

**FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT**  
**Institutional Quality Assurance Program (IQAP) Review**  
**English and Cultural Studies B.A., M.A., Ph.D.**  
**Date of Review: May 13 and 14, 2021**

*In accordance with the University Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), this final assessment report provides a synthesis of the external evaluation and the internal response and assessments of the undergraduate and graduate programs delivered by English and Cultural Studies. This report identifies the significant strengths of the program, together with opportunities for program improvement and enhancement, and it sets out and prioritizes the recommendations that have been selected for implementation.*

*The report includes an Implementation Plan that identifies who will be responsible for approving the recommendations set out in the Final Assessment Report; who will be responsible for providing any resources entailed by those recommendations; any changes in organization, policy or governance that will be necessary to meet the recommendations and who will be responsible for acting on those recommendations; and timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations.*

**Executive Summary of the Review**

In accordance with the Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the department of English and Cultural Studies program submitted a self-study in April 2021 to the Acting Vice-Provost, Faculty and Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies to initiate the cyclical program review of its undergraduate and graduate programs. The approved self-study presented program descriptions, learning outcomes, and analyses of data provided by the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis. Appendices to the self-study contained all course outlines associated with the program and the CVs for each full-time member in the department.

Two arm's length external reviewers and one internal reviewer were endorsed by the Dean, Faculty of Humanities, and selected by the Acting Vice-Provost, Faculty and Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies. The review team reviewed the self-study documentation and then conducted a remote review on May 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> 2021. The review included interviews with the Provost and Vice-President (Academic); Acting Vice-Provost, Faculty, Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies, Associate Dean, Grad Studies and Research, Chair of the Department and meetings with groups of current students, full-time faculty and support staff.

The Chair of the Department and the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities submitted responses to the Reviewers' Report (December 2021 and February 2022). Specific recommendations were discussed and clarifications and corrections were presented. Follow-up actions and timelines were included.

## **Strengths**

- **University Mission:** The reviewers recognized the department's positive contribution to the university's mission to "achieve international distinction for creativity, innovation, and excellence."
- **Commitment to Teaching:** They praise ECS's commitment to teaching, including the priority area of community engagement, and note students' appreciation of faculty members' support for them during COVID and the high quality of tutorials (reflecting dedicated TA training).
- **Research Program:** The reviewers also noted that faculty members have "robust research programs including innovative community-based, socially-engaged and interdisciplinary work," suggesting that "the long list of faculty members' publications, awards, grants and other honours is a clear sign of not only productivity but also high quality work being produced in the department."
- **Top Overall Profile:** This research strength helps to explain why, in the reviewers' words, the department "punches above its weight in terms of the size and success of its graduate program." They note that ECS "was described to [them], at every level, as the strongest department in the Faculty, with the best research and graduate records".

## **Areas for Enhancement or Improvement**

The reviewers listed several areas for improvement, with the qualifying note that some areas in which the department could improve are beyond the department's control, due to governance structures and/or limited resources. Among the areas detailed in the recommendations below are:

- managing the balance between literary and cultural studies in graduate and undergraduate programs;
- communication to undergraduate students about these areas in relation to learning outcomes and different paths through the program;
- fostering undergraduate and graduate student community.

## Implementation Plan

### Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations with the Department's and Dean's Responses

Recommendation	Proposed Follow-Up	Responsibility for Leading Follow-Up	Timeline for Addressing Recommendations
<b>Undergraduate Program Recommendations</b>			
<b>Recommendation: Evaluate the balance between cultural studies and literature offerings</b>	The department is evaluating the entire undergraduate curriculum in light of impending retirements. Managing the cultural studies/literature balance relationship will be part of those discussions. Important to note here is that many faculty members reject the idea of a dichotomy between cultural studies and literature as inconsistent with the realities of teaching in English and Cultural Studies: in keeping with the department's strengths in "innovative community-based, socially engaged and interdisciplinary work" noted by reviewers, many of the courses taught and dissertations supervised in the department address literature, via the lenses of cultural studies and theory.	Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UCC), Graduate Studies Committee (GSC), Cultural Studies and Critical Theory Committee (CSCTC), Department Chair, MacPherson Institute	2021-2025 Work in the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will begin this year towards reimagining undergraduate area requirements. Thinking through the way we address the relations and tensions between literature and cultural studies will be part of these conversations. A department retreat in 2022- 2023 will focus on these issues and curricular changes, with the expectation that further changes will be necessary as more faculty members retire over the next 5 years. Consultations with the MacPherson Institute will assist in curricular (re)mapping and (re)assessing our program learning outcomes
<b>Recommendation: Ensure that students understand the</b>	The changes discussed above will go some way towards addressing this problem. However, since the report also	UCC, Graduate Chair, GSC, CSCTC, Department Chair	2021-2025 See above. One or two department meetings, in addition to the retreat

