



University of Alberta Quality Assurance Suite of Activities

Faculty of Extension: Academic Program Reviews and President’s Visiting Committee

Excerpted Reports

Executive Summary

The combined review process for the Master of Arts in Communication and Technology (MACT) and the President’s Visiting Committee found the Faculty of Extension to be forward thinking and successful in engaging with community partners and students. The outcomes of the Faculty’s teaching are research are consistent with the University’s commitment to excellence and engagement.

The reviews found the faculty members to be fully engaged in teaching, community service, and scholarly activities. The resourcing, administrative structure, and support services available appear adequate and consistent with what one would expect to find within a nationally ranked Canadian research university.

The MACT is a successful program with potential for growth. Students appreciate the depth of understanding provided by theoretically oriented courses and note this is a differentiator compared to other professional master’s. It is well positioned and supported with opportunities for growth if resources could be made available. In particular, the program fees could be raised modestly, not only to help pay for additional faculty resources, but also as a recognition of the quality of the program.

Program Review

Programs Reviewed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Master of Arts in Communication and Technology
Review Dates	February 27-28, 2017



Reviewers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dr. Richard Smith, (Chair) Professor, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University; ● Dr. Maria Bakardjieva, Professor, Department of Communication, Media and Film, University of Calgary; ● Dr. Carrie Smith-Prei, Department Chair, Modern Languages and Cultural Studies, University of Alberta; ● Dr. Lynn McGarvey, Vice-Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
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Outcome

The Graduate Program Review Committee (GPRC) found the MACT to have a high level of quality and by all indicators. The review found the program is underpriced, and therefore underappreciated. The MACT program, while relatively new, is known within the media, professional communications, and public relations industry in Alberta and is gaining wider recognition. The program`s graduate student conference, organized with University of Calgary students each winter, is especially well-known. The program is succeeding in a difficult space - online education - through hard work and continuous improvement of content and tools. Although the MACT is a professional program, the curriculum is a blend of research foundations and the courses on the needs of industry, public administration and civil society.

Program Strengths

- The Faculty of Extension has a detailed and comprehensive strategic plan, and the MACT program fits well with it's the values and objectives.
- The program has considerable interaction with the local, national, and international professional bodies (e.g., IABC, PR Association of Canada) as well as strong alumni connections. Thanks to these linkages, the curricula and learning environment meet disciplinary and institutional standards.
- The MACT curriculum is kept relevant through regular updates in the context of technological changes (e.g., social media, mobile media) and the evolving the needs of students (for example, reducing the knowledge management focus).
- The combination of a three week “intensive” coupled with longer online courses sees high satisfaction by students, excellent retention and graduation rates, and other important outcomes including advanced study.
- The program policies and procedures are clearly written and well understood by students.
- The program attracts high quality students who show strong retention and completion rates.
- There is considerable community engagement through the capstone projects and course



work. Notable community partners include the City of Edmonton, the Alberta Treasury Branch, and other non-profit groups in the city and region.

- The program uses space efficiently as the students are mainly online and schedules have them present on campus during “quiet” times of the year. The newly renovated Faculty of Extension building is a state-of-the-art educational facility capable of meeting diverse student needs.

Opportunities for Program Improvement and Enhancement

The committee made several recommendations:

- The GPRC noted that MACT could benefit from performance indicators linked to the Faculty’s strategic goals. For example, a method to track and improve mentoring practice could be explored.
- The committee felt that the MACT was underpriced and acknowledged the constraints the University is under with regards to tuition. They advise that underpriced tuition can call into question the quality of the program, especially to international students. The GPRC recommends raising fees and investing in both scholarships (to maintain access) and faculty and research that would enhance quality in the long run.
- The committee recommended that strategies for alumni engagement continue to be explored.
- The committee observed that while faculty access UAlberta professional development resources, there seems to be a lack of training specific to supervising in a professional program. The Committee recommends coordinating with other professional schools to share best practice and resources.
- The GPRC recommends exploring new modes of delivery (mobile delivery, high definition video, virtual reality, etc.) as these become more available and affordable. Given the focus of the program, experimentation and adoption of these new technologies could be approached as a research project and as a unique direction of professional development that can be carried over into the student’s’ workplace and civic activities.”
- The Committee noted that all of the core faculty are male, and recommend that hiring more full-time female faculty members should be a priority.
- The GPRC found no clear guidelines around the structure of the capstone project and the thesis. They recommend clarifying requirements as a well as mechanism for checks and balance to improve the student experience.
- The Committee supports the Program`s plans to introduce a Post-baccalaureate certificate program based on the courses offered in the MA program.

Implementation Plan

In response, the Faculty made the following commitments:



- The Faculty agrees that performance indicators could be an area for future development.
- The report recognizes the challenge faced by MACT with regard to its inability to raise program fees, even modestly, to reflect current value of the program. MACT will need to continue to work with the Dean’s office, and the University who is working with Advanced education, to develop a strategy to address this matter.
- MACT Alumni are currently invited to attend social events, extra-curricular webinars, and are encouraged to attend the annual Rundle Summit graduate student conference. MACT is looking into ways to further engage alumni with non-credit workshops and a professional stream at the Rundle Summit.
- MACT will contact the University’s Centre for Teaching and Learning to inquire about possible opportunities specific to professional programs and look at opportunities to coordinate with other professional schools at the University of Alberta
- The program will work with the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) and its Professional Development initiative to identify best practices in mentoring and evaluation of mentoring with students.
- The Director of MACT will look into funding through the University’s Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund (TLEF) to undertake a research project on innovative use of technologies in online and blended learning that can be applied to MACT program delivery.
- The MACT program will continue working on the proposals for a Post-baccalaureate certificate, which we intend to bring forward for review in the coming year.

