

FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

Institutional Quality Assurance Program (IQAP) Review

Labour Studies (Graduate and Undergraduate programs)

Date of Review: March 17 – 18, 2025

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 Labour Studies undergraduate and graduate programs. 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 School of Labour Studies submitted a self-study in January 2025 to the Acting Vice-Provost Teaching and Learning and Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies to initiate the cyclical program review of its program. 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 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 Social Sciences, and selected by the Vice-Provost Teaching and Learning and Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies. The review team reviewed the self-study documentation and then conducted a virtual site visit to McMaster University on March 17-18, 2025. The review included interviews with the Deputy Provost; Acting Vice-Provost Teaching and Learning and Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies, Faculty Dean, Associate Deans of graduate and undergraduate studies, Director, School of Labour Studies, and meetings with groups of current students, full-time faculty and support staff.

The Director, School of Labour Studies submitted responses to the Reviewers' Report (May 2025). Specific recommendations were discussed and clarifications and corrections were presented. Follow-up actions and timelines were included.

Strengths

The reviewers stated that an in-person site visit would have been preferable, although they also wrote that “the logistics of the virtual visit were flawless.” The reviewers also highlighted a number of positive attributes of the program in the “Program Strengths” section. These include:

- The people in the program, “students, faculty, and staff,” which reviewers identified the “greatest strength.” The review praised the student body and the “quality of the faculty.”
- Small size of the School of Labour Studies, which the review noted created a strong community and an excellent learning environment for the students.
- The School’s strong and extensive ties to the community, particularly their success in educating non-traditional students both in the undergraduate and Certificate programs.
- The strength of their curriculum, especially regarding experiential learning.

In the body of the report, the reviewers also highlighted the School’s success in fulfilling the top priorities in McMaster’s Strategic Plan. The reviews particularly highlight success in:

- Helping establish McMaster as a centre for top class research and scholarship (Priority #3), as evidenced by the faculty’s record in research, publication, and funding, and the school’s key role in growing associations such as the Canadian Association for Work and Labour Studies (CAWLS).
- Achieving “inclusive excellence” (Priority #1), with the reviewers especially praising how “the School has consistently embedded values of equity, diversity, and inclusion into its programming.” The review also praised the high levels of achievement of the students in recent years.
- Engaging with the broader community (Priority #4), as already noted above.
- Pursuing “pedagogic innovation” (Priority #2), especially through the undergraduate program.
- The reviewers also praised the School’s commitment to accessibility in all of its programs – BA, MA and PhD – as well as its provision of advance credit to students who successfully complete one of the certificate programs.

Opportunities for Improvement and Enhancement, including appropriateness of resources

The reviewers’ report concurred with the broad challenges identified in the self-study. The School has stopped its decline in undergraduate enrolment and its numbers have been climbing again, but the rebound must be maintained without losing the community and comfortable in-class experience that the students prize, and which has allowed them to thrive.

The most frequently noted problem in the review (as in the previous one) is the severe limits on faculty resources, which make it a challenge to grow and sustain the PHD program and to meet undergraduate students’ desire for a broad range of subject offerings. In the section on resources, the reviewers state: “Th[e] level of faculty resources creates challenges for the unit, especially in the area of graduate supervision and PhD program delivery, in which only 2.75 faculty members are available to supervise PhD candidates. Limited faculty resources have also made previous recommendations calling for expanding the breadth of course offerings difficult to enact.”

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

Recommendation #1:

We encourage the School to leverage its already strong connections with off-campus organizations in order to enhance its recruitment at the undergraduate level. Potential connections between the non-degree certificates and the towards groups and organizations traditionally close to the School and its Faculty members. This would have to be done in coordination with the Faculty and the University's recruitment teams.

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:

We concur especially with the last part of the recommendation: the School should work with recruitment teams (which the faculty has been developing in recent years) to boost enrolment, bringing in community partners as well.

Our certificate program is entirely online and most of the students are not local, so barring the creation of an online degree, recruiting large numbers into our undergraduate program will be a challenge.