<p><b>relationship between these cultural studies and literature offerings</b></p>	<p>identifies the relationship between these areas as a significant point of tension amongst some faculty, discussions at department meetings will need to go beyond specific course offerings to rethink how we see ourselves as a department (see above).</p>		<p>described above, will focus on the question of our identity (to which the relationship between literary and cultural studies is central).</p>
<p><b>Recommendation: Engage in multi-year planning, with an eye to highlighting student pathways through the program (see next recommendation)</b></p>	<p>We understand the rationale for this recommendation, which has come up in previous IQAP reviews. Though we have tried to put in place 2- year plans, unanticipated course cancellations (usually due to unexpected leaves or course release) make it impossible to guarantee course offerings over a multi-year period. However, our curricular reform process will result in a leaner program so most courses will be taught often. The curricular reform itself is a form of multi-year planning towards a self- sustaining program with a small faculty complement.</p>	<p>UCC, Department Chair</p>	<p>2021-2025 (see recommendation 1, above)</p>
<p><b>Recommendation: Develop suggested pathways to help undergraduate students craft cohesive, connected programs according to their main interests</b></p>	<p>Our planned undergraduate curriculum review will include modifying requirements to offer and articulate different routes through the program reflective of students' interests.</p>	<p>UCC, Department Chair</p>	<p>2021-2025 (see recommendation 1, above)</p>
<p><b>Recommendation: Emphasize key skills and learning outcomes on the department website, and in all material used in communicating with and advising students.</b></p>	<p>Identifying and describing key skills and learning outcomes will be part of/play an informing role in the process of reworking the undergraduate curriculum.</p>	<p>UCC, Department Chair, in consultation with MacPherson Institute and the Centre for Career Information &amp; Experiential Education</p>	<p>2021-2025 (see recommendation 1, above)</p>

<p><b>Recommendation: Explore the possibility of creating smaller class sizes to improve the undergraduate student experience</b></p>	<p>We agree with the reviewers that “small class size has a direct impact on student experience and the sense of belonging”, while recognizing that faculty budgetary constraints make reducing class size difficult. Tutorials are one way to replicate the advantages of a small class.</p> <p>Planned curriculum restructuring will include extending the practice of allocating tutorials to select upper-year courses in which students encounter difficult subject matter (e.g., ENGLISH 3EE3 African American Literature). A survey of undergraduate students regarding their experience in the program (including but not restricted to courses) will provide us with data to support efforts to improve the undergraduate experience.</p>	<p>UCC, Department Chair, in consultation with Anti-Racist Teaching Practice Group<sup>[1]</sup> and other faculty members.</p>	<p>2021-2025 (see recommendation 1, above)</p>
<p><b>Recommendation: Appoint a faculty mentor to work with students towards cohort-based events organized around student interests</b></p>	<p>This work is already underway. In 2019 the department negotiated 3-units teaching release for the UCC in the 2nd of a 2-year term to allow for the expansion of the role to encompass counselling, communications and mentoring. The revived McMaster English and Cultural Studies Undergraduate Society (MECSUS) and development of a creative writing magazine (Spectrum) are due largely to the efforts of the UCC, Cathy Gris�, who is starting the 2nd-year of her term following a year’s research leave</p>	<p>Undergraduate Curriculum Chair, Department Chair</p>	<p>Present and ongoing</p>

<b>Graduate Program Recommendations</b>			
<b>Recommendation: Radically shrink the graduate program(s)</b>	Conversations have begun this year in GSC and CSCTC around reforming our graduate programs. While we note that we have already shrunk our graduate programs significantly (total PhD numbers/supervisions may not reflect this change yet), current and projected reductions in faculty numbers will necessitate continued reductions. The GSC and CSCTC will deliberate and make decisions this year about the pace and degree of change, recognizing that, while reductions in program size will lead to reduced scholarship funding and, eventually, hamper program quality, these moves may be necessary for long-term sustainability of these programs in the absence of additional faculty resources and/or improvements to the “points” system	GSC, CSCTC	2022-2025
<b>Administrative/Larger Program recommendations</b>			
<b>Recommendation: Continue to pay an appropriately-skilled person to establish and maintain an engaging social media presence for the department</b>	As long as funds allow, the department pays a graduate student who's web/social media-savvy and familiar with the department/programs to serve as Web Assistant to maintain the department's social media presence.	Chair of Publicity Committee	Present and ongoing

