

Northern Studies Program Review

Reviewers are asked to provide a report that:

- Identifies and commends the degree program's notably strong and creative attributes
- Describes the degree program's respective strengths, areas for improvement, and opportunities for enhancement
- Recommends specific steps to be taken to improve the degree program, distinguishing between those the program can itself take and those that require external action
- Recognizes the institution's autonomy to determine priorities for funding, space, and faculty allocation; and
- Respects the confidentiality required for all aspects of the review process

PART 1 - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Executive Summary will be made publicly available on the Provost's website.

ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT

Northern Studies

DEGREE PROGRAM(S) UNDER REVIEW

Bachelor of Arts (Northern Studies)

CHAIR/DIRECTOR

Dr. Gary Wilson

DATE OF DEGREE PROGRAM(S) REVIEW

24 February 2022

DATE OF THE PREVIOUS DEGREE PROGRAM(S) REVIEW

Unknown

INTERNAL RESOURCE PERSON

Unknown

REVIEWERS

Dr. Heather Nicol
Director School for the Study of Canada
Trent University

Dr. Michel S. Beaulieu
Associate Vice-Provost Academic
Lakehead University

I. SUMMARY OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW OF DEGREE PROGRAM(S) PROCESS

The reviewers received the self-assessment report written by the Northern Studies Program Coordinator. On 24 February 2022, both reviewers met through a series of online Zoom meetings with the Provost and Vice-President Academic, the Dean of Indigenous Studies, Social Sciences, and Humanities, the Northern Studies Program Coordinator, faculty contributing to the program, administrative support staff, and students. The meetings consisted of a series of conversations that provided context for information found in the submission and allowed for the fleshing out of questions, concerns, and further details both reviewers had surrounding the program. Through this process, the reviewers gained a clear understanding of how the program works and were able to develop a frank appraisal of the program's structure and of those who teach, support, or take Northern Studies courses

at Trent. Conversations were open and respectful, and reviewers were able to request supplementary information which was forthcoming. After the conclusion of the review, the reviewers met again with the Program Coordinator via zoom, to ask for assistance in answering a few more questions raised during their consultation.

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Major Strengths of the Degree Program

The major strengths of the program are its interdisciplinary nature, its relevance to UNBC’s strategic and academic planning goals and priorities, and the depth of teaching and research expertise of associated faculty.

Significant Areas of Weakness or In Need of Further Development

Courses and thematic areas - areas could be further developed, as well as additional “core” courses. The most significant area of weakness and/or need for further development is dedicated core faculty. Both reviewers agree that the current coordinator has done yeoman's work in keeping the program together. Faculty who teach courses that contribute to the program are also, with no exceptions, dedicated to the field of study, supportive of its interdisciplinary nature, and firmly believe in its relevance. However, as will be outlined in other sections of this report, the lack of core faculty (or even officially cross-listed members) limits the program from reaching its full potential.

Comments of the Future Direction of the Degree Program(s)

The Northern Studies program at UNBC has the potential to become a flagship program considering the institution's strategic and academic priorities and geographic position. The inherent limitations in the current context and structure of the program present an opportunity to reconceive and reinvigorate within the institution. There are clearly ways in which the program can be restructured to meet the realities of the fiscal and resource context of UNBC.

III. SUMMARY OF THE REVIEWERS’ RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS	DESCRIPTION OF THE RECOMMENDATION
Appointment of a dedicated Core Coordinator	The appointment of a dedicated faculty member to coordinator the program. Currently, program coordination, while good, is undertaken by a faculty member whose appointment is not with the program.

<p>Explore the creation of a dedicated research cluster.</p>	<p>Exploring how the creation of a dedicated research cluster could enhance research opportunities for students and shape potential future hiring and increase institutional capacity and strengths. Consider new ways to create capacity for undergraduate and graduate students, particularly around community-based and experiential learning.</p>
<p>Appointment of Cross-Appointed Faculty</p>	<p>Currently, there are only associated faculty who, while dedicated, have responsibilities to the home units they are appointed. The appointment or cross-appointment of dedicated faculty to the program would provide stability and opportunities.</p>
<p>Resource Core Courses</p>	<p>Resources for the offering of core courses are needed (ideally delivered by faculty appointed to the program). The program is overly dependent on core-courses that are delivered by other institutions. Consideration should also be given to a required capstone course and/or thesis/research project.</p>
<p>Elective Course Restructuring</p>	<p>Elective courses are largely delivered by other departments and/or programs. They may or may not have appropriate content. They are scheduled around the needs of their home department. Reduction of the number of elective courses, while at the same time ensuring disciplinary breadth, will help students navigate the program. It would also allow for the firming up on degree level and program level expectations and learning outcomes/objectives.</p>

