

## Master of Arts Interdisciplinary Studies Program Review Summary Report, December 2022

### Program Reviewed:

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Master of Arts: Interdisciplinary Studies (MA-IS)

### External Review Team Appointed by the Provost & Vice President Academic:

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- Dr. Katherine Acheson, Professor, English Language and Literature, University of Waterloo
- Dr. William Carroll, Professor, Sociology, University of Victoria
- Dr. Vive Kumar, Associate Dean, Research and Innovation, Faculty of Science and Technology, Athabasca University (Internal Observer for site visit only)

### Key Milestones:

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- Program Review Kick-off: July 22, 2021
- Self-Study Approval by MA-IS Program Council: March 2022
- Self-Study Approved by Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty Council: May 26, 2022
- Virtual Site Visit: July 14-15, 2022
- Receipt of External Reviewer Report: July 27, 2022
- Program Response Report to Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences Faculty Council: January 13, 2023
- Program Response Report to Faculty of Graduate Studies Faculty Council: February 2, 2023
- Program Response Report to Academic Planning, Priorities and Standards Committee (APPSC) of General Faculties Council: March 27, 2023
- Public Posting of MA-IS Program Review Summary Report: March 28, 2023
- Annual Program Update to APPSC: June 2024

### Overview of Program Strengths and Challenges:

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Strengths of the MA-IS program identified in the self-study include robust core courses at the entry and exit to the program along with eportfolio pedagogy within those courses, the variety available to students through numerous study streams, focus areas and courses, the strong quality of faculty and their solid research portfolios, and the high level of student satisfaction as measured through student and alumni surveys.

The reviewers' report provided the following overall observation of the MAIS program:

We find the descriptions of strengths and challenges in the MAIS self-study to be an accurate reflection of the current situation. MAIS provides a flexible and rich graduate-level interdisciplinary program for a large student body arrayed across the country and indeed

continents. Faculty are well qualified and dedicated to their educational mission, and students and alumni have favorable views of the program.

The reviewers were suitably impressed with the program and mentioned in particular “the scope and rigour of the interdisciplinary nature of the program, the diverse pathways it offers students to reach their even more diverse educational goals, the professional and compassionate support that the administrative staff give to students, and the commitment of so many faculty to the program’s success.”

The reviewers expressed confidence in the qualifications and strong research portfolios of the faculty and noted the program’s ability to provide robust research capability outcomes for students. They highlighted the praise provided by students and alumni for the high quality of course design and delivery and lauded the MA-IS Community of Practice.

While there are several areas for improvement highlighted in the MA-IS self-study, first and foremost is the issue of managing faculty workloads to secure an adequate number of faculty to successfully deliver the MA-IS program as intended. The external review report strongly corroborates this finding, stating “... we heard repeatedly that the institution does not have sufficient faculty resources or infrastructure to deliver the program as it is intended to be delivered and in such a way as to safeguard its educational mission and reputation for the future.”

This capacity challenge is identified as critical as it has knock-on effects for the ability of the program to address other areas of concern identified by the external review team and the self-study, such as timely course revisions, availability of course offerings, improved student mentorship and advising, increased research opportunities for faculty and students, and in decolonization of the curriculum.

External reviewer recommendations are addressed in the Program Council Action Plan below.

### Program Council Action Plan:

Priority	Recommendations	Proposed action(s)	Timeline	Lead responsibility	Resourcing responsibility	Dean's response
1 <b>CRITICAL</b>	That the University address faculty workload issues that have been holding MAIS back from achieving its potential. This includes devising means by which faculty who participate in MAIS can approximate the 40:40:20 workload profile that is typical of research universities.	<p>This recommendation is addressed to the University, not the MA-IS Program, as it depends upon an adequate faculty complement that cannot be brought about by program councils. This recommendation is marked <i>critical</i> because every other high priority recommendation in this review depends upon it.</p> <p><b>Program-level actions:</b> the Director will consult with the FHSS Dean to discuss possible mitigations, strategies to draw more FHSS faculty into the MA-IS Program, as well as how best to make the case for new recruitments.</p>	<p>The timeline depends on University Executive decisions regarding the provision of an adequate faculty complement in the Program.</p> <p>The actions we can take at the program level will commence immediately and are ongoing.</p>	The University Executive with respect to recruitments; the Director with respect to what can be done at the program level (in consultation with the FHSS Dean and Centre Chairs).	The University Executive	<p>An institutional level workload analysis is underway.</p> <p>New Assistant Professor, Interdisciplinary Studies recruitment is in the process.</p>
2 <b>CRITICAL</b>	That the University and the Faculty commit to fixing issues that affect the schedule of course offerings and prevent students from achieving their academic goals in a reasonable time frame.	<p>This recommendation is addressed to the University/Faculty, not the MA-IS Program, as it is not a problem that can be solved at the program level. Since adequately addressing this recommendation hinges upon resolving the faculty workload issue in #1 above, it is more appropriately addressed there.</p> <p><b>Program-level actions:</b> the Director will review the possibility of more focus area cross-listings and bringing more FHSS faculty into MA-IS.</p>	<p>The timeline depends on University Executive decisions regarding the provision of an adequate faculty complement in the Program.</p> <p>The actions we can take at the program level will commence</p>	The University Executive with respect to recruitments; the Director with respect to what can be done at the program level (in consultation with the FHSS Dean and Centre Chairs).	The University Executive	In agreement