<p><b>Recommendation: Reduce the secondment of ECS faculty to other units on campus, or institute a system whereby ECS is compensated for lost faculty labour<sup>[2]</sup> so that it is not being disadvantaged or effectively penalized for its major contributions to interdisciplinary and community-based work</b></p>	<p>A system whereby departments are compensated for the labour faculty members commit to supporting interdisciplinary programs and EDI initiatives would be welcomed, and would require the support of the Dean and Assoc. Deans. As the university is moving to enhance interdisciplinary offerings and to enhance EDI and other initiatives in which ECS faculty have interest and expertise, moving to “withdraw [ECS faculty] from any extradepartmental Commitments” is neither practical nor desirable. Decisions about these secondments will continue to be made on a case-by-case basis in consultation with interested faculty members.</p>	<p>Department Chair Dean and Assoc.Deans</p>	<p>Present and ongoing.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation: Organize a departmental retreat, with a professional facilitator, to explore ways of improving the department’s cohesion and morale as well as the unity of the undergraduate curriculum; these discussions must also address issues of equity and diversity</b></p>	<p>Consultation has already begun, via an extraordinary summer department meeting attended by most faculty members, and small group/one-on- one conversations between the Department Chair and several faculty members (including the Graduate Chair and CSCT Director) and graduate students; and between individual faculty members and students. While some expressed surprise about the magnitude of reported issues, others described damaging dynamics including bullying, related to English/CSCT tensions and to broader issues of equity and inclusion such as racism and sexism (these encompass the difficulties/demands of decolonial/anti-oppressive work as well as some</p>	<p>EIO, Professional facilitator</p>	<p><b>Timeline for Addressing Recommendation:</b>  Already completed/ongoing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• summer department meeting; follow-up conversations between Chair, faculty members and students</li> <li>• Graduate orientation workshop on seminar participation</li> <li>• Grad Buddies peer-mentoring program</li> </ul> <p>Planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possible new core course for MA students</li> </ul>

	<p>resistance to those needed changes). Recognizing that the range of problems exposed will require a range of solutions and that some issues-- including widespread reports of burnout, exhaustion and low morale--are connected to broader areas of strain, the department is committed to addressing the identified problems. Following what some instructors were already doing in their graduate courses, the department has begun this work in graduate orientation by initiating ongoing discussions with incoming students (continued in individual classes) about inclusive and anti-oppressive practices geared towards interdisciplinary seminars. Additional graduate community and cohort-building activities, including peer mentoring are being discussed and implemented. A workshop on bullying and harassment conducted by EIO for faculty and graduate students followed by two ½-day faculty retreats and a ½-day graduate student with a professional facilitator should help to identify and ameliorate stresses that the report describes.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EIO workshop (November, 2021)</li> <li>• Externally facilitated workshops for faculty (January, May, 2022)</li> <li>• Externally facilitated workshop for graduate students (January, 2022)</li> <li>• Department Retreat (May, 2022)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation: The University should understand that ECS requires additional line appointments in order to participate more meaningfully in community engagement and experientially based</b></p>	<p>We will draw on the expertise of Cathy Grisé, who has taken a lead in developing and experiential learning initiatives in the department and Faculty, to assist in curriculum development to further incorporate EE assignments into our classes, with support from an ELAP grant. The department will continue to support its offerings in Community Engagement and Experiential- Based Learning as far as</p>	<p>Dean, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Studies, UCC, GSC, CSCTC, in consultation with MacPherson Institute, Office of Community Engagement</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>



