculum Review, the Program should also identify its comparative advantages, and its strategic goals and objectives as a legal studies program, with a view to increasing its relative standing as the Legal Studies “program of choice” for students in Ontario and across Canada.

Response

This will be included as a component of the Program Curriculum Review.

Recommendation

The Program should broaden its recruitment base and efforts beyond the GTA, with a view to increasing application rates.

Response

The Program will explore opportunities to broaden the recruitment base beyond the GTA and is already taking steps in this direction. The Program has been discussing the possibility of transforming some of the courses into online or hybrid model, which will help it reach broader audiences. Work is in progress on developing a program website, which could be a useful recruitment tool for students outside the GTA. In addition, the Program will explore the possibility of developing targeted recruitment initiatives outside of the GTA (particularly in areas where there are no local university offerings in the Legal Studies) and work on improving scholarship provision to top candidates for admission.

Recommendation

The Program is encouraged to continue to support the Practicum element of the curriculum and, if possible, expand it, as well as explore other experiential learning opportunities that are less of a time commitment for students, such as internships.

Response

As indicated above (under Response #2), the Practicum is currently undergoing a review at the Faculty level. The Legal Studies Program is represented on this committee. Additionally, the Legal Studies Program will work on developing experiential learning opportunities other than the Practicum.

Recommendation

Consistent with recommendation 3, above, the Program should establish an Introduction to Legal Studies course that sets a foundation, in the first year, for students in the field.

Response

The Social Science and Humanities Faculty is currently working on developing a common 1st year for all students, with an “Introduction to...” each program area (e.g., Legal Studies, Communication, Political Science, etc.) included in the first year. The development of a course “Introduction to Legal Studies” will respond to this recommendation (see Action Plan for implementation deadlines).

Recommendation

Create an explicit linking of measurable program learning objectives with evaluation methods used throughout the Program be undertaken during the Program Curriculum Review.

Response

This will form part of the Program Curriculum Review.

Recommendation

The Program should examine the nature and reasons for the observed differences in GPA across specializations in the Program.

Response

The data showed GPA differences among specializations (especially the Alternative Dispute Resolution specialization). However, a closer examination of this data reveals that it is not sufficient to make reliable conclusions to act on it at this point. The Program will monitor more closely the differences among specializations to ascertain whether they are systematic and warrant action.

Recommendation

The Program may benefit from reviewing the model for utilizing sessional instructors (continuity model vs turnover model) and examine the strategic use of sessional instructors (e.g., number of sessional instructors, types of courses they teach).

Response

Given that teaching needs change from term to term, it may not be possible to adhere to any specific model or to establish any set guidelines for the strategic use of sessional instructors. Nevertheless, the Program will place increased emphasis on circulating sessional job postings to wider audiences (including through professional networks and listservs) as well as on quality control to ensure best selection of sessional instructors. It is hoped that promoting greater awareness about the program, including through a new program website, will help attract a larger pool of qualified candidates for sessional positions. Further, the Program will continue providing newly hired instructors with necessary support and guidance prior to the beginning of teaching as well as throughout the semester. There are already a number of quality controls in place.

Recommendation

It may be worthwhile reconsidering the teaching only stream or, at the very least, lower to workload to 6 courses.

Response

The Program appreciates the Review Team's concern about high workload for the teaching faculty. However, given current budgetary constraints, it is not possible to lower the workload as suggested.

Recommendation

The Program would benefit from having the SSH Faculty either direct greater attention and resources to hiring TAs that are qualified in legal studies or concentrating resources on hiring and allocating more grading assistants to the Program.

Response

The Legal Studies faculty will discuss ways to better prepare TAs for the Legal Studies courses and will liaise with the Faculty TA Committee to implement these measures. In addition, the Program will consider organizing a day retreat for Legal Studies TAs in order to provide them with a better understanding of the Program's teaching philosophy and requirements in the Legal Studies courses.

Recommendation

The Legal Studies faculty currently do not have access to HeinOnline database. The Review Team acknowledges the resources constraints faced by any library, but notes that this database is an essential resource to carry out research in the legal studies field.

Response

HeinOnline database is extremely expensive (US \$30,000 per year) and, due to the current financial situation is unaffordable. Nevertheless, the library will keep HeinOnline under consideration and will explore purchasing access to it, should the financial situation improve.

Recommendation

The Program is encouraged to carefully evaluate the efficacy of developing joint programs (patterned after the program with Engineering) in light of: Program learning outcomes (and concerns regarding whether the joint programs will have a coherent set of learning outcomes and degree expectations); availability of resources to operate the programs; and challenges associated with 5-year degree programs, such as student demand.

Response

The joint programs are brand new initiatives and will be carefully evaluate as suggested by the Review Team.

Plan of Action

The table below presents a timeline of the actions planned to address the recommendations from the external report.

Proposed Action	Timeline	Person/Area Responsible
Major program curriculum review, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identifying Program's comparative advantages to increase its standing 	February 2016 – February 2017	All Legal Studies faculty (with support of UOIT's Teaching and Learning Centre) (we will establish several subcommittees)

<p>as a 'program of choice' in Ontario and Canada;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explicit linking of measurable program learning objectives with evaluation methods; ▪ Carefully evaluating the efficacy of developing joint programs 		
Developing 1 st year "Introduction to Legal Studies" course	<p>Course development: February – September 2016</p> <p>Course approval by faculty council and university curriculum committee: fall 2016</p> <p>Course offering to students: fall 2017</p>	all Legal Studies faculty
Broadening recruitment base and efforts	<p>Development of program website: January –July 2016</p> <p>Exploring the possibility of developing hybrid and online courses: February – December 2016</p>	<p>Identifying structure and content of the website: all Legal Studies faculty</p> <p>Building program website: external contractor</p> <p>Development courses: all Legal Studies faculty</p>
Practicum and experiential learning opportunities	<p>Faculty review of the practicum: February – May 2016</p> <p>Development of ideas for new experiential learning opportunities: February – September 2016</p>	<p>practicum review committee</p> <p>all Legal Studies faculty</p>
Dedicating greater attention and resources to hiring TAs that are qualified in legal studies	<p>Development of ideas to improve TA preparation: February – March 2016</p> <p>Liaising with the Faculty TA Committee to implement these measures: March – April 2016</p>	<p>all Legal Studies faculty</p> <p>Faculty TA Committee</p>

Due Date for 18-Month Follow-up on Plan of Action: Aug 2017

Date of Next Cyclical Review: 2022-23