



**Graduate
& Postdoctoral
Studies**

Office of the Vice-Provost and Dean
Yeates School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies

Final Assessment Report (FAR) and Implementation Plan

Periodic Program Review (PPR)

Graduate Program in Digital Media (MDM)

Last Updated: Mar 4, 2025

FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

In accordance with the University Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), this final assessment report provides a synthesis of the external evaluation and the internal response and assessments of the graduate program in **Digital Media (MDM)**. This report identifies the peer review identified strengths of the program, together with opportunities for program improvement and enhancement, and it sets out and prioritizes the recommendations that have been selected for implementation.

The report also includes an Implementation Plan that identifies who will be responsible for approving the recommendations set out in the final assessment report; who will be responsible for providing any resources entailed by those recommendations; any changes in organization, policy or governance that will be necessary to meet the recommendations and who will be responsible for acting on those recommendations; and timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Digital media skills are critical to the Canadian economy and are a crucial part of modern communication and commerce. The increasing use of digital technologies in almost every sector of the economy has created a high demand for workers with digital media skills.¹ The ability to effectively create, produce, manage and use digital content has become a crucial requirement for many jobs.² The demand for workers with digital media skills has led to the creation of new jobs in the industry, including positions in web development, digital design, social media management, and video production. Canadian companies need digitally literate employees with digital media skills to improve their operational efficiency and competitiveness in the global marketplace. The digital media industry contributes significantly to the

¹ Government of Canada. (2019, November 25). The Digital Economy in Canada. Retrieved from https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/icgc.nsf/eng/h_07284.html

² Media Technology Monitor. (2019). Digital Media in Canada: A Landscape Report. Retrieved from <https://www.mtm.ca/digital-media-in-canada-a-landscape-report/>

Canadian economy, with revenues from digital media products and services expected to grow in the coming years.³ Additionally, a report by the World Economic Forum (WEF) found that digital skills, including digital media skills, are among the most in-demand skills in the job market. The report states that employers are looking for a combination of digital media literacy and soft skills.⁴

The MDM program growth is propelled by the reality that Canadian and global companies are constantly seeking ways to reach customers and promote their products through digital channels, this leads to a growing demand for professionals with digital media skills. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), employment in digital media is projected to grow faster than the average for all occupations from 2019 to 2029, with a projected growth rate of 9%. The BLS also notes that “as businesses increasingly seek to reach customers through digital channels, the demand for workers with digital media skills is growing.” As a result, the MDM continues to experience growth from international and domestic early career and mid-career learners. The program has enjoyed 13.82 percent since the 2013-14 cohort. In the 2022-23 school year, there are 73 candidates, compared to the 20 in the early program in 2014. The program has enjoyed sustained domestic and international interest with early career and mid-career learners.

The program experienced an average growth rate of 23.39% among international students over the past five years. These statistics and reports demonstrate the importance of having digital media skills in the job market and the growing demand for professionals with these skills.

We have the following goals for the MDM Program moving forward.

1) Expand Reach. Toronto Metropolitan University and the MDM program are looking to move beyond the domestic student audience and aggressively expand into international markets. In this we will seek to make the course content, and the degree requirements more accessible to distance learners

³ Statistics Canada. (2018, August 29). The digital media industry in Canada. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-621-m/11-621-m2018002-eng.htm>

⁴ World Economic Forum (2022). These are the digital skills companies need to succeed in a changing economy, Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/01/digital-skills-ai-machine-learning-cloud-computing-job/>

to take the growing number of mid-career learners and those who reside out of Canada. This can be accomplished by offering a wide range of course materials and learning experience through various synchronous and asynchronous online modalities. The key here is to make online offerings more broadly available to assist in bringing the Masters of Digital Media to a broad, international audience.

2) Assert Leadership. In the words of our leadership team, the Masters of Digital Media program is also looking to 'own' the educational space of "digital media" through effective marketing and promotion campaigns. To accomplish this task means greater and dedicated investment and emphasis on marketing the MDM program to high-yield target audience. When prospective students are researching options in the Digital Media space, TMU MDM should be positioned as the premier higher education offering on the market. With the help of TMU resources, MDM seeks to show up at the top of every listing in higher education as the premier destination for digital media. The MDM program should be viewed as synonymous with digital media leadership and skills. MDM must be the go-to program for any student— international or domestic — looking for a graduate degree in digital media.

