



First Nations Studies Final Assessment Report & Implementation Plan

Faculty / Affiliated University College	Faculty of Social Science
Degrees Offered	B.A.
Modules Reviewed	Honors Specialization in First Nations Studies; Major in First Nations Studies
External Consultants	Chris Andersen, Dean, Faculty of Native Studies, University of Alberta; Jeff Orr, Dean, Faculty of Education, St. Francis Xavier University
Internal Reviewer	Kathy Hibbert, Associate Dean, Teacher Education, Faculty of Education, Western University
Date of Site Visit	February 14, 2019
Evaluation	Good Quality with Report in Two Years
Approval Dates	SUPR-U: June 10, 2019 SCAPA: September 11, 2019 Senate:
Year of Next Review	2026-27

In accordance with Western’s Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the Final Assessment Report provides a summary of the cyclical review, internal responses and assessment and evaluation of the undergraduate modules delivered by the First Nations Studies Program. This report considers the following documents: the program’s self-study, the external consultants’ report and the responses from the Faculty of Social Science. The Final Assessment Report identifies the strengths of the program, opportunities for program enhancement and improvement and details and prioritizes the recommendations of the external consultants and prioritizes those recommendations that are selected for implementation.

The Implementation Plan details the recommendations from the Final Assessment Report that are selected for implementation, identifies who is responsible for approving and acting on the recommendations, any action or follow-up that is required and the timeline for completion.

The Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan is sent for approval through SUPR-U, SCAPA, Senate and the Ontario Universities’ Council on Quality Assurance and is made available on a publicly accessible location on Western’s IQAP website. The Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan is the only document resulting from the undergraduate cyclical

review process that is made public, all other documents are confidential to the Program/Faculty and SUPR-U.

Executive Summary

The reviewers conducted a site visit for one full day on February 14, 2019. After a thorough review of the self-study provided by Janice Forsyth, Director of FNS, the reviewers consulted with all First Nations Studies faculty, two students, a former staff member, and the Dean and Associate Dean of Undergrad Studies for the Faculty of Social Science. The self-study highlighted both the enthusiasm of faculty, staff and students for the work they were doing, and the challenges that they faced in such a small, somewhat dispersed program that relies on resources from other programs (e.g., Anthropology). The self-study called for an injection of resources, and noted that the program would benefit from an elevation to full department status. It was recommended that the program be renamed to 'Indigenous Studies'. The reviewers submitted fifteen recommendations.

The program and Faculty responses to the recommendations are largely in agreement, though tempered by concerns that they could not be achieved until and unless additional faculty were hired as expected. Both the program and Faculty responses committed to working toward the goals outlined in the recommendations, recognizing that some of the goals are aspirational. It is important to note that a number of the reviewers' recommendations go beyond the purview of the cyclical review process, and these will be referred to the Special Advisor to the Provost on Indigenous Matters. They are included in this Final Assessment Report for completeness. The implementation plan focuses on recommendations having to do with the learning environment and outcomes for students, which are the purview of the cyclical review process.

Significant Strengths of the Program

The following program strengths are identified in both the self-study and the External Consultants' Report

- The enthusiasm of the faculty and staff in such a small program, to work hard to provide differentiated and individualized learning was evident in the self-study and in conversations with faculty and students;
- Indigenous faculty and staff who bring cultural and Indigenous research expertise and pedagogies.

Summary of the Reviewers' Key Recommendations and Department/Faculty Responses

Many of the recommendations centred on the need to build capacity in the First Nation Studies program based on three "institutional reasons": (1) The role that a Department can play in supporting the recruitment and retention of Indigenous faculty, staff and students, as part of Western's overall commitment to Reconciliation and that of the Faculty of Social Science; (2) The central place an First Nations Studies department can play in realizing the University's mission as an intellectual leader in advancing Indigenous knowledges, worldviews and ontologies in collaboration with Indigenous communities; and (3) The importance of Departmental status for allowing strategic organizational maneuvering for building the role of the University as a leader in Indigenous-settler Reconciliation.

