

**PERIODIC PROGRAM REVIEW  
ARTS AND CONTEMPORARY STUDIES  
Faculty of Arts**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The periodic program review process made clear that Arts and Contemporary Studies (ACS) remains a flagship Faculty of Arts program, showcasing the faculty's interdisciplinary offerings, collegial partnerships, expansion of experiential learning and maintenance of its strong commitment to teaching and learning in the humanities and social sciences. It also highlighted important elements pertaining to changes that will be required in relation to the program's structure, core courses, faculty members and meeting students' needs and desires.

**Background**

Since its first year of operation (2004), ACS has maintained excellence in teaching and learning in the humanities and social sciences. Throughout their studies, students are also provided with interesting and innovative opportunities to apply their new knowledge and skills.

Major changes came in 2007 when Ryerson University introduced discipline-based options to the existing thematic interdisciplinary options and a new policy stipulating that ACS students no longer were obliged to select an option. Over the duration of the program's existence, professionally-related course offerings have also been expanded, thereby enabling students to complete up to two minors. Taken together, these three changes have made ACS the most flexible program in the Faculty of Arts.

**Strengths**

ACS's fundamental strength is that it offers students a wide array of learning choices embedded within an interdisciplinary curriculum in the humanities and social sciences. A further notable strength is that the program can rely on the participation of several devoted instructors – drawn from across the participating Faculty of Arts departments – who are all deeply committed to interdisciplinary teaching and to supporting experiential learning opportunities inside and outside of the classroom. These talented scholar-teachers also actively support ACS students in myriad co- and extra-curricular activities, and they continually urge students to think, act and learn critically.

**Weaknesses**

Although ACS is rich with individuals devoted to teaching ACS-coded courses, it does not have a core group of faculty members to serve on its many committees, student-led initiatives, hiring panels and other groups and activities. In addition, the absence of core faculty members contributes, at times, to a feeling – shared by both students and faculty members – that ACS does not have a coherent, engaged learning community. This sense of dispersion is exacerbated by ACS's lack of a physical “home” location and by the fact that ACS's first-year foundational courses are open to students from across the entire Faculty of Arts.

With the recent addition of new Faculty of Arts bachelor's programs in English, History and Philosophy, internal competition has also hindered ACS; the most notable effect has been a decline both in the number of applicants to ACS and in the mean entering average of its incoming students. ACS continues to offer options in English, history and philosophy; however, student demand has fallen with the addition of these BAs.

## **Opportunities**

ACS recognizes the opportunity to grow and expand its enriching program by taking strategic action on the following opportunities: seconding to ACS a core group of dedicated faculty members; conducting a complete curriculum review (including adding new learning opportunities that respond to students' interests and requests); reconfiguring and redeploying the Advisory Council; and revising ACS's informational and promotional materials.

## **Developmental Plan Highlights**

### **Dedicated ACS Faculty Members**

In order for ACS to continue to grow and serve its nearly 900 students, having a core group of faculty members seconded to the program for a four-year term would help to ensure excellence in students' academic engagement, research, work opportunities and overall learning experience. The active presence of a dedicated group of faculty members would also ensure that ACS students have a stable contingent of faculty members, the program would have a strong presence on university committees and the program director would have a resource group to help with organizing and hosting events, representing the program and administering various other activities (e.g., awards, scholarships, adjudication, consultation). Most importantly, such a team would be a great benefit during ACS's upcoming curricular redevelopment.

ACS presently has its two offices within the Office of the Dean's physical space. If four-year secondments to the program are approved, ACS would relocate to a suite of offices where the newly appointed faculty members could be housed together. This would give students a space to call their own, and a locus in which ideas and engagement could be cultivated and a true program spirit would thrive. It would also foster a stronger sense of community among students and faculty members.

### **Curriculum Changes**

ACS will be facing curriculum changes in the immediate future. In this regard, one of the most important factors to be dealt with is the university-level curricular restructuring. If Ryerson adopts majors – and, more specifically, combined majors – ACS will be obliged to re-evaluate the role of its options. That being said, ACS will continue to provide its students with opportunities to focus on discipline-based as well as interdisciplinary learning pathways. Like the rest of the Faculty of Arts, ACS considers retaining majors to be an excellent way forward. Under this scenario, the departments of English, History, Philosophy and Languages, Literatures and Cultures would host their majors in their fields, and ACS students would have access to those majors as well as to the interdisciplinary options.

Regardless of the larger institutional changes, ACS has recognized the need for a strong revision of its Generalist Option. Ideally, the Generalist Option should provide students with a high-quality undergraduate degree in the humanities and social sciences. In order to ensure this, the

ACS Generalist Option will be revised as an option with sub-groups, whereby courses will be selected according to a clear pre-requisite system.

The self-study report of the periodic program review also underlined the need to examine some of ACS's interdisciplinary options, and one of the major findings was students' desire for additional options. ACS's new Curriculum Committee has been tasked with surveying current trends and student/employer needs, reviewing curriculum and planning new options that are contemporary, heuristically sound and include a strong community-engagement component.

In order to begin the transformation of ACS's curriculum, the program director has been actively involved in recruiting and securing new community partners to serve on the Advisory Council. These members will play an integral part of the curricular restructuring, and they will help to ensure that experiential learning is made available to students by their second year in the program.

In order to continue to grow within the Faculty of Arts, ACS is also reviewing its first-year curriculum, with a view to including it on the faculty's first-year common platform. Inclusion of these courses would ensure ease of program transfer for Faculty of Arts first-year students and support the transfer of Faculty of Arts students who entered Ryerson as "undeclared."