

UTQAP Cyclical Review: Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan

1 Review Summary

Program Reviewed:	Renaissance Studies, B.A. (Hons.): Specialist, Major, Minor
Division/Unit Offering Program:	Faculty of Arts & Science (housed in Victoria College)
Commissioning Officer:	Dean, Faculty of Arts & Science
Reviewers (Name, Affiliation):	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Professor Katherine Acheson, Associate Dean of Arts, Undergraduate Programs, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Waterloo2. Professor Walter Stephens, Charles S. Singleton Professor of Italian Studies and Director of Graduate Studies for Italian, Department of German and Romance Languages and Literature, Johns Hopkins University
Date of Review Visit:	September 24, 2018
Date reported to AP&P:	October 30, 2019

Previous Review

Date: Reviewed as part of the 2005-06 University review of Victoria College

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Undergraduate Programs

The reviewers observed the following strengths:

- Programs are distinguished and well-respected
- Graduates are of high quality with many going on to graduate programs
- Programs are flourishing, with plans to introduce a Specialist program soon

The reviewers made the following recommendations:

- Integrate Renaissance and Literary Studies programs more

Faculty/Research

The reviewers observed the following strengths:

- Award-winning faculty members

The reviewers made the following recommendations:

- Consider implications of upcoming retirements

Administration

The reviewers observed the following strengths:

- Excellent specialized library services

The reviewers made the following recommendations:

- Explore options for creating an Endowed Chair

Current Review: Documentation and Consultation

Documentation Provided to Reviewers

The reviewers were provided with:

- Terms of Reference
- Self-Study and Appendices
- Previous review report and response
- Library report
- Access to course descriptions
- Calendar entry
- Faculty CVs
- Syllabi

Consultation Process

The reviewers met with:

- Dean, Faculty of Art & Science
- Vice-Dean, Academic Planning and Strategic Initiatives
- Principal, Victoria College
- Program Coordinator
- Program faculty
- Administrative staff
- Students
- Representatives from cognate units: Italian Studies, History; English; Art.

Current Review: Findings and Recommendations

1. Undergraduate Program

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- Overall quality
 - One of the signature programs offered at Victoria College; contributes to the College's rich history of excellence and international achievement
- Objectives
 - Meets University, Faculty, and College missions
- Curriculum and program delivery
 - Program works to ensure curriculum is current, even with limited resources
 - New curricular focus is problem- and concept-based rather than geographically or traditional author-focused
 - Topics in feminism, sexuality, global Renaissance, etc., have been added
 - Level of in-course research considered demanding but rewarding
- Innovation
 - Students have a variety of excellent opportunities to learn beyond the classroom: research opportunities, conference organization, interactions with visiting scholars, and different employment opportunities involving digitizing books, exhibition set up, etc.
 - Annual Student Association colloquia allow students to present their research outside the classroom to a wide audience of undergraduate and graduate students, postdocs, faculty and others from outside the program
- Assessment of learning
 - Course evaluations show that students rate the assessment methods with high satisfaction – assignments help better their understanding of material and accurately allow them to demonstrate what they have learned
- Student engagement, experience and program support services
 - Excellent library collection and services
 - Unique employment opportunities include Corbet Fellowships, and work-study positions

- Quality indicators – undergraduate students
 - Outstanding levels of student satisfaction, and students report:
 - Impressive faculty dedication, engaged with student research projects and are readily available for student consultation
 - Very satisfied with class size
 - Colloquia opportunity is seen as a major asset to their program
 - High praise for the program coordinator
 - High entering averages for students
 - Student morale is high and positive
- Quality indicators – alumni
 - Program stays in touch with graduates regarding events and other program activities

The reviewers identified the following **areas of concern**:

