

***SUBMITTED TO OUCQA FOR INFORMATION – June 5, 2023***

***APPROVED BY TRENT UNIVERSITY’S SENATE COMMITTEE – May 16, 2023***

# Final Assessment Report & Implementation Plan – Executive Summary

# MA/PhD Cultural Studies

# Completed by the Cyclical Program Review Committee (CPRC)

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| **Degree Programs Being Reviewed** | MA Cultural Studies  PhD Cultural Studies |
| **External Reviewers** | Dr. Michael O’Driscoll, University of Alberta  Dr. Catriona Sandilands, York University |
| **Internal Representative** | Dr. Chris Furgal, Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies and  Trent School of the Environment |
| **Year of Review** | 2022-2023 |
| **Date of Site Visit** | November 24-25, 2022 |
| **Due Date for Implementation Report from the Program** | May 1, 2024 |
| **Date Prepared by CPRC** | April 26, 2023 |
| **Date Approved by Provost & VP Academic** | May 4, 2023 |
| **Signature of Provost & VP Academic** |  |

Cultural Studies is an interdisciplinary field that is constantly changing. In addition to studying art, film, literature, technology, media, and popular culture, the discipline remains committed to practicing and promoting cultural theory and to writing from a politically informed and often transformative position.

Founded in 1978, Cultural Studies at Trent was the first department of its kind in North America. With its own faculty, courses, and pathways, as well as a distinctive academic practice, it provides students with an opportunity for a more intensive, integrated, and wide-ranging way of studying culture than is available at other institutions.

The MA in Cultural Studies has been offered at Trent since 1989. MA students have the option of completing a one-year Major Research Paper (MRP) stream or a two-year Thesis stream. The PhD in Cultural Studies has been offered since 2007. Students pursue coursework and examinations on their way to writing and defending a dissertation. In recent years, research-creation has become an increasingly important part of many students’ doctoral research. Although students may pursue any work in the field, the three prominent themes that reflect faculty and student interests are Culture, the Arts, and Narrative; Culture, Technology, and Media; and Culture and Theory.

**Overview**

During the 2022-2023 academic year, the MA and PhD in Cultural Studies programs underwent a review. Two arm’s-length external reviewers, Dr. Michael O’Driscoll, University of Alberta, and Dr. Catriona Sandilands, York University, were invited to review the self-study documentation. The site visit took place on November 24-25, 2022. Dr. Chris Furgal, internal representative, from the Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies and Trent School of the Environment, also participated in the site visit.

This Final Assessment Report (FAR), in accordance with Trent University’s Institutional Quality Assurance Policy (IQAP), provides a synthesis of the cyclical review of the degree programs. The report considers: the Self-Study, the External Reviewers’ Report, the Program Response, and the Decanal Response.

A summary of the review process is as follows: the academic unit completed a self-study that addressed all components of the evaluation criteria as outlined in Trent’s IQAP. Appendices included: Curriculum Vitae, Course Syllabi, Data Tables, Student and Alumni Surveys and a Library Statement of Support. Qualified external reviewers were invited to conduct a review of the programs that involved a review of all relevant documentation (self-studies, appendices, and IQAP policy) and participation in a virtual visit. During the virtual site visit, reviewers met with senior administration, faculty, students and staff.

The External Reviewers’ Report identified twenty-three (23) recommendations with the primary focus being to provide a program that is both sustainable and of high quality. Ideally, recommendations will focus on a culture of ongoing and continuous improvement, and prioritizing student-centred learning and experiences.

Following receipt of the External Reviewers’ Report, the Program and Dean provided responses to the Report. Based on the four review documents, the Cyclical Program Review Committee (CPRC) then reviewed and assessed the quality of the degree programs and reported on significant program strengths, opportunities for improvement and enhancement, and the implementation of recommendations.

The Implementation Plan identifies seventeen (17) recommendations for implementation and specifies the proposed follow-up and the person(s) responsible for leading the follow-up. The Academic Unit, in consultation with their Dean, will submit an Implementation Report in response to the recommendations identified for follow-up. The Report is due May 1, 2024.

**Significant Program Strengths**

In both the MA and PhD programs, students benefit from the engaged involvement of faculty members drawn from a variety of undergraduate departments. The programs also excel in providing an intimate and supportive student experience, owing to their smaller size. As noted by the external reviewers, ‘the highly convivial spaces in Scott House and Wallis Hall create excellent opportunities for community-building, rigorous in-person intellectual engagement, and collegial support’.

The PhD program is also distinguished by a number of unique features. It provides students with the freedom to pursue their field of interest within a context of interdisciplinary integration and welcomes dissertation proposals that embrace research creation. The innovative structure of the program allows students the flexibility to work on interrelated research projects, in a supportive and intensive intellectual environment. As each project is completed, original work may be presented at conferences, submitted to scholarly journals and may be assembled for publication.

**Opportunities for Program Improvement and Enhancement**

As a function of continuous improvement, the Program is encouraged to regularly monitor and assess the level of student satisfaction and success to ensure curriculum remains relevant, current and effective within the discipline. An annual retreat for faculty could be used as part of a regular review process.