Northern Studies Program

Northern Studies BA

Northern Studies Minor

Faculty of Indigenous Studies, Social Sciences and Humanities

Coordinator: Dr. Gary Wilson

Dean: Dr. Kriston Rennie

Provost and Vice President, Academic: Dr. Mark Dale

Date UNBC Received the External

Review of Degree Programs Report: April 24, 2022

Please Note: The Responses to the External Review of Degree Program(s) Report, Action Plan and the 36 Month Action Plan Progress Report are made publicly available on the Provost's website.

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PART 1 – ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT’S RESPONSE TO THE EXTERNAL REVIEW OF DEGREE PROGRAM(S) REPORT

(June 8, 2022)

I. Overall Impression of the Summary of Findings and Recommendations from the External Review of Degree Program Report

The external Review of the Northern Studies Program identified a number of strengths and challenges confronting the program and its programs of study. In general, the Program agrees with the findings and recommendations in the report and looks forward to working with the Faculty of Indigenous Studies, Social Sciences and Humanities (FISSSH) and the University to develop a suitable action plan that will revitalize the program structure and activities so that it can continue to contribute to UNBC’s goals and objectives in the areas of northern-focused teaching and research.

Correction of Factual Errors or Areas of Misunderstanding in the Report

Aside from a couple of small typos, there are no factual errors or areas of misunderstanding in the Report.

PART 2 - ACTION PLAN

What steps does the Academic Administrative Unit intend or propose to take in response to the recommendations from the *External Review of Degree Program(s) Report*?

UNBC Responses to the External Review of Degree Program(s) Report			
1	Recommendation	Appointment of a dedicated core Coordinator and cross-appointed faculty members	
	Action	<p>The current Coordinator intends to step down from this role in June 2023. As an initial action, a new Coordinator will have to be appointed. In the short term this person will not be “dedicated”; they will assume the duties of the existing Coordinator. In the longer term, the appointment of a dedicated Coordinator will depend on the future organization and focus of the Program. A secondary action would be to cross-appoint existing faculty members who are active in the Program and coordinate with their home departments regarding their teaching, research and service commitments to the Northern Studies Program.</p>	
	Person(s) Responsible	Kriston Rennie, Gary Wilson	
	Target Implementation Date	June 2023	
	Implementation Details	12 month Action Plan Progress Report	A new Coordinator has been appointed and will assume the role on July 1, 2023. Cross-appointed members have not yet been appointed.
		24 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		36 month Action Plan Progress Report	
2	Recommendation	Explore the creation of a dedicated research cluster	

	Action	There is considerable research capacity in northern and Arctic studies across all faculties at UNBC, although capacity in the Northern Studies Program's home faculty (FISSSH) has been diminished in recent years due to departures and retirements and the fact that recently hired faculty members do not specialize in northern and circumpolar studies. As an initial action, the Program will convene a meeting of interested faculty members at UNBC to discuss the possibility of establishing a dedicated research cluster or a more formal institution (such as an institute or a centre) to build research capacity and highlight the important research being done at UNBC in northern and circumpolar studies.	
	Person(s) Responsible	Gary Wilson, Members of the Northern Studies Steering Committee, Kriston Rennie	
	Target Implementation Date	June 2023	
	Implementation Details	12 month Action Plan Progress Report	There have been some preliminary discussions about a northern/Arctic focused research cluster with the Interim Vice President, Research and Innovation. A meeting of interested faculty members and the new (permanent) Vice President, Research and Innovation will take place in the Fall of 2023 when the new Coordinator takes over. The current Coordinator has compiled a list of potential participants, including existing and new faculty members with an interest northern/Arctic studies and will discuss this list with the incoming Coordinator prior to July 1.
		24 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		36 month Action Plan Progress Report	
3	Recommendation	Resource core courses and restructure elective courses	
	Action	The existing programs of study draw heavily on courses offered by other departments at UNBC and other institutions in the UArctic consortium (of which UNBC is a member). The BA and Minor programs of study were designed to rely on these external courses precisely because the program lacks capacity (funding and dedicated faculty members) to deliver courses. Any changes to the existing programs would depend on progress in Recommendation #1 – the cross appointing of existing faculty members, the eventual hiring of new faculty members who specialize in northern and circumpolar studies, and decisions about the changes to the structure of the Program. As an initial action, the program could convene a meeting to discuss changes to the existing structure. This meeting could be held separately from or in conjunction with the meeting outlined in Recommendation #2.	
	Person(s) Responsible	Gary Wilson, Members of the Northern Studies Steering Committee, Kriston Rennie	
	Target Implementation Date	June 2023	
	Implementation Details	12 month Action Plan Progress Report	A meeting to discuss the changes to the existing programs of study could take place as part of the meeting discussed in Recommendation 2.
		24 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		36 month Action Plan Progress Report	

