

# Final Assessment Report

Recreation & Leisure Studies (BA/MA/PhD)

Recreation & Sport Business (BA); Therapeutic Recreation (BA);

Tourism Development (BA); Tourism (Option)

Recreation & Leisure Studies – Aging, Health and Well-being (PhD); Recreation & Leisure Studies – Work and Health (PhD)

## December 2022

### Executive Summary

External reviewers found that the Recreation and Leisure Studies (BA, MA, PhD, Option) delivered by the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies were in good standing.

*“The University of Waterloo’s Recreation and Leisure Studies Program is a high-quality program with dedicated and experienced faculty members. The research achievements of the faculty are internationally respected and, as a result, the quality of the graduate program is strong. In addition, program innovation efforts and willingness to adapt the curriculum to industry and to students’ needs, represent strong points.”*

A total of 13 recommendations were provided by the reviewers, including improving the co-op program, increasing the involvement of alumni and professionals to provide better access to internships and placements for students, limiting the number of graduate students, and increasing faculty diversity. In response, the program created a plan outlining the specific actions proposed to address each recommendation as well as a timeline for implementation. The next cyclical review for this program is scheduled for 2026-2027.

### Undergraduate enrollment over the past three years

	Recreation and Leisure Studies			Recreation and Sports Business		Therapeutic Recreation		Tourism Development		Tourism
	General	Honours	Co-op	Honours	Co-op	Honours	Co-op	Honours	Co-op	Option
<b>Fall 2021</b>	11	43	36	128	214	108	79	11	21	0
<b>Fall 2020</b>	7	47	34	113	188	106	75	15	21	0
<b>Fall 2019</b>	7	59	51	91	155	90	82	9	15	5

\*based on Active Students Extract retrieved from Quest September 17, 2021

### Graduate enrollment over the past three years

	Recreation and Leisure Studies		Aging, Health and Well-Being PhD
	MA	PhD	
<b>Fall 2021</b>	32	40	7
<b>Fall 2020</b>	29	39	9
<b>Fall 2019</b>	32	30	6

\*based on Active Students Extract retrieved from Quest September 17, 2021

Notes: The Recreation and Leisure Studies – Work and Health (PhD) program was discontinued in 2012-2013.

### Background

In accordance with the University of Waterloo’s Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), this final assessment report provides a synthesis of the external evaluation and the internal response of the Recreation and Leisure Studies (BA/MA/PhD), Recreation and Sport Business (BA), Therapeutic Recreation (BA), Tourism Development (BA, Option), PhD in Recreation and Leisure Studies – Aging, Health and Well-being, PhD in Recreation and Leisure Studies – Work and Health programs delivered by the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies. A self-study (Volume I, II, III) was submitted to the Associate Vice-President, Academic and Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs on June 17, 2020. The self-study (Volume I) presented the program descriptions and learning outcomes, an analytical assessment of the programs, including the data collected from a student survey, along with the standard data package prepared by the Office of Institutional Analysis & Planning (IAP). The CVs for each faculty member with a key role in the delivery of the program(s) were included in Volume II of the self-study.

From Volume III, two arm’s-length external reviewers were selected by the Associate Vice-President, Academic and Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs: Dr. Kelly Bricker, Professor of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, University of Utah, and Dr. Frederic Dimanche, Associate Professor of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Ryerson University.

Reviewers appraised the self-study documentation and conducted a virtual site visit to the University between November 9 and November 12, 2020. An internal reviewer from the University of Waterloo, Dr. Ana Ferrer, Professor of Economics, was selected to accompany the external reviewers. The visit included interviews with the Provost and VP, Academic; Associate Vice-President, Academic; Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs; Dean of the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences; Chair of the Department as well as faculty members, staff, and current undergraduate and graduate students. The Review Team also had an opportunity to meet with representatives from the library, and Co-operative Education.

Following the site visit, the external reviewers submitted a report on their findings, with recommendations. Subsequently, the program responded to each recommendation and outlined a plan for implementation of the recommendations. Finally, the Dean responded to the external reviewers' recommendations, and endorsed the plans outlined by the program.

This final assessment report is based on information extracted, in many cases verbatim, from the self-study, the external reviewers' report, the program response and the Dean's response.

## **Program Characteristics**

### **Undergraduate Programs**

#### **Recreation and Leisure Studies; Four-Year Honours**

The Honours Recreation and Leisure Studies program introduces students to the many aspects of the fields of leisure studies, tourism, events, parks and outdoor recreation, therapeutic recreation, municipal and cultural recreation, and business management. This major allows students the greatest opportunity to tailor their degrees to meet their own career or post-graduate goals using the flexibility of the electives in the program. Students can choose nine or more Recreation electives and up to thirteen non-Recreation electives, allowing room to complete options, minors, or teachable subjects for Teacher's College. Specific degree requirements can be found [here](#).

#### **Recreation and Sport Business; Four-Year Honours**

The Honours Recreation and Sport Business program is designed to equip future leaders with business-related competencies in recreation and sport contexts across public, nonprofit, and commercial sectors. In the Department and across campus, the degree introduces students to the main areas of human resource management, marketing, finance, and communications, and then have the opportunity to further specialize in one or more areas using their elective courses offered through [Wilfrid Laurier University's Lazaridis School of Business and Economics](#) in addition to those offered at Waterloo.

The program may be completed either through the co-op or regular stream. Degree requirements can be found [here](#).

#### **Therapeutic Recreation; Four-Year Honours**

The Honours Therapeutic Recreation program provides students with the expertise to enhance the overall quality of life for individuals, communities, and specific populations, such as older adults and persons living with differing levels of ability. Students learn to assess the physical, social and emotional needs of clients, as well as models for enhancing their lives through professional practice involving recreation activities and community inclusion.

The program may be completed either through the co-op or regular stream. Students complete a required practicum placement, and an internship placement designed for students to obtain further hands-on practical experience in a supervised therapeutic recreation setting. Degree requirements can be found [here](#).

