



**Thanatology
Draft Final Assessment Report**

Faculty / Affiliated University College	King's University College
Degrees Offered	BA
Modules Reviewed	Major in Thanatology, Minor in Thanatology
External Consultants	Kathleen R. Gilbert, Professor Emeritus, Indiana University David E. Balk, Professor, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York
Internal Reviewers	Paul Nesbitt-Larking, Ph.D., Huron University College
Date of Site Visit	30 March, 2017
Evaluation	Good Quality with Report in One Year
Approval Dates	SUPR-U: September 27, 2017 SCAPA: October 4, 2017 Senate:

Executive Summary

The onsite visit began at 8:30 am with the reviewers meeting with Vice-Provosts Karen Campbell and John Doerksen. There was a discussion of Ontario Undergraduate degree outcomes, program and course learning outcomes, and the process of program development. The affiliation agreement and the funding model for King's and Western were also briefly explained.

Further explanation of the King's context took place in the 9:00 meeting with Associate Academic Dean of King's, Joe Michalski. From 9:30 until 11:00, the reviewers met with faculty members in Thanatology, all of whom were part-time. Challenges of assessment, curriculum, and coordination were raised.

At 11:00 am, the team met with the King's College chief and associate librarians and discussed resources for the programs in Thanatology. This was followed at 11:30 am with a lunch attended by six students in the program. The students spoke highly of the teaching and experiential learning opportunities.

Following brief meetings with programs assistant, Lois Mansfield, and administrative assistant, Estelle van Winckle, the reviewers met with Program Coordinator, Darcy Harris at 1:30 pm. Dr. Harris drew attention to the rising enrollment figures and the need for an additional full-time and permanent faculty member to serve the existing needs as well as to develop new areas of research and teaching in Thanatology. These views were echoed by Associate Professor Eunice Gorman, who spoke of the need to develop courses in research methods, advanced and special topics courses.

At 2:30 pm, the reviewers met with Chair of Program, Alan Pomfret. He stated the need for another faculty member in Thanatology and, related to that, the development of an Honors Specialization module in Thanatology. Following a brief meeting with the online administrative assistant, Laura Clark, King's Principal, David Sylvester met the reviewers at 3:30 pm. The Principal agreed that the Thanatology program requires a new full-time and permanent faculty member.

The working day continued at 3:45 pm with a brief meeting with Academic Dean, Sauro Camiletti and a debrief with internal reviewer, Paul Nesbitt-Larking. The review team and members of the Thanatology department had dinner together at 5:30 pm and further discussed the program.

The external reviewers' report is favourable, and argues that the program in Thanatology 'delivers a far-ranging, coherent curriculum clearly addressing degree level expectations as set forth in the Western University document titled "The Western Degree Outcomes".' The external reviewers note both the high quality of the faculty members, with regard to their teaching and research, as well as the excellence of the students in the Thanatology program.

The external reviewers concur with many of the participants in the review that the program requires additional full-time and permanent faculty members. The reviewers recommend two additional full-time faculty members. These are needed to develop further courses, opportunities for experiential learning (notably field work placements for all students in years 3 and 4), and an Honors Specialization in Thanatology. The reviewers note the demand among both students and faculty members for an Honors Specialization in Thanatology. The reviewers additionally raise the challenges of program administration on the basis of the current model of two full-time members. This level of staffing is insufficient to sustain the challenges of program and student coordination, as well as program continuity.

The reviewers further advocate the further organization of course sequencing in order to give a more coherent structure (to "scaffold") to program progression. This would include setting prerequisites and expectations regarding typical pathways from one level of courses to another.

The external reviewers are generally satisfied with the learning objectives of the Thanatology program and find them to be comprehensive with regard to the intellectual scope of Thanatology and appropriately varied with regard to the methods used for assessment. The reviewers further note the uniform and impressively high aggregate course evaluations from students. Noting the relatively high retention and graduation rates, the external reviewers commented that 'the Thanatology Program students we met impressed us: they are intelligent, attentive, and very promising young adults.'

In terms of the program, the reviewers advocate for a greater number of field work placement opportunities for students in years 3 and 4, and for the development of courses in research methodology and independent study options within Thanatology. The external reviewers also call for the exploration among Thanatology faculty members of options for double majors. (It is unclear whether the reviewers are aware that double majors are currently open to students, and they are simply encouraging faculty to advocate for *particular* double majors, or whether they have in mind the development of dual degrees). The reviewers were also open to the idea of developing an introductory 0.5 level course that might act as a gateway course to programs in Thanatology.

