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2016-2017 Cyclical Program Review of Law and Society

PROGRAMS:
Honours BA Law and Society
Honours BA Law and Society in Combination

Final Assessment Report

Submitted by: Dr. Heidi Northwood, Dean, Faculty of Liberal Arts; Dr. Kathryn Carter, Associate Vice-President: Teaching and Learning; Dr. Paul Jessop, Vice-President: Academic

Date: October 3, 2017

PART ONE: EXECUTIVE RESPONSE

A) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REVIEW DOCUMENTS

Self-Study

- The self-study describes the history of the program and its evolution into a standalone program that has forged relationships with the Sussex Law program. The self-study preparation was led by Dr. Jonathan Lavery and Dr. Mark Davison in consultation with members of the program. Since this is the first cyclical review for the Law and Society program, there were no previous review recommendations to be implemented. The document asks reviewers to respond to key questions such as increasing interdisciplinarity in the program, attracting students from more diverse backgrounds and opportunities for practica or community service learning.

- The document outlines the program's consistency with Laurier's mission and Strategic Academic Plan in areas such as academic excellence, diversity, experiential learning, and interdisciplinarity. The program level learning outcomes are clearly articulated, as are degree level expectations. Program curriculum unfolds logically as students move through the program, and skills are introduced, reinforced, and mastered sequentially as students move through their four year in the program. Relationships with the Sussex Law program and the Law Option are outlined, and the program is regularly refreshed to ensure that content is current and aligns with the program goals.

- The Law and Society program is a direct entry program and standards are consistent with those in the Faculty of Liberal Arts. While class sizes are increasing, the program is seeking new ways to maintain a high quality in-class experience for its students to continue to provide excellent support for students in the program. Modes of delivery in the program are varied, and include face-to-face lecture, writing intensive courses, collaborative work, capstone courses, and inquiry-based learning. The program contributes a large amount of service teaching to the university throughout the year-levels.

- The program makes efficient use of existing resources and explains the recent hiring of new faculty members on a limited term basis. Administrators are efficient and effective, but additional workload may strain that position's support capabilities. Committee structures and program decision making processes are clearly described as are support services for students and faculty on campus.

- Where research funding is required, faculty are successful in obtaining it and faculty in the program regularly contribute to the university as well as to the broader academic community both through service and publications.

- The program has seen growth in applicants over the period under review and seeks ways to keep those students in the Law and Society program and lower their attrition rates. Course evaluations are consistently at or above the Faculty averages and students report a high degree of satisfaction with the program when surveyed. Employment rates are particularly high for graduates, as were alumni satisfaction rates.

- The document concludes by reiterating the growth of the program and noting its areas of concern about faculty compliment to sustain the program, ensuring that the program quality remains high, and retaining more top quality students.

External Reviewers' Report

The external reviewers for the Law and Society cyclical review were Dr. Tarah Brookfield from History and Youth and Children's Studies programs at Wilfrid Laurier University and Dr. George Rigakos from the Department of Law and Legal Studies at Carleton University. The site visit took place on March 30-31, 2017 at the Brantford Campus of Wilfrid Laurier.

Executive Summary

In its first seven years, the LASO program has grown into a well-received honours BA, minor and option that provides students with critical thinking skills with which to analyze the interrelations between law and society. As it enters it next stage of development, LASO can build on its existing strengths and successes to meet a number of challenges that will impact its future growth and identity.

The first challenge will be to reconcile the perception of the LASO as a pre-law program, a pre-existing issue that has been exacerbated by the new partnership agreement with Sussex Law School. We believe that positioning LASO as a critically engaging BA for students seeking an education and career both in and outside of formal law should be prioritized.

The second challenge is that as enrollment in LASO is predicted to grow, the program will need to continue to advocate for new resources, while also making better use of existing program, campus, and community supports. These should involve the implementation of long term planning regarding course development and rotation, as well as deliberating on the specialities of future fulltime and limited term hires.