Students planning a career in Therapeutic Recreation will also be prepared for certification with the [National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification \(NCTRC\)](#) and/or registration with [Therapeutic Recreation Ontario \(TRO\)](#).

#### **Tourism Development; Four-Year Honours**

Tourism represents one of the world's largest industries, creating numerous opportunities for inspired professionals who can develop and deliver rewarding experiences while protecting cultural and natural resources for future generations. Students in the Tourism Development Honours program delve into the social, economic, cultural, and environmental impacts of tourism in communities, in Canada, and around the world. Students learn how to plan, implement, and evaluate tourism experiences in environmentally and culturally sensitive ways. Degree requirements can be found [here](#).

#### **Recreation and Leisure Studies; Four-Year General Degree**

Students may be placed in the general degree program at any time following their first year if deemed ineligible to continue in any of the honours programs. Thereafter, students may continue in the general program to graduation, or meet the requirements to be eligible to return to one of the honours programs.

The Four-Year General Recreation and Leisure Studies program provides an opportunity for students to continue their studies in the recreation and leisure field, even if they have not met the requirements to continue their studies at the Honours level. Students take the same courses as the Honours level program, though the degree requirements are slightly different, and have an opportunity to meet the Honours level requirements and return to the Honours program. Often this success is achieved within one to three academic terms. Nevertheless, students may choose to remain in the four-year General program and complete the lesser requirements to graduate with this degree. Degree requirements can be found [here](#).

#### **Tourism Option**

The Tourism Option provides an opportunity for students to focus their studies in the tourism field, exploring topics such as tourism impacts, tourism planning and marketing, cultural heritage, and outdoor recreation resource management. The Tourism Option is available to students in any honours-level plan at UW. Students interested in working for the Canadian

Federal Government are encouraged to take French language courses. Requirements for the option can be found [here](#).

### **Joint Honours Plans**

Students in Recreation and Leisure Studies honours plans may choose to complete a Joint Honours degree. A Joint Honours plan allows a student the opportunity to complete two degrees at the same time by completing the degree requirements set out by both Departments. Most joint honours degrees (e.g., REC + PSYCH) consist of a minimum of 20 to 22 units (i.e., 40 to 44 term courses) between the two plans total.

The requirements for a joint honours degree are determined by the two Departments offering the honours degree plans.

The most common Joint Honours Degrees are between Recreation and Leisure Studies and Psychology, Social Development Studies, Geography, and Sociology. Requirements for Joint Honours Degrees can be found [here](#).

### **Graduate Programs**

The Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies (RLS) currently offers one Master of Arts (MA) degree that students can obtain through two different paths: the MA thesis option or the MA coursework option.

The Department currently supports two doctoral programs: the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Recreation and Leisure Studies and the PhD in Aging, Health, and Well-Being. The PhD in Aging, Health, and Well-Being represents a collaborative doctoral program, operated by the three academic units in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences: RLS, the Department of Kinesiology, and the School of Public Health and Health Systems.

### **Summary of Strengths, Challenges and Weaknesses based on Self-Study**

#### **Undergraduate programs**

##### **Strengths**

The evidence collected for this report suggests undergraduate studies in RLS have many strengths to celebrate:

- Over the review period, the undergraduate program experienced steady growth in enrolment, particularly in Recreation and Sport Business (RSB). The addition of sport to RSB appears to have been a good decision in terms of attracting more qualified applicants to the Department. Overall, Department applications and admissions have

steadily increased over the program review period, demonstrating a strong demand for the curricula within the Department.

- The curriculum mapping process associated with the program review showed that the Department meets the Provincial guidelines for learning outcomes and its undergraduate programs progress in a logical sequence from introductory to more advanced levels of learning. These findings bode well for students in our program and ensure courses contribute to positive learning experiences.
- The review also showed that instructors utilize a diversity of sound assessments and styles, which add variety and value to the curriculum for students.
- At a time when AHS aims to attract students from other faculties on campus, approximately a third of students enrolled in RLS courses originates from outside of the Department.
- Feedback from the student survey indicated students reported achieving learning outcomes very well. Students are generally satisfied with their achievement of learning outcomes consistent with curriculum mapping, with particular strengths in research and development of professional skills. Students are also highly satisfied with their preparedness for employment or future studies.
- In terms of additional strengths, students highlighted undergraduate advising support as a significant strength of the Department. They also mentioned opportunities to take courses across the majors, flexibility of the majors, and opportunities to connect with other students as highly satisfactory.
- In terms of alumni perspectives, alumni overwhelmingly rated their educational experiences as good or excellent. They also reported a good fit between their program of study and their career fit. In other words, training in the program was deemed highly relevant to their career paths.
- Employment rates within two years of graduation at or above the Provincial rate. Given the focus on local impact articulated by the current Provincial Government, this finding reflects well on the Department in terms of career preparation.

### **Challenges**

While few challenges can be gleaned from the assessment, the Department ought to consider the following concern:

- A quarter of surveyed RLS students thought co-op placements in RLS were satisfactory only. Our observation of the quality of placements is that the opportunities to secure more desirable work experiences tends to increase with each subsequent work term (i.e., students become more competitive for co-op placements as they get more work experience). Nevertheless, the Department could always do more to make available relevant work experiences for its co-op students by recruiting more employers to post meaningful jobs in the co-op system. The challenge in doing so, however, is that placements/co-op opportunities cannot be restricted to RLS students alone in the job

search system and are open to competition from any Waterloo student, irrespective of his or her major. Moreover, the centralization of co-op makes it challenging for academic units to do their own recruitment of employers. These challenge makes it difficult to address concerns expressed by students surveyed for this report.