FOLLOW UP DATES

As per the *External Review of Degree Program(s) Procedures*, the Academic Administrative Units are responsible for submitting Action Plan Progress Reports to the Dean on the following dates:

- 12 month Action Plan Progress Report: June 30, 2023
- 24 month Action Plan Progress Report: June 30, 2024
- 36 month Action Plan Progress Report: June 30, 2025

PART 3 – DEAN’S AND PROVOST AND VICE PRESIDENT, ACADEMIC’S RESPONSES

I. Summary of the Degree Program Review Process

The external reviewers for the Northern Studies program, Professors Heather Nicol and Michel Beaulieu, conducted their formal review at UNBC (online, via Zoom) on 24 February 2022. Having been provided with the program’s self-study and supporting documentation beforehand, the reviewers met on the day with the Provost, myself as the Dean of the Faculty of Indigenous Studies, Social Sciences and Humanities, the Northern Studies Program Coordinator (Dr. Gary Wilson), the program’s contributing faculty and committee members, the program’s administrative support staff, and some former students. The entire review process sought to gather additional context and details around the academic program, its history and development, obtain a clear understanding of its current status and operations, and a thorough appraisal of its structure. Upon completion of the interview process, the reviewers submitted their executive summary to the Provost and Dean on 24 April 2022. After consultation with the Northern Studies Program committee, the Coordinator submitted his program’s response and action plan to the Dean and Provost on 6 July 2022.

II. Dean’s Response to the Recommendations and Action Plan

(Date of the Response: 5 August 2022)

Utilizing UNBC’s provided template, the external reviewers issued a summary of recommendations for the Northern Studies Program. These were organized into five main areas:

1. The appointment of a dedicated faculty member to coordinate the program.
2. The possible creation of a dedicated research cluster, which might enhance research opportunities for students and shape potential future hiring and increase institutional capacity and strengths.
3. The appointment or cross-appointment of dedicated faculty to the program, with a view to providing stability and opportunities.
4. Resources for the offering of core NORS courses (ideally delivered by faculty appointed to the program).
5. Reduction of the number of elective courses, while at the same time ensuring disciplinary breadth, in order to help students navigate the program.

The above recommendations aim to provide stability and capacity for the Northern Studies Program, which has long depended on the Coordinator’s individual efforts, and the willingness of select faculty (often impermanent) to offer core NORS undergraduate courses. As the reviewers noted, the program’s strength lies in its interdisciplinary nature, and its relevance to UNBC’s strategic and academic planning goals and priorities. To deliver on these objectives, the reviewers recognized a need for developing core courses and thematic areas, built around full-time faculty members across the institution. According to their view, such a commitment is essential to realizing the program’s full potential to become one of UNBC’s ‘flagship’ programs.

Meeting this aspirational goal would require a commitment of fiscal and human resources, as well as a restructuring of the academic program that extends well beyond its home Faculty of Indigenous Studies, Social Sciences and Humanities.

With reference to the first recommendation above, the Program’s coordinator (Dr. Wilson) intends to step down from his role in June 2023, with a view to appointing a replacement to assume the principal organizational responsibilities. The new coordinator of Northern Studies will not (cannot) be ‘dedicated’ in the sense proposed by the external reviewers. I support this transition, recommending further that the new Program Coordinator serve on a 3-5-year term – sufficient time to implement the proposed recommendations and provide stability in this phase of the program’s life. Should the incumbent reside in another Faculty, I recommend that the Provost consider whether the program’s formal re-assignment from FISSSH to another Faculty is both advantageous and structurally and administratively efficient/necessary.

