

# **RYERSON UNIVERSITY**

## **Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan for the Periodic Review of the Master of Arts (MA) in Early Childhood Studies (ECS)**

In accordance with the University Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), a final assessment report (FAR) is required to provide an institutional synthesis of the external evaluation and internal responses and assessments of the Periodic Program Review of the Early Childhood Studies program. This report identifies significant strengths of the program and opportunities for program improvement and enhancement. It also sets out and prioritizes recommendations selected for implementation.

This report includes an Implementation Plan that identifies:

- Who will be responsible for approving the recommendations outlined in the final assessment report; Who will be responsible for providing any resources made necessary by the recommendations; Who will be responsible for acting on the recommendations;
- Timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of the recommendations.

### **Summary of the Periodic Program Review of the MA in Early Childhood Studies**

The graduate program in Early Childhood Studies submitted a self-study report to YSGS in Fall 2014. The report outlined the program descriptions and learning outcomes, an analytical assessment for the program, and program data including data from student surveys and the standard data packages. Course outlines and CVs for full-time faculty members were appended.

Two external reviewers were selected:

- Dr. Anna Kirova, Professor of Early Childhood Education, Department of Elementary Education, Dr. Larry Prochner, Professor of Early Childhood Education, Department of Elementary Education, University of Alberta
- Dr. Alan Pence, Professor, School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria

Upon review of the ECS self-study documentation they conducted a site visit to Ryerson on November 27 and 28, 2014. The Peer Review Team (PRT) interviewed a cross-section of individuals and groups, including the Provost and Vice-President Academic; the Dean and Associate Dean of the Yeates School of Graduate Studies (YSGS); Dean of Community Services; and meetings with faculty members; students; support staff; alumni; and graduates.

In their report, submitted December 18, 2014, the PRT provided feedback demonstrating program achievements, recommendations, as well as challenges, some of which they stated are not necessarily unique to the School, but rather reflect a trend common to all provinces in Canada to decrease funding for post-secondary education institutions. The ECS report indicates a number of creative and strategic ways taken to address these challenges. The PRT feedback and recommendations that were presented were stated to be in the spirit of collegiality with possible suggestions to address challenges. The PRT provided recommendations for future consideration and addressed some strengths and weaknesses.

### **PRT Identified Strengths of the MA in Early Childhood Studies Program**

- The program is a result of a vision to create an innovative and unique early years program that incorporated new and diverse understandings of children's care and development.
- That diversity and innovation is evident in the many electives identified in program materials developed at the outset and updated since.
- It is also evident in the faculty who have created and taught innovative courses, reached out to develop new resources in the community, supervised MRPs, pursued research, and continued a strong tradition of undergraduate education providing coursework and supervision for what may be the largest undergraduate Bachelor's-level program in early childhood studies in Canada.

### **PRT Identified Weaknesses of the MA in Early Childhood Studies Program**

Given such a range of responsibilities it is not surprising that there are also some weaknesses in the existing program. Those weaknesses could be summarized as challenges:

- The need for clearer, more accurate and more timely communications with students in regards to the nature of and opportunities afforded by the program;
- Given the lack of true 'electives' available to students each year, consideration of alternative curricular approaches to address diversity of content and diversity of students and their needs; and
- Strengthening preparations for a desired, future doctoral program through differentiating between those faculty with 'research and research support responsibilities' and those without such expectations. Institutions across Canada have approached these differences in roles and responsibilities in various ways.

## **Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations With Responses from ECS and YSGS**

As mandated by Ryerson Senate Policy 126, what follow are the YSGS-level responses to both the PRT report recommendations, and the responses to the report by ECS. The PRT includes 7 recommendations that have been divided into two broad categories: academic and administrative.

Note: the recommendations are numbered in the order that they appeared in the PRT report, and do not reflect a priority rank in ordering. Recommendation 4 is, however, considered the most important recommendation.

### **ACADEMIC RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Recommendation 2**

To create a more integrated program of studies by identifying broader topics for the 'electives' that could accommodate diverse interests. This would address student and faculty concerns that the large number of electives suggests more choice than have thus far been provided.

