

Final Assessment Report for the 2019-2020 Cyclical Program Review of the General BA and BSc Without Designation Programs

INTRODUCTION

In accordance with Laurier's Institutional Quality Assurance Procedures ([Policy 2.1](#)), this Final Assessment Report provides a summary of the review process for the General BA and BSc Without Designation programs prepared by the Quality Assurance Office. All recommendations made by the external review committee are listed in order, followed by a response on behalf of a General Programs Ad Hoc Advisory Committee that was assembled for the cyclical review, and a response from the deans of the faculties that offer these programs.

Recommendations not approved for implementation have been identified, and those that have been prioritized are listed in the Implementation Plan.

The Final Assessment Report is reviewed and approved by the Vice-Provost: Teaching and Learning and the Provost and Vice-President: Academic. Following completion of the Final Assessment Report, it is approved by the Program Review Sub-Committee and Senate Academic Planning Committee. Approval dates are listed at the end of this report. Final Assessment Reports are submitted to Senate as part of an annual report on cyclical reviews, and to the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance for information. Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Reports are posted on the public-facing page of the [Quality Assurance Office](#) website.

The Implementation Plan for the recommendations prioritized in the Final Assessment Report can be found at the end of this report. Units will submit their first Implementation Report two years following approval of the Final Assessment Report at Senate. The Implementation Report will include comments from the unit on actions taken toward the completion of recommendations, comments from the relevant Dean(s) related to the progress made, and comments from the Program Review Sub-Committee, which is responsible for approving the Implementation Report and deciding if further reports are required. The Senate Academic Planning Committee will also approve the Implementation Report.

SUMMARY OF REVIEW PROCESS

The General BA and General BSc Without Designation programs are offered by four faculties at Laurier: Arts (BA), Human and Social Sciences (BA), Liberal Arts (BA), and Science (BA + BSc). The last cyclical review of these programs took place during the 2011-2012 review cycle.

The Self-Study was authored by Sally Heath, Manager: Academic Program Development and Review in consultation and collaboration with a General Programs Ad Hoc Advisory Committee, which consisted of Associate Deans in all four faculties that offer the degree programs.

To ensure representation from both the Arts and Science, the external review committee for the review consisted of two external reviewers from outside the university, and one internal reviewer from Laurier but outside of the department. The review committee was selected by the Program Review Sub-Committee on October 22, 2019, and the site visit was scheduled by the Quality Assurance Office for March 5-6, 2020.

The review committee consisted of Dr. Bruce McKay from the Department of Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier, Dr. Neta Gordon from the Department of English Language and Literature at Brock University, and Dr. Denis Maxwell from the Department of Biology at Western University. During the two-day site visit, which took place at both the Brantford and Waterloo campuses, the review committee met with the following individuals and groups:

- Dr. Maureen Mancuso, Interim Provost and Vice-President: Academic and Dr. Kristiina Montero, Interim Associate Vice-President, Teaching and Learning
- Dr. Ken Maly, Vice Dean, Faculty of Science
- Dr. Gavin Brockett, Associate Dean: Student Affairs and Learning, Faculty of Arts
- Students from the General BA and BSc programs at both Brantford and Waterloo
- Ms. Maureen Coulter, Student Advisor, Faculty of Science
- Mr. Brandon Falcao and Ms. Jenna Overset, Academic Advisors, Faculty of Arts
- Ms. Gail Forsyth, Director: Teaching, Learning, and Retention
- Ms. Charlotte Innerd, Head of Collections and Acquisitions, Ms. Debbie Chaves and Mr. Greg Sennema, Liaison Librarians
- Dr. Judy Eaton, Coordinator, Foundations Courses
- Dr. Ken Werbin, Associate Dean, Faculty of Liberal Arts
- Dr. Lauren Eisler, Dean of the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, and Dr. Chris Alksnis, Associate Dean, Faculty of Human and Social Sciences
- Ms. Sara Neziol, Manager: Academic Advising
- Sally Heath, Manager: Academic Program Development and Review

The review committee submitted their completed report on April 6, 2020. The executive summary from the report is provided below.

External Reviewers' Report Executive Summary

The reviewers would like to thank all participants in the Self-Study process, as both the authors of the report and everyone we spoke to communicated a genuine concern for the well-being and success of General BA and BSc students. It was clear that those we spoke to during the site visit are not satisfied with the status quo, in which so many WLU students feel so discouraged. We would also like to thank the students we met with, who spoke to us with remarkable candour and willingness to provide productive feedback; their good faith participation in this

process is a testament to an extraordinary resilience, often in the face of personal challenges and systemic roadblocks. We were honoured to hear their stories.