The third challenge is for the program to commit to more engagement and collaboration with other relevant academic programs (i.e., Criminology and related Faculty of Liberal Arts programs) and services on campus (Research Services, Community Service Learning, Centre for Teaching Innovation and Excellence, and Sussex Support Staff) in order to developing further strategies for improved student retention, student experience, experiential learning, academic excellence, and faculty research profile.

List of Recommendations

1. The Law and Society program ought to embrace student preparation for law school as a possibility for growth, as a vehicle for expanding its interdisciplinary mission, and as a pedagogical opportunity to reach a diversity of students.

2. Monitor the effects of the Sussex partnership on student enrolments in LASO relative to other programs and institute a strategic approach to recruitment and admissions.

3. The creation of a LASO methods course focusing on producing legal research and briefs, legal citation methods, and accessing and understanding case law and legislation.

4. To consider what benefits and drawbacks may derive from the reinstatement of cross-listed courses with Criminology and the expansion of cross-listed courses with other Faculty of Liberal Arts.

5. To work with the Centre for Teaching Innovation and Excellence to consider what curriculum support material could be developed to better communicate to CAS and new faculty the learning outcomes and student workload expectations for required courses and Foundation courses.

6. The implementation of a rotational strategy that outlines when introductory, senior and fourth-year LASO courses will be offered five years in advance.

7. A Departmental review of the demand and pedagogical purpose of the Law Option.

8. That LASO explore a leading role in the NCA accreditation process for returning BA/LLB Sussex Law students.

9. Expand search and community outreach for legal and socio-legal experts to teach as CAS in LASO;

10. Bolster FT faculty hiring as the program grows.

11. Prioritize SSHRC research applications.

12. Conduct a thorough assessment of the progression of students through the LASO program with the goal of isolating and eliminating obstacles to completion.

13. Financially and logistically support a renewed Law and Society Student's Association.

14. In cooperation with the University and interested alumni investigate the feasibility of instituting a "Laurier University Legal Clinic."

Unit Response

The Unit Response was authored by Jonathan Lavery, the current Law & Society Program Coordinator. The report notes that all full-time LASO faculty members and one CAS member were consulted in the preparation of the response. The response thanks the reviewers for the time and effort put into the review and notes that the process was a rewarding one. No corrections to the reviewers' report were identified.

The program responded in detail to each of the 14 recommendations made by the reviewers, indicating if they agreed with the recommendation or not, along with an explanation of their rationale; gave examples of any actions already taken place toward implementation; outlined future steps that could or would be taken toward the implementation of a recommendation; and noted where the implementation of a recommendation was outside the scope of the program's decision-making and/or or the review process.

B) IDENTIFICATION OF PROGRAM STRENGTHS

The Law & Society program has witnessed increased enrolments over the past few years, especially in conjunction with the partnership with the University of Sussex Law School. Because of this partnership, the quality of students has improved (given the high GPA requirements for entry into this program), and the program is in a stronger position overall.

C) OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT

The program is at a crossroads. If the program faculty decide to embrace the partnership with Sussex, as the external reviewers suggest, they will be able to shape actively the education of its students who wish to pass the bar, providing them with an excellent undergraduate education that situates the law in its socio-political context, and the critical apparati to see more clearly the consequences of law and related policies. It will, further, be able to actively improve the partnership, being 'at the table', engaging to make the experiences of its students better, and the outcomes of the two degrees more assured. But if program faculty continue to play the role of critic without engagement with faculty from Sussex or with WLU faculty and staff to learn up-to-date information about the program, then we may need to revisit the arrangement, perhaps switching the pairing to another program in the Faculty of Liberal Arts. As a side-note: the LASO response to the external reviewers states that "since this venture was not initiated within the program, faculty are understandably concerned about not being the authors of their own destiny" (p. 2). I[1] would like to remind the program's faculty members that while the idea was brought to them, they voted to be a part of it.

If the program can work together more effectively, and work with others outside the program, then it will be appropriate to add new faculty to the mix. As it is, the program is divided on many issues, including the very nature of its discipline, and this has engendered stasis and given fuel to a pre-existing negativity and suspicion.