### **Weaknesses**

The program review process enables the Department to identify deficiencies that warrant greater attention. The following “weaknesses” offer guidance in terms of areas the Department should aim to improve:

- Only a third of students surveyed were very or highly satisfied with career planning or future studies. The Department, therefore, could do a better job assisting its undergraduate students with career planning, through advising, events, and in-class direction.
- Even though students felt their training in research was highly satisfactory, only a quarter believed they had good opportunities for research experiences within their undergraduate degree program. The growth of the Department’s graduate program has meant undergraduate students have received less active encouragement to complete undergraduate theses. If advising capacity to oversee such projects is too limited, however, then the Department should perhaps consider ways it can incorporate group research projects in selected courses.
- The Tourism Development degree program has had consistently low admissions, despite a concerted effort to rebrand the program, which challenge its sustainability as a degree offering within the Department. Despite laudable efforts on behalf of faculty to bolster the curriculum (e.g., the integrated curriculum), admissions remain consistently low. This matter presents an equity issue in terms of the allocation of teaching resources committed to upper year Tourism Development courses with low enrolments. The Department will need to revisit the viability of the Tourism Development program and make the hard decision to either inactivate the major and keep it as a minor or rebrand the program to attract more undergraduate students. The latter option would require a better understanding of market trends and a sincere desire to meet the career preparation needs of potential students.

### **Graduate programs**

#### **Strengths**

In our most recent graduate student feedback, obtained through our Graduate Student Experience Questionnaire (administered in January 2019) and focus groups (administered in Spring 2018 and Fall 2018), students identified a number of strengths of our graduate program. These include:

- *Diversity* (of faculty and student expertise, courses offered, programs offered, teaching styles used, student population including domestic and international students) – students indicate that this diversity provides opportunities for interdisciplinary discussion, to develop diverse skills, to explore complexity of issues across a breadth of areas, and provide choice in the ways students can complete their MA.
- *Theoretical and methodological sophistication* – ‘Heavy focus of the philosophical underpinnings of leisure research and the importance of methodology set this program apart’ as a number of students highlights. Students appreciate how diverse ways of knowing and representing research are respected, taught and encouraged in our graduate program. Some also mention appreciating the critical and social justice orientation within our graduate programs.
- *Innovative nature of the program* – graduate students are particularly proud of the innovative nature of our program, calling it ‘cutting edge’, ‘pushing boundaries’, ‘encourages creativity’, and ‘radical’.
- *Culture within the Department* – students highlight the welcoming and supportive culture cultivated within the Department repeatedly. This culture fosters collegial support and mentorship, inclusivity, a strong sense of community, and a genuine sense of teamwork and exchange of ideas. The culture is most often linked to the people within the Department, including approachable, accessible, friendly, engaged, highly supportive, and inspiring faculty/mentors; staff who ‘genuinely care about the success of every student’; and other students who respect and support each other.
- *Courses/facilitation styles that prepare students for their own independent research* –As mentioned earlier in [section 5.6](#), students often identify their courses as a strength of the program. More specifically, students describe how the quantitative and qualitative methods courses in first year for MA students, and the foundational courses like 700 and 772/773 for PhD students, prepare thesis-based students for their independent research and the coursework students for their capstone program evaluation course. Students describe the practical teaching styles used in the graduate courses as a particular strength of the program. These teaching styles allow for interactive, dialogical, collaborative, and experiential/service learning opportunities and make the courses more engaging for students.
- *Graduate student opportunities provided/learning environment* – Our graduate students also identify a number of other graduate student experiences and learning opportunities that further enrich their graduate experiences in our program. They especially note the GARLS symposium, which often provides students with their first opportunity to share their research with others. Some students also identify opportunities for career development as a strength as well as research and teaching assistantship opportunities and opportunities for PhD students to teach a course.

## Challenges

Students and faculty members have also identified a number of challenges going forward.



These challenges are primarily associated with recent changes made to our graduate programs that we continue to monitor as well as to staff support for the graduate program. These include:

- *Ensuring the MA coursework option is relevant to students* – Our MA degree (thesis and coursework options) is a research-intensive program. Although MA coursework students have appreciated the opportunity to take the research methods courses, they have also expressed the need for courses that also prepare them for diverse jobs in the profession (e.g., therapeutic recreation content and examples, a business/leadership type course).
- *Balancing work-life balance with course expectations* – Information from both our focus groups and questionnaires has highlighted that students are finding it challenging balancing all course expectations, especially in the fall term when students take most of their core courses.
- *Meeting needs of diverse students in our courses* – Although the interdisciplinary nature of our program is viewed as a real strength of the program by both students and faculty members, it can also pose a challenge when there are students with a diversity of backgrounds and preparation levels in some of our courses. For example, all of our graduate students (MA and PhD) are required to take REC 600. This means that students with one or two previous degrees in leisure studies are engaging with students who have no background in recreation and leisure studies, making it challenging for instructors to meet the diverse student learning needs.
- *Lack of adequate staff support for graduate program* – Despite the significant growth in our graduate program over the past 7 years, RLS continues to struggle with the lack of staff support for the program. The lack of support has become a significant issue most recently as our program reached the highest number of graduate students in the Department's history. The graduate program is currently supported by a 0.6 staff position shared with the Dean's Office in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences. This staff position is supported by 0.3 of the Department Administrator position. The inequities within the Faculty in relation to support staff for graduate programs are most apparent considering that the student/staff ratios are similar or higher in RLS compared with the thesis graduate programs in the other Departments in the Faculty. Inadequate staff support has made it challenging to respond to student requests and needs in a timely manner. It is also making it extremely challenging to implement new initiatives to support the graduate program.

### **Weaknesses**

- *Funding inequities* – Current funding policies within the Department create inequities among students, which can cause tensions between students in different types of programs. For example, our MA thesis students are guaranteed two terms of funding and our MA coursework students have no guaranteed funding, although the

Department tries its best to provide some funding to the MA coursework students when it can. In addition, international PhD students are provided with an International Doctoral Student Award each term for four years, which significantly reduces the tuition fees paid by these students. Our international MA students are eligible for an international student award, which can cover approximately half of their tuition fees. However, this award is dependent on the number of awards allocated to the Faculty annually, and is not guaranteed for all international MA students. These inequities can make it extremely challenging for some of our students and can impact times to completion when they are forced to work to cover their tuition and living expenses.