<p><b>learning.</b></p>	<p>possible within current constraints. We will also continue to highlight the need for additional resources to maintain and expand them.</p>		
<p><b>Recommendation: Broaden the notion of what “counts” in the point system for teaching reduction, and award additional course releases (i.e., beyond the maximum 3 credits) for those faculty who are shouldering particularly heavy workloads. BIPOC faculty, for example, often devote considerable time to mentoring and to building community relationships, and this additional work inevitably affects the amount of time they have available for research.</b></p>	<p>As noted above, the department would welcome a revision of the points system to recognize the labour faculty members—especially BIPOC faculty members--commit to mentoring students, EDI initiatives and other contributions to community. Plans to review departmental governance over the next two years will focus on improving transparency and recognizing and remediating uneven workloads in the department, with particular attention to ways of alleviating the disproportionate burdens placed on BIPOC faculty (many of whom are women in mid- and early career, groups who also carry relatively heavy service loads).</p>	<p>Department Chair, Anti-Racist Teaching Practice Working Group, Dean, Associate Deans, Graduate Studies &amp; Research</p>	<p>2021-2023</p>
<p><b>Recommendation: Change the budget model so that the department is not disadvantaged financially by recruiting international students.</b></p>	<p>Graduate Chair, CSCT Director, Department Chair</p>	<p>The budget model is beyond the purview of the department. However, we will engage in ongoing discussions with the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research regarding possibilities for admitting more international students to our graduate programs.</p>	<p>January, 2022 and ongoing</p>

[1] This group was formed in May, 2020, to understand and address instances of racism in the classroom. Goals for 2021 including expanding the group's anti-racist focus to encompass diverse forms of oppression both within and beyond the classroom and encouraging participation in the group by other interested faculty members.

[2] ECS does receive compensation for reallocated faculty labour in the form of paid course release for some faculty members involved in initiatives (significant committees, research Institutes, etc.) beyond the department. However, these contributions outside the department are not recognized in the faculty formula on which future hiring decisions are based, and while loss of teaching may be compensated from time to time in these arrangements, the loss of the faculty member's service to the department is not recognized or compensated (often leading to many faculty members carrying a 'double burden' of service to multiple departments or programs, exacerbating the problem of burnout).

## **Dean's Response, Faculty of Humanities**

Let me begin by thanking Dr. Susie O'Brien and her colleagues, including staff, and the undergraduate and graduate students in English and Cultural Studies for contributing to the self-study and to the visit by the review team. I'd also like to thank the reviewers: Dr. Siân Echard, Department of English Language and Literatures, University of British Columbia; Dr. Warren Cariou, Department of English, Film and Theatre, University of Manitoba; and the internal McMaster reviewer, Dr. Lydia Kaporiri, Department of Health, Aging & Society. We are particularly grateful for their time and energy during the pandemic.

I am not going to comment on the template provided to the review team, as it is a university-wide document that sits outside my authority. On a second matter related to the process, I would echo Dr. O'Brien's comments that it might be best not to become too wedded to the idea of virtual site visits. While we have had some success with them during the pandemic, they may unintentionally limit the effectiveness of reviews. In this case, the chair and some colleagues believed that the remote nature of the review meant that there was less opportunity to get to know the department and that the discussion of more sensitive issues was difficult in the remote environment. Recruiting students for focus groups was also more challenging during the pandemic and may have been worsened by the remote nature of the event.

I would also like to make a couple important updates to the reviewers' report here at the outset. ECS was granted a new tenured faculty appointment in 2021, and the new colleague does not have any teaching commitments elsewhere. ECS welcomed the addition of a second tenured faculty member with shared teaching and service commitments in ECS and Indigenous Studies. The department was also offered the opportunity of making a tenure-track appt in 2021, as part of a spousal arrangement, but declined further consideration of the individual, as not fitting departmental needs.

The review team quite rightly stressed the strengths of the Department. English and Cultural Studies has an especially strong reputation in the university and beyond for its successful graduate programs and its high-quality researchers and instructors. In recent years several faculty members have also made or continue to make important contributions to McMaster outside of ECS. The chair's response targets three areas of improvement for the undergraduate and graduate programs: 1) managing the balance between literary and cultural studies courses at all levels; 2) communication to undergraduate students about these areas and paths through the program; and 3) fostering community among undergraduate and graduate program students. I support all three recommendations. Below I offer some comments on the department's implementation plan.

I appreciate the time that the department, especially Dr. O'Brien, has put into the plans for several workshops, trainings, and a retreat to discuss the causes of discord identified by the reviewers. I know as well that Dr. O'Brien has also spoken to individual faculty members and has invited graduate students to share their experiences with her in confidence. I did the same, though I was not surprised that no graduate students reached out. That said I am confident that department colleagues are taking the comments of the reviewers seriously and working to understand and respond to internal tensions. I have offered some financial resources to enrich the workshops and planned retreat this year.