The reviewers appreciate that the authors of the Self-Study recognize this process as an opportunity to improve the experience of students enrolled in the General BA and BSc programs, so that they are better “supported in their educational journeys” and no longer have the perception of “stigma . . . associated with being transferred into a General degree program.” Though many of the recommendations below address the issues of “support” and reducing “stigma,” a key recommendation seems less explicitly signalled within the Self-Study. That is, rather than focusing solely on “enabl[ing] students to better meet progression requirements and stay in their Honours degree program,” WLU must first modify their current progression requirements in order that they be consistent with the overall Ontario university landscape. Specifically, WLU is an outlier among Ontario universities in that students are not allowed to progress in their major if their GPA falls below a 5.0 (or a C/65%) after the completion of 4.0 credits. For example, at Brock University (the home institution of one External Reviewer), students are placed on academic probation if their overall averages fall below 60% (or 4.0), which is consistent with WLU’s regulations around academic probation; however, there is no overall regulation that even students placed on academic probation, let alone those who are merely not meeting the overall average for an Honours degree, are removed from their major. Likewise, at the University of Western Ontario (the home institution of the other External Reviewer), progression in one’s major – including within the Richard Ivey Business School – is not tied to GPA, as even students who are placed on academic probation are permitted to remain in their major program. At the Ivey School, for example, it is only in Year Three that students are assessed for their eligibility to continue with the Honours program.

Crucial here is that the current practice at WLU of removing students from their major programs – and that includes both students placed on academic probation and students whose GPA is between 4.0 and 4.99 – is inconsistent with practices at most Ontario universities, and that this practice directly leads to the excessive number of students placed in WLU’s General programs. Further, the current WLU practice of assessing students for progression after the completion of 4.0 credit attempts seems especially counter-intuitive, given what we know about the difficulties many students have transitioning from high school to university. It seems absurd for a university to invest so many resources recruiting students into their programs of choice only to automatically remove them from those programs after what may very well be one lousy set of results from exams taken in the first four months. The ensuing stress on students - as well as on support programs such as academic advising and the offices that field questions and process petitions and overrides resulting from removal – is both unnecessary and not in keeping with progression processes at other institutions.

Our second, more extensive, set of recommendations are directed towards those students who remain in the General BA and BSc program, either because they are ultimately unable to meet program requirements for their Honours year, or because a three-year program is the best fit for them. For this cohort – which, if the recommendation to change the progression requirements at WLU is accepted will be much, much smaller – we have focused both on actions that will improve institutional support for these students and on actions that we feel will remove some of the stigma currently (and wrongly) associated with the General programs. We also make recommendations focussed on making the General BA and BSc degree a viable and attractive option for non-traditional students, part-time and mature students.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES

The External Reviewers' Report included 11 recommendations, which have been listed verbatim below, followed by a summary of the response provided on behalf of the General Programs Ad Hoc Advisory Committee. The responses from each of the deans of the four faculties that offer the General degree programs is provided in the subsequent section.

Recommendation #1: That WLU modify its progression requirements, bringing them more in line with those at other Ontario universities.

General Programs Ad Hoc Advisory Committee Response: The committee wholeheartedly agrees with this recommendation, and believes that this is perhaps the most important and promising improvement to these programs to come out of the external review. The committee also recognizes that the implementation of this recommendation presents perhaps the biggest challenge at the university, since it represents a broad change to current practice that affects the entire institution. Laurier's progression requirements for its Honours programs are an anomaly within the sector that results in a large number of students being moved into a General degree program early in their studies, at a time when they are still adjusting to the academic demands of university life. Depending on the program requirements, the decision to move a student from their Honours program of choice into a General degree may even occur based on their performance in 1-2 100-level courses in their originally chosen discipline. Bringing Laurier's progression requirements in line with that of other Ontario institutions would support the achievement of one of the goals of this review, which was to develop strategies that enable students to stay in their Honours program of choice (oftentimes the programs which brought them to Laurier in the first place) and reduce the number of students placed into a General degree program at the end of their first year, in particular.

An institutional change to the progression requirements for Honours students across all faculties **would not preclude individual programs for setting their own standards**; rather, it would reset the institutional baseline to work towards the goal of giving students a longer runway for proving they can meet the progression requirements of their Honours program.

In addition to accomplishing the goal of reducing the stigma students experience when moved into a General degree, retaining students in an Honours program could have positive financial implications for the university.