1) *Reconciliation through investment in Indigenous people*: The reviewers note that one of the main elements that make Indigenous studies units distinctive is a fully functioning department. It is perhaps most distinguishable by the large proportion of Indigenous students within its ranks of majors. In turn, often the majority of registrants in IS courses are Indigenous students, which not only provides mutual support for them but raises the level of debate within the classrooms in productively complex ways. Creating and sustaining an investment in attracting and supporting Indigenous students and staff requires IS departments to be staffed with sufficient human resources.

2) *Valuing Indigenous Studies Knowledges, Worldviews and Ontologies*: The reviewers note that Universities are organized around epistemological perspectives and pillars, and departments house and lead significant disciplinary knowledge. In an Indigenous studies context in particular, any discussions of Indigenous studies as a discipline must acknowledge and theorize their central importance, because lacking an institutional “presence” inhibits their ability to carry out their disciplinary vision and mission. Simply put, like all disciplines, programs such as Women’s Studies and Indigenous Studies are emerging disciplines in their own right and as such are worthy of Departmental status. The commitment to invest in such programs by elevating them to departmental status sends an important message about the high value priority placed upon the knowledge that such disciplines hold and lead. Toward that end, departmental status offers vital positioning for Indigenous studies to create intellectual “elbow room” for themselves on campus;

3) *Organizing Departments to lead strategic directions*: The reviewers state that departmental status enables academic programs to be more autonomous and strategic in planning and building their human resources. Enrollment helps drive resource allocation. Making FNS a department simplifies its ability to grow its resources and intellectual signature because its course growth is then no longer as dependent on the good will of other departments in lending faculty, cross-listing of these department’s courses, and the limitations associated with key courses being taught by part-time faculty. When FNS becomes a Department it can invest more strategically in the offering of courses and the hiring of faculty that build important research and program themes that allow it to contribute more energetically to the wider Reconciliation goals of the University.

While in principle the program and Faculty support the reviewers’ recommendations regarding departmental status, their support is tempered by a recognition that additional growth must first occur. Progress on the recommendations related to the learning environment—the purview of the IQAP cyclical review process—can proceed without changing the administrative structure from a program with a Director to a Department with a Chair. The Dean notes in his response that he has “...committed to hiring more full-time tenure-track faculty members” for the program and hopes “to bring the contingent of people in First Nations Studies up to five.” The Dean indicated that a search undertaken in the current year for additional faculty was unsuccessful. It was pointed out that like institutions across Canada, it is a struggle to attract and hire tenure-track faculty with the requisite background and qualifications. This challenge speaks to the reviewer’s goal of ensuring that the space that they are being hired into offers a sufficient cultural and intellectual ‘home’ to attract new scholars.

Reviewers’ Recommendations

The reviewers provided the following recommendations.

