

Report to ALA Committee on Accreditation
Conditional Status Progress report
School of Library, Archival and Information Studies (SLAIS),
The iSchool at the University of British Columbia

December 1, 2015

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Appendix 1: iSchool Annual Assessment Report – 2015

Appendix 2: iSchool Statement on Graduate Competencies

1 INTRODUCTION

This report constitutes the second status report on our *Plan for the Removal of the Conditional Accreditation Status*, submitted to COA on October 1, 2014. A previous Conditional Status Progress Report was submitted on March 1, 2015. Following the March report we received notification that we should, “Continue to update the COA on collection of assessment data and use of the data in the program’s planning and decision-making processes (2008 Standards II.7).” (Letter from COA, April 24, 2015).

This report responds to that request by providing details of recent assessment activities taken in the context of our Learning Outcomes Assessment (LOA) Program, (Section 2) and our 2014-2015 External Review (Section 3). Section 4 provides details of how assessment data is used in the School’s planning process by presenting a timeline of these processes over the past year and providing concrete examples of issues raised through assessment and addressed through short term and long term initiatives. In this way, we demonstrate how the School responds to evidence of potential for improvement in specific learning outcomes through decision-making, action and through longer range planning.

As we write this report, we are in the midst of preparations for our Accreditation Review and Site Visit, which will take place in October 2016. Our Self Study Outline was submitted to the COA early in October and we received positive feedback from the ERP Chair Roy Bonin and COA Director Karen O’Brien on the sources of evidence identified. We are proceeding towards the preparation of the Program Presentation, which will build upon and describe much of the work we have done over the past two years to strengthen and systematize learning outcomes assessment and planning in the School.

2 SCHOOL LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT (LOA) PROGRAM

Our formal LOA program was initiated in the fall of 2014. Since the last status report in March 2015, we completed a full annual cycle of data collection and reporting and initiated assessment activities for the 2015-2016 academic year.

2.1 Summary of Data Collection since March 2015

In accordance with the data collection procedures outlined in our LOA Program, which was presented in full in our October 2014 report on Conditional Status, we:

- Carried out a detailed survey of our current students in March/April 2015;
- Collected and compiled 2014-2015 course-based measures of learning outcomes and student evaluations of teaching in April 2015;
- Gathered feedback from employers and supervisors of experiential learning and independent research opportunities, including the Graduating (Capstone) Project, the Co-op education program, Professional Experience courses, Practica, and Theses in May 2015;
- Conducted focus groups with employers of our MLIS, Master of Archival Studies (MAS) and Dual (MLIS and MAS) graduates in June 2015;
- Completed our annual Alumni Survey in October 2015.

In the summer of 2015, drawing upon all these sources of evidence, the iSchool Assessment Committee prepared and disseminated the iSchool Annual Assessment Report (2015), which underwent internal review by faculty and staff, and an abridged and anonymized version was approved for public dissemination. This report has been available on the Program Assessment page of the iSchool website since early fall 2015¹ together with summary data on annual employment data and tables showing direct measures of student learning outcomes². The full public iSchool Annual Assessment Report – 2015 is included here as Appendix 1.

2.2 LOA Results: MLIS Program

The 2015 Assessment Report contains a table of measures of learning outcomes for the MLIS program as well as summaries of other quantitative and qualitative data collected from these activities that provide context and detail. As noted above, this information is all available from the iSchool website and a notice of this was disseminated in our Fall Newsletter that is sent out to our constituents. The Table of Direct Measures shows high levels of achievement among MLIS students on many of the measures across the iSchool Competencies (iSchool Statement on Graduate Competencies – Appendix 2). There is also clear evidence of the quality of our graduates in the high post-graduate employment levels and the positive reports from employers and supervisors of experiential learning.

In addition, some areas for improvement were identified through this process. The following competency areas and related aspects of the program were flagged for further attention and noted in the report.

- **Foundational Competencies:** Student survey data show low self-assessments for 1.3.
- **Management Competencies:** measures suggest some areas of concern here, both from course-based measures and Alumni Survey for 3 and 3.1
- **Research Competencies:** Course-based measures raise some concerns, as do the low numbers of students attending iSchool colloquia. Students rate their own competency on 4.2 fairly low as well.
- **Professional Competencies:** Low rates of student participation in professional organizations.
- **Student input** points to the need to introduce more clarity and challenge into course offerings; update the content and provide more focus on technology.
- **Community input** points to the need to develop professionalism and career-oriented skills; an understanding of organizational issues, and a critical, big picture perspective. Understanding technology and its role in organizations and society is important; also community outreach and information policy.