*ECS will discuss the possibility of strategically grouping electives during the Fall 2015 term. This will also include a discussion of the program's goals and conceptual framework. YSGS supports the recommendation of the PRT, and the response of ECS.*

#### **Recommendation 3**

To add alternative methods of assessment as well as alternative methods of delivery including digital teaching and learning, which is consistent with Ryerson's Academic Plan and would increase student access to individual courses and the Master's program.

*ECS responds that while graduate Faculty foster student engagement online through the use of Blackboard Discussion Boards and web logging (in password protected multi-user course blogs), ECS acknowledges the PRT report recommendation regarding exploring alternative methods of assessment and delivery. Faculty members will continue to strive to ensure appropriateness of delivery and methods used for the evaluation of student progress. YSGS supports the recommendation of the PRT, and the response of ECS.*

#### **Recommendation 4**

To convert the MRP to a Master's thesis. The MRP is not providing the program with a strong and suitable base from which to develop a PhD program and should be

discontinued in favour of a two-stream Thesis/non-Thesis structure. This would stream a smaller number of students who are oriented toward research, to the thesis, and the larger group of students to the course-based masters, which could stabilize enrolment numbers in elective courses.

*ECS responds that though a number of students are entering PhD programs on the strength of their MRP and their overall performance in the program, the Faculty is in favour of exploring the possibility of moving to a thesis option. However, there are a number of factors to consider before moving in this direction. Some questions to consider are: How would a thesis and non-thesis stream differ? How different is a thesis structure from our current MRP structure? What are the implications of moving to a thesis structure for Faculty work-loading and for student choice? The PRT noted that students found it difficult to organize and complete an MRP in one year thus raising questions about the viability of completing a thesis in one year. In order to explore these possibilities more thoroughly:*

- *The PD will compile information comparing Thesis/Non-Thesis structures in other programs at Ryerson as well as across universities (Spring/Summer 2015) in order to help inform the discussion.*
- *The Faculty will discuss this recommendation during the Fall 2015 term and, if in favour, will create a time-line for its implementation.*

*YSGS supports the discussion of implementing a change from an MRP to a thesis, or a hybrid model containing a thesis, MRP, or course work option. YSGS may help facilitate future discussion on this major program change, along with stakeholders in ECS and FCS. We note that major changes to the existing program such as those affecting the MRP would follow our IQAP policies.*

## **ADMINISTRATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Recommendation 1**

To update information on the School's website including the program brochure on an on-going and timely manner to reflect current course offerings, program changes and degree requirements.

*ECS responds that the website update has been initiated and students beginning the program in Fall 2015 will have updated course information. The web site will be updated twice a year by the Program Director (PD) and Program Assistant (PA). YSGS supports the recommendation of the PRT, and the response of ECS. We will continue to work with ECS on its on- and off-line view book, and new landing page on the YSGS website.*

### **Recommendation 5**

To streamline ethics approval by arranging agreements between the School and school districts, hospitals, childcare providers, etc.

*This recommendation was not explicitly addressed in the ECS response. YSGS responds that ethics approvals require approvals from the REB and that YSGS support the dialogue of streamlining the approvals process, although it is important to note that YSGS is not involved directly with the process.*

### **Recommendation 6**

To assign supervisors for MRPs with consideration of the workload of faculty members, equity of distribution, as well as student interest. Future hiring should consider an appointment at the rank of associate professor with a track record of research and supervision, relieving junior colleagues from the responsibility of leadership in this area in their pre-tenure period.

*ECS responds that the MAECS is a one year program with MRP supervision occurring during the spring/summer term (the non-teaching term for most RFA). Assigning Faculty to MRP supervision responsibilities contravenes Article 10 of the RFA Collective Agreement and will not be acted upon. MRP supervision will continue to be voluntary. YSGS responds that faculty engagement in the program (and any graduate program at Ryerson) is a key ingredient for its ongoing success. YSGS recognizes the spirit of the recommendation of the PRT, and note that MRP supervision is not normally considered as part of an assigned workload for faculty.*

### **Recommendation 7**

To encourage faculty members to continue to build their reputation, in light of the School's desire to develop a PhD Program and in line with Strategy 21 of the Academic Plan.