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			immediately and are ongoing.			
<b>3</b> <b>CRITICAL</b>	That the University and the Faculty commit resources so as to ensure timely revision of courses.	<p>This recommendation is addressed to the University/Faculty, not the MA-IS Program, as resources cannot be provided at the Program level (the MA-IS Program does not preside over a separate budget of its own).</p> <p><b>Program-level actions:</b> In consultation with the FHSS Dean, the Director will review the current course production process with a view to addressing the needs in the MA-IS Program. Also see the previous two critical recommendations.</p>	<p>The timeline depends on University Executive decisions regarding the provision of an adequate faculty complement in the Program.</p> <p>The actions we can take at the program level will commence immediately and are ongoing.</p>	The University Executive with respect to recruitments; the Director with respect to what can be done at the program level (in consultation with the FHSS Dean and Centre Chairs).	The University Executive	What are the special needs in the MA-IS program that the course production processes do not allow? Steps that are outside of FHSS, e.g., copyright, are to be followed. Also, course production takes time. A 3.5-month period is reasonable length of time for a course to go through production and be opened.
<b>4</b> <b>HIGH PRIORITY</b>	That the University provide resources necessary to accelerate the process of decolonizing the MAIS curriculum, beginning with the core courses, continuing with the MAIS electives, and proceeding as possible to disciplinary courses included in the curriculum.	<p>This recommendation is addressed to the University regarding provision of resources, not the MA-IS Program, and can only be implemented in part at the Program level.</p> <p><b>Program level actions:</b> The December 2022 CoP meeting will be devoted to the decolonization of MA-IS. From that initial meeting, a sub-committee of interested faculty will be formed and tasked with determining where and how the Program can be decolonized. The Director will consult with the FHSS Dean about the possibility of</p>	<p>The timeline depends on University Executive decisions regarding the provision of an adequate faculty complement in the Program.</p> <p>Regarding the actions we can take at the program level, the change in course</p>	The University Executive with respect to recruitments; the Director with respect to what can be done at the program level (in consultation with the FHSS Dean and Centre Chairs).	The University Executive	In agreement in principle. Possible overlap/duplication with the work of the DCC exists. Given that workload is already identified as an issue, creating another committee that might overlap with an existing committee (Circle) should be considered.

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		leveraging SME funds to prioritize decolonization as well as the funds set aside for Indigenous consultation. The MA-IS Program Director, in consultation with the FHSS Dean, will also add a question to the course production forms asking course authors/revisers to describe the ways in which the course in question incorporates less colonial material into its content and structure. We will map where decolonization is and is not taking place in the Program. We will make visible the work of students who are doing the work of decolonization by highlighting their projects, capstone papers, and other research. We will examine how to make special calls for research that explicitly engages with decolonization.	production forms is in process while other actions will commence with the December CoP. The decolonization sub-committee formed out of that CoP will likely hold its first meeting in the new year.			Also, Indigenous faculty members in FHSS have already decided to use the funds available for Indigenizing courses toward the development of two Indigenous undergraduate and graduate Indigenous Research Methodologies courses.
<b>5 HIGH PRIORITY</b>	That the 12 focus areas be rejuvenated and reconfigured to align with contemporary themes reflecting faculty strengths, ensuring that courses in each area are offered so that students can complete their programs in a timely manner and in the focus areas that interest them.	Insofar as ensuring adequate offerings for students to complete their studies in a timely manner depends upon having an adequate faculty complement, this recommendation too depends upon resolving the critical recommendations above.  <b>Program level actions:</b> Focus area stewards to revise the descriptions of their focus areas as needed in such a way as to clarify their meaning and scope, and to specify	Focus area needs assessments and revised descriptions to be completed by February 2023, submitted to the Director, and thence to MA-IS Program Council for review and discussion.	The University Executive with respect to resourcing; the Director in consultation with focus area stewards and MA-IS Program Council for program-level actions.	The University Executive	In agreement.