As a preamble to what follows—to provide context to my ranking of the recommendations in priority ranking—I believe we can and should add faculty to the LASO program (#10) but only once recommendations #1, #2, #7, #11 and #12 have been completed, and the program faculty has demonstrated that it can work together. I see recommendations #4, #5, #6 and #9 as being 'stop gap' measures, intended to 'hold down the fort' until these new hires are possible.

I concur with the program faculty that recommendations #3, #8, #13 and #14 are lower priority for now.

[1]The usage of the first person throughout Sections B-D refers to the Dean of Liberal Arts, who authored these sections of the report.

D) PRIORITIZATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS APPROVED FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The 'Stop Gap' Recommendations (#4, #5, #6 and #9): These are being ranked first, not because they are the most important, but because they need to be worked on and completed quickly. I concur with the program **(re #4)** that cross-listing courses with Criminology is unlikely to help the current situation, but cross-listing courses with other FLA programs where appropriate could help expand the offerings to LASO students, relying on pre-existing FLA faculty expertise, and not overburdening LASO courses with more students. With more courses available to LASO students, the LASO Five-Year course planning document **(#6)** can be updated and communicated to students so that they can more effectively plan their course work over the duration of their degree (which may also improve retention **(#12)**). Finally, the recruitment and mentoring of excellent CAS faculty **(#5 and #9)** is of utmost importance as both a 'stop-gap' measure and longer term.

Recommendations related to Partnership with Sussex Law School (#1, #2, and #7): As mentioned above, LASO has a choice to make regarding its involvement with the Sussex partnership. If it chooses to engage in conversations about program improvement, offering solutions to problems and being involved in the follow-through, then it will be doing part of the work for **Recommendation #1**, and alongside this, LASO should make a plan about how it recruits and plans for future growth (e.g., decide which areas of specialization should be prioritized for new hires and in what order) **(#2)**. Finally, I agree that the Law Option is likely to be in higher demand in the coming years given the number of students who are likely to want to pursue a law degree outside the Sussex partnership **(#7)**. The LASO program should be planning for this (course offerings and personnel) as part of its engagement with programmatic, faculty and campus issues and planning.

Recommendations related to Strengthening the Program (#11 and #12): Student attrition is a huge concern for this program. Finding out the causes and working on remedying whatever deficiencies are discovered should be a priority for the program **(#12)**. If the program needs assistance for this project (e.g., a student worker for data collection and analyses), it should approach the FLA dean's office with a request. Finally, the stronger the faculty, the stronger the program. I am heartened to hear that there are two SSHRC applications in the works **(#11)**.

SIGNATURES

Heidi Northwood	October 3, 2017	
Kathryn Carter	October 30, 2017	
Paul Jessop	October 31, 2017	

PART TWO: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Recommendation to be Implemented	Responsibility for Implementation	Anticipated Completion Date	Additional Notes
Recommendation #4: Review cross-listed courses in FLA to expand offerings to students	LASO Program Coordinator	May 2018	
Recommendations #5 & #9: Recruit and mentor CAS faculty	LASO PC and faculty	Ongoing	LASO should develop strategies for recruitment and mentoring in the 2017-18 year. Implementation of these strategies should be ongoing
Recommendation #1: Decide whether to engage in Sussex partnership	LASO Program in its entirety	Fall 2017	
Recommendations #1, #2, #6: If the program is 'in', then it should go about making a strategic plan for recruitment, persistence and success. This can include plans for incremental faculty hires over the next five years in identified high-need areas, based on needs identified in a revised Five-Year Course Planning document.	LASO Program Coordinator in conjunction with entire program faculty	June 2018	The FLA dean would be happy to assist with this project.
Recommendation #12: Student Attrition Project	LASO Program Coordinator	Fall 2018	The FLA dean would be happy to assist with this project.
Recommendation #7: Law Option	LASO Program Coordinator	Fall 2019	Work should begin now, but data will need to be collected for a number of years to show stable trends.