Acting Dean's Response:

The Faculty strongly supports the School's proposed plan to work collaboratively with both the Faculty recruitment team and the School's community partners to enhance recruitment into its undergraduate programming. Such recruitment should involve recruitment into Level I Social Sciences as well as into the School's degree programs in Level II. While recognising the challenges in recruiting students from the certificate program, the School is encouraged to look for other innovative ways to recruit students as it already does by offering students with a completed certificate one credit towards an undergraduate degree. For example, the Faculty is currently providing one credit towards an undergraduate degree for the completion of certain Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) at Ontario high schools (<https://futuresocsci.mcmaster.ca/specialist-high-skills-major-shsm/>). There is opportunity for the School to explore the chosen SHSM majors for this credit option as well as engage in targeted advertising or activities to specific high schools hosting these majors in the local areas.

Recommendation #2:

We encourage the School to put in place a regular assessment process of the Concurrent Certificate with Commerce and to consider similar initiatives with other units, whether inside or outside the Faculty of Social Sciences.

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:

We have been tracking the Concurrent Certificates informally, but creating a more thorough process will take time. In McMaster's administrative system, students do not register in such Concurrent Certificates; they claim them at the end of their degrees, and show they have completed the requirements. The first cohort that can claim this Certificate will complete their degrees in April 2026. Once we gather data on students who complete the Certificate, especially their home faculty or department, we will be able to assess progress more consistently.

Regarding collaborations with other departments and faculties, discussions have been taking place on the Faculty and University level encouraging greater collaboration and especially interdisciplinary development. The Director and undergraduate director will be engaged in these efforts.

Acting Dean's Response: The Faculty recognizes the challenges in determining the success of the Concurrent Certificate in Work and Labour Relations given the delay in learning who completes the course requirements for the concurrent certificate programs. Therefore, the School's approach is reasonable in terms of determining who is completing the certificate as one way of assessing the certificate program. The School might also want to assess how the certificate is currently being promoted to students in Social Sciences and Business and how it be being used as an undergraduate recruitment tool.

Recommendation #3:

We encourage the Faculty and University administrators to consider ways to facilitate interdisciplinary collaborations between units, in particular by reviewing the "bum in seats" funding model and by making joint projects easier between units affiliated with different Faculties. This would include providing units with the data necessary to the assessment of such initiatives.

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:

The School fully concurs with this recommendation for the Faculty and University administrators to act on this, especially given the concerns articulated in our response to R#2 regarding how to track the Concurrent Certificate.

We also agree that joint projects would be easier to create and sustain with a funding model that is less competitive and more collaborative.

Acting Dean's Response: The University is currently working on the course registration system to allow students to register for minors offered at the University. The Faculty has indicated its willingness to pilot registration in its minor programs (offered by the Vice-Provost, Teaching and Learning). The hope is that this could then be extended to allow for the registration in a concurrent certificate program. The Faculty highly values interdisciplinary programming. There are ways to support such initiatives within the current budget model and the Faculty is very willingly to work with the School to do so.

Recommendation #4:

We noted that the School has begun to reverse the enrollment decline in the 'gateway' first year courses. We recommend that these efforts to boost first year course enrollments continue, combined with support for greater promotion and awareness of program offerings among first-year students.

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:

The School has been revising and reshaping the Level 1 courses for many years (as the report notes) and we will be doing another review this year in light of the IQAP report and most recent enrolment trends.

We have expanded promotion of our courses on social media and other areas, and will explore new ways to make Level 1 students aware of our courses.

Acting Dean's Response: The School is to be commended for its work in reversing its enrollment trends. As noted in recommendation #1, the School is encouraged to work with the Faculty recruitment and communications team to support both Level I and Level II recruitment activities.

Recommendations #5 & #6 (combined because they speak to the same issue):

Recommendation #5: We recommend that the School explore ways to expand PhD supervision capacity. This could include granting supervision privileges to Teaching Professors.

Recommendation #6: We also recommend proactively engaging faculty from other units who already have PhD supervision privileges in Labour Studies when an application in their area of expertise is received, rather than limiting supervision considerations to current School faculty.

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:

The Teaching Professor was granted supervisory privileges in the Spring of 2025, not long after the IQAP cite visit.

Many Labour Studies faculty have been pursuing this goal, in fact some of our most recent PhD graduates (whose defense occurred since the review) had committees in which the main supervisor was the only member of Labour Studies. The School has a policy that allows supervision by faculty outside SLS, although efforts to increase the extent of external participation will face challenges, since supervisory capacity in other departments is also stretched, and some of our adjunct faculty (Ian McKay, Steven McBride) just retired.

