

Program Review

Final Report

Humanities Program Areas

Submitted to
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Faculty of Arts, Science & Management

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Preamble

As we continue working through the process of program review and renewal we are guided by the college's overarching, interwoven strategic plans, *BUILD 2026, Widening Our Doorways*, and *Working Together – the NIC Indigenization Plan*. The recommendations put forth (and the action items detailed in the accompanying Action Plan) align with commitments articulated in the guiding documents and are part of our continued effort to meet the needs of our diverse community of learners.

A. Executive Summary

The Department of Humanities wrote a self-study and shared it with three reviewers who formed the external review team. The reviewers met in person with various people at North Island College for two days to explore and learn more about the challenges and successes of the Humanities program area.

The reviewers provided **twelve** recommendations related to commitment to learners, program structures, the learning community, practices, and collective impact. Specifically, external reviewers noted some potential to renumber course, improve and develop learning outcomes (course and program), develop new ways to measure success (i.e. course and faculty evaluations, data, modes of evaluation), foster higher academic standards for international students, continue field schools, increase Indigenization, consider faculty workload in light of Hyflex, and build partnerships with other complementary programs.

The Department of Humanities has written this final report summarizing their self-study recommendations, along with their response to recommendations from the external review team and Dean Cruickshank.

This report accompanies an Action Plan which details action items to undertake the recommendations.

B. Background

In accordance with North Island College's Policy 3-11, the department undertook the program review process. This final report synthesizes recommendations and next steps from the department's self-study and the external review report.

The self-study was completed in February 2022 and submitted to the dean of Arts, Science & Management, Dr. Neil Cruickshank. Survey data from current students, alumni, and faculty were included to support the conclusions and recommendations shared in the self-study.

The external review visit was conducted on April 28, 2023.

The external review team consisted of:

- Tim Lewis, Professor and Chair, History Department, Vancouver Island University
- Christian Lieb, History Instructor, Camosun College
- Kathleen Heywood, Math and Sciences Faculty, North Island College

The external review team, in fulfillment of its responsibilities, met with:

- Vice-President Academic: Tony Bellavia
- Dean, Arts, Science & Management: Dr. Neil Cruickshank
- Chair, Humanities: Ryan Blaak
- Director, Office of Global Engagement: Mark Herringer
- Director, Office of Indigenous Education: Kelly Shopland
- Director, Centre for Teaching & Learning Innovation: Dr. Liesel Knaack
- Director, Institutional Research and Planning: Wes Skulmoski
- Faculty
- Students and Alumni

This final report is based on the program self-study, the external review report, and responses from program faculty.

C. Program Overview

The humanities at NIC strive to teach, equip, and support students to meet NIC's mission by working together to build healthy and thriving communities one student at a time.

Mission

To explore our past, define our present, and transform our future.

Vision

To expand our collaboration with other departments in addressing the needs of Gen Z and other stakeholders and to raise our profile to reflect the inherent and potential value of humanities courses.

Purpose

To help students understand the complexities of an interconnected world and to become empowered with skills in critical thinking, argument analysis, and envisioning other perspectives.

Basic Structure of the Humanities Program Review Areas

The general requirement for the program area is a C (or equivalent) in English 12; the specific prerequisites for each discipline are as follows:

French and Spanish

There are no specific prerequisites for first-year courses in French and Spanish. For second-year courses, first-year courses are prerequisites. All the basics of the French and Spanish languages and cultures are covered in the first-year courses. First-year grammatical and cultural concepts are strengthened in second-year courses, and some literature and translation components are also added.

Global Studies

Currently, only one Global Studies course has been consistently offered – GLS-160 Culture, Communication, and Global Citizenship. There is no special prerequisite for this course. Other Global Studies courses have been created, but not yet offered, for the forthcoming Field School to Japan. These too are open and flexible in terms of admission.

History

With very few exceptions, there are no prerequisites for history courses at NIC. Most students start with first-year courses, though students can go directly into second-year courses as electives later in their studies.

Liberal Studies

There are no special prerequisites for liberal studies courses at NIC. The program area requirement of a C in English 12 does not reflect the intensive reading and writing demands of these courses. Historically, liberal studies students have been a self-selecting group who possess literacy skills well above the minimum requirements. Second-year courses in liberal studies have not yet been introduced into the regular cycle of course offerings as appropriate prerequisites and student preparation is being considered.