1. That the First Nations Studies Program be reorganized and re-named as the Department of Indigenous Studies.

2. The new Department of Indigenous Studies should engage an outside facilitator who has expertise in both strategic academic planning and Indigenous academic programming to co-develop a comprehensive academic plan alongside other Indigenous partners.
3. It is recommended that Western develop a strategic plan that invests substantially in one Indigenous language program (that the FNS program will possess a major role in the positioning of) through attention to succession and mentoring so that Western will be seen as the “go to” lead institution for re-vitalization of this language.
4. It is recommended that, in addition to its attention to more typical forms of university assessment, that the FNS program seek, when possible, to include an array of partners – including, importantly, Indigenous partners – in discussions about the diversity of knowledge forms that they might deem beneficial.
5. It is recommended that the FNS program engage in intensive professional development facilitated by Indigenous studies scholars and other Indigenous knowledge holders who can assist them in identifying key approaches to teaching that benefit Indigenous organizations & communities and assist them in considering how these might be positioned as transformative experiences across the program.
6. It is recommended that the FNS program consider re-orienting the time focus of its chair towards at least one third of time commitment to engaging with Indigenous community partners and inter-university/polytechnic relations, or hire a part-time administrative liaison person accompanied by some minimum time commitment to this by the chair.
7. It is recommended that, in addition to its commitment to building a plan for investment in Indigenous language succession, that the FNS program, after developing its strategic academic plan, resource the program with at least one additional Indigenous language professor, one expert who would emphasize local Indigenous research and two additional faculty members in areas to be determined on the basis of the outcomes of the academic planning and visioning exercise. These positions ought to be housed in the FNS program rather than be part-time or borrowed instructors from other Departments.
8. It is recommended that, after completing its strategic academic plan, which is expected to involve Indigenous studies scholars and local community partners and include a special attention to local Indigenous languages, the FNS program should consider a plan for modernizing its on-line engagement approaches and its digital archival language pedagogy approach to strengthen this community and inter-institutional commitment.
9. It is recommended that the current FNS resource room become more accessible to Indigenous students and other students pursuing academic programming in Indigenous Studies, by making it a more socially inviting “lounge-type” space for study, small group learning and social gathering.
10. It is recommended that normal class size indicators that typically drive planning in departmental growth models be suspended in recognition of the historic institutional under-investment in Indigenous studies programming and the overall need to appropriately invest in this fragile and complex program in ways that provide certainty, trust and confidence for its faculty, staff, students and Indigenous partners.
11. It is recommended that the FNS program establish an ongoing relationship with local Indigenous partners that ensures FNS opportunities to a) provide external advice to the program about its research interests; b) that FNS course areas and program themes are, where possible and relevant, considered in discussion with Indigenous partners and that these have opportunities to suggest program issues that are of concern to them; and c) that, when possible and relevant, local Indigenous partners have opportunities to suggest ways that the FNS program might better support their students to achieve aspirations that advance their social and economic development and decolonization.
12. It is recommended that 100% of core course offerings be staffed by permanent faculty who are housed in the new IS Department.

13. It is recommended that a key part of the strategic academic plan of the department that is introduced in recommendation 2 be related to a vision-setting exercise that identifies a process to understand how local and global Indigenous studies epistemologies and worldviews can be nested alongside contemporary issues affecting and driving the development of local Indigenous organizations & communities. This should then lead to a process through which a series of research-based courses are developed that support a plan for capacity building of Indigenous and non-Indigenous student researchers who will be the students accessing FNS programming.

14. It is recommended that the University prioritize the investment in several key entrance awards to attract Indigenous studies students directly to study in FNS and that it establish an ongoing mechanism for identifying and tracking the success of its graduates in careers that are considered important for Indigenous social and academic development.

15. It is recommended that, given Western's aspirations to respond effectively and meaningfully to the TRC, that the Dean of Social Science, and the Chair of the FNS program work with the Provost to advance a plan that assists the new President in cultivating a respectful and ongoing relationship between senior administration and local Indigenous communities.

Other Opportunities for Program Improvement and Enhancement

In addition to the recommendations, the review process may have identified other considerations to enhance or enrich the program.

- No additional considerations were identified.

Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan provides a summary of the recommendations within the purview of the cyclical review process that require action and/or follow-up. The Director, in consultation with the Dean of the Faculty, will be responsible for monitoring the Implementation Plan. The details of progress made will be presented in the Deans' Annual Report and filed in the Office of the Vice-Provost (Academic).

Recommendation	Proposed Action and Follow-up	Responsibility	Timeline
1. That First Nations Studies be renamed Indigenous Studies	Proposal to Senate		
2. That the program develop a comprehensive academic plan that clarifies learning outcomes and modular requirements. The plan will align faculty resources with curricular goals.	Undertake curricular planning, including appropriate consultation		
3. That the program develop a plan that incorporates an Indigenous language in the program	Identify a key Indigenous language and develop strategy to include in program		
4. That the FNS program engage with Indigenous community partners and inter-university/polytechnic relations	Develop a strategy for community outreach		
5. That the current FNS resource room become more accessible to Indigenous students and other students pursuing academic programming in Indigenous Studies	Allocation of space		