Acting Dean's Response: The School has expanded its own PhD supervisory capacity with the recent awarding of supervisory privileges to its Teaching Professor. The School could explore the possibility of adjunct appointments outside of the Faculty or McMaster as a way of further expanding its supervisory capacity.

Recommendation #7:

We recommend that the School continue to review and refresh course offerings. Review and update current elective offerings at cognate units. Review course content to limit unnecessary overlap. Review the strategic role of online course offerings. Leverage and expand experiential learning opportunities, particularly within the Master's curriculum, where they are currently almost absent compared to their strong presence at the undergraduate level.

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:

The School concurs that a review of the Undergraduate curriculum with an eye towards reducing overlap is a priority.

Last year, we began to review our offerings of electives, eliminating some that did not engage students; this review will continue.

Regarding online courses, expanding our online offerings, especially at Level 2, has been key to our rebound in enrolment; but students who major in our program have excelled in the in-person format and strongly prefer that we keep it. Our next step is to determine how to maintain this balance.

The school will continue to offer Co-op Options and a placement course, now a 3-Unit course with a greater focus on field experience.

Regarding the Masters' program: the School will conduct a review of existing experiential education (EE) opportunities in other programs, and consider whether offering an EE pathway (in addition to the MRP and thesis pathways) is viable, or how EE opportunities can be expanded in other ways.

Acting Dean's Response: The School is encouraged to continue its review of its elective course offerings as well as determine how it might expand its experiential education offerings with an eye to the impact on enrollments and on student experience.

Recommendation #8:

We recommend leveraging the program's strengths with work placements and co-op with sufficient administrative supports to ensure the sustainability of these initiatives.

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:

Enrolment in our co-op program has not been what the School of Labour Studies had hoped (the enrolment for the upcoming 2025-6 year was especially poor). The School will work with Experiential Education on improving recruitment, and work with partners in the community to provide opportunities. The challenge is that most such partners lack the resources to provide paid positions; finding those resources will be one of the priorities of the School's part of McMaster's upcoming fundraising and development campaign.

As noted in the response to #7, the School has changed the placement course to a 3-Unit offering in the winter, which should ensure its viability.

Acting Dean's Response: The low enrollment in the co-op program is disappointing for the School. With the recent hiring of a Director, Advancement – Humanities, Social Sciences & Campaign and the upcoming hire of an Associate Director, Advancement Social Sciences in the new year, the Faculty will be in a good position to support the School's objective of fundraising for co-op opportunities with its community partners.

Recommendation #9:

Based on inputs from graduate students and reflections by program faculty, we recommend a critical assessment of the viability of the unit level methods course. This may include current efforts to revise the course or seeking a more interdisciplinary option with other departments offering appropriate methods courses.

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:

Already completed. One of our faculty stepped up to take on this course and redesigned it completely. The new version is being offered in the Fall Term 2025.

Acting Dean's Response: The School should assess the revised course after its delivery to ensure it addresses the expressed concerns.

Recommendation #10:

The level of faculty resources (4.75 FTEs) presents significant challenges to graduate supervision in general and to the viability of the PhD program in particular. We recommend that the University and Faculty allow the School to regain at least the same number of FTEs that was deemed necessary when the PhD program was launched. Failing that, we recommend a critical review of the viability of the PhD program and that options be explored, including with other McMaster units, to expand the supervisory capacities of the program and guarantee course offerings.

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:

The School agrees whole-heartedly that 1) the current level of faculty resources creates major problems regarding graduate supervision and the future of the PhD program, and 2) that the School needs to reach the faculty complement that was considered essential when the PhD program was started. If the School does not get new faculty resources, then we agree that we will need to carefully review the PhD program, including exploring potential partnerships with other McMaster units.

Acting Dean's Response: Given the fiscal environment the Faculty is currently operating within, any commitments to new faculty-lines are likely to be very limited in next budget cycle. The School is encouraged (as noted above) to explore other ways to expand the supervisory capacities of the program, including exploring potential partnerships with other McMaster units.

Recommendations #11 & 14 – combined because they speak to very similar things:

Recommendation #11: Given physical space limitations, we recommend exploring shared undergraduate space for the Labour Studies Student Association. Partnering with a cognate unit, such as Sociology, would enhance efficiencies in space utilization and greater awareness of the Labour Studies program.