- Curriculum and program delivery
 - No program or degree objectives in addition to the standard Arts & Science degree level expectations
 - Difficulties in attaining “quantitative reasoning” core competency within the curriculum
 - Breadth course options need improved balance in catering to both science and humanities students Some students indicated an interest in expanding curricular focus from the emphasis on the Italian heart of the Renaissance
- Student engagement, experience and program support services
 - Students identified the need for more program, degree, and breadth requirement advising, especially given that not all courses are offered each year
- Quality indicators – undergraduate students
 - Enrolment numbers declining over the past few years
 - Faculty participate in recruitment events, but are unsure of the impact of their efforts
 - Students report wishing they knew about the program earlier in their University career

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Curriculum and program delivery
 - Develop course-specific learning outcomes and include the information on syllabi
 - Continue discussions with Material Culture program regarding mounting a course to address the quantitative reasoning core competency
 - Ensure success of course is measured
 - Consider development of other opportunities that may fulfill the core competency
- Student engagement, experience and program support services
 - Assist student degree and program tracking by:

- Creating a tracking list of requirements that is maintained and updated
 - Ensuring program advisors have an up to date list of annual course offerings, that includes which courses fulfill the breadth requirements and are relevant to the program
- Quality indicators – undergraduate students
 - Develop a promotion and recruitment strategy for the program, which may include:
 - Classroom visits
 - Student ambassadors
 - Social media and web presence

2. Faculty/Research

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- Overall quality
 - Highly distinguished and accomplished faculty
 - Ranked in the top of their field with respect to quantity of publications and citations
 - Very active in national and international conferences and events
 - Many faculty are named to administrative and director roles within organizations, journals, and editorial boards
 - No significant difference in benefits and salary between faculty streams
- Research
 - Faculty members are also publishing in cognate areas such as history and Canadian history, immigration studies, and ethnic studies

The reviewers identified the following **areas of concern**:

- Faculty
 - Significant, pressing issue of faculty complement planning:
 - Consultations on hiring will require intensive consultation and cooperation from all concerned
 - Need to find suitable faculty leadership replacements
 - Current faculty are already stretched thin and are teaching on overload, and teaching stream faculty have little or no time for research
 - Delays in faculty renewal could affect program reputation
 - Struggle to lean on cognate departments for faculty

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Faculty
 - Faculty, College, cognate units, and leadership should work on plans for faculty complement and faculty renewal

3. Administration

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- Relationships
 - Close and valuable relationship with the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies
 - Leadership had good relationships with internal departments such as Art, History, and English, and external units such as the Royal Ontario Museum, the Gardiner Museum, and the Fisher Rare Book Library
- Organizational and financial structure
 - Victoria College staff view the program very positively and are comfortable with workload of advising, course scheduling, and other tasks associated with program support
- International comparators
 - Unique and exceptionally valuable program, that stands out among international peer institutions in all respects; comparators typically only offer graduate programming

The reviewers identified the following **areas of concern**:

- Organizational and financial structure
 - Program website has out of date curricular information
 - Unclear whether there is some type of program advisory board

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Organizational and financial structure
 - Program leadership should revise website to reflect current program content and highlight strengths

Consider establishing or revising a program advisory board that would meet regularly to consult on program promotion, relationship building, and other items related to program design and delivery



2 Administrative Response & Implementation Plan

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF ARTS & SCIENCE

September 26, 2019

Professor Susan McCahan
Vice-Provost, Academic Programs
University of Toronto

Re: UTQAP cyclical review of Renaissance Studies

Dear Professor McCahan,

Along with the faculty, staff and students of the Renaissance Studies program and Victoria College, I am pleased with the external reviewers' assessment of Renaissance Studies, B.A. (Hons.): Specialist, Major, Minor. The reviewers complimented Renaissance Studies as being "*a unique and exceptionally valuable*" undergraduate program.

The quality of this program notwithstanding, as per your letter dated July 31, 2019, the review report raises a number of issues and challenges. I am writing to address the areas of the review report that you identify as key. The response to these items and implementation plan are separated into immediate (six months), medium (one to two years), and longer (three to five years) terms, where appropriate, along with who will take the lead in each area. The Dean's office has discussed the reviewers' comments through consultation with the Principal of Victoria College to develop the following implementation plan incorporating the reviewers' recommendations.