Philosophy

Except for PHI 211 (which requires a previous course in philosophy), there are no prerequisites for philosophy courses at NIC. Each course is treated as an introduction to philosophy within its own topic. Students taking both first- and second-year levels of a course will generally do so in that order; however, second-year courses can and have been taken prior to their respective first-year level. Some students complete only a single philosophy course as a requirement for their program.

Humanities courses also contribute to the Associate of Arts Degree, the only credential for students within English, Humanities, or Social Sciences courses. The AA is a 60-credit degree largely combining first- and second-year courses in English, the Humanities, and Social Sciences (as well math and/or science).

Removed Women's Studies which is now part of SS. Added Global Studies which was missing.

D. Summary of Strengths and Challenges

Strengths

Strengths of the humanities program areas center on the format and relevancy of its courses and are reflected in the qualities developed by students within those courses.

Humanities courses are flexible and adaptive in their formats. They are student-centered and respond to learner needs by adapting teaching approaches to support DALs (Department of Accessible Learning Services) students, international students, and students who identify their specific learning needs. Courses are relevant to students and the world we live in (the courses evolve as the world evolves), presenting balanced perspectives that promote inquiry and critical thinking, while strengthening practical learning skills through course activities and assignments.

Through their studies in the humanities, students develop connectivity to others in the world, along with an appreciation for the diversity of perspectives and “truths.” In doing so, students expand their capacity for caring and kindness and build a passion for further learning.

Challenges

1. Insufficient variety in course delivery

- a. Method of Delivery - humanities courses often only have one section in a semester of a particular course in each of the humanities disciplines. Because of this, method of delivery choices must be made by the department in consultation with the dean around delivery format (i.e., classroom, online, blended etc.) and scheduling (day & time assigned - often needing to be coordinated with other program areas and space limitations). The result is that students then have limited accessibility and choice for their desired or required course for later transfer.
- b. Topic Delivery - more options are needed for course topic rotation of the various humanities courses to provide more choice for students, especially those students in our community studying part time.
- c. Due to the small size of the humanities program areas, decisions on curricular offerings have been influenced by the specialties of individual instructors as well as instructor retirements and seniority. The resulting configurations have been appropriate; however, this program review provides the opportunity to acknowledge this historical practice and consider how best to distribute the curricular offering across the disciplines moving forward.
- d. This issue intersects the concerns and interests of the humanities with those of the social sciences, women’s studies, anthropology, and political science (all influenced by this historical practice).

2. Lack of consistency across all formats and authorized course descriptions (ACDs)

- a. Students may still not feel there is clarity in course descriptions/formats. Clarity is needed when choosing courses.

3. Insufficient student feedback surveys during and after courses.

4. Limited collaborative internal and external partnerships

- a. For many years now, consultation and collaboration with humanities faculty has been limited or non-existent. This disconnect not only sees the possibility of irrelevant course topics in the offerings, but also potentially affects future student enrollments (i.e., declining enrollments). Historically, faculty connected with the community and schools directly and regularly, which assisted in offering programs of interest to future students and for the community, getting to know the humanities faculty.
 - b. Internal: program areas would benefit from increased interaction and formal partnerships with administration, Office of Global Engagement (OGE)
 - c. External: program areas would benefit from productive interaction between peers and with the NIC community, professional community, and humanities programs at other institutions, high schools, and colleagues at other institutions
- 5. Lack of a recognized presence or profile within the NIC community and larger community beyond**
- a. Challenged in feeling “visible.”
 - b. Lack of visibility emphasized by lack of effective and consistent marketing strategies and branding. Much attention still needs to be given to the website along with recruiting efforts in high schools.
- 6. Lack of a strategic response to the specific needs of international students**
- a. Recognizing the extent to which present program area structures are not working for many international students and that the current arrangements are dysfunctional.
- 7. Wide divides exist between international students and instructors, international students and domestic students, and the humanities department and the Office of Global Engagement**
- a. To the extent that it feels like we are running two parallel programs: one for domestic students and the other for international students. The divide between international and domestic students is particularly marked in the humanities, given that critical reading and writing and nuanced self-expression traditionally play such a prominent role in our area.
 - b. This issue does extend throughout university studies, and any reforms considered by the humanities should not be introduced without extensive collaboration with others outside the area. Instructors’ responses to this divide range from the consistent maintenance of high academic standards to individualized attempts to provide accommodations to help international students compensate for the lack of requisite language skills.
 - c. Reasons for the divide must be explored, so a multi-faceted approach to this problem can be developed
 - i. If international students are to succeed in the humanities – even to a satisfactory extent – this approach must include a combination of structural change in the program area and changes to the English-language prerequisites for entry to its courses.
 - ii. A current systemic issue is that the recommended IELTS language prerequisites for all NIC history courses is 7.0 or 7.5 in writing and reading but college entrance requirements are such that students can gain access to our courses with an IELTS level of 6.0.
- 8. Not maximizing field schools**
- a. While field schools have not been a significant source of FTEs for the college, they have provided profoundly enriching educational experiences for the participating students and have also provided positive publicity for the college.