3) Leverage Alumni. The MDM team has an enormous and untapped resource for the promotion and advancement of our program through our massive alumni network. We want to support our graduates in sharing their MDM stories with the broader public. We recognize the power of testimonials in higher education promotion. Broad and diverse representation can help prospective students see themselves in the program. We want our alumni network to be empowered, supported and incentivized to act as ambassadors for the program. Our graduates are often our best evangelists, and recruitment officers. We want to ensure that our graduates have the support they need to act as key advocates for the MDM program. Alumni support could take the form of mentorship programs, brand ambassador initiatives, as well as mentoring and networking events that help to communicate the promise and the value of the MDM program.

4) Dedicated Faculty. One of the challenges identified in the body of the report is the lack of dedicated full-time faculty for the MDM program. Currently, the program is highly dependent on

lecturers and tenured faculty from other departments within TMU. This can lead to challenges with agility to address new trends in the marketplace, limiting our ability to respond to learner needs. Having the stability of full-time faculty members fully dedicated to the MDM program means they are better able to cultivate long-term programs and rapidly expand MDM educational offerings in response to changes in the higher education and wider global marketplace.

5) Research Mobilization. We recognize that there is an imperative to increase the amount of published research created by MDM students and faculty. There is huge value to both students and faculty in the program to engage in scholarly knowledge mobilization in support of MDM projects and research. Having dedicated full-time faculty would greatly assist in this goal. In this, we want to incentivize and encourage students to participate in peer-reviewed scholarly journals, conferences and other scholarly engagements. A focus on research opportunities and publishing will further enhance the reputation of the MDM. This can be encouraged through financially compensating students for these typically unpaid activities, and providing them with dedicated faculty support to assist them in these endeavors.

6) Collaborative Spaces. We also seek to expand our practice-based learning and the experiential hands-on learning we have become known for. The barrier to this expansion, however, is the lack of dedicated space for MDM within the University to enable collaborative flexible team-based exercises. While we currently use the Red Bull gaming hub for some of our collaborative requirements, we recognize that we need a dedicated fabrication and maker space area to enable the kinds of practice-based scholarship that will keep us the premier destination for digital media learners.

7) Projects Focus. Given the rise of AI natural language processing tools such as ChatGPT and other similar AI applications, we need to look at new, effective ways to assess student work. We are targeting a move away from more traditional, papers-based assessment models. We, instead, wish to privilege project-based Masters research projects. 21st century skills such as product development and design should be emphasized within the MDM. In this, we are looking to create artifacts, products and

applications that can be used in real-world settings by commerce, community and social innovation organizations to affect transformational change.

8) Curricular Changes. Key to the following proposed changes is the creation of a common elective pool of approximately 12 unique electives accessible by multiple cohorts simultaneously. Many of these electives exist as coded courses but have predominantly not been offered. Proposed curriculum changes are listed below.

Addition of Curriculum Streams: Educational Streams provide focus and structure for MDM students allowing them to successfully complete the program with specific skills and outputs.

We propose to add a total of 6 curriculum streams of 3 - 5 courses using predominantly existing courses.

Reduce Required Courses from 7 to 5: The current number of required courses including 2 milestones is high compared to other similar programs. Students have indicated first semester theory based courses do not adequately prepare them for specific project interests or provide the practical skills needed to succeed post graduation.

Increased options for degree completion requirements: To accommodate applicant demand, and to allow more opportunity for qualified applicants to participate in the Master of Digital Media program we intend to increase capacity and the number of available applicant seats. This gives the program an opportunity to offer additional pathways for degree completion. We propose adding the following:

- A formal Thesis option
- A supervised Capstone option
- A Coursework only option of 11 total courses

PERIODIC PROGRAM REVIEW AND PEER REVIEW TEAM

The graduate program in **Digital Media (MDM)**, submitted a Self-Study Report to the Yeates School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies that outlined program descriptions and learning outcomes, an

analytical assessment of the program, program data including data from student surveys and the standard data packages. Course outlines and CVs for full-time faculty members were also appended.

Two external and one internal arm's-length reviewers were selected from a set of proposed candidates. The Peer Review Team (PRT) for the Periodic Program Review (PPR) of this graduate program consisted Dr. Gabby Resh (Ontario Tech University), Dr. Jeffrey Boase (University of Toronto), and Dr. Reem El Asaleh (Toronto Metropolitan University).

The PRT site visit was conducted in person on October 13-14, 2024. The visit included interviews with the University and Faculty Administration including the Provost and Vice-President Academic, Faculty Dean, Faculty Associate Dean, Vice-Provost and Dean Yeates School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (YSGPS); Associate Dean Programs YSGPS, Graduate Program Director of the Graduate Program, Director Graduate Program Administration, and meetings with Faculty, a group of current students, administration, and support staff.