3 FACULTY OF ARTS EXTERNAL REVIEW OF THE ISCHOOL

External reviews are carried out for academic units with the Faculty of Arts approximately every 5 years. Our most recent review was conducted in the December 2014 and the report was issued to us in mid-March 2015. The review panel included two senior academics from peer institutions and one UBC

¹ http://slais-ischool.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2014/09/AnnualAssessmentReport_2015_Public.pdf

² <http://slais.ubc.ca/programs/about-department/program-assessment/>

reviewer from outside of the iSchool. In preparation for the review, we prepared a detailed Self Study document and reviewers met during the site visit with individuals and groups representing many of our stakeholders, including : the Dean of Arts, Associate Dean for Graduate Policy & Program Review from the Faculty of Graduate Studies, Associate University Librarian, iSchool faculty and lecturers, adjunct (sessional) professors, most of whom are working information professionals, SLAIS staff, and students from across all programs.

While the External Review is not focused on student learning outcomes *per se*, it addresses many issues that influence learning outcomes, and in this way, it complements the School's internal LOA program. The External Review report concluded that the School provides "high-impact educational experience for professionals," and notes that "unlike many other iSchools, SLAIS has managed to begin developing a broader approach to the study of information while maintaining its strengths in the traditional domains of libraries and archives". The External Review process was extremely valuable for the school, as the review panel affirmed the value of the School and its programs, noting particularly the excellent quality and engagement of our students, while also providing an extensive set of recommendations designed to strengthen the School. Here, we will highlight a number of the recommendations that are most relevant to the MLIS program and student learning outcomes.

3.1 Results and Recommendations – MLIS Program

- Students reported difficulties in understanding how to leverage the richness of course offerings and the flexibility of program structures in planning their own path through the programs. The Review recommended that guides, pathways, program profiles, etc. be put in place to improve clarity and help students to tailor their learning experiences to prepare for careers in different areas.
- They reported that input from students, community representatives and alumni indicate that MLIS graduates increasingly will be expected to have strong technology and management competencies. They suggested that we build up our offerings and recruit faculty who can develop and provide curricula in these areas.
- The Review Panel found evidence from multiple sources that the quality of teaching across iSchool programs varied significantly among sessional instructors and that this variation had a noticeable impact on students' perceptions and SLAIS's reputation with employers. They suggested that we incorporate more ongoing review and evaluations of part time instructors, offer more support and resources for instructors, and include them in the life of the School to a greater extent.

4 THE ROLE OF ASSESSMENT IN PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING

Outcomes from the LOA program and the External Review summarized in the previous two sections provide valuable input to the School's planning process and help to establish priorities for the current year and future years. This section of the report outlines the relationship between assessment and planning and describes steps taken as part of this broader process to investigate and address these outcomes.

As laid out in the iSchool Guidance Document for Planning and Assessment, we set annual planning and assessment foci for the period 2014-2019. In 2014-2015, the focus was on Mission, Goals and Objectives, and during that period we were able to develop and articulate a renewed vision, mission, goals and objectives, and to install the iSchool Graduate Competencies as the central driver for the direction, evaluation and articulation of the MLIS program. While the major work in this area has been done, we continue in our efforts to integrate, communicate and gather input on these new frameworks. The focus for the current year is Program Structure and Development, which enables us to target much of our energy towards strengthening the MLIS (and MAS) curricula in response to data gathered through program assessment.

4.1 Timeline and Process: Assessment and Planning

The close relationship between assessment and planning is illustrated by the processes underway in the school over the past 8 to 10 months, which are summarized here. All the reports and discussions referenced here were informed by assessment activities.