Recommendation #14: We recommend that the School continue to support the Labour Studies Student Association (LSSA)—including by securing financial support for its activities—and continues its efforts to build engagement and connections among graduate students, including by creating a space or an association specifically dedicated to them.

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:

As noted in the IQAP self-study, the LSSA has been remarkably active in recent years, doing well even through the pandemic, and thriving since. The School remains actively engaged with the LSSA, and will continue to support them in their efforts to connect with students and organize recruitment, social, and career-oriented events. In discussions with the LSSA leadership, funding problems did not seem a chief concern, although this may change with pending legislative changes by the Ontario government. In that event, we will work with the LSSA to ensure that they have sufficient funding. Regarding space, there are limited options in our building, and combining with a larger unit may not suit our students' strong attachment to our small community. However, there are rooms for student associations and department/program specific events in L.R. Wilson Hall (the Humanities and Social Sciences building) and the Hub, McMaster's new space specifically for undergraduate students, and we will help the LSSA take advantage of them.

Acting Dean's Response: The School is also encouraged to work with the Office of the Associate Dean, Undergraduate Studies to help provide support to the Labour Studies Student Association

Recommendation #12:

We recommend that the School review and amend its by-laws to include formal representation of both undergraduate and graduate students on the School Council and any committees related to academic programs.

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:

The School generally agrees that more student involvement in our Council and related committees would be a good idea.

The Director will consult with the LSSA about the possibility of undergraduate representatives sitting on the SLS council.

There is not currently a student association for our graduate program, so we will need to explore ways to identify and recruit student representatives for the council, or to encourage the creation of a graduate student body.

The School will also research how student representation is achieved in other departments and programs in Social Science and will look to follow best practices.

Acting Dean's Response: Determining best practices for the representation of undergraduate and graduate students in academic programming decision-making bodies is a reasonable course of action as is the School's plan to determine how such representation could be implemented.

Recommendation #13:

We recommend that the School establish a formal and confidential system for complaints and suggestions, allowing students to express concerns directly to the School's leadership.

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:

The School currently has a number of avenues for students to raise concerns, and our small size tends to make our leadership accessible to students. Nevertheless, the School will explore ways to ensure that students are aware of the ways available to express concerns. The School will also research existing practices at McMaster for creating confidential systems for complaint, at the same time making sure that any such system is consistent with McMaster policies.

Acting Dean's Response: As noted by the School, the Faculty/University already has a number of formal processes to handle student complaints, depending on the type of complaint. Raising awareness of these various processes is something the School could pursue. The Faculty does not support the development of any process that would contravene University policy. The student course evaluation system is a clear opportunity for students to provide suggestions directly to the School's leadership and program exit surveys could similarly be run to gather suggestions for program improvements.

Recommendation #15:

We recommend that the University and the Faculty of Social Science consider increasing the number of faculty members in the School or explore ways to better recognize and/or alleviate the administrative workload currently borne by the School's faculty.

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:

As noted re. Recommendation #10, the School fully concurs that the University and the Faculty of Social Science need to consider creating new positions in the School of Labour Studies.

The reviewers are also correct that the limit size of our faculty complement creates serious administrative burdens on the School's existing faculty. With 4.75 FTEs, covering the key leadership positions (Director, Graduate Director, Undergraduate Director, plus managing our Certificate Programs, which combined have more than 200 non-degree students), is a perennial challenge. Moreover, the School's faculty is aware of the importance that we have a voice in key bodies in the Faculty of Social Sciences and indeed around the university. All this leaves the current faculty considerably overextended regarding service commitments.

Acting Dean's Response: The Faculty acknowledges and values the effort of the current faculty of the School of Labour Studies in administrating both the School and its undergraduate and graduate programming and in representing the School/Faculty across campus. The Faculty has been working with the School's leadership to try to ensure fair recognition of the service contributions of its faculty members through Cp/M, course releases for formal administrative roles and the recent memorandum of understanding between the Faculty and the School for the School's non-degree Certificate Programs.

Implementation Plan

In the chart below, please outline the recommendations made by reviewers, briefly outline the actions you plan to take, who will be responsible for leading the action, and a timeline for completion.