The reviewers note the adequate library and informational support for the Thanatology program, but call for the addition of a full-time administrative assistant to support the Thanatology program.

In responding to the external reviewers, Thanatology Coordinator, Dr. Darcy Harris, agreed that the addition of a single full-time faculty member would 'support the current program structure that is in place.' This would spread the overall workload and, in particular, take some pressure off the Coordinator role. Only with the addition of a single faculty member would the mounting of an Honors Specialization be possible.

According to Dr. Harris, the addition of a fourth faculty member would permit the enhancement of program course offerings as well as better scaffolding of the program to permit certain paths of progression for students. A fourth member would increase the number of foundational courses as well as opening up the possibility for a broader range of special topics and independent study courses.

While Dr. Harris understood the call for greater opportunities for supervised field work for students in years 3 and 4, she also mentioned that in her judgment the current opportunities in the local area for placements are restricted. This is owing to the high demands from a range of professional programs at the local institutions of higher education.

Dr. Harris mentioned that double honors opportunities already exist for Thanatology students. However, she noted that the addition of full-time faculty members should decrease the pressure on class

enrollments in Thanatology and thereby open up the possibility for greater numbers of non-thanatology students to take a module in Thanatology.

The introduction of a methods course at the fourth-year level would be made possible given the implementation of an Honors Specialization in Thanatology, which would necessitate a new hire. A common interdisciplinary qualitative research methods course (IS 2252F/G) might also be appropriate to Thanatology students, according to Dr. Harris. Dr. Harris did not believe that the introduction of a gateway course or a preliminary first-year 0.5 course in Thanatology would be necessary. According to her, Thanatology 2200 currently fulfills the gateway requirement, providing an overview of issues and topics in the field.

The creation of distinct tracks within the program, in 'end of life care' and 'grief and bereavement,' might be feasible, according to Dr. Harris, but would necessitate additional courses.

Responding to the external reviewers, the Vice-Principal and Academic Dean, Dr. Sauro Camiletti, concurred with the views of Dr. Harris in her response. On the key question of additional full-time members of Thanatology, Dr. Camiletti agreed with the logic that the introduction of an Honors Specialization would necessitate an additional full-time hire, and that further deepening and strengthening of the Thanatology program, including the introduction of methodology courses, expanded experiential learning opportunities, more refined course sequencing, and wider course options, would support the case for two additional full-time hires. The case for full-time hires is further strengthened owing to the challenges of securing adequate part-time faculty members, an issue referred to by both Dr. Harris and Dr. Camiletti.

Significant Strengths of the Program

- The high quality of full-time and part-time faculty members in the Thanatology program, both as teachers and researchers;
- The high quality of the students in the Thanatology program;
- The adequacy of library and informational services to support the Thanatology program;
- High levels of expression of student satisfaction with the Thanatology program, assessed in course evaluations and comments.

Suggestions for Improvement & Enhancement

- An additional full-time faculty member required to support an Honors Specialization, with related course and program development in Thanatology, as well as support for administration of the Thanatology program, course sequencing, student advising, and supervision of field work;
- A second additional full-time faculty member required to:
 - o Further support adequate administration of the Thanatology program. At present, the administration of the program is highly dependent upon a single coordinator;
 - o Further support the growth of the Thanatology program, meeting increasing student demands. This includes more refined course sequencing, or "course scaffolding," and greater choices with regard to course options and specialized courses, such as experiential learning opportunities or independent study courses;
 - o Further develop adequate advising and consultation for students;

- o Further develop adequate supervision of field work for all Thanatology students enrolled in years 3 and 4 of the program;

Recommendations for Program Sustainability

Recommendation	Responsibility
Examine the coordination of the existing program as it relates to experiential learning. Develop a plan to improve the administrative workload involved with coordinating the program and the practica.	Educational Policy Committee, Faculty Council and Vice-Principal/Academic Dean
Explore the structure of the existing program as it relates to course sequencing, experiential courses, course levels and quantity, and how to manage planned growth.	Educational Policy Committee, Faculty Council and Vice-Principal/Academic Dean

Recommendations for Program Improvement

Review the potential of developing an Honors Specialization in Thanatology	Educational Policy Committee, Faculty Council and Vice-Principal/Academic Dean
Consider the possibility of a full-time faculty appointment in Thanatology, contingent on the development of an Honors Specialization in Thanatology	Educational Policy Committee, Faculty Council and Vice-Principal/Academic Dean