The PRT report was communicated to the Associate Dean, YSGPS on Jan. 20, 2025, and a response to the report from the graduate program and Faculty/School Dean was communicated on Feb. 7, 2025. The responses of the Program and the YSGPS were revised after feedback received during the meeting of the Programs and Planning Committee (PPC) on Feb 24, 2025. This response reflects those revisions. This was then approved by YSGPS Council on March 5, 2025.

PROGRAM STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

The PRT stated that the interdisciplinary nature of the MDM program offers students from diverse backgrounds a valuable opportunity to collaborate and develop or enhance skills that align with a growing demand for professionals who can work across the digital media industry. The cited strengths, areas for improvement, and opportunities for enhancement, for this graduate program outlined below.

Strengths

- The program brings together students from various backgrounds and experiences, fostering a collaborative environment where unique perspectives enrich project outcomes.

- Instructors have diverse expertise and backgrounds, and the program emphasizes interdisciplinary approaches that prepare students for a wide range of career opportunities in digital media.
- Current faculty, staff, and contract lecturers, provide significant value to the student cohort, despite what appears to be a lack of institutional support. This is a program that does a lot with a little.

Areas for Improvement

- There is an inconsistent emphasis on professional development skills such as portfolio building and business management, resulting in weaker connections to industry-specific skills and job opportunities. In addition to this, business-related skills could be more soundly integrated into the wider curriculum.
- The program lacks enough dedicated, long-term (tenure stream) faculty necessary to ensure learning consistency across cohorts and between courses. This is particularly true in recent years, given the sharply increasing size of student cohorts.
- Increasing cohort sizes have resulted in large classes, which has detracted from the student experience.
- The program lacks sufficient focus on theoretical foundations and research methods, and students in the thesis stream face limited resources and support.
- Students encounter a lack of elective course options and face difficulties accessing courses outside the MDM program, hindering transdisciplinary learning.
- Poor communication between faculty and students leads to unclear expectations, course plans, and schedules. This is especially concerning with respect to MRP expectations.
- Limited collaboration between faculty across streams results in inconsistencies in course delivery and teaching approaches, and the lack of consistent elective offerings lead to a lack of coherence across the broader program.
- Unequal application timelines across fall, winter, and upcoming summer cohorts cause logistical challenges, particularly for international students.
- Students often have insufficient time to secure and execute partnerships effectively, reducing the value of industry collaborations.
- A limited number of dedicated faculty are available to supervise students, and there is inadequate support to help students find supervisors.

Opportunities for Enhancement

- Hire additional dedicated faculty to address gaps between streams, ensure consistency in course delivery, and strengthen support for core and elective courses. If institutional constraints are so insurmountable that they absolutely prevent the university from directly hiring tenure track faculty as program members, consider other ways of achieving this same outcome. For example, consider contractually requiring that new hires in related departments teach a certain number of courses in the program.
- Hire more staff to help manage the demands of sharply increasing enrollment, or decrease enrollment.
- Embed clear professional development modules, such as business planning and portfolio building, into core courses to better prepare students for industry demands.
- Introduce advanced coding courses tailored to varying skill levels and interaction contexts, or offer skills assessments to allow experienced students to focus on new areas of growth that will strengthen their MRP project deliverables.
- Revise course outlines to increase the presence of theory, and improve theoretical consistency between classes.
- Facilitate access to electives outside the program to support students' transdisciplinary goals and broaden their learning opportunities.
- Decrease class size in high enrollment courses by offering more sections.
- Develop a consistent and transparent communication system between faculty and students to clarify expectations, deliverables, and course schedules. While students mentioned Discord, this may need to take the form of “town hall- style” meetings, regular check-ins with student leaders, etc.
- Redesign the industry partnership stream to integrate better with coursework and extend timelines, allowing students to establish and execute partnerships effectively. Ensure that industry partnerships facilitate skill development.
- Enhance resources for the startup stream to better support entrepreneurial students in launching their projects and ventures.

SUMMARY OF PRT RECOMMENDATIONS, GRADUATE PROGRAM AND YSGPS RESPONSES, AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

A report on the progress of these initiatives will be provided in the Follow-up Report which will be due in one year from the date of Senate approval.