- b. There is potential to expand field schools, adding to student learning opportunities, attracting interested students to the college, and developing more positive and symbiotic relations with the OGE.
- c. Field schools seem ideally suited to the development of new interdisciplinary course packages and new certificates or micro-credentials.

E. Self-Study Recommendations

Commitment to Learners

Focus: This area focuses on the program's commitment to student learning by reflecting on the underlying values and philosophy of the program. This includes the alignment of program commitments with the needs and expectations of students, the institution and the broader discipline, industry, or profession.

3. Explore the reasons for the divide between international and domestic students within the humanities department and seek to address these. Through a multi-pronged approach committed to success for all students.

- This should include a conversation with the rest of HSS and English and with the administration and OGE about how best to set English language prerequisites for international students in a way which will support student success and protect institutional integrity but should move well beyond that to an engagement with all stakeholders to systematically re-envision how international students might be best integrated into our programs.

Program Structures

Focus: This area focuses on the roots and design of the program, as well as how and why the program has evolved over time highlighting key milestones, developments, and accomplishments as it relates to the student learning experience. This includes the evolution itself, as well as the mechanisms in place for identifying and responding to emerging needs and changing realities.

1.1. Creation of Certificate in University/Academic Fundamentals/Foundations

- This was initially geared to international students but also has great potential merit for Indigenous and mature students.
- The goal is to provide students with the basic tools and skills to succeed at NIC and beyond. This could include a number of preparatory courses for students first term at NIC, focusing on their orientation to NIC, navigating the library, academic integrity, basic writing skills, the Canadian context, and possibly some brief introductions to the humanities, social sciences, etc. Thereafter, students could select from existing 100-level courses or newly developed 100-level courses. Other options include 6-credit, team-taught courses that bring together, for example, English and history or English and philosophy.

1.2. Creation of Certificate in Liberal Arts

- This certificate consists of ten courses (first- and second-year university transfer courses) comprising 30 credits from the designated course list.
- The certificate emphasizes breadth of learning and may be completed in conjunction with a diploma or degree program or separately.
- The program provides a broad exposure to areas of knowledge and methods of inquiry essential to a liberal arts education. This type of education can prepare students for many fields in today's workplace.
- Ten (existing) courses.

4. Support the creation of a "Special Topics in the Humanities" course which could be adapted to a variety of topics.

10. Systematically and collectively assess current course offerings and discuss the curriculum's coherence, gaps, under-utilized opportunities, and possible rotations with each other, the department, and the administration.

Learning Community

Focus: This area focuses on the program as a learning community. This includes interactions and relationships between and among faculty and students within the program, as well as engagement with broader communities (e.g., institutional, regional, discipline, industry, or profession specific relationships).

2. Explore ideas for local and international field schools and work with other interested faculty, OGE and the college to plan for those and to integrate them effectively into the curriculum. The development of new travel courses to articulate with VIU's LBST 290, LBST 291, and LBST 292 might be of use here.

7. Re-engage with local area high schools, using assertive participation in dual credit programs as one catalyst here.

8. Assess the role of humanities education at the Campbell River, Port Alberni, and Mixalakwa Campuses and at the Ucluelet Centre, and assess also how we can best reach and serve students within our catchment area through digital delivery.

Practices

Focus: This area focuses on teaching and learning practices, including assessment and evaluation methods and the alignment of these approaches to supportive practices. This includes the methods or approaches members of the department engage in to fulfil the stated commitments while engaging in reflective practice.

6. Work together to create more consistency across different teaching formats and authorized course descriptions.

9. Encourage the development and sharing of ways to survey our students for their feedback and ideas.

Collective Impact

Focus: This area focuses on the accomplishments and contributions of faculty and students from the program. This includes learning experiences, opportunities and outcomes related to the program. This also includes mechanisms in place to help faculty and students reflect upon and recognize accomplishments.