External examiners noted the work that faculty have done thus far to develop community relationships. Nevertheless, they also identified an increasing need to respond to changes in both the field and the job market by expanding opportunities for students to engage in media and research-creation work on campus, as well as their ability to participate in community organizations in more public-facing scholarship. Specifically, they recommended steps be taken to expand current partnerships and provide more opportunity for ‘community service learning, community-based research, alternative forms of dissemination and knowledge mobilization, and/or intern opportunities at both the MA and PhD levels. The Program is encouraged to explore ways to incorporate some of these suggestions.

Also referenced in the external review was the need to provide more guidance to students in terms of demonstrating how their skills and knowledge could be used to pursue non-academic careers. The Program is urged to find ways to offer additional professional development opportunities to students, at both the MA and PhD levels, in order to develop these transferable skills. The review team suggested professional development goals and activities should be included in degree requirements moving forward (e.g., at the PhD level, as part of the Special Field Exam). This kind of experience would benefit students who will seek employment outside academia.

**Implementation Plan**

The Implementation Plan identifies those recommendations that require action by the academic unit. The Chair or Director, with members of the academic unit, will be responsible for leading the follow-up in consultation, and where appropriate, with Dean(s) and other university departments.

The Academic Unit will report on actions taken and the status of each recommendation by the due date provided. The Dean will be responsible for reviewing the Implementation Report and submitting the final report to the Office of the Provost.