*ECS supports are currently in place at the Faculty- and School-levels to encourage Faculty members to continue building their research profiles. ECS Faculty have an ongoing commitment to engage MA students in their research projects through opportunities to work as research assistants and carry out their MRP research within the umbrella of larger funded projects. Graduate program Faculty members teach in both the graduate and undergraduate programs. Through the ECS undergraduate program, many MAECS students build their capacity in scholarship and teaching by working as graduate teaching assistants.*

*YSGS supports this recommendation, and will continue to work, and encourage the Faculty- and School- level supports to expand and enhance SRC of faculty engaged with the program.*

The PRT recommendations and the responses by ECS and YSGS raise important points regarding the program, and the discussion of these will only have a positive development in the evolution of the program. Several recommendations focus on program delivery and administration, and there were three academic recommendations. In particular, Recommendation 4 regarding a change to a thesis option from an MRP will be carefully vetted in the context not only of the program, but also in FCS and YSGS.

**IMPLEMENTATION PLAN:**

<b><i>Recommendation</i></b>	<b><i>Proposed Follow-up</i></b>	<b><i>Responsibility for Leading Follow-up</i></b>	<b><i>Timeline for Addressing Recommendation</i></b>
To create a more integrated program of studies by identifying broader topics for the ‘electives’ that could accommodate diverse interests. This would address student and faculty concerns that the large number of electives suggests more choice than have thus far been provided.	<i>ECS will discuss the possibility of strategically grouping electives. This will also include a discussion of the program’s goals and conceptual framework.</i>	<i>Graduate Program Director, ECS</i>	<i>Fall 2015</i>
To add alternative methods of assessment as well as alternative methods of delivery including digital teaching and learning, which is consistent with Ryerson’s Academic Plan and would increase student access to individual courses and the Master’s program.	<i>Faculty members will continue to strive to ensure appropriateness of delivery and methods used for the evaluation of student progress.</i>  <i>ECS acknowledges the PRT report recommendation regarding exploring alternative methods of assessment and delivery.</i>	<i>Graduate Program Director, ECS</i>	<i>Fall 2015 and Winter 2016</i>

	<i>YSGS will work with the ECS program director to explore opportunities to implement alternative methods of teaching as described in the recommendation.</i>		
To convert the MRP to a Master's thesis. The MRP is not providing the program with a strong and suitable base from which to develop a PhD program and should be discontinued in favour of a two-stream Thesis/non-Thesis structure. This would stream a smaller number of students who are oriented toward research, to the thesis, and the larger group of students to the course-based masters, which could stabilize enrolment numbers in elective courses.	<i>The Graduate Program Director will compile information comparing Thesis/Non-Thesis structures in other programs at Ryerson as well as across universities in order to help inform the discussion.</i>  <i>The Faculty will discuss this recommendation and, if in favour, will create a time-line for its implementation.</i>	<i>Graduate Program Director, ECS</i>	<i>Spring/Summer 2015</i>  <i>Fall 2015 term</i>
To update information on the School's website including the program brochure on an ongoing and timely manner to reflect current course offerings, program changes and degree requirements.	<i>Website updates have been initiated so students beginning the program in Fall 2015 will have updated course information.</i>	<i>Graduate Program Director, ECS</i>	<i>Summer 2015</i>  <i>The web site will be updated twice a year by the Graduate Program Director and Graduate Program Assistant.</i>
To streamline ethics approval by arranging agreements between the School and school districts, hospitals,	<i>This recommendation was not explicitly addressed in the ECS</i>	<i>Not applicable.</i>	<i>Not applicable.</i>

