

# Two-Year Progress Report

## Recreation and Leisure Studies (BA, MA, PhD)

### September 2014

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**RLS Department student, faculty and staff overview for 2014-15:** Undergraduate enrolment will approximate 540 students in fall 2014, an RLS record high. Graduate enrolment will approximate 65 to 70, also a historic high, but graduate intake levels have remained steady at target over the past two years. RLS enters fall 2014 with 18 faculty (an increase of 3 from the review period): 6 full professors (1 who will retire in October, 1 on 12-month sabbatical leave, 1 starting 6-month sabbatical leave in January), 3 associate professors (1 on unpaid leave for the duration of the academic year), 6 assistant professors, and 3 lecturers (1 continuing probationary and 2 definite term). Replacement of the retiring professor will be delayed at least until July 2015 given UW's recent hiring moratorium. RLS has 2 permanent staff (an administrative assistant and an undergraduate advisor) and a 1-year contract academic assistant hired to assist with ever increasing numbers of undergraduate students and the complexities of undergraduate advising.

**On-going Strategic Planning efforts:** In response to ongoing retirement-driven faculty turnover (8 new faculty hires over the past 7 years), RLS initiated an *Appreciative Inquiry* (AI) planning process in fall 2012 with a goal of maintaining Departmental markers of excellence (e.g., top-ranked North American leisure studies research program from 2000 through 2010; unparalleled experiential education opportunities via Co-op, practicums and internships relative to other Ontarian recreation and leisure undergraduate programs), while upgrading our undergraduate and graduate programs to take advantage of emerging faculty strengths. The AI process concluded in summer 2013 and was followed by an extensive overhaul of the RLS undergraduate curriculum. Those changes are currently working their way through appropriate UW channels. Beginning fall 2014, again building upon the AI results, a similar process will be undertaken with respect to the graduate curriculum.

#### **Undergraduate program response to review to date**

Our Augmented Program Review requested that RLS consider course reductions in order to improve curriculum efficiency and effectiveness. Our ongoing strategic curriculum re-design process will ensure the RLS core and the core courses required of each of our four majors contribute to successful student learning experiences and efficient course delivery. Goals include:

- a) Reduction of the number of undergraduate courses in the RLS calendar from 53 to between 35 and 40<sup>1</sup>;

- b)** A policy whereby every course in the revised calendar will normally be taught every year;
- c)** An increase in the size of the RLS common core from 8 to 12 courses, 6 of which will be taught in students' first 3 terms ensuring a stronger cohort experience for all RLS students;
- d)** A minimum of 4 major-specific courses in all four RLS majors, open only to those students for the purpose of creating major-specific cohort experiences;
- e)** Experiential-oriented field course in all four RLS majors (e.g., REC 253, 312, 356, 380), to be taken in 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year, and a capstone course taken during students' 4B term;
- f)** Re-focussing/re-naming two majors – from Tourism & Parks Management to *Tourism Wellbeing & Community* and from the catch-all Recreation & Leisure Studies to a moniker reflective of understanding leisure in contemporary society. The latter change will affect that major only. The *Recreation and Leisure Studies* Department name will remain intact. As well, our *Recreation & Sport Business* (RSB) and *Therapeutic Recreation* (TR) major names will remain intact.

Some of these changes have been approved at the Department level. The remainder will be approved during scheduled September and October meetings in order to work through the required votes needed to appear in the 2016 UW Calendar.