In response to this recommendation, a proposal for a change to progression requirements that would enable students to remain in their Honours program for a longer period before being moved into a General program will be prepared by the ad hoc General Programs Ad Hoc Advisory Committee, in consultation with Enrolment Services, for discussion during the 2020-2021 or 2021-2022 academic year. This proposal will be first discussed at the faculty level, and then shared with the Vice-President Academic's Advisory Council (VPAC), and the Senate Academic Planning Committee.

Recommendation #2: That WLU explore a strategy of intentional advising after 4.0 credits, focusing especially on students whose GPA falls below 5.0.

General Programs Ad Hoc Advisory Committee Response: The committee believes that the implementation of this recommendation does not make sense at this time, especially if the first recommendation is implemented, which should result in a significant decrease in the number of students who are not able to continue in their Honours program. In discussing this recommendation, it was noted that while there was agreement in principle that with the current progression requirements, advising after 4.0 credits could be beneficial, advising procedures vary by faculty and campus. Not all faculties would have the resources to be able to implement this recommendation, and the logistics would be different across faculties. The committee saw value in the spirit of the recommendation, particularly for students who are placed on probation early in their academic career, but are optimistic that the implementation of Recommendation #1 would render it less necessary. This recommendation will be shared with all faculties, who will be encouraged to engage in intentional advising with students who have been placed on probation where it is feasible.

Recommendation #3: That both the General BA and General BSc programs drop the use of the phrase “Without Designation” in the program title.

General Programs Ad Hoc Advisory Committee Response: The committee agreed with this recommendation and believed that there was no reason to include the phrase “Without Designation” in the degree designation for General students. A student who is transferred into a General degree program could graduate instead with a General BA or General BSc, which are already degrees without a designation (or major) at the university. The possibilities of removing the “Without Designation” from these degree titles will be explored during the 2021-2022 or 2022-2023 academic year.

Recommendation #4: That WLU explore opportunities for “micro-credentialing,” keeping the particular needs of General BA and General BSc students in mind, and should allow students in these programs to hold minors and options.

General Programs Ad Hoc Advisory Committee Response: The committee supports this recommendation philosophically. Like many of the recommendations coming out of this review, the implementation of the most significant one (#1), would render many of the associated recommendations unnecessary. In principle, the committee felt that if a student had completed the requirements for a secondary credential (e.g. Minor or Option), they should be able to graduate with it, recognizing also that it is perhaps a paradox to hold a Minor without a Major. With reference to new forms of microcredentials that the university is currently exploring, such as undergraduate and post baccalaureate certificates, the committee believed that General students should be eligible to complete these, and that it could, perhaps, complement their degree and help them to make it more marketable. It is hoped that the operationalization of the university’s Credential Innovation Framework, approved at Senate in 2020, will enable students to complete these skill-based credentials alongside their General degree.

Recommendation #5: That WLU ensure that students graduating with a General BA or General BSc are not excluded from regulations on graduating with Distinction or High Distinction.

General Programs Ad Hoc Advisory Committee Response: As referenced in the “Clarifications or Corrections of Statements in the Report,” we believe that this may be a misunderstanding on the part of the review committee, since General students are eligible for these commendations as outlined in the university’s Graduation with Distinction regulations. General BA and BSc students are eligible for the “High Distinction” and “With Distinction” notation depending upon their GPA as defined by the regulation. These students do not qualify for the Alumni Gold Medals, as these are for Honours programs only, but they are eligible for the Alumni Bronze medal and the Governor General’s Silver medal and these students are not excluded for consideration. For example, in Spring 2019, a General BSc student graduated with High Distinction and received the Alumni Bronze medal for the undergraduate level.

Since current practice already allows for General degree students to be eligible for the recognition identified in the recommendation, we do not believe that any further action is required and this recommendation has not been included in the Implementation Plan.

Recommendation #6: That WLU strike an *ad hoc* program committee to consider ways to redesign the curricular structure of the General BA and BSc programs, paying attention to how these programs can be promoted as attractive and viable options for non-traditional university students.

General Programs Ad Hoc Advisory Committee Response: When the cyclical review of these programs began in September 2019, an *ad hoc* committee consisting of Associate Deans or designates from each of the four faculties that offer General degrees was struck. Throughout the review process, this group met and collaborated to discuss the goals of the review and provide ideas and feedback on the self-study. These representatives each met with the external review committee during the site visit to both campuses in March.

Following the review, this committee met to discuss the external reviewers’ report, and agreed that they would continue to meet on an as needed basis through the remainder of the review to support the implementation of the recommendations. A discussion of the curricular structure of the General BA and General BSc will be scheduled as part of this committee’s ongoing commitment to the implementation of the cyclical review recommendations.