The proposed cross-appointment of existing faculty members is not in my view a tenable option, as it would require a coordinated approach across 5 Faculties to formal teaching plans (cf. Article 30 of the Collective Agreement), wherein members and their respective Chairs agree, on a consistent basis, to committing their time and courses to Northern Studies, thereby reducing their core teaching in their own programs.

Action #1:

The Dean and Coordinator plan and recruit a replacement NORS Coordinator (before 30 June 2023) to serve for 3-5 years, in consultation with the Northern Studies Program Committee. This legacy planning should include open conversations about possible changes to the existing program structure, which in turn might lead to proposals for change along the lines outlined below.

On the second recommendation, the Program rightly notes the ‘considerable research capacity in northern and Arctic studies across all faculties at UNBC’. However, this capacity no longer resides within the Faculty of Indigenous Studies, Social Sciences and Humanities, with expertise in northern and circumpolar studies existing more in other Faculties across UNBC, especially in the Faculty of Environment. Given the critical mass of scholars across the institution, the coordination of a research group to help build research capacity and attract graduate students, is a viable and appealing option. I have discussed this scenario with the current Interim VP of Research and Innovation, Dr. Kathy Lewis, who recommended strengthening UNBC’s ties with ArcticNet. Such a direction, in my view, would alter significantly the program’s trajectory from an undergraduate program with few students, to an exclusively research- and graduate-focused entity. I have also discussed this potential with Dr. Tristan Pearce from the Faculty of Environment, to explore the potential of harnessing existing connections and research expertise to better situate the Northern Studies Program.

Action #2:

The Dean will coordinate with the Program Coordinator, the Office of Research and Innovation, the Dean of Environment, and related faculty members, to explore the potential of developing a more formalised research structure that enhances the opportunities for academic collaboration, grant applications and success, and graduate student training in the fields of Arctic and Circumpolar Studies.

Addressing the third, fourth, and fifth recommendations above, the Program notes how Northern Studies draws heavily on other departments across UNBC and other institutions in the UArctic consortium, of which UNBC is a long-standing member. The BA and Minor programs of study in NORS were designed to rely on these external courses precisely because the program lacks capacity (funding and dedicated faculty members) to deliver courses, which in my estimation creates ongoing challenges which undermine the program’s potential strength, sustainability, and predictability for interested students. There are no pre-determined plans to hire specialists in northern and circumpolar studies, though the possibility remains that future hires across the institution might intersect with the aims and objectives of the Northern Studies program in its current iteration.

Action #3:

Determine current teaching capacity for existing programs. Assemble the Program Committee and compile an inventory of potential courses and permanent faculty members willing to contribute to the program. On the basis of this information, and teaching plans for the respective academic units of the involved members, formulate a plan as to whether the BA in NORS remains a viable and realistic option. If not, proceed with the formal removal processes through Senate, considering the Minor in NORS as the only remaining option for undergraduate students at UNBC.

I believe there is ample scope to revise the current Minor in Northern Studies to reflect current and future teaching/research expertise at UNBC. Failing this objective, it behoves the institution to develop a new, stand-alone Minor in Northern Studies with a concentration on Climate Change in the North or something similar.

Action: #4:

Consider a revision of current minor and/or construction of new minor to focus on the Arctic/climate, with a view to constructing a robust undergraduate option that: a) maximises faculty expertise and time; b) attracts students; and, c) attract donors, agencies to invest in the potential of such a program.

Related to all the recommendations above, the future of the Northern Studies Program at UNBC will also depend on its connection and contribution to the UArctic network.

Action #5:

Re-evaluate teaching contribution to UArctic, ensuring that UNBC’s commitments involve continuing faculty members (as opposed to temporary staff) if the arrangement is to proceed.

Conclusion:

As the above recommendations and proposed actions illustrate, there are a few possible scenarios to shape the future of Northern Studies at UNBC. While I support an institution-wide investment in a coordinated research centre, I also support the continuance of a Minor in Northern Studies, which must be better resourced and planned in order to deliver consistently to prospective and current students. In this way, I believe that UNBC can effectively embrace NORS as a flagship program.

III. Provost and Vice President, Academic's Response to the Recommendations and Action Plan
(August 22, 2022)

The Provost's Office agrees with all five recommendations and thanks the Dean, the Program and the reviewers for their thoughtful contributions.

Thanks very much. Mark
