

Two-Year Progress Report

Liberal Studies (BA)

August 2022

Background

The Faculty of Arts offers a [Three-Year General Liberal Studies](#) plan and a [Four-Year General Liberal Studies](#) plan. As of 2019, Liberal Studies can be completed as an Honours plan and as a co-op plan as of 2020. Liberal Arts plans are administered by the Faculty, rather than a specific department, and give students a wide range of course choices. Students in a Liberal Studies program can also select from all minors in Arts, and the plans can be combined with Arts and Business plan. It is also available as an online-only program.

The last review of the program was completed in 2019. External reviewers Professor André Loiselle, Dean of Humanities at St. Thomas University and Professor John Justin McMurtry, Associate Dean Programs and Chair of the Department of Social Science at York University, delivered their report April 29, 2019.

The reviewers identified two main strengths of the program, which are related to its two purposes in the Faculty of Arts. The first is that it provides a vehicle for students who are interested in a program with a high degree of flexibility that allows them to engage with a number of humanities and social science disciplines and to “pursue their own path”, in the reviewers’ words. The second is that it provides a means of retaining students who have been unable to maintain required standing in a major plan. This includes students who transfer from other Arts majors, as well as those who are transferring into Arts from another faculty. For those students, Liberal Studies provides an opportunity to take courses that will be required for them to declare a new Arts major. These students are therefore typically in the Liberal Studies plan only temporarily.

The reviewers’ recommendations were mainly intended to address a perceived lack of program structure that in some ways results from the program’s dual role. The flexibility that allows students transferring from another plan to take courses that they require for admittance to another major, was a challenge for identifying a set of program learning outcomes, besides the University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (UDLES), that would also serve the students who wish to graduate with a Liberal Studies major. The mobility of students into and out of the program presents difficulties for developing a “cohort” among Liberal Studies students and for identification as a group within the Faculty of Arts. This mobility is also a challenge for reporting on numbers of majors and their time in the program.

Enrollment over the past two years

Count Date	3-YR General	4-YR General	Honours	Co-op
Fall 2020	86	186	134	57
Fall 2021	95	165	108	107

Includes students registered in the term (enrolled in courses)

Progress on Implementation Plan

Reviewer Recommendations

1. Develop a Handbook for Liberal Studies which highlights the pathways in and out of Liberal Studies, the supports available to students while in the Program (library, advisors, etc.), and the pathways to graduation. The handbook should be positive and share success stories so that the students can see themselves moving forward rather than feeling “dumped” in Liberal Studies.

Status: completed

The development of a handbook was originally planned to be completed in Summer 2020, by the Liberal Studies Academic Advisor working in the Arts Undergraduate Office. However, the pandemic and the increased demands for advising has led to delays. As an interim measure, we have created a [Liberal Studies discipline webpage](#) and have improved the [Liberal Studies major](#) webpage with information on program goals and requirements. We will further develop this into a more complete “handbook” by the end of Summer 2022. *(Update: this has been completed. However, rather than a pdf “handbook”, the material is on the expanded Liberal Studies major page.)*

As part of this development, we have also updated calendar language to simplify the descriptions of the plans so that Liberal Studies is now referred to as a “major.” Although it is not a major in the sense that it is not focussed on a particular discipline or area of study, Liberal Studies is the main academic plan noted on a student’s transcript and has a plan average and plan requirements. The previous calendar language was confusing for students because every rule that referred to majors required a similar provision or exception for Liberal Studies. It is hoped that this change will also help students better identify with Liberal Studies as their major, as well as making program requirements and rules clearer.

2. Create a core capstone course with clear learning outcomes (such as skills identification, reflexive journaling, written and oral communication exercises, professional development, strategies on how to transition to the workforce or grad school) for those who wish/are required to graduate from Liberal Studies.