5. Initiate activities designed to promote collegiality and collective self-reflection, including, but certainly not limited to, peer interaction, exploring team-teaching opportunities and interdisciplinary program development. We should discuss with English whether much tighter bonds might be forged productively with the humanities.

F. Summary of Key Findings from the External Reviewers

The external review team commended the Humanities faculty for their experience, effectiveness, and hard work over many years. The team highlighted the substantial contributions of the Humanities faculty to the culture of the college, but they also noted that these labours have often gone unrecognized.

The external reviewers admitted that they needed further information to offer a more complete and detailed set of recommendations. Specifically, they noted deficiencies in knowledge sharing, course and instructor evaluation, and student exit surveys.

In spite of these deficiencies, the reviewers identified four areas that stood out:

1. **Need for first-year courses.** They suggested that some current second-year courses could be renumbered as first-year. Their examples focused on History.
2. **Evaluation and grading.** They commended faculty for innovation in assignment design, but suggested that university transfer students might also benefit from some more “traditional” forms of evaluation. They also raised a concern about grade inflation.
3. **Program unity.** Historically, the department has been a collection of disciplines, offering a cafeteria-style selection of courses. The review team thus noted that the department would benefit from greater program unity.
4. **Certificate/diploma & Indigenization.** The reviewers were especially receptive to the department proposal for certificates and diplomas. They thought this might (in part) address the concern about program unity (in #3 above). They also recommended that the department proceed on its commitment to Indigenization. (Both in Action Plan).

A general theme in the review team’s findings was that the department is at a crossroads. Department members are hopeful that Program Review will be an effective process by which positive change occurs.

G. Program Response to External Reviewers' Recommendations

This section outlines the recommendations made by the external review team and our department responses.

Commitment to Learners

Focus: This area focuses on the program's commitment to student learning by reflecting on the underlying values and philosophy of the program. This includes the alignment of program commitments with the needs and expectations of students, the institution, and the broader discipline, industry, or profession.

Recommendation 6

International students within the NIC Humanities program require additional academic assistance to build up their English language reading and writing skills. Alternatively, higher academic entrance requirements must be established.

Department Response: The Department of Humanities agrees that international students should be supported in building their English language reading and writing skills. This has been proposed through the university foundations credential that has been suggested under Action Item #5 and #2

Program Structures

Focus: This area focuses on the roots and design of the program, as well as how, and why, the program has evolved over time highlighting key milestones, developments, and accomplishments as it relates to the student learning experience. This includes the evolution itself, as well as the mechanisms in place for identifying and responding to emerging needs and changing realities.

Recommendation 1

Restructure Humanities courses to allow for more first-year offerings largely through the renumbering of some pre-existing second-year courses. This would seem logical given that many domestic students are transferring after completing the equivalent of only two semesters.

Department Response: The Department of Humanities will examine this recommendation on a discipline specific basis. Please see Action Item # and . Curriculum mapping.

Recommendation 2

Establish clear and straightforward learning outcomes at both the course and program levels based on a common template.

Department Response: The Department of Humanities agrees that clear and straightforward learning outcomes at both the course and program levels need to be developed. Please see Action Item 11#.

Recommendation 7

To further ensure that all students are as prepared as possible for the academic requirements that they face within the Humanities program, prerequisites for some, if not all, second-year courses should be implemented.

Department Response: The Department of Humanities will examine this recommendation on a discipline specific basis. Please see Action Item #. Curriculum mapping.

Recommendation 9

If a new one or two-year certification is established, it would be desirable to include an experiential learning/ work placement component that would address the Ministry of Education's push for more hands-on learning opportunities and meet a stated desire of members of the NIC administration. This type of co-op option would be most practical at the second-year level.

Department Response: The Department of Humanities will examine this recommendation in regard to proposed development of certificates and diplomas. Please see Action Item #2.

Learning Community

Focus: This area focuses on the program as a learning community. This includes interactions and relationships between and among faculty and students within the program, as well as engagement with broader communities (e.g., institutional, regional, discipline, industry, or profession specific relationships).

Recommendation 8

The field schools that the NIC Humanities regularly organize seem to be a successful feature of the program. They should continue, and be given additional support, if possible. Field schools provide NIC Humanities students with unique learning experiences, offer important opportunities for collaboration with other departments, and should assist in building a stronger sense of identity amongst students themselves and between students and the program as a whole.

Department Response: The Department of Humanities agrees with this recommendation and will continue to build on its field school initiatives. Please see action item #12

Recommendation 10

Further steps should be taken to promote Indigenization and expand Indigenous content within the program. Regular consultation with the Working Together Working Group should assist in this effort.