The reviewers made recommendations relative to developing a promotional strategy for the program, including updating the website to ensure its accuracy.

As the College response notes, "the aim of a promotional strategy would not be to grow the program substantially but rather to ensure that students who may be interested in the Specialist, Major, or Minor are aware of Renaissance Studies early enough in their undergraduate career to benefit from the opportunity."

Immediate term response: Victoria College promotes the Renaissance Studies program at College and University-wide events, as well as external events such as the Ontario Universities Fair and international conferences of the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies (CRRS). In addition, high-profile Renaissance Studies faculty who are affiliated with the program serve as "ambassadors" in their home units, including Art History, English, History, French, and Italian Studies.

The Dean holds regular meetings with the College Principals. At the regularly scheduled October meeting, the issue of the visibility of college programs to students will be discussed.

The website for the program has been revised, and will be relaunched as part of the new Victoria University website. Technical challenges have delayed the launch, but the website is expected to be up and running later in the fall of 2019. The new website will improve the visibility of the program to interested students.

While the program has confirmed its alignment with the Faculty of Arts and Science Degree Level Expectations, the reviewers emphasized the need to develop specific program learning outcomes, and suggested that course-level learning outcomes could be included in course outlines.

Immediate term response: When developing the self-study in advance of the external review, the Program Coordinator identified the ways in which the program's learning objectives fulfilled the Degree Level Objectives for Honours Bachelor Degrees as set out by the Faculty of Arts & Science. Within a six-month timeframe, the Renaissance Studies program committee will consider and, where necessary, update these learning objectives in order to reformulate them as program-specific learning outcomes.

Medium term response: In cases where course outlines do not already include course-level learning outcomes, the Program Coordinator will ensure that faculty add them for the 2020-21 academic year.

The reviewers made suggestions relative to improving academic advising and curricular planning for students, including creating checklists, clarifying course availability, and communicating options for supporting quantitative and breadth requirements. They also recommended consideration of appropriate options for supporting the quantitative reasoning requirement.

Immediate term response:

Quantitative Reasoning requirement. The College has now introduced two new courses, VIC242H "Scientific Worldviews of the Renaissance" and VIC442H "The Renaissance Book" (which includes a digital component); both courses are being offered as of Fall 2019. Renaissance Studies students can fulfill the quantitative reasoning requirement with either of these courses.

Academic Advising and Curricular Planning. Renaissance Studies students have extensive access to advising staff including the Program Coordinator and the Vic Programs Liaison Officer, as well as other staff in the Victoria College Principal's and Registrar's Offices. Tools for curricular planning are already available to students in Arts & Science (e.g., Degree Explorer); program staff will ensure that students are aware of these existing resources. The Program Coordinator will ensure that any specific suggestions made by the reviewers that would enhance clarity for students (e.g., checklists) are implemented in the short term.

The reviewers suggested that the efforts of core participants in the program’s design and delivery could be amplified through the creation of an advisory board that could build relationships and promote opportunities for students.

Immediate term response: The Renaissance Studies Program Committee, chaired by the Program Coordinator and including faculty from cognate departments (e.g., English, History, Art History, Italian Studies) meets at least once each semester to discuss program curriculum. The Program Coordinator works closely with the Director of the CRRS and the Principal of Victoria College; all of these individuals are in regular contact with the Chairs of cognate departments, including English, History, Art History, French, and Italian Studies. The external reviewers may not have been fully aware of the mandate or activities of this Program Committee, which indeed serves as an advisory board carrying out the functions identified by the reviewers.

The reviewers recommended prioritizing shared faculty complement planning, given the demands on faculty time from cognate units. They noted that professors in both the tenure and teaching streams are stretched thin by overloads.

Immediate term response: The College has now appointed a full-time teaching-stream Assistant Professor as a multi-year CLTA in Renaissance Studies and Literature & Critical Theory. In addition, the College has set up cooperative arrangements with the Department of English making possible regular on-load teaching by English Department faculty. As a result, new English faculty are now teaching courses in Renaissance Studies in 2019-20.