Faculty Review

Review Dates	February 27-28, 2017
Reviewers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. John LaBrie, (Chair,) founding principal of Northeastern University-Toronto; • Dr. Hiram Fitzgerald, Associate Provost for University Outreach and Engagement, Michigan State University; • Dr. Li-Shih Huang, Associate Professor, Learning and Teaching Scholar-in-Residence, University of Victoria • Dr. Deanna Williamson, Department Chair, Human Ecology, University of Alberta;

Outcome

The President’s Visiting Committee (PVC) examined the scholarly activity of the Faculty as well as the Continuing and Professional Education, the English Language School, and the Graduate



Professional Programs. The report provides commendations and recommendations on all these areas.

The Faculty of Extension is an interdisciplinary Faculty, guided by its consideration of the scholarship of engagement which unifies the diverse roles and interests of faculty members. In the national context, the Faculty of Extension is an important contributor to scholarly articles in this field of inquiry. The PVC report emphasized that the Faculty stands tall amongst its peer group thanks to the high level of community engagement, the success of Continuing Professional Education Programs and the English Language School.

Faculty Strengths

- The Faculty of Extension Strategic and Research plans provide the organization with a forward looking and visionary document to guide future programmatic and investment decisions.
- The Faculty of Extension has been successful in establishing a vibrant footprint in the urban core. There continues to be challenges, such as having limited access to the main campus for international students, but the facilities provided the Faculty for its core work are of a high caliber and are well maintained and well used.
- The Faculty has received numerous national awards which are consistent with the work conducted and the mission of the Faculty.
- The Faculty is deeply and successfully engaged with community partners and the outcomes are consistent with the University's commitment to engagement as outlined in For the Public Good. The Faculty's work in this area should be highlighted and celebrated as best practice
- Community representatives, local officials, and students who contributed to the review spoke to the partnerships the Faculty has built. In addition, the research centres in the Faculty each have extensive networks within particular communities as do the certificate and degree programs.
- Extension faculty members are well-credentialed and diverse. There is a solid distribution of academic backgrounds and a healthy level of professional engagement.

Opportunities for Improvement and Enhancement

The committee made several recommendations:

- The PVC questioned the relevance of the name of the Faculty, pointing out that programming today shows little to no resemblance to traditional "extension" programs. They recommend that a clearer name for the Faculty could eliminate possible confusion in the larger educational marketplace and position it in other programmatic areas.
- The Committee encouraged the Associate Dean for Research work with faculty to ensure they have the tools and skills needed to enhance scholarly output based on their programmatic outcomes. Individual faculty should be strongly encouraged to develop a



scholarship regime alongside their programmatic efforts.

- The PVC believes that a stronger assessment and valuation regime on program and learning outcomes should be implemented in the Continuing Professional Education programs. This regime should be put in place to better measure and track student success.
- The PVC felt that the English Language School's connection with other departments at the University of Alberta could be strengthened through programs designed to facilitate the entry of graduate students into the institution. This might be accomplished through designing a modular program that could be tailored to address both English for Academic Purposes and discipline-specific needs at the graduate level.
- The Committee encouraged the English Language School to systematically conduct outcomes assessment to demonstrate the effectiveness of its programs, and to prioritize its resources including for maintaining partnerships.
- The English Language School was also encouraged to build on the strong foundation of the Advanced Professional Program in English-Medium Instruction (APPEMI) by reaching out to units across the University of Alberta that have international English as an Additional Language faculty members. A service-based learning component could be built in that would give instructors attending the APPEMI from overseas an opportunity to participate in a practicum component through partnerships with other faculties on campus.
- The PVC suggested that ELS should consider articulating their vision and mandate of to help prioritize, sustain, and manage demands in ways that contribute to building strengths. Implementing needs and outcomes assessment (beyond enrollment counts, completion rates, crude experience ratings) would enable the school to evaluate the effectiveness of each seed program for future implementation.

Implementation Plan

In response, the Faculty made the following commitments:

- The Faculty has started the process to contemplate a name change. After information-gathering, a process will formally begin in Fall 2017 and hopefully result in an Extension Faculty Council approved name change to bring forward to University Governance in 2018.
- The Faculty will continue to actively encourage participation in engagement specific knowledge mobilization by highlighting appropriate publishing venues in discussions with the professoriate, Continuing Professional Education and English Language School staff. Extension will also develop more formal incentives and performance expectations in this regard.
- Rigorous student assessments are already conducted in all Continuing Professional Education programs; however some changes have been made to improve results. This may resolve the area identified by the PVC.



- Regarding potential areas of development for the English Language School within the University, the ELS team has started to engage with departments across campus. After gathering information on needs of incoming and current graduate students, they plan to raise awareness about the existence of English for Academic Purposes offering as at Extension. This initiative is expected to be implemented by September 2017.
- Work has begun on defined learning outcomes for the English Language School's programs. They will focus on English language goals and cultural learning beyond the experiential learning taking place during field trips.
- The Faculty is building connections to support APPEMI participants. They are also developing an interchangeable set of modules that are delivered in multiple modes (e.g. online, face-to-face, on-site, off-shore, through synchronous and asynchronous interactions, conference style, etc.), which can be aggregated flexibly. APPEMI is available as an approved credential or as a customized series.
- The recommendation to clarify the English Language School's mission is well taken, and in fact, the newly developed vision and mandate of ELS, when operationalized, will define the parameters of ELS' programs.