I also support the re-evaluation of the undergraduate curriculum. I am happy to see the Department consider the relationship between literary and cultural studies as part of that process. I agree with the plans to ask the MacPherson Institute for assistance. I would recommend further that early drafts of potential changes be shared with the Associate Dean, Academic and Assistant Dean, as they may have further ideas and help the team avoid pitfalls. For example, the review team recommended the articulation of different 'pathways' through the program. While we agree that helping students think about their progress through the major can be productive, Associate Dean Corner and Assistant Dean Osterman may be able to advise the Department on ways to do that while retaining flexibility for students. "Streams" tend to lock students into rigid sets of options. Ideally, some middle ground can be found. The idea of additional TAs will have to be carefully considered. We have Faculty-wide standards for TA allocation and additional TAs are costly.

I am grateful to see the Department's interest in community-building activities for undergraduates and graduates. This goal is on my mind as well. I am hopeful that the Faculty's new alumni outreach coordinator can assist with some of this work both within ECS and across the Faculty. She will begin meeting with chairs in early 2022.

The Department has rejected the possibility of a 'drastic reduction' in the size of the graduate program, which was mentioned by the review team as a possible way forward, though not a recommended one. The Associate Dean, Graduate Studies, has had several discussions with the ECS graduate director, Dr. Dean, over the last year or two about such options, and while there has been agreement to decrease MA intake slightly, at the moment we also agree that a radical reduction in the size of the PhD cohort is undesirable. It does make sense, however, to continue exploring ways to balance the supervisory loads across the department better.

Beyond curricular review and community building, the report and departmental response highlight the contributions that ECS faculty make to interdisciplinary programs as a concern. I have had discussions with Dr. O'Brien about concluding some faculty members' commitments elsewhere, and I also rewrote one colleague's appointment letter in 2021, as requested, to end teaching requirements outside of ECS. We have also made changes centrally to support our interdisciplinary programs. Humanities has hired a long-term CLA, and several recent TT hires have had commitments extended to our two interdisciplinary programs, GSJ and GPSJ. With Associate Dean Horn's help, we have also constructed MOAs with other departments to ensure that there are contributions to GSJ and GPSJ from across the Faculty. It is

important that we continue to seek sustainable ways to support new and existing interdisciplinary programs, but I believe we are beginning to make progress in this regard.

The department also references the burden of providing/expanding experiential education offerings to its students and the work of mentoring students, especially BIPOC students, among other EDI initiatives. I support the department's plan to review its internal governance structures, increase transparency, and balance service commitments better across its faculty complement. Investments are being made in my office that will facilitate the expansion of experiential education and student development opportunities without requiring a commensurate commitment of faculty time. This is a new initiative that will take time to grow (and the pandemic has not helped), but we now have two terrific staff members in place to work on careers/experiential education. We have also partnered with the Alumni Office to hire a Humanities alumni engagement officer, mentioned earlier, who will begin to work with departments on events connecting current and former students. She also aims to expand our alumni mentorship program. These and other initiatives will contribute to the establishment of our new Student Experience Office, which, integrating EDI commitments, will increase support for students centrally and provide support for work being done in departments.

There is no plan to revise the points system to allow for additional teaching release, but there are other changes underway that are aimed at easing the burden of faculty members involved in EDI work, which disproportionately falls to BIPOC faculty. Part of this strategy has to be the recruitment of more BIPOC faculty members. In 2021 the Faculty hired six tenured or tenure-track colleagues and one new multi-year CLA. Of these seven individuals only one is neither Indigenous nor a person of colour. There are two searches ongoing in the Faculty at the moment: one is a targeted search only open to people of colour and Indigenous candidates, and in the other deliberate measures have been taken to attract a diverse pool of candidates and the committees is aiming to appoint a BIPOC scholar. The EIO is working to better coordinate EDI initiatives across campus, and Humanities is establishing an EDI advisory committee to partner with the EIO. The university has also been investing in greater supports for BIPOC students on campus, including the newly opened Black Student Success Center. I recognize that students will continue to seek personal mentorship from supervisors and instructors, which they should, but we are hopeful that new and expanded services for students (along with greater coordination and more BIPOC faculty and staff) will also make a difference for students and the faculty who support them now.

### **Quality Assurance Committee Recommendation**

McMaster's Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) reviewed the above documentation at the April, 2022 meeting and the Committee recommends that the undergraduate and graduate programs delivered by English and Cultural Studies should follow the regular course of action with an 18-month progress report and a subsequent full external cyclical review to be conducted no later than eight years after the start of the last review.