- March 2015: the External Review Report was received, followed by a meeting to discuss the results with the Dean of Arts, Associate Deans, and all faculty and staff. We submitted our first official response to the External Review in June 2015. The External Review recommendations informed planning activities in the summer of 2015.
- July 2015: LOA results published in the Annual Assessment Report, which was reviewed and approved by the Assessment Committee and circulated to Faculty and staff. LOA results informed planning activities in the summer of 2015 and were disseminated publicly in September 2015.
- September 3, 2015: iSchool Retreat was held. Based on the results of the External Review and the Assessment Report, the Director presented a set of strategic plans and tactical priorities. Discussion at the retreat focused on: review and revision of the iSchool Goals and Objectives, discussion of iSchool plans and priorities and review of the Assessment Report to identify areas for improvement.
- August-September 2015: A Planning Brief and Hiring Rationales were developed based on the input from these two Assessment processes and presented to the Dean of Arts at the annual planning meeting, which includes the iSchool Director and Administrator, the Dean of Arts and the Assistant Dean of Finance. The Dean reviewed the School's plans, approved the hiring of two tenure track faculty members in 2015-2016 and gave tentative approval for two additional positions in 2016-2017. Two special projects were approved, one focused on technology-based learning initiatives in the school, and another on new programs initiatives.
- September 2015: Based on the priorities established by faculty and staff at the iSchool Retreat, the Director met individually with heads of Standing Committees (Curriculum, Admissions, Assessment) in September to establish mandates for the 2015-2016 year. These include a number of issues related to both the process of assessment (e.g. establishment of a capstone experience requirement in the MLIS; identification of appropriate direct measures for Competency 5.2) and response to the results of the assessment (e.g. review of the

management-related components of the curriculum). Committees will report on progress at monthly faculty meetings and submit a year-end report.

The next step in this ongoing process will be to prepare an iSchool Strategic Plan: meetings with faculty for this purpose are planned for December, and consultation opportunities with community members will be scheduled early in 2016.

4.2 Responses to specific concerns and recommendations

Table 1 summarizes a number of specific issues that arose in the Annual Assessment Report and in the External Review report together with the source of evidence and actions either underway or planned to address them. It is important to note that the actions taken in response to areas for improvement identified in the assessment processes are not *ad hoc*, but are components within a broader framework of planning, articulated through the iSchool’s Mission, Goals and Objectives.

Table 1: Examples of issues identified through assessment and the School’s response

Areas of Focus	Sources of Evidence	Actions underway or planned
<i>Specific Learning Outcomes</i>		
Technology Competencies (1.3)	Assessment Report: (student self-perceptions and employer focus groups); External Review (student input)	iTechFlex initiative funded and underway in 2015, including a technology learning portal, face-to-face workshops, enhanced tech infrastructure and “technology across the curriculum” approach; plans to recruit faculty in this area
Management Competencies (3, 3.1)	Assessment Report (course-based measures and alumni survey); External Review (input from students and employers)	Curriculum Committee mandated to investigate management components of curriculum; inform redesign of required management course
Research Competencies (4.2)	Assessment Report (course-based measures, student self-perceptions, colloquia attendance)	Research Methods moved to the MLIS core as of fall 2015 and electives will now build on common competency base
<i>Factors contributing to Learning Outcomes</i>		
Teaching: Promote consistency of high quality teaching	External Review (multiple sources); Assessment Report (Student Teaching Evaluations)	New teaching listserv and orientation for adjunct faculty, continue systematic review of student teaching evaluations and feedback sessions with instructors
Program Structure: Clarify and add structure to MLIS Curriculum	Assessment Report (student input); External Review (student input)	Curriculum Committee mandated to finalize and implement MLIS Curricular pathways in 2016

5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this report we have provided evidence and details of ongoing, broad-based assessment of learning outcomes through a range of data collection activities. We have also shown that the School makes use of and responds to the results of assessment activities through a systematic process of establishing committee mandates, setting goals and reporting those to the academic administration, community stakeholders and students. These processes are all linked, as they should be, to ensure that assessment of student learning outcomes is a major driver of decisions that affect the MLIS program and shape the learning experiences of future information professionals. We rely heavily on input from alumni and employers in this process, and we continue to take steps to provide more opportunities to consult with these groups and involve them more fully in the life of the school.

We are confident that in this report, and our previous reports, we have demonstrated willingness to engage fully with the LOA approach and that we have successfully instantiated this approach in the MLIS program. There are many examples of how this type of assessment has driven and continues to drive positive change in the School; further, we now have the systems in place to ensure the sustainability of these practices over the long term. These examples and processes will be fully documented in our Program Presentation, under preparation for the Accreditation Review of the School scheduled for Fall 2016.