Other ongoing RLS undergraduate initiatives include:

- a)** Reaffirming our commitment to teaching quality and the student experience by putting our strongest instructors in 1<sup>st</sup>-year and 4<sup>th</sup>-year courses;
- b)** Creation of writing intensive initiatives in REC 101 with UW's phasing out of the English Language Proficiency Exam to strengthen the English literacy skills of 1<sup>st</sup>-year students;
- c)** Exploring the process of converting students to their desired major upon arrival to the University to assist with decision making around course offers and sequencing. This would also help to facilitate the development of a 3-year teaching plan for faculty, staff, and students; RLS continues work in strengthening college articulation agreements with institutions that produce several dozen transfer students annually;
- d)** The Department is also in the process of creating two new articulation agreements with Mohawk College's Recreation Therapy diploma program and Niagara College's Recreation Therapy program. RLS will target colleges with tourism diploma programs once the new Tourism, Well-being and Community degree has been approved. All current articulation agreements are in the process of being reviewed to determine renewal date, whether or not there have been any changes to the programs, and if so, requesting course outlines to expedite the transfer credit assessment process;

**e)** Stronger communication between RLS and the Centre for Cooperative Education and Career Action has been established through monthly meetings. During the monthly meetings with the Associate Chairs of Undergraduate Studies, Assistant Registrar, and Associate Dean, the Faculty Relations Manager provides details on overall employment statistics for the Faculty and the RLS Department. Term data includes the total number of students scheduled for work, total number of students participating in the process, number of employed students, and number of unemployed students seeking employment. As a result, the undergraduate team can reach out to unemployed students and provide information on resources to increase their likelihood of securing employment. The Undergraduate Associate Chair has met with the Faculty Relations Manager to discuss skills and competencies of RLS students to ensure future job opportunities are relevant and valuable to the students' academic career (see point c above). Additional ways to link co-op and academic content have also been explored, so students can further integrate co-op experiences with their academic major. The Faculty Relations Manager facilitates an information session for second-year RLS students at the beginning of the fall term. This session provides an overview of co-op processes and what students can expect with the upcoming job search, interview process, and securing employment. This session is tailored to the RLS students and provides opportunities to ask program-specific questions.

**f)** AHS has developed a Foundation Term to assist students who are academically at-risk in their first year or are required to withdraw from the program after their first year of study. A questionnaire has been designed by RLS to rule-out other potential reasons for the student's lack of academic success, for example, mental health issues or lack of interest in the program. If the student lacks skills for academic success, a Foundation Term is offered consisting of UNIV 101 and two REC courses with clear requirements for this term. The Student Success Office officially opened October, 2011 to assist students with academic issues and to assist with the transition to university. This summer, AHS hired a Faculty Relations and Academic Support Specialist, who is shared with the Faculty of Arts. Through this new position, AHS will complement first-year orientation to ensure seamless transitions and development of a learning community. AHS is currently developing a common first-year course to target writing with feedback, building engagement, and developing English literacy and communication skills. This past academic year, RLS saw their first Bridge to Academic Success in English (BASE) students. This program is for students who have met the academic requirements for RLS, but their English language test scores have not been achieved. RLS is moving to a two-term BASE program, which allows students who have met English language requirements and course averages to move into degree studies. There is great potential to grow the RLS international student complement.

- g) 2+2 programs have been explored but, as all options were specific to tourism partnerships, no further action will be undertaken until RLS tourism faculty numbers are at full complement and changes to the undergraduate degree implemented,
- h) The RLS TR group has created a survey to be sent to key stakeholders (practicum and internship supervisors) for feedback on the existing TR curriculum to identify possible gaps in the curriculum and/or reinforce curriculum content to ensure graduates are competent and confident practitioners;
- i) The Recreation Student Association (RSA) was regenerated as a part of AHSUM (Applied Health Sciences Undergraduate Members) and has had a healthy influence on students the past two years and going forward.

### **Graduate program response to review to date**

During the 2013-14 year RLS fully implemented a process of assigning interim supervisors to incoming MA and PhD students to help address issues of supervisory load and to better facilitate student/ supervisor connections.

Both AHS-wide collaborative Ph.D. programs (*Aging Health and Well-being* and *Work and Health*) underwent stringent review in 2013-14. AH&WB developed resource plans going forward that do not require teaching resources in the next five years from RLS, but will entail continued support through student supervision, committee members, and a small (proportionate) budget contribution. Admissions to the W&H program have been suspended given lack of faculty-wide resources to sustain it.