### **Summary of Key Findings from the External Reviewers**

The reviewers felt that the Recreation and Leisure Studies program is of high-quality with dedicated and experienced faculty members. The research achievements of the faculty are internationally respected and, as a result, the quality of the graduate program is strong. In addition, program innovation efforts and willingness to adapt the curriculum to industry and to students' needs, represent strong points.

### **Program Response to External Reviewers' Recommendations**

1. Support the co-op program (a Waterloo trademark) with a dedicated person identifying reliable options for students, building greater capacity in RLS co-op placements.

#### **Response**

RLS identifies three primary goals related to co-op, which require significant investment of time and resources: (1) improve the relevance of co-op to future careers in RLS-related fields; (2) enhance co-op experiences and retention; (3) improve student success and hireability in co-op. To achieve these goals, RLS has initiated the following steps:

- It is working together with the Dean's Office in the Faculty of Health and Co-operative Education on campus to explore the potential for greater capacity to increase the connectivity between RLS and business development;
- It is developing a co-op strategy and specific tactics to achieve its goals, including:
  - conducting focus groups with students and alumni;
  - working closely with co-op business developers
  - attending events in recreation, sport, tourism, and event settings to build relationships with potential employers;
  - chairing working groups to explore changes to work term sequencing;
  - implementing preparedness training for 1B students;
  - organizing training for faculty related to academic integration; and
  - partnering with advancement to pursue new opportunities for student jobs in the not-for-profit sector.

Through these efforts, RLS is making significant progress toward meeting its goals related to co-op.

### **Dean's Response**

The Faculty of Health has established a "Student Experiential Learning Fund" as one of its priorities in the faculty's five-year strategic plan. This fund is established to create and facilitate experiential learning in not-for-profit organizations. We believe that most of these types of opportunities will be co-op positions that are attractive to students in the RLS co-op stream. Currently, we have a prospect who is interested in funding this initiative through our advancement office.

2. Increase graduate support, perhaps by decreasing graduate acceptance to a more manageable number of students, as they relate to class sizes, mentoring, advising and support.

### **Response**

RLS has taken actions to review and improve its graduate studies curriculum, consistent with its Strategic Plan for 2020-2025, with a particular emphasis on re-designing its MA coursework program, likely into a separate degree offering, to ensure greater demand and improved student experience. Once finalized, MA coursework and thesis admission targets will be adjusted accordingly, with the former increasing and the latter decreasing. The department has also implemented overall reductions in MA and PhD thesis international student admissions.

### **Dean's Response**

I support this recommendation to increase graduate support in the context of capacity of mentorship, funding and class sizes. The program's plan to reduce targets in the thesis routes while increasing targets in the course-based routes would reduce the commitment for guaranteed funding which is not required for course-based graduate students. If the program receives adequate domestic applicants who are highly competitive, RLS may consider reducing international intakes which cost more and do not bring provincial funding to the program. The University is examining ways for faculties to provide interdisciplinary experiences. This could open opportunities for RLS graduate students to take courses outside of the program, and in turn, RLS could offer courses to students outside of RLS, thereby creating economies of scale. For example, faculties could instruct larger classes and help the department be more efficient.

Targeted hiring will begin in fall 2021 for the Black and Indigenous excellence cluster hires in the University, for 4-5 CRCs allocated to the Faculty of Health, and for 1-2 Schlegel-UW Research Chairs within the faculty. These are opportunities for RLS to build capacity for new

faculty hires that will generate funding support for graduate students who choose to study under their supervision.

3. Deactivate the Tourism Development emphasis area, with such low enrollment, faculty resources should be utilized elsewhere.

#### **Response**

RLS inactivated the Tourism Development major in March 2021 effective September 1, 2022. In conjunction with the inactivation, RLS inactivated REC 380, which will enable it to use faculty resources elsewhere. Enrolment for REC 480 will be monitored to ensure it meets sufficient demand to justify its continued offering.

#### **Dean's Response**

While deactivation of the Tourism Development major will be effective in Fall 2022, it is still a possibility for students to pursue this area as a minor.

4. Keep some tourism courses as part of other programs, or embed content with other courses, maybe with a focus on health / wellness tourism / tourism quality of life and communities?

#### **Response**

REC 280 and REC 480 remain part of a Tourism minor students can still pursue. The Department is currently reviewing and in some cases redesigning its undergraduate majors (Recreation and Leisure Studies, Recreation and Sport Business, Therapeutic Recreation). Through this process, RLS is considering how, if at all, tourism-related content can be included. The suggestion to align tourism with health/wellness tourism, as well as related to other recreation and sport settings, will ultimately depend on the direction the degree offerings take.

#### **Dean's Response**

RLS has a well-planned strategy to incorporate tourism development topics throughout its curriculum, as well as align these with the strategic plans of the department, faculty and university, particularly as they relate to health.

5. Evaluate the TR program to ensure a balance between clinical and community professional placement requirements.

#### **Response**

RLS plans to take the following steps to enhance its TR curriculum:

- a. Continue to develop connections with TRO and support its work through faculty liaisons and committees.
- b. Survey TR alumni about the relevance of certification to the employment they secured after graduation to determine how many of our students pursue TR jobs that actually require certification.
- c. Based on survey results, discuss as a Department the possibility of broadening the TR program and reconsider certification requirements. Pending the outcome of the discussion, if relevant, explore how RLS can enhance the capacity of its instructors to ensure students are eligible and prepared to write the CTRS exam and/or be ready to apply for TRO registration.
- d. Partner with the Faculty of Health marketing and undergraduate recruitment team to strengthen how RLS articulates the importance of TR within individual and community health and wellness. The Department and Faculty will work together to identify marketing strategies and outreach opportunities that resonate with high school populations and pathways for college transfers and practitioners interested in lifelong learning.
- e. Continue to coordinate TR curriculum group meetings each term with TR course instructors as an on-going way of updating and sharing ideas, as well as reviewing/mapping current curriculum and identifying gaps and overlap.
- f. Provide additional administrative support for REC 253 and REC 450 to support the facilitation of meaningful practical placements and internships in diverse settings.
- g. Identify what financial resources and/or other supports are needed to continue to expand the TR video simulations and practice labs to ensure these remain current and engaging for our students.