Department Response: The Department of Humanities agrees with this recommendation to promote Indigenization and expand Indigenous content within the program. Please see action item #3

Recommendation 12

Whether or not a new Humanities-focused credential is established, NIC Humanities should look to partner with other programs on any initiative that seems likely to serve the needs of students and their ultimate educational goals; the Elementary Education Foundations Certificate being proposed by Math-Sciences being one such example.

Department Response: The Department of Humanities will examine this recommendation in regard to the proposed development of interdisciplinary (including those beyond English, Humanities, and Social Sciences) certificates and diplomas. Please see Action Item #2 and #4

Practices

Focus: This area focuses on teaching and learning practices, including assessment and evaluation methods and the alignment of these approaches to supportive practices. This includes the methods or approaches members of the department engage in to fulfil the stated commitments while engaging in reflective practice.

Recommendation 3

In order to effectively measure how well the agreed upon learning outcomes are being met, regular student evaluations of every Humanities course and faculty member need to be conducted. Ideally this evaluation process would be campus-wide and managed by NIC, but if that is not attainable, program faculty should undertake regular courses evaluations on their own.

Department Response: The Department of Humanities looks forward to working with CTLI and administration to role out institution-wide evaluations.

Recommendation 5

While creative and progressive means of student evaluation have genuine benefits, Humanities faculty should still strive to provide program students with at least some experience with more the traditional means of evaluation, assignment structures and/or grading standards that NIC students will encounter once they transfer to other post-secondary institutions.

Stiffening of academic expectations should ensure greater student success following transfer and maintain the expectations of the BC University Transfer system. However, such a move will provide more challenges for international students.

Department Response: The Department of Humanities will examine this recommendation on a discipline specific basis. Moving forward we look to forward building relationships with other institutions across the province (including articulation) to have a greater understanding of academic assessments and evaluations and how they connect to academic expectations. Please see Action Item #17.

Recommendation 11

As NIC moves to more fully embrace Hyflex course delivery strategies, steps should be taken to ensure that faculty workload does not become unmanageable as a result.

Department Response: The Department of Humanities looks forward to the opportunities of hyflex and has concerns about the impact of workload. We will work with CTLI and administration to explore this further.

Collective Impact

Focus: This area focuses on the accomplishments and contributions of faculty and students from the program. This includes learning experiences, opportunities, and outcomes related to the program. This also includes mechanisms in place to help faculty and students reflect upon and recognize accomplishments.

Recommendation 4

Additional data on whether or not learning outcomes are being met, and how well the program is serving student needs as a whole, must be attained through regular surveying of those who exit the Humanities program. This would have to be an institutional initiative.

Department Response: The Department of Humanities looks forward to working with CTLI, IRP and administration to role out institute wide data gathering.

H. Indigenization of Teaching and Learning Experiences

Humanities is committed to improving its approaches to Indigenization and remaining accountable to Indigenous communities and learners. To date, specific discipline areas and instructors have done important work in Indigenizing their courses. Building on this will include consultation with the Working Together Working Group to gain wisdom and guidance on how to continue moving forward with Indigenization efforts. Connected to this, the Department will in the coming year address the Indigenization questions in the Program Review Final Report Guide. Additionally, the Department will seek to connect instructors to PD opportunities which will improve approaches to Indigenization and increase accountability to Indigenous communities and learners. For further information please refer to Action Item #2.

I. Summary

The Humanities self-study and larger program review has been a meaningful process whereby Humanities faculty have reflected on the successes and challenges of past years. Humanities provides a wide range of flexible and adaptive courses that are taken by many students throughout NIC. As such, the Humanities provides students with relevant courses that promote balanced perspectives explored through inquiry and critical thinking. Along the way students develop and strengthen a range of crucial skills (reading, research, analysis, writing) through course activities and assignments.

The self-study and larger program review process has also provided Humanities faculty with a framework to consider future goals and ambitions. This has largely been explored through a desire to create new credentials in light of the perceived ineffectiveness of the Associate of Arts Degree for both domestic and international students. However, it has also more broadly called on Humanities to consider commitment to learners, program structures, the learning community, practices, and collective impact.

The accompanying Action Plan document outlines the actions and next steps Humanities will take to address all of these areas. The Action Plan, where applicable, connects to the self-study, recommendations from external reviewers, and/or the Dean. They also connect to the larger strategic plans of the college.