At request of the AHS Dean's office, we took a lead role during the 2013-14 year developing an AHS-wide graduate course in qualitative research methodologies (AHS 600). This course has long-term potential to reduce enrolment pressure in REC 673 which was, to date, the only qualitative analysis course in the Faculty. It is anticipated that AHS 600, when fully on-board, may serve all 3 AHS academic units and enhance the learning experience by providing the necessary number of sections to effectively do that as well as serve graduate students from other faculties. If AHS 600 performs as envisioned, RLS will explore changing REC 673 to serve as an advanced-level qualitative methodologies course which would better serve student needs and create efficiencies by reducing the number of one-on-one REC 792 Advanced Research Methods courses that we currently mandate for doctoral students.

As part of the already described strategic planning process, RLS is progressing toward re-working all graduate courses with a long-term view to including no more than 12 in the UW Calendar and normally offering all graduate courses every year. This proposal will be fully discussed during the 2014-15 academic year. Our goals include better aligning elective graduate courses with our major areas of research: *Leisure and a) community, b) environment, c) health and well-being, d) identity and diversity, and e) service and policy*. It will also address student concerns regarding course availability and comply with the recommendation that we thin out

and streamline our graduate course offerings and further limit the number of independent studies courses offered (i.e., REC 696/697/698, REC 792).

RLS has made progress toward developing more stringent guidelines and requirements for doctoral students who teach undergraduate courses in our Department. These guidelines, which will include the completion of a minimum number of CTE instructor training courses, will likely reduce the number of students who teach courses and enhance the experience of those who do by ensuring they are better prepared. We will also be putting in place a more formal mentoring process for new instructors to give them better support as they develop their teaching skills. Last, it is now policy that doctoral students cannot normally teach RLS courses prior to completion of comprehensive exams. Two definite term lecturers have been hired (a 2-year term and a 1-year term) to reduce Departmental dependency on graduate students to teach courses. The 1-year DTL covers an aforementioned leave of absence whereas the 2-year DTL covers chronic shortages related to undergraduate growth and administrative course buyouts.<sup>2</sup>

RLS has given serious consideration to course-based MA programs over the past two years. The Masters in Therapeutic Recreation (MTR) proposal was approved through Department and Faculty channels as well as by UW Senate and the Ontario Ministry but was shelved by Provost McBoyle in 2013 on the basis of inadequate revenue projections. That proposal will remain dormant for the foreseeable future, at least until the current RLS therapeutic recreation faculty complement is fully replenished; RLS is currently down two lines in that area pending replacement of a retiring faculty member and permanent resolution an unpaid leave situation. Preliminary discussion of a course-based tourism MA was also introduced by the RLS Graduate Studies committee but that discussion is on indefinite hold until newly hired tourism faculty are fully on board. As a decision has been made to move one of our tourism faculty lines, via retirement and replacement, to the TR group, the Department will not likely move in this direction until if or when a new faculty tourism hire can be justified.

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<sup>1</sup> This process includes reviewing courses that need to be deactivated or amalgamated as a result of the Department's visioning process. Most of these changes involve only REC courses, however AHS is also exploring possibilities of amalgamating REC 203/SOC 210 – Sociology of Sport with HLTH 260 – Social Determinants of Health and KIN 250 – Sociology of Physical Activity to provide an inter-professional education opportunity for all AHS students. This course could provide all students an opportunity to share and integrate knowledge from their respective degree programs. The Department is also exploring viability of the Parks Option given the upcoming retirement of our park management specialist and a decision to re-assign that line in support of the burgeoning Therapeutic Recreation major.

<sup>2</sup> Current RLS faculty teaching buyouts include: Director, Canadian Index of Well Being (2 courses, ongoing); Director, P<sup>2</sup>ULSAR (1) and RBC Retirement Research Centre (1); Special Advisor to the President on Women's and Gender Issues (1); PI, CURA project (1); and requisite reductions for Department Chair (2), Associate Dean (1.5), and 2 Associate Chairs (1 each).