### **Dean's Response**

The proposed plan to evaluate the TR program will help ensure that students obtain a balance between experiences in clinical and community professional placements. A community consultation panel helps ground the program in current and emerging practices. The expansion of TR video simulations will add to the repertoire of learning opportunities and enhance accessibility to online learning objects.

6. Develop alumni networks and an advisory council.

### **Response**

Strengthening the Department's relationship with its alumni remains a strategic priority for RLS, as indicated in its 2020-2025 strategic plan. With this in mind, RLS has:

- hosted a session led by the Centre for Career Action to offer faculty training in launching personal LinkedIn sites;

- created its own LinkedIn page to be leveraged as a platform to facilitate alumni communication and expand the RLS alumni network;
- encouraged first year students to create their own LinkedIn accounts and link with the department page;
- offered in-person events, such as “REC the Grad House,” an event for on-campus alumni (there are over 100 RLS alumni working on campus) to strengthen department ties with alumni;
- participated actively in the Faculty of Health’s 10,000 Coffees initiative, a so-called “talent experience platform” for inclusive mentoring, alumni connectivity with students, and skills development;
- consulted with a panel of alumni (as opposed to an advisory council) about the Department’s name; and
- Distributed and collected data from an alumni survey to solicit alumni feedback on the undergraduate and graduate curricula in RLS.

### **Dean’s Response**

During the pandemic, the Department of RLS, and the rest of the Faculty, successfully hosted public lectures and panel discussions online which attracted large audiences on and off campus, across the country. We will likely incorporate a hybrid approach to future public lectures which will be in-person events with an option for audiences in any geographic region to attend. This will facilitate and increase our reach to alumni who may not be able to travel to campus to network.

The Department's plan to help students learn networking skills along with faculty is an effective way to ensure that they stay connected when they graduate and transition to become alumni.

7. Increase advising support for graduate students, especially concerning administrative level support.

### **Response**

RLS has hired a contract staff position in 2022 to provide increased administrative support for the graduate program in addition to other responsibilities with the goal of making this a regular ongoing position.

In terms of advising support, RLS assigned Grad Committee members to serve as advisors to coursework students to share the advising load and has continued this practice annually since. In addition, RLS will remind individual faculty supervisors of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs (GSPA) guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and, more generally, the GSPA’s Guide for Graduate Research and Supervision. Overall, RLS has

always had conscientious and dedicated faculty who have provided generous advising support to their students, so the Department is confident supervisor support warrants little more than a reminder of best practices.

### **Dean's Response**

The Dean's office is committed to reviewing the workload, roles, and responsibilities associated with the graduate coordinator role.

8. Increase communication and clarity surrounding funding support for graduate students, as well as teaching mentoring to ensure PhD students have teaching experience to build their CVs as well as research experience before graduating.

### **Response**

The Associate Chair of Graduate Studies and Graduate Studies Administrator conducted a review of all communications surrounding funding support for graduate students to identify potential gaps or inconsistencies in the funding information and funding support opportunities communicated to graduate students. In doing so, they took into account the diversity of student status (full-time/part-time; domestic/international) and program options (MA coursework, MA thesis, PhD). The comprehensive review included communications from the Department, Faculty, and GSPA associated with recruitment and admission, internal and external scholarship opportunities and awards, teaching assistantships and research assistantships, and sessional instructor opportunities. The review was completed by July 2021. In addition, the following actions were taken:

- a document was prepared and shared with students in Fall 2021 on the impacts of tri-council and other major scholarships on graduate funding commitments to dispel myths and misunderstandings about the funding implications and encouraging students to apply for these awards which ultimately benefit the students and the department; and
- a student panel was established each fall semester to share tips on creating successful tri-council scholarship applications led by previous recipients.

RLS will continue to do its best to provide teaching opportunities for Ph.D. students where possible during their degree experiences. However, it cannot guarantee an experience for all students. Practically, an insufficient number of formal teaching opportunities exists for all PhD students. Moreover, legitimate concerns do arise about some PhD students' level of preparedness or ability to lead an undergraduate course by themselves. Ultimately, RLS is responsible, first and foremost, to ensuring its undergraduate students are exposed to only high-quality instructors. As a result, Ph.D. student's teaching skillset and potential determines whether a formal opportunity is available to them. Those Ph.D. students who fail to receive an opportunity to teach are encouraged to complete the Centre for Teaching Excellence (CTE) Fundamentals of University Teaching certificate. Completion of this

certificate is already required of all Ph.D. students who wish to be considered for a sessional position. Ph.D. students who fail to be hired as sessional instructors are encouraged to deliver guest lectures in courses taught by full-time faculty. For those who do receive formal teaching opportunities, mentoring support is provided by the Department's Teaching Mentor, a position established specifically to provide such mentorship. All told, then, the recommendation that RLS ensure all PhD students gain teaching experience is not something to which the Department can commit.

### **Dean's Response**

In addition to communication about funding support for graduate students, I would encourage mentorship for supervisors to work with students to apply for external awards starting in the students' first year which serves as practice for subsequent years when chances of success increase. In terms of teaching experience, the Department of RLS presents a comprehensive plan ranging from opportunities to teach a full course, to serving as guest lecturer and obtaining training in Centre for Teaching Excellence. In Fall 2021, the Faculty of Health and Graduate Studies and Post-Doctoral Affairs (GSPA) jointly provided \$200K to support graduate students in Health whose research were delayed beyond their program limit due to COVID-19.