**DUE DATE FOR IMPLEMENTATION REPORT: May 1, 2024**

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| **Recommendation** | **Proposed Follow-Up**  If no follow-up is recommended, indicate ‘No follow-up report is required’ and provide rationale | **Specific Timeline**  Indicate specific timeline for addressing or completing recommendation | **Position Responsible for Leading Follow-up** |
| **Recommendation 1**  That the Programs pursue more avenues for cross-listing of courses, collaboration and joint appointments with other programs, specifically, but not exclusively in the area of Indigenous. | The Program should seek out opportunities for collaboration and course cross-listings.  The Implementation Report will outline any new collaborations and cross-listed courses. | Ongoing; update to be provided by May 1, 2024 | Program Director |
| **Recommendation 2**  That an additional tenure-track be hired to fill the need for IBPOC perspectives in Cultural Studies for which there is considerable student demand. | This falls outside the purview of this review.  Faculty renewal is part of the ongoing academic planning and budget processes, and takes place through discussions with Deans. |  |  |
| **Recommendation 3**  That the LTA position in Media Studies be converted into a tenure-track position. | No follow-up is required.  The position has already been converted. |  |  |
| **Recommendation 4**  That the Programs, in partnership with Graduate Studies, develop a long-term plan for supporting research-creation and media arts in terms of facilities, space, faculty complement, community partnerships, and standards for evaluation. | Standards for evaluation and community partnerships should be reviewed by the Program Committee through the lens of providing support for research-creation and media arts.  The Implementation Report will outline outcomes to support research creation and media arts. Specifically talk about:   * Areas of development * Partnerships and collaborative opportunities | Ongoing; update to be provided by May 1, 2024 | Program Director |
| **Recommendation 5**  That the Programs place strong emphasis on the cultivation and support of partnerships with community organizations, and that students at both the MA and PhD levels be encouraged to engage in public-facing scholarship as part of their degree programs. | The Program should investigate ways to promote public-facing scholarship within the degree programs. Further emphasis on cultivating community partnerships is encouraged.  The Implementation Report will identify any new development and support of partnerships, as well as how they have been incorporated into the degree program. | Ongoing; update to be provided by May 1, 2024 | Program Director |
| **Recommendation 6**  That Graduate Studies implement an across-the-board increase to the graduate research fellowship. | No follow-up is required.  Graduate stipends for both MA and PhD students will be increased starting September 2023. |  |  |
| **Recommendation 7**  That the Program explores greater incentives and more direct, program-specific support for student applications for Tri-Council funding. | The School of Graduate Studies provides extensive supports for students applying for tri-council funding and other scholarships. The Program should work on ensuring that all qualified students apply for these funding opportunities.  The Implementation Report will outline:   * New supports introduced * Student applications and grant success | Update to be provided by May 1, 2024 | Program Director |
| **Recommendation 8**  That the Program establish a designated pool of available funding for student conference and research support, and that a formal application process be developed and published to ensure equity of access. | No follow-up is required.  The School of Graduate Studies offers travel bursaries to help defer the cost for student travel participation. |  |  |
| **Recommendation 9**  That students be supported to explore opportunities for professional development at both  the MA and PhD levels, and that professional development goals and activities be included in degree requirements. | The Program Committee will consider incorporating professional development opportunities into degree requirements for CUST 5000,  CUST 6100 and CUST 6200.  The Implementation Report will identify:   * any curriculum changes to specific courses * any changes to program degree requirements | Update to be provide by May 1, 2024  Changes to be in place for Sept 2024 | Program Director |
| **Recommendation 10**  That the Programs develop a greater range of Graduate Research Assistant opportunities to provide experience in collaborative research and skill-specific professionalization, and that these positions be paid in addition to the standard funding package. | Faculty are encouraged to explore funding opportunities that may be available from external sources such as Tri-Council awards or research grants.  The Implementation Report will identify any progress in securing funding. | Update to be provided by May 1, 2024 | Program Director |
| **Recommendation 11**  That the Programs develop formal, program-specific guidelines on MA and PhD supervision and examination including clearly defined responsibilities (for both students and faculty), procedures for changes to the supervisory committee, and directions to institutional channels for support, complaints, and appeals. | The program is encouraged to consider program-specific guidelines.  The Implementation Report will outline results of discussion. | Update to be provided by May 1, 2024 | Program Director |
| **MA Program Specific** |  |  |  |
| **Recommendation 12**  That the required MA course CUST 5000 include ‘framing’ assignments and questions to allow students to respond to the included Salons in terms of approach, methodology, and professional development. | The Program will review and consider if any changes to curriculum need to be made.  The Implementation Report will indicate any curriculum changes. | Decision by May 1, 2024 | Program Director |
| **Recommendation 13**  That the Program explore a fast-track option between the BA and the MA in Cultural Studies beyond the measures implemented in 2017 allowing BA students to take a graduate course. | No follow-up is required as this falls outside the purview of this review.  This is an excellent recommendation, and we would encourage the  Program to consider this option. |  |  |
| **PhD Program Specific** |  |  |  |
| **Recommendation 14**  That Graduate Studies fund a full-day retreat for CUST faculty members and students to discuss the curriculum, overall objectives of the PhD program in light of changed conditions of graduate study, as well as changes to the theory and practice of Cultural Studies that have occurred since the Program’s inception. | The Program is encouraged to hold a Retreat to review and reflect on those aspects of the Program identified in the External Reviewers’ Report.  The Implementation Report will highlight discussions of the retreat, and outline resulting changes to the Program and curriculum. | To be discussed at Retreat – Summer 2023 | Program Director |
| **Recommendation 15**  That the Program:   1. review curriculum of CUST 6100 and, 2. consider having all assignments for this course be graded by the course director, with supplemental comments from other faculty participants. | The Program will review CUST 6100 at their retreat.  The Implementation Report will indicate any curriculum changes to CUST 6100.  No follow-up is required.  The Program has been indicated that marking for CUST 6100 will now be completed by the Course Coordinator. | To be discussed at Retreat – Summer 2023 | Program Director |
| **Recommendation 16**  That the Program support the creation of a student-generated reading list to accompany the required readings for the first comprehensive examination, and suggest that the comprehensive examination could, with the supervisor’s agreement, include a selection of texts from this list as well as the 6100 required readings. | The Program is encouraged to consider a reading list.  The Implementation Report will provide an update on the reading list. | Update to be provided by May 1, 2024 | Program Director |
| **Recommendation 17**  That the Program add a required 0.5 elective course for each student, chosen depending on interest, in Year 1 of the program. | No follow-up is required.  This will be implemented in 2024-25. |  |  |
| **Recommendation 18**  That CUST 6110 should ideally include ‘framing’ assignments and questions to allow students to  respond to the weekly Salons in terms of approach, methodology, and professional development. | The Program will review and consider if any changes to curriculum need to be made.  The Implementation Report will indicate any curriculum changes. | Decision by May 1, 2024 | Program Director |
| **Recommendation 19**  That one of the final assignments for CUST 6200 should be a course syllabus. | The Program will consider whether the course will include the creation of a syllabus. They may also want to consult with CTL about potential professional development opportunities for syllabus creation.  The Implementation Report will provide an update. | Decision by May 1, 2024  Changes to be implemented by Sept 2024 | Program Director |
| **Recommendation 20**  That some of the required PhD courses be taught by Faculty other than the Graduate Program Director so that students have the opportunity to work with a broader range of faculty members over their degree programs. | The Program will discuss staffing needs with their Dean(s). | Update to be provided by May 1, 2024 | Program Director to discuss staffing needs with:  CUST Chair,  Grad Dean, and Dean of Hum & Soc Sc |
| **Recommendation 21**  That the Program develop and publish a clear set of guidelines regarding the three-project dissertation model. | The Program is encouraged to finalize their guidelines and make them available to students.  The Implementation Report will report on progress. | Update to be provided by May 1, 2024 | Program Director |
| **Recommendation 22**  That the Program revise the evaluation of CUST 6325 – Special Field Examination to mirror more closely the requirements of a PhD dissertation defense, including the possibility of required revisions. | No follow-up is required.  This has been completed and included in calendar copy. |  |  |
| **Recommendation 23**  That the Program standardize access to undergraduate courses for those students opting to meet the PhD language requirement through this process. | The Program will provide information on undergraduate courses that meet the PhD language requirements. | Update to be provided by May 1, 2024 | Program Director |