PRT Recommendations	PRT Rationale	MDM Program Response	Proposed Program Action	Dean of The Creative School Response	Program Timeline and Responsibility/Lead	YSGPS Response
Recommendation 1: Dedicated Faculty	There is little-to-no faculty continuity. MDM needs to “borrow” faculty from schools that may be reluctant to give those faculty members up. The university pays lip service to supporting interdisciplinarity, but does not appear to support it in this specific case. Strengthening interdisciplinarity could come via a hiring process that enables new dedicated MDM faculty to be “interdisciplinary to support MDM”, such as was the case with Naimul Khan.	The program recognises the need for continuity of faculty.	Draft list of potential TFA to be cross-listed to the MDM which will mean dedicated program support for 2 years.	We have discussed this strategy in the past and will support this initiative. We look forward to supporting the hire of cross-appointed faculty to the program where possible.	The Program will engage in this immediately.	Such resource-related matters are outside the purview of the YSGPS, but it will continue to support efforts and initiatives related to pedagogical needs.
Recommendation 2: Credit for Supervision	While faculty members who supervise MRPs or theses can acknowledge supervision as service, there is really no incentive structure	Unfortunately, this cannot be offered, as it is considered part of the responsibility of TFA faculty as outlined in their letters of employment	The MDM can formally confirm supervision by any non-TFA supervisor if requested. This can take the form of	Supervision is recognized as SRC in faculty members’ Annual Report. Per policy, there is no credit or remuneration for supervision.	The Program will engage in this immediately.	The YSGPS is available for consultation to assist the Program in its consideration of how to support and encourage supervision of MRPs and theses.

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	that will ensure adequate supervision. This poses a significant risk for a growing program that does not have dedicated faculty, especially as students expressed numerous concerns about finding supervisors. Numerous students expressed having a hard time getting responses from potential supervisors, and suggested that the current process was too ad hoc, noting that there should be a more coherent process for supervisor matchmaking. Notably, a few students expressed that “contract lecturers were more helpful than full-time profs” because they appeared to have formed a greater connection with the cohort. While this can be seen as a positive,	and within the collective agreement. Sessional instructors and supervisors not directly associated with the MDM or with TMU can list supervision as recognised by the program within the context of a CV.	correspondence by the program GPD.			

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	the program cannot expect to rely on contract lecturers for supervision.					
Recommendation 3: Greater Support/Clarity Around MRP Expectations	A major concern for students had to do with MRP bottlenecks. One student noted that the MRP is “too mysterious” and not really well explained. Formalized expectations could take shape during an “MRP orientation” at the start of the semester that would go over steps, options, how to find a supervisor, etc. Notably, this would be an opportunity for students to pitch MRP ideas to their peers and receive feedback.	<p>The program agrees that communication around MRP expectations can be complicated given the variety of options. Much of this has been mitigated by changes to the core structure of the program.</p> <p>Primarily moving the Collaborative Workshops 1 required course to the first semester:</p> <p>This allows students to begin their MRP immediately, while being supported by a regularly scheduled course.</p> <p>Information about the MRP is now given to students within the context of assignments with regular checkpoints and milestones.</p>	<p>A new Student Success Coordinator role will be tasked with developing templates and information materials to clarify expectations.</p> <p>Addition of new opportunities for peer consultation around MRPs</p> <p>Continue to closely support MRP introduction and progress in the Collaborative Workshops 1 required course.</p>	Given the revised curriculum, there are likely to be many fewer MRPs and thus greater access and coverage to support.	The Program will engage in this in the upcoming months (March-April) for future cohorts.	The YSGPS supports the Program response to this recommendation and commends its efforts to ensure that its students can successfully navigate the expectations of the MRP in a timely manner. The YSGPS is also available for consultation to assist the Program in its consideration of how to better support the MRP as a pathway and communicate this to students.

PRT Recommendations	PRT Rationale	MDM Program Response	Proposed Program Action	Dean of The Creative School Response	Program Timeline and Responsibility/Lead	YSGPS Response
		However, there are areas of improvement as identified by the PRT.				
Recommendation 4: Greater Administrative Support for Liaising with External Partners	Students noted that partnerships need to be coordinated 6 months in advance, not 10 days in advance, but frequently expressed challenges with this coordination. They would like to see industry partners present to the cohort early on, and would like to see a more diverse set of partnership opportunities from UI/UX, gaming, visualization, etc. They noted that the current list skews too heavily to AR/VR, and that the timeline is too tight for them to reach out to other companies.	Agrees with the recommendation and is implementing a role to supplement.	Hiring a Student Experience Coordinator who will have a role in facilitating and maintaining industry partnerships.	The Creative School Dean will support this position, if fiscally viable.	The Program will engage in this in the upcoming months (March-April) for future cohorts.	Such resource-related matters are outside the purview of the YSGPS, but it will continue to encourage and advocate for efforts and initiatives that ensure appropriate support for experiential learning and collaborative activities.