<p>childcare providers, etc.</p>	<p><i>response. YSGS responds that ethics approvals require approvals from the REB and that YSGS support the dialogue of streamlining the approvals process, although it is important to note that YSGS is not involved directly with the process.</i></p>		
<p>To assign supervisors for MRPs with consideration of the workload of faculty members, equity of distribution, as well as student interest. Future hiring should consider an appointment at the rank of associate professor with a track record of research and supervision, relieving junior colleagues from the responsibility of leadership in this area in their pre-tenure period.</p>	<p><i>ECS responds that the MAECS is a one year program with MRP supervision occurring during the spring/summer term (the non-teaching term for most RFA). Assigning Faculty to MRP supervision responsibilities contravenes Article 10 of the RFA Collective Agreement and cannot be acted upon.</i></p> <p><i>YSGS recognizes the spirit of the recommendation of the PRT, and note that MRP supervision is not normally considered as part of an assigned workload for faculty.</i></p>	<p><i>Not applicable</i></p>	<p><i>Not applicable</i></p>
<p>To encourage faculty members to continue to build their reputation, in light of the</p>	<p><i>ECS supports are currently in place at the Faculty- and</i></p>	<p><i>Graduate Program</i></p>	<p><i>Ongoing</i></p>

School's desire to develop a PhD Program and in line with Strategy 21 of the Academic Plan.	<i>School-levels to encourage Faculty members to continue building their research profiles.</i>	<i>Director, ECS</i>	
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## **PERIODIC PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Submitted Sept 19, 2014 with ECS Self Study Report

### **Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies**

This report has been prepared for the Periodic Review of the MAECS program. It is based on pre-existing data, such as admissions applications and faculty course surveys, as well as additional surveys, focus group discussions, and a curriculum mapping exercise.

The program was designed to focus on issues of diversity and inclusion in early childhood, using an interdisciplinary approach. Its purpose was to prepare well-educated leaders to respond to the increasingly diverse population of Canada, and the worldwide scientific evidence calling for greater investments in early childhood.

The first cohort of students was admitted in 2006 and 158 full-time and 25 part-time students have graduated from the program so far. Full-time students normally complete the program in three semesters, while part-time students normally take six semesters to graduate. Students have the option to either take ten courses, or to take seven courses and write a Major Research Paper (MRP), usually based on primary or secondary empirical data.

Curriculum goals include desirable knowledge, skills, and habits of the mind for students. A recent curriculum mapping exercise shows that MAECS programmatic goals are congruent with the goals of the University and the Faculty of Community Services, learning opportunities for almost all of the goals are identifiable in the courses taught, and student achievement is demonstrable in their graded assignments. Additional experiences, such as teaching or research assistantships enhance students' opportunities for meeting these goals.

Nevertheless, ongoing feedback from students and faculty has resulted in recent changes, which will be implemented from Fall 2014. These include reduction of required courses from four to two; addition of two new courses including an internship; deletion of some elective courses; and fine-tuning of course descriptions.

Applicants for the MAECS program need a minimum GPA of B from a four-year degree granting university or college (or a mix of the two). Assessment criteria include GPA scores and quality of the statement of intent, letters of reference, and work/voluntary experiences. The number of applicants has increased from 92 to 150 over eight years and students' GPAs at entrance shows a steady increase over time. The withdrawal rate is a low 6% for full-time students and 15% for part-time students.

Students in the program have received external scholarships in six of the eight years of the program, ranging in annual total value from \$12,000 to \$44,500. Internal funding has been available every year, ranging from \$117,000 to \$182,000. Every student who is accepted

into the program receives some funding from the university, unless s/he is an international or a part-time student. The amount an individual student receives is calculated on the number of students admitted, the funding available for that year, and the merit-based rank of the student as determined by the admissions committee. Many students are also hired by the university as teaching or research assistants, or for administrative positions, and can work to 10 up to hours per week.

Student satisfaction with this program is high. Faculty course surveys rate the program as better than or the same as other graduate programs at the university in all but one of the 14 questions. Focus group discussions with students underscored their appreciation for the extensive support received throughout the program, especially in writing their MRPs. However, students also asked for a wider range of elective courses, clearer communication about available options, more in-depth research training, and fewer administrative procedures.