The potential for changes to curricular structure will also be revisited upon operationalization of the university’s Credential Innovation Framework (see Recommendation #4), and targeted marketing to appropriate audiences will ensue.

Recommendation #7: That WLU make use of the *ad hoc* program committee to review how various university support services might be more specifically directed at/made available to students in the General programs. It may be that this *ad hoc* program committee take temporary “ownership” of this cohort for the duration of this

review, though the committee may want to consider ways to make permanent the administration of this program, perhaps via a standing program committee.

General Programs Ad Hoc Advisory Committee Response: As noted in the response to Recommendation #7, the ad hoc committee that collaborated on the General Programs Self-Study, and on this report, has agreed to continue to meet in order to support the implementation of the review recommendations. If Recommendation #1, acknowledged as the most significant potential change to come out of this review process, is implemented, it should significantly reduce the number of students in the General degree programs who require specialized support services. Laurier's Academic Advising teams are already engaged in the work of ensuring that students in General degree programs are aware of the academic support services available to them.

The possibility of a more formalized standing committee for the General Programs could be explored in the medium to longer term, once the effects of the implementation of other recommendations has been assessed.

Recommendation #8: That WLU make it possible to designate more courses associated with LSBE as Faculty of Arts credits.

General Programs Ad Hoc Advisory Committee Response: The decision-making associated with the implementation of this recommendation would rest with the Faculty of Arts. At present, in order to graduate with a General BA from the Faculty of Arts, a student must have successfully completed 8.0 credits of courses within the Faculty of Arts, or courses deemed to be equivalent. This regulation was put in place to address an issue in which students from the Lazaridis School of Business and Economics were being transferred into the General BA within the Faculty of Arts and were graduating from that faculty with minimal Arts courses having been completed. By requiring that students have 8.0 credits from within the Faculty of Arts, it ensures that students are accepting earlier on that they have been transferred out of their original program rather than trying to shadow the Honours major as long as they are able to.

It was noted in committee's discussion of this recommendation that while at Laurier, Economics is part of the Lazaridis School, elsewhere it is frequently housed within a Faculty of Arts. The implementation of this recommendation will be further discussed at the Faculty of Arts Dean's Advisory Council in 2021-2022 or 2022-2023.

Recommendation #9: That program requirements for the General BA Without Designation – Faculty of Science and the General BSc Without Designation be aligned with the minimum foundational maths and/or sciences requirements in Faculty of Science Honours programs, and that it be made clear which courses are acceptable for inclusion in a General BSc program.

General Programs Ad Hoc Advisory Committee Response: The committee agreed that the implementation of this recommendation should be explored, as it has been a perennial conversation within the Faculty of Science. Since it relates specifically to the General degree programs offered through the Faculty of Science, any changes to program requirements would be the purview of that faculty.

Recommendation #10: That WLU make use of the *ad hoc* program committee to begin discussion about the development of 4-Year degree options for General students.

General Programs Ad Hoc Advisory Committee Response: The committee did not believe that this recommendation was a priority, since there are already 4-year non-honours degree options that exist for students; therefore, it has not been included in the proposed Implementation Plan. As noted in the university's academic calendar: "At the end of Year 4 in a BA, BKin or BSc honours program (including Economics), students who are registered in an honours program, meet all progression requirements and successfully complete all credits of that program, but who cannot graduate from that honours program because their GPA is insufficient, have the option of receiving a BA, BKin or BSc (without General or Honours) which denotes the major of the honours program and any eligible options or minors on the degree" ([Alternate Graduation Option for Honours BA / BSc Students](#)). This option enables a student who has completed 20 credits and met progression requirements, but does not have the GPA to graduate with an Honours degree to receive a bachelor's degree in their major (e.g. Bachelor of Chemistry).

The committee felt that the only faculty that could benefit from the addition of a 4-year non-honours degree was the Lazaridis School of Business and Economics, as that faculty does not currently offer a non-honours option for Business students, who are transferred to another faculty to complete their degrees as a General student if they do not meet progression requirements, which may result in a delay in graduation in order for the student to meet the General degree program requirements specific to that faculty.

Recommendation #11: That WLU encourage the LSBE to consider offering a non-Honours degree option for their students.

General Programs Ad Hoc Advisory Committee Response: Given some of the challenges for students associated with being transferred from one faculty to another in order to graduate, the committee can understand the rationale behind this recommendation. The implementation of it, however, is outside of the scope of decision-making for the faculties that comprise this committee and currently offer General degree programs. It should be noted that this recommendation only relates the Business undergraduate program as Economics students are able to graduate with a 4-year Bachelor of Economics degree, as noted in the calendar regulation referenced in Recommendation #10.