Medium to longer-term response: The Dean is aware of the challenges faced by College-sponsored programs in obtaining teaching commitments from cognate units. As part of the A&S planning process, the Faculty is exploring new ways to provide better connections between multi-disciplinary programs, such as Renaissance Studies, and Departments, which hold the bulk of faculty lines. The Faculty will work with Victoria College to facilitate relationships with cognate units.

The Dean’s office will monitor the implementation of recommendations, with, at minimum, a brief report to the Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs, midway between the year of the review and the year of the next site visit.

The year of the next review will be **2026-27**.

To conclude, we appreciate that the external reviewers identified Renaissance Studies' strengths and noted a few areas for development. Renaissance Studies has already begun to move forward with plans to address the recommendations as presented by the reviewers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M Woodin". The letters are cursive and fluid.

Melanie Woodin
Dean and Professor of Cell and Systems Biology

cc.

Angela Esterhammer, Principal, Victoria College, Professor, Department of English
Poppy Lockwood, Vice-Dean, Academic Planning and Strategic Initiatives, Faculty of Arts & Science
Asher Cutter, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Issues and Academic Planning
Daniella Mallinick, Director, Academic Programs, Planning & Quality Assurance, Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs
Andrea Benoit, Academic Review Officer, Office of the Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science

3 Committee on Academic Policy & Programs (AP&P) Findings

The spokesperson for the reading group reported that the summary covered the full review, though the notion that the only two full-time faculty were eligible to retire was not emphasized. The administrative response adequately addressed all issues identified and the group noted that the reviewers commented on the outstanding nature of the program. The group requested additional comment on the issue of over-burdened faculty as well the possibility of two current full-time faculty retiring.

Regarding the summary, Professor McCahan noted that it identified the “significant, pressing issue of faculty complement planning” as an area of concern. It does not mention retirements specifically because, at the time the summary was written, no faculty retirements had been confirmed. Professor Esterhammer noted that the notion of over-burdened faculty required contextualization in that many faculty voluntarily assumed additional teaching responsibilities as it allowed them to teach a diverse set of courses. In addition, one new teaching stream appointment had already been made at Victoria College, which would add to the teaching staff supporting the program, and others were planned. As well, recent and planned faculty additions in cognate units would also enhance the teaching support for the program.

No follow-up report was requested.

4 Institutional Executive Summary

The reviewers noted that the Renaissance Studies program “stands above all comparators, national and international, in all respects.” They praised the curricular focus of the program, which is problem and concept based, and supported the introduction of new content in areas of feminism, sexuality, and global Renaissance. The reviewers highlight several excellent opportunities for experiential learning including the annual Student Association colloquium. Overall, the reviewers were impressed by the high level of student satisfaction, which included reports from the students of excellent faculty and staff dedication to the programs. The reviewers recommended that the following issues be addressed: developing a promotional strategy for the program; developing specific program learning outcomes and including course-level learning outcomes in course outlines; improving academic advising and curricular planning for students; creating a program advisory board to build relationships and promote opportunities for students; and prioritizing shared faculty complement planning. The Dean’s Administrative Response describes the Faculty, College and programs’ responses to the reviewers’ recommendations, including an implementation plan for any changes necessary as a result.

5 Monitoring and Date of Next Review

The Dean’s office will monitor the implementation of recommendations through ongoing

meetings with the College Principal and Program Director, as well as the A&S unit-level planning process.

The Dean will provide an interim report to the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs midway between the September 24, 2018 site visit and the year of the next site visit on the status of the implementation plans.

The year of the next review will be 2026-27.

6 Distribution

On October 26, 2020, the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan was posted to the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs website and the link provided by email to the Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Science, the Secretaries to AP&P, Academic Board and Governing Council, and the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance. The Dean provided the link to the Principal of Victoria College and Program Directors.