Recommendation	Action(s) to be Taken	Responsibility for Leading Action (specify the role(s) that will be responsible for each action item e.g. Program Chair.)	Timeline for Completing Action (indicate specific timelines (e.g. not 'ongoing') for action)
#1 - leverage LS's already strong connections with off-campus organizations in order to enhance its recruitment at the undergraduate level.	School of Labour Studies (SLS) will work with FSS's (gradually developing) recruitment teams to boost enrolment, bringing in community partners as well.	Director, undergraduate director	2025-6 Academic Year and going forward
#2 – create a regular assessment process of the Concurrent Certificate with Commerce and to consider similar initiatives with other units	Gather data on first cohort that can claim Concurrent Certificate Join Faculty and higher level plans for new collaborations	Director, undergraduate director Director, undergraduate director	Starting April 2026 Ongoing
#3 - the Faculty and University administrators to consider ways to facilitate interdisciplinary collaborations between units, in particular by reviewing the “bum in seats” funding model	SLS will encourage Faculty and University to take such actions	Director, University and Faculty leadership	2025-6 academic year and going forward
#4 - continue efforts to boost first year course enrollments, and greater promotion and awareness of program offerings among first-year students	SLS will continue rethinking first year courses expand promotion of our courses on social media and other areas	Director, Undergraduate Director, Social Media coordinator	2025-6 academic year and going forward
#5 & #6 – Expand PhD supervision capacity, by allowing Teaching Professors to supervise	Teaching Professor granted supervision privileges last year	Graduate Director	2025-6 academic year and going forward

and proactively engaging eligible faculty in other units.	SLS will continue to actively engage those in other units re. supervision		
#7 – refresh course offerings, focusing on overlap, electives, on-line courses and experiential learning in the Masters	Review of offerings continues this year, especially regarding electives and curriculum overlap. Regarding Masters: SLS will explore how experiential education is pursued in other programs and how such as pathway can be created in our program.	Director, Undergraduate Director, Graduate Director	2025-6 academic year and going forward (a constant effort by our School)
#8 – leverage program strengths to ensure viability of placement and co-op	New 3-unit placement course created and should be viable; SLS will work with Experiential Education and fundraising and development to strengthen Co-op option	Director, Undergraduate Director	2025-6 academic year and going forward
#9 – critically assess methods course	New methods course being offering this Fall	Methods course instructor	Completed
#10 - that the University and Faculty allow the School to regain at least the same number of FTEs that was deemed necessary when the PhD program was launched; otherwise, review of the viability of the PhD program	SLS agrees entirely with need for new hiring to support PhD If these are not found, we will review the future of the PhD program.	Faculty of Social Science and University Leadership Graduate director, Director	2025-6 Academic Year and going forward until adequate faculty complement is achieved 2027-8 Academic Year
#11 and #14 – support the LSSA, particularly regarding funding and space	SLS will continue engagement with LSSA, which has been strong in recent years, helping with space and financial issues as needed.	Director, Undergraduate Director	2025-6 Academic Year and Going Forward
#12 – allow for formal student representation on the School	SLS will consult with LSSA about representation	Director, Undergraduate Director, Graduate Director	2025-6 Academic Year and Going Forward

Council and academic committees	SLS will consult with graduate students about finding representatives. SLS will explore how student representation is achieved in other Soc Sci programs.		
#13 - establish a system for students to express complaints and suggestions directly to the School's leadership	SLS already has many avenues for students to voice concerns. But SLS will research existing practices at McMaster for creating such systems as are consistent with McMaster policies	Director	2025-6 Academic Year and Going Forward
#15 - that the University and the Faculty of Social Science consider increasing the number of faculty members in the School or explore ways to better recognize and/or alleviate the administrative workload currently borne by the School's faculty.	SLS fully agrees and will continue to advocate for new positions to relieve the administrative burdens on current faculty members.	Director, all faculty	2025-6 Academic Year and going forward until adequate faculty complement is achieved.

Quality Assurance Committee Recommendation

McMaster's Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) reviewed the above documentation at the March 19, 2026, meeting. The committee recommends that the **Labour Studies graduate and undergraduate** programs should follow the regular course of action with an 18-month progress report and subsequent full external cyclical review to be scheduled in seven years, and to be conducted no later than eight years after the start of the last review.