## **9. Increase administrative support for research grants and external funding.**

### **Response**

Administrative level staff support requires approval from the Dean's Office. Any administrative support for research grants and external funding will likely be provided at the Faculty level, so the Chair will initiate a discussion with the Associate Dean of Research and the Dean of the Faculty of Health to discuss this recommendation and how the Faculty can support it. Currently, RLS staff provide information about research accounts and information relevant to building budgets. In addition, the Office of Research on campus provides extensive support in terms of reviewing applications prior to submission, as well as helpful workshops to assist faculty in applying for specific grant opportunities, including the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada, the primary source from which RLS faculty apply for external funds.

Evidently, an implementation subgroup of the Faculty of Health's Strategic Plan has discussed support for researchers applying for external grants. It included related questions in its survey to faculty members scheduled to be administered in March 2021 as part of its consultations. While the subgroup cannot articulate the specific action that results from its consultation process, strategies to increase support for faculty who apply for external grants are under serious consideration as part of the Faculty of Health's Strategic Plan implementation.



**Dean's Response**

The Faculty's strategic plan implementation committee has a subcommittee that has surveyed faculty researchers and will make recommendations for objectives and tactics to pursue in the next five years. Administrative support for research grants will be discussed at a faculty level among the three academic units through the Associate Dean Research who is engaged with and aware of research grant support from the Office of Research.

10. Consider a review exam of some type for graduate students, prior to students committing to comprehensive exams, such as candidacy exam or something that reviews work and provides some type of indication of comprehensive exam success. Suggest aligning comprehensive exams with the respective research interests of the PhD students.

**Response**

RLS believes adding a candidacy exam would be redundant with the aims of the coursework requirements of our Ph.D. program. For Ph.D. students to move on to the comprehensive examination process, they must complete coursework requirements designed to ensure students have sufficient knowledge and understanding of our field, including the different theoretical and methodological approaches used. Additionally, RLS regards this recommendation as redundant with the intentions of the comprehensive examination itself, which are to effectively assess a Ph.D. student's ability and preparedness to meet the demands of dissertation research.

In regard to the second point of the recommendation, the current practice within RLS is for comprehensive examinations to align with the research interests of PhD students. Supervisors meet with their students on several occasions to discuss student research interests prior to the start of comprehensive examinations. Students are also asked to submit a short summary of their substantive, theoretical, and methodological areas of interest and expertise to their faculty supervisor, which is subsequently shared with the student's comprehensive committee and used to inform the examination questions. Our takeaway from this point in the recommendation is to ensure this process is more clearly communicated to, and consistently implemented by, students and supervisors.

In regard to the more general recommendation, the RLS Graduate Studies Committee has initiated and completed a formal review of the comprehensive examination process that involved intensive consultations with current Ph.D. student representatives from different cohorts and stages of their program of study. The following outcomes are already being implemented. Specifically,

- a. Establishing a semi-annual comprehensive examination cohort meeting with the Associate Chair of Graduate Studies;

- b. Enhancing and formalizing a more purposeful, relational, and goal-oriented pre-comprehensive examination dialogue between students and supervisor/committee members; and
- c. Developing and implementing expectations for student-supervisor check-in meetings throughout the comprehensive examination process.

### **Dean's Response**

I agree with the response that a "review exam" prior to the comprehensive exam is redundant; it can also unnecessarily prolong length to completion for doctoral students. The comprehensive exam is, in essence, a candidacy exam. The subcommittee of the RLS Graduate Studies Committee has carried out a comprehensive review of the comprehensive examination process to enhance the student experience.

- 11.** Identify mental health support processes, and ensure all students have access to these support mechanisms as part of an orientation.

### **Response**

RLS consulted with orientation leaders at the University and Faculty levels to better understand current orientation practices and gaps in mental health support during orientation. To be clear, attendance at orientation is, and always has been, optional. The cost is \$110/student and students may opt-out if they so choose. Recognizing this practice, RLS is pleased it has championed the integration of the mental health resources widget on all LEARN pages across the university to promote mental health resources within the LEARN academic platform. Currently, several initiatives are underway to integrate mental health supports/awareness into orientation including:

- a. Delivery of "Single and Sexy" presentation, now replaced by "TBH: To Be Honest" focused on healthy relationships, safety, homesickness, academic integrity, imposter syndrome, shifting values, university transition. All RLS students who physically attend on-campus orientation have taken part in this presentation.
- b. Delivery of "Waterloo Ready" virtual orientation program. This optional orientation to university life includes an overview of mental health resources and instructions to make a wellness kit.
- c. Presentation "HYPE (Having Your Program Explained)" for incoming RLS students provides mental health resources, including links to counselling services, peer-to-peer support (MATES), and Warrior recreation programs.

In addition to these resources already provided during orientation, several actions RLS is planning include:

- a. Embrace and expand a pivot to virtual orientation programming. Given the changed delivery format and the removal of specific presentations previously delivered in person (e.g., Single and Sexy) during COVID-19, RLS will work closely with UW orientation to streamline online orientation through various programs (e.g., Waterloo Ready, residence life, Faculty and Department level), thereby reducing redundancy and promoting greater engagement and connection with the Department before students begin their first year.
- b. Continue to expand partnerships with Campus Wellness to help students create a toolbox of resources that serve to bridge orientation to well-being in first year and beyond.
- c. Explore the possibility of including HEALTH 105 (Mental Health Literacy) into all RLS program plans as a required first year course.

### **Dean's Response**

While orientation is optional, all first-year students have free access to several resources online and on campus that support students' mental health, including the Mental health Literacy course which is a service course for all students on campus, and has received provincial funding to be developed into a course for all post-secondary institutions in Ontario to adopt.

- 12.** Support international students with orientation topics unique to international students acclimating to a new culture and learning environment.

### **Response**

The RLS Undergraduate Advisor will connect one-on-one with incoming international undergraduate students during the first month of their first term at Waterloo to answer questions and connect them with any resources of value to each individual. At the graduate level, a member of the Graduate Studies Committee will connect in a similar fashion with incoming international students to support their transition to Waterloo.