This recommendation has been shared with the Lazaridis School for their consideration, but has not been included in the proposed Implementation Plan.

DECANAL RESPONSES

DEAN OF ARTS: I have looked over the Unit Response and I have no issue with what the Associate Deans have proposed as action steps toward implementing those recommendations that are being prioritized. As Acting Dean of Arts, I am happy to support the recommendations and responses as they are presented.

Recommendation #8 pertains specifically to the Faculty of Arts, which commits to examining whether or not to

allow select Business and Economics courses towards the General BA requirements.

DEAN OF HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES: I have read the report and have no concerns or issues with the recommendations put forward and the implementation plan. As the Dean of the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, I am pleased to support the recommendations and the implementation plans as outlined.

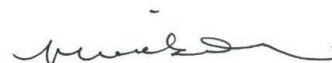
DEAN OF LIBERAL ARTS: The Faculty of Liberal Arts is very pleased to see the thoroughness of the report and the substantive recommendations that have been made. I agree with all of the responses from the ad hoc committee, but I would suggest that we reshape the response with regard to intentional advising after 4.0 credits. While I understand that the capacity for advising varies across faculties, I still think it is wise to indicate that availability of advising is ideal for these kinds of students. Instead of discounting its advisability due to the variations, let's just say that an appreciative advising model would be the goal when interacting with students in the general programs.

DEAN OF SCIENCE: I thank the reviewers for their time and effort in providing us with these useful recommendations, and for the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee's effort in first providing the self-study review document and then their responses to the recommendations. Like my colleagues, I agree with and support the responses made by the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee, including that to Recommendation #9, and have nothing further to add.

SIGNATURES

Dr. Mary Wilson

January 29, 2021



Dr. Anthony Vannelli

March 1, 2021



Approved by Program Review Sub-Committee:

March 9, 2021

Approved by Senate Academic Planning

March 23, 2021

Committee:

Submitted to Senate (for information):

April 12, 2021

Implementation Report Due Date:

April 12, 2023

RECOMMENDATIONS PRIORITIZED FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND ACTION PLAN

The following Implementation Plan was proposed by the General Programs Ad Hoc Advisory Committee, and approved by the deans of each of the four faculties that offer the programs.

Recommendation to be Implemented	Responsibility for Implementation	Anticipated Completion Date	Additional Notes
Recommendation #1: That WLU modify its progression requirements, bringing them more in line with those at other Ontario universities.	General Programs Review Committee, in consultation with the Faculty Deans and Enrolment Services	To be proposed during the 2021-2022 or 2022-2023 academic year	
Recommendation #3: That both the General BA and General BSc programs drop the use of the phrase “Without Designation” in the program title.	General Programs Review Committee, in consultation with the Faculty Deans and Enrolment Services	To be proposed during the 2021-2022 or 2022-2023 academic year	
Recommendation #4: That WLU explore opportunities for “micro-credentialing,” keeping the particular needs of General BA and General BSc students in mind, and should allow students in these programs to hold minors and options.	University-wide responsibility	In progress	An update on the institutional strategies around Microcredentials will be provided in the Implementation Report for the review.
Recommendation #6: That WLU strike an <i>ad hoc</i> program committee to consider ways to redesign the curricular structure of the General BA and BSc programs, paying attention to how these programs can be promoted as attractive and viable options for non-	General Programs Review Committee, in consultation with the Faculty Deans and Enrolment Services	To be proposed during the 2021-2022 or 2022-2023 academic year	

traditional university students.			
Recommendation #7: That WLU make use of the <i>ad hoc</i> program committee to review how various university support services might be more specifically directed at/made available to students in the General programs. It may be that this <i>ad hoc</i> program committee take temporary “ownership” of this cohort for the duration of this review, though the committee may want to consider ways to make permanent the administration of this program, perhaps via a standing program committee.	General Programs Review Committee, in consultation with the Faculty Deans	To be revisited in 2021-2022 academic year	As noted in the response to this recommendation, the General Programs review committee has committed to seeing through the implementation of relevant recommendations.
Recommendation #8: That WLU make it possible to designate more courses associated with LSBE as Faculty of Arts credits.	Faculty of Arts Dean’s Advisory Council	To be proposed during the 2021-2022 or 2022-2023 academic year	
Recommendation #9: That program requirements for the General BA Without Designation – Faculty of Science and the General BSc Without Designation be aligned with the minimum foundational maths and/or sciences requirements in Faculty of Science Honours programs, and that it be made clear which courses are acceptable for inclusion in a General BSc program.	Faculty of Science	To be proposed during the 2021-2022 or 2022-2023 academic year	