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	Focus area stewards can lead this effort.	gaps in the offerings. The focus area needs and revised descriptions will then be brought to MA-IS Program Council for review.				
<b>6 HIGH PRIORITY</b>	That AU and FHSS ensure that MAIS is able to hire indigenous expertise into continuing positions that include opportunities to shape the program and model the transformative potential of decolonization and indigenization.	<p>This recommendation is addressed to the University, not the MA-IS Program, as recruitments are not program decisions.</p> <p>For decolonization actions at the program level, please see #4 above.</p> <p><b>Program level actions:</b> we will pursue the interdisciplinary recruitment now underway, and the Director will consult with the FHSS Dean on making the case for new recruitments as well as strategies for inviting Indigenous colleagues to teach in the MA-IS Program.</p>	<p>The timeline is dependent upon University Executive decisions regarding recruitment.</p> <p>Consultations with FHSS Dean to begin immediately.</p>	The University Executive with respect to recruitments; the Director with respect to what can be done at the program level (in consultation with the FHSS Dean and Centre Chairs).	The University Executive	In agreement
<b>7 HIGH PRIORITY</b>	That the Director of MAIS, in consultation with appropriate expertise within the University, review orientation materials and approaches with an aim to strengthening them.	<b>Actions:</b> 1) The Director will review student orientation materials and will offer an overview of the MA-IS Program via webinar to incoming students after each intake. 2) Focus area stewards will be encouraged to offer one webinar talk per year to students about their respective focus areas. 3) Student participation in the FHSS research talks and in the annual FGS Graduate Student Conference will be encouraged.	Orientation materials to be reviewed in fall term 2022; MA-IS webinar overview to be conducted the first month of winter and fall terms. Remaining actions to be initiated in Fall term 2022.	The MA-IS Program Director, focus area stewards, FHSS Dean.	n/a	In agreement. The focus steward workload needs coordination with the Dean and Chairs (resources permitting) and be in alignment with the ongoing workload analysis. Advising students cannot be achieved in place of reduction in

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		4) The Director will engage with FGS to create more explicit roles for faculty to engage with students at the Conference. 5) The Director will consult with the FHSS Dean about assigning a portion of each steward's workload for a role in student advising. Going forward, this will be made a part of the expectation for the focus area steward role.				teaching or course revision/development , which would negatively impact all other recommendations.
<b>8 HIGH PRIORITY</b>	That MAIS leadership and FHSS explore strengthening advising resources for students enrolled in the program.	<b>Actions:</b> same as #7 above.	Orientation materials to be reviewed in fall term 2022; MA-IS webinar overview to be conducted the first month of winter and fall terms. Remaining actions to be initiated in Fall term 2022.	The MA-IS Program Director, focus area stewards, FHSS Dean.	n/a	In agreement
<b>9 MEDIUM PRIORITY</b>	To involve more of the MAIS community in the Community of Practice (CoP), we advise organizers to consider encouraging FHSS and contract faculty who teach in MAIS to join the CoP. Alumni are also interested in joining the CoP or attending events organized by the CoP.	<b>Actions:</b> A clear description of the CoP and its purpose will be formulated and distributed, and the MA-IS Program will continue to widely invite FHSS faculty while recognizing workload issues (see recommendation #1). The Director will also consult with the FHSS Dean about possible compensation for contract instructors and, for at least one CoP meeting, formulate a topic that might be attractive to alumni.	Already in process with invitations sent out for the October CoP, consultations regarding compensation for contract instructors to take place in November/22; suitable topic for alumni to be formulated in January	The Director in consultation with faculty lead on the CoP.	The University Executive/FHSS	Permanent faculty members, who teach in the MA-IS program, can participate in CoP discussions. There are no provisions in place to engage instructors on contract in this process.

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	An initiative linking alumni as mentors to incoming students could also be helpful in providing orientation and building community.		2023 for a spring CoP. Description of the CoP and its purpose will be completed by January/23.			
<b>10</b> <b>MEDIUM</b> <b>PRIORITY</b>	That the Director of MAIS, in consultation with others as appropriate, develop a plan to increase and raise the profile of work-integrated learning (WIL) in the program.	<b>Actions:</b> The Director will establish a Program-wide expectation that instructors of MAIS 700 and 701/2 make note of projects and capstone papers that incorporate WIL and send this information to the MA-IS office for coordination in a venue that showcases such achievements. The new ILE may be leveraged in this regard. The Director will explore the possibilities of the <a href="#">RIIPEN</a> platform and bring it back to MA-IS Program Council for discussion and will also put a WIL component in the learning contracts that are completed prior to reading courses and final projects.	November/22	The Director		In agreement.
<b>11</b> <b>LOW</b> <b>PRIORITY</b>	In order to better recognize the development of research capacity and proficiency in the MAIS program, consider adding a program-level learning outcome that reflects the development of theories	<b>Actions:</b> The Director will incorporate the capacity of research skills into the first MA-IS PLO "integrated learning" and bring it to MA-IS Program Council for approval.	November/22	The Director	n/a	In agreement



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	and practices of interdisciplinary research and analysis.					
<b>12</b> <b>LOW</b> <b>PRIORITY</b>	To enable students to extend their research capacities and enhance their preparation for further graduate studies, consider adding a thesis to the options for completing the degree (presently 700 or 701, or 701 and 702). In recognition of the workload associated with thesis supervision, faculty should be granted fractional teaching release for thesis supervision to completion.	<b>Action:</b> Strike a sub-committee to begin discussions about a thesis option and possible alternatives such as a publication route, while recognizing that without adequate resourcing it will not be possible to open a thesis option.	January/23	The Director	n/a	FHSS Dean: In agreement  FGS Dean: I do not believe this should be a low priority for a CARU. This should be a high priority, in my view. The number of students in this program should generate enough revenue to fund several thesis students, which would raise the credibility and profile of this program.