### **Dean's Response**

The Student Relations Officer is also an excellent resource who can support our international undergraduate students.

13. Create a plan for diversifying the faculty as new positions become available.

### **Response**

The 2020-2025 RLS strategic plan underscores the Department's commitment to diversity by (1) committing resources to improve representation of diverse identities in speakers and recruitment materials; (2) creating a committee to develop and implement a Department-specific approach to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations; (3) developing relationships with Indigenous communities on campus and beyond with the intent of Indigenizing the Department. Moving forward, the Department is taking steps to hire Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) as faculty and staff and coordinate continuing education on matters of equity and inclusion.

To advance these aims, the Department underwent an anti-racism and anti-oppression process in 2020-2021. Dr. Richard Norman, a Ph.D. graduate from RLS, led the process by engaging in extensive consultation with students (undergraduate and graduate), staff, and faculty. RLS established a Faculty Working Group and a Graduate Student Working Group. The Faculty Working Group undertook a consultation process that led to the development of department commitments to consciousness, community, and power (see: <https://uwaterloo.ca/recreation-and-leisure-studies/about/commitments-anti-racism>). It is fair to say RLS is regarded as a leader in anti-racism and anti-oppression efforts on campus.

To improve its ability to hire BIPOC faculty and staff, RLS commits to utilizing hiring practices outlined by The Tri-agency Institutional Programs Secretariat. See: [https://www.chairs-chaires.gc.ca/program-programme/equity-equite/best\\_practices-pratiques\\_exemplaires-eng.aspx](https://www.chairs-chaires.gc.ca/program-programme/equity-equite/best_practices-pratiques_exemplaires-eng.aspx). RLS did make an offer to an Indigenous candidate for one of the University's Indigenous Excellence Hiring initiative, but unfortunately the candidate declined the offer of employment, citing the expense of housing locally as his deciding factor. RLS will continue to prioritize its active pursuit of qualified BIPOC applicants for future positions.

### **Dean's Response**

The University of Waterloo just launched the cluster hiring initiatives with plans to recruit 10 Indigenous and 10 Black tenure-track faculty members across campus, including the Faculty of Health. This is one of several approaches to increase numbers of faculty members from under-represented racial groups. The President's Anti-Racism Taskforce (PART) will complete its mandate in December 2021 and present other recommendations for diversifying the campus. In addition to the cluster hiring initiatives, the Faculty of Health will begin to recruit for four, possibly 5 Canada Research Chairs that will help the University achieve its equity targets in 2019; these include persons who identify as Indigenous, women, visible minority, or have a disability.

### **Recommendations Not Selected for Implementation**

While each external reviewer recommendation warrants careful consideration, the Department recognizes the small number of students with whom the external reviewers met did not offer a representative sample of the student population in RLS and in some regards may have articulated perspectives not shared by their peers. With this in mind, the responses above attempt to validate the feedback received and take serious and concerted efforts to address any concerns raised, while also offering sufficient room to carefully consider how to move forward productively in ways that benefit students, faculty, and staff and recognize the good things RLS does and will continue to do.

**Implementation Plan  
Implementation Plan**

	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Proposed Actions</b>	<b>Responsibility for Leading and Resourcing (if applicable) the Actions</b>	<b>Timeline for addressing Recommendations</b>
1.	Support the co-op program (a Waterloo trademark) with a dedicated person identifying relatable options for students, building greater capacity in RLS co-op placements.	Work with Faculty of Health and Co-operative Education to explore options for greater capacity to increase connectivity between RLS and business development. Develop co-op strategy – focus groups with students and alumni, work with co-op business developers, attend related events to build relationships with potential employers, explore work term sequencing changes, preparedness training for 1B students, faculty training for academic integration, partnering with advancement to pursue new job opportunities in not-for-profit sector.	Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies; Department Chair	Explore options in 2021 and begin to implement changes over next two years.
2.	Increase graduate support, perhaps by decreasing graduate acceptance to a more manageable number of students, as they relate to class sizes, mentoring, advising and support.	Restrict MA thesis option and PhD admissions while increasing MA coursework admissions. Redesign MA coursework option to better appeal to potential recruits.	Associate Chair for Graduate Studies; Department Chair	Begin with 2021 admissions. Redesign MA coursework option over next year.
3.	Deactivate the Tourism Development emphasis area, with such low enrollment, faculty	Inactivate Tourism Development major. Inactivate REC 380.	Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies	Approval Winter 2021. Changes effective September 2022.

	resources should be utilized elsewhere.			
4.	Keep some tourism courses as part of other programs, or embed content with other courses, maybe with a focus on health / wellness tourism / tourism quality of life and communities?	Explore curriculum options for tourism courses or content in other majors as part of review of other majors in Recreation and Leisure Studies, Recreation and Sport Business, and Therapeutic Recreation.	Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies; Department Chair	During 2021
5.	Evaluate the TR program to ensure a balance between clinical and community professional placement requirements.	Written, video and in-person practice simulations added 2017-2019, with ongoing expansion and updates. Create community consultation panel including a balance of clinical and community partners. Foster connections with TRO. Explore how to enhance instructor capacity to prepare students for CTRS exam/TRO registration requirements. Work with Faculty of Health undergraduate recruitment team to improve strategic marketing and outreach for TR major, including high school recruitment and pathways for college transfers and practitioner lifelong learning. Continue regular TR curriculum group review of course content to identify gaps and overlap. Provide additional administrative support for practicum and internship placements.	Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies; Department Chair	Begin in 2021 and ongoing