Status: incomplete (declined)

As noted in the response to the reviewers’ report, we are not convinced of the need for a capstone course. All Liberal Studies students have to satisfy the University Communication Requirements and many come from co-op programs and have therefore taken professional development courses, have had work terms, and have reflected on their work experiences. As of 2020, Liberal Studies can itself

be completed as a co-op program. With the advent of Honours Liberal Studies (2019), students can also enrol or stay enrolled in the Arts and Business program (Regular or Co-op), and therefore complete the capstone course for that plan. Students in Liberal Studies can also do the [EDGE Certificate \(offered by Co-operative and Experiential Education\)](#), which provides experiential learning, skills identification, and reflection on the relationships between work and academic experiences.

We also doubt the administrative feasibility of such a requirement. The fact that many students do not expect to graduate from Liberal Studies will make it difficult to ensure that students enrol in a capstone course. Liberal Studies has three-year and four-year general degree plans in addition to an honours plan and devising a capstone for all three would be challenging. The Undergraduate Affairs Group, the body which considers and approves curricular innovations and changes in the Faculty of Arts, rejected the idea the last time a program review suggested it (2011).

3. Develop Learning Outcomes which offer some indication of the knowledge, skills and values that students acquire through the Liberal Studies program when they graduate from it.

Status: Completed

Learnings outcomes for the program were developed with the help of the Centre for Teaching Excellence, in the summer of 2021.

4. Gather more robust data on the Liberal Studies student body such as: which programs they come from, which programs they go into out of Liberal Studies, which students graduate in Liberal Studies (and from what programs), how many students are voluntarily "renaissance scholars" and which are in the program involuntarily, where students work after graduation, and how many go on to graduate school.

Status: In progress

We are now collecting better data on a termly basis, mainly through ASIS/OAT queries that can identify students who graduate with Liberal Studies plans, as well as the plans from which they enter the program, and plans they begin after leaving the program.

The distinction between those who "choose" the program, and those who do not is difficult to make. We can identify those students who enter Liberal Studies without first declaring another major, and it might be assumed that these students are more likely to be those that the reviewers refer to as "renaissance scholars", who intentionally choose the program and intend to graduate from it. It is, unfortunately, beyond our capability to identify the number who go on to graduate school, or where students work after graduation.

5. Create an "excellence award" for the best graduating student from Liberal Arts to encourage a sense of belonging, excellence and value for students who are going to graduate from the program.

Status: Completed

Since June 2020 we confer a convocation award to the top graduate in the Honours Liberal Studies program (with a minimum overall average 80%).

Updated Implementation Plan

	Recommendations	Proposed Actions	Responsibility for Leading and Resourcing (if applicable) the Actions	Timeline for addressing Recommendations
1.	Create handbook for Liberal Studies	Handbook for Liberal Studies will be prepared	AUO Advisor for Liberal Studies; no resources	Interim webpage developed. Online handbook to be completed (August 2022). Update: completed.
2.	Create core capstone course	Declined		N/A
3.	Develop learning outcomes for the plan	Learning outcomes will be developed	AD Undergraduate Programs with CTE; no resources	Completed (August 2021)
4	Gather more robust data on Liberal Studies students	Establish regular and consistent data collection on all of the facets referred to by the reviewers except graduate career or grad school outcomes	AUO Advisor for Liberal Studies; Arts Academic Officer; no resources	Completed
5.	Create an excellence award	Add Honours Liberal Studies to convocation awards	AD Undergraduate Programs; no resources	Completed (June 2020)

Date of next program review: _____ **2025-2026** _____
Date

Signatures of Approval:



Martin Cooke, AD Undergraduate programs (acting) _____ May 2, 2022 _____

Chair/Director _____ Date

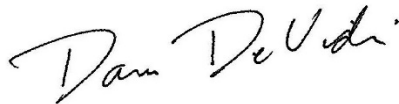
AFIW Administrative Dean/Head (For AFIW programs only) _____ Date



17/01/2023

Faculty Dean _____ Date

Note: AFIW programs fall under the Faculty of ARTS; however, the Dean does not have fiscal control nor authority over staffing and administration of the program.



October 2, 2022

Associate Vice-President, Academic _____ Date
(For undergraduate and augmented programs)

Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs _____ Date
(For graduate and augmented programs)