Student success in the program is demonstrated by high GPAs upon graduation, which are on average 3.84 for full-time students and 3.79 for part-time students. Their scholarly output is demonstrated by a total of 20 articles published in (or accepted by) refereed journals, 4 book chapters, 20 conference presentations, and 90 MRPs. Available alumni data show that graduates are working as college instructors (in 7 colleges and 2 universities in Ontario, as well as in 3 colleges in other provinces), teachers, researchers, administrators, Child Life workers, and with children and families through NGOs or other organizations. Several students are pursuing further education in doctoral or master's programs in Education, Sociology, Psychology and Social Work.

Alumni attribute to the program a deeper understanding of 'the field,' different theoretical frameworks, and diversity and inclusion. Many commented on their improved skills in critical thinking, research, writing, using technology, and public speaking / presentation. They claim to have gained self-confidence, and developed professional work habits. However, a few are also disappointed with the over-emphasis on the education sector, and insufficient support for making contacts and exploring work options. Some recommend allocating more time to teaching quantitative research, and adding a practicum, especially for those who have not studied Early Childhood Education.

Almost all 18 members of the core faculty in the School of ECS teach in the MAECS program, or supervise MRPs, or both. Full-time professors based in other Ryerson schools/departments regularly supervise students and two of them also regularly teach in the program. Part-time instructors or supervisors are also recruited for their specific expertise, when needed. Several members of the faculty volunteer to teach in the evenings to include the part-time students. Many of them also voluntarily add 'Directed Studies' courses to their normal workload, if they share an interest with a student in an area of study not on offer as a course. Altogether, 75% of the courses are taught by full-time faculty and 25% by part-time instructors.

Faculty members have research interests that reflect the focus of the program on diversity and inclusion, particularly with reference to immigrant children and families and children with disabilities. They have studied language and literacy development; family and community relationships; children's rights and mental health; theories, history, policies, and services for early childhood care and education. Several faculty members are also interested in emerging areas such as doing research with children, social technologies used by children, children and the environment, multiple literacies, and arts-based teaching.

Collectively, they have published 128 articles in refereed journals, 25 books, and 61 book chapters since 2006. Another 23 refereed articles, 5 books, and 10 book chapters are forthcoming.

On the whole, members of the ECS faculty believe they have benefitted enormously from the program. It has helped to enrich their teaching and scholarship, and enhanced their research productivity. It demands a high level of investment but supporting and witnessing the of the students' intellectual growth is also very rewarding. They would like to see a broader range of course offerings, wider distribution of supervisory responsibilities, explicit guidelines for MRP supervision, and planning for a doctoral program.

Human and financial resources, space, computing and library facilities are the key resources available to the program. While the allocated human and financial resources are fully stretched, efforts to maximize efficiencies and procure additional resources whenever possible are ongoing. The program has appropriate and adequate space and computing facilities. The graduate lounge in particular is much appreciated by the students. The library's electronic resources and staff services are of high quality but books and journals in hard copy are insufficient. Faculty and students have to rely on interlibrary loans for these, which can mean long wait-times.

In conclusion, the MAECS program has established a strong foundation in its first seven years. Its graduates work in a variety of fields related to young children and their families, many in positions where they influence others' thinking, which points to the potential multiplier effect of the program. Faculty members associated with program are well-established scholars and very effective teachers. There is a clear coherence between the curriculum and faculty research, which is an important reason for their high level of commitment to the program. However, the program also needs to identify and respond to emerging needs and opportunities to build on this success. The following areas will be the focus of attention in the next few years:

- Seeking ways to offer a wider range of courses
- Creating opportunities for students to explore work options
- Developing mechanisms for wider distribution of MRP responsibilities and creating detailed guidelines
- Working with various units of the university towards greater structural efficiency
- Establishing mechanisms for systematic and ongoing internal review of the program
- Planning for a doctoral program in early childhood studies