6.	Develop an alumni networks and an advisory council.	<p>LinkedIn training for individual use. Graduate student LinkedIn group page established in 2020.</p> <p>Regular virtual and in-person (when possible) events, such as recent Recreation and Sport Business networking event connecting alumni with current students and faculty.</p> <p>Alumni consultation panels and alumni surveys for each major to provide feedback/input on curriculum decisions.</p>	Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies; Department Chair	Started in 2020-2021 and ongoing
7.	Increase advising support for graduate students, especially concerning administrative level support.	<p>Discuss options for increased staff support for graduate administration with the Dean and Associate Dean Graduate Studies in Faculty of Health.</p> <p>Remind faculty of GSPA guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of supervisors, and guide for graduate research and supervision.</p> <p>Graduate Studies Committee members assigned as faculty supervisors for MA coursework option students beginning in 2019. Consider required once per term minimum meetings between supervisors and students.</p>	Associate Chair for Graduate Studies; Department Chair	2021 and ongoing
8.	Increase communication and clarity surrounding funding support for graduate students, as well as teaching mentoring to ensure PhD students have teaching experience to build their	<p>Review of all current funding communications.</p> <p>Develop and implement plan for improving communication and clarity of funding support for graduate students.</p>	Associate Chair for Graduate Studies	July 2021 for review of funding communications. Communication plans to be



	CVs as well as research experience before graduating.	Increase communication of PhD teaching experience training and mentoring opportunities to students.		developed and implemented over next year throughout academic cycle.
9.	Increase administrative support for research grants and external funding.	Faculty of Health Strategic Plan implementation committee identifying needs and strategies for increasing support.	Dean of Faculty of Health Associate Dean Research	Survey March 2021 Strategies over next year
10.	Consider a review exam of some type for graduate students, prior to students committing to comprehensive exams, such as candidacy exam or something that reviews work and provides some type of indication of comprehensive exam success. Suggest aligning comprehensive exams with the respective research interests of the PhD students.	Clear, concise communications to students and supervisors about the process for incorporating student research interests in comprehensive exam questions. Formal review of comprehensive exam process with student focus groups, environmental scan of other comprehensive exam processes across campus, and consultations with PhD students in redesigning the department's process and requirements to include regular dialogue and check-in meetings.	Associate Chair for Graduate Studies	May 31, 2021 for environmental scan of other PhD comprehensive exam processes and requirements. Redesign process over next year.
11.	Identify mental health support processes, and ensure all students have access to these support mechanisms as part of an orientation.	Work with UW Orientation to streamline online orientation to reduce redundancy and promote greater engagement and connection with the Department, Faculty, residence life, and other academic support services. Expand partnerships with Campus Wellness to create a toolbox of resources to bridge	Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies	Over next year starting with Fall 2021 orientation

		<p>well-being from orientation into first year and beyond.</p> <p>Explore the possibility of including AHS 105, Mental Health Literacy, as a required first-year course for all RLS students.</p>		
12.	Support international students with orientation topics unique to international students acclimating to a new culture and learning environment.	<p>Undergraduate Advisor will connect one-on-one with incoming undergraduate students during the first month of their first term at Waterloo to answer questions and connection them with resources.</p> <p>A member of the Graduate Studies Committee will connect with incoming graduate students to support their transition to Waterloo.</p>	Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies; Associate Chair for Graduate Studies	Fall 2021 and continuing
13.	Create a plan for diversifying the faculty as new positions become available.	<p>Anti-racism Faculty Working Group creating a position statement to guide actions related to anti-violence/anti-oppression/anti-racism and develop recommendations for an eventual action plan. The Graduate Student Working Group is identifying how it can support anti-racism initiatives in RLS.</p> <p>Develop and implement a Department-specific approach to respond to the TRC recommendations.</p> <p>Develop relationships with Indigenous communities to Indigenize the Department.</p> <p>Utilize hiring practices outlined by The Tri-agency Institutional Programs Secretariat for</p>	Department Chair	Currently in progress, with specific action plans and implementation beginning over the next year.



		recruiting and assessing applications for BIPOC faculty and staff hiring.		
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The Department Chair/Director, in consultation with the Dean of the Faculty shall be responsible for the Implementation Plan.

Date of next program review \_\_\_\_\_ **2026-2027**  
Date

**Signatures of Approval**



\_\_\_\_\_  
Chair/Director December 20, 2022  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
AFIW Administrative Dean/Head (*For AFIW programs only*) Date



\_\_\_\_\_  
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.



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



\_\_\_\_\_  
Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs Date  
January 17, 2022



(For graduate and augmented programs)

## Final Assessment Report – Department of Recreation & Leisure Studies

### February 2023 - Implementation Plan Update

	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Timeline for addressing Recommendations</b>
1.	Support the co-op program (a Waterloo trademark) with a dedicated person identifying relatable options for students, building greater capacity in RLS co-op placements.	Completed
2.	Increase graduate support, perhaps by decreasing graduate acceptance to a more manageable number of students, as they relate to class sizes, mentoring, advising and support.	Redesign MA - Ongoing
3.	Deactivate the Tourism Development emphasis area, with such low enrollment, faculty resources should be utilized elsewhere.	Completed
4.	Keep some tourism courses as part of other programs, or embed content with other courses, maybe with a focus on health / wellness tourism / tourism quality of life and communities?	Completed
5.	Evaluate the TR program to ensure a balance between clinical and community professional placement requirements.	Ongoing
6.	Develop an alumni networks and an advisory council.	Ongoing
7.	Increase advising support for graduate students, especially concerning administrative level support.	Completed
8.	Increase communication and clarity surrounding funding support for graduate students, as well as teaching mentoring to ensure PhD students have teaching experience to build their CVs as well as research experience before graduating.	Ongoing
9.	Increase administrative support for research grants and external funding.	Ongoing
10.	Consider a review exam of some type for graduate students, prior to students committing to comprehensive exams, such as candidacy exam or something that reviews work and provides some type of indication of comprehensive exam success. Suggest aligning comprehensive exams with the respective research interests of the PhD students.	Completed
11.	Identify mental health support processes, and ensure all students have access to these support mechanisms as part of an orientation.	Completed
12.	Support international students with orientation topics unique to international students acclimating to a new culture and learning environment.	Ongoing
13.	Create a plan for diversifying the faculty as new positions become available.	Ongoing