

School of Library, Archival and Information Studies (SLAIS)

Faculty of Arts

Summary of External Review: December 2014

Highlights and Key Findings:

- Reviewers indicated that in general SLAIS has navigated well the significant changes in the larger intellectual, institutional, and professional contexts. 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.
- Reviewers commended SLAIS faculty members as active, excellent contributors to research in a variety of areas, and accessing a substantial amount of external funding.
- The School's graduate programs are well-structured and functioning well, with the MLIS (Masters of Library and Information Studies) and MAS (Masters of Archival Studies) programs providing high-quality educational experiences that prepare students for a range of careers in the information professions.
- The MLIS faces particular challenges and opportunities arising from changes to libraries and the larger information landscape, and also increasing interest in the core MLIS skills and knowledge among employers in the private and public sectors and from potential students.
- The MAS is uniquely well established and highly respected. It is unclear how the MAS as a relatively small program is developing new program leaders or preparing for future leadership transition.
- Reviewers commended the Master of Arts in Children's Literature as a model program with regard to partnerships and planning.
- Reviewers identified several aspects of SLAIS's governance, organizational structure, and administrative practises that need to be improved: (a) collaboration with the Faculty of Arts Dean and UBC administration, (b) ALA reaccreditation and SLAIS's institutional identity, (c) creation of an external advisory board (recommended in the two previous reviews), and (d) management of collegiality and diversity of perspectives from different disciplines.

Key Recommendations:

- Build connections within the university that leverage and make visible SLAIS's distinct contribution to the research priorities of the Faculty of Arts and the university as whole.
- Additional resources, such as more faculty, more funding, and additional space, would benefit SLAIS to further develop and realize its full potential.
- Shift from a program development strategy of identifying overlap and potential redundancy to focus on growing a set of complementary programs through partnerships and examine and develop each program with a focus on its role in the larger context. Develop materials and processes that show students how to leverage the richness of the course offerings both within SLAIS and UBC.
- Develop ways of attracting students with a broader range of backgrounds and preparing them for a broader array of careers both inside and outside the traditional information professions.
- Continue to strengthen procedures, structures, and practices to address concerns raised by the ALA accreditation Committee with the goal of acquiring full accreditation as soon as possible.

- Integrate strategic planning, thinking, and communication into every aspect of the School's administration and operations. Form an advisory board, with members from both the community and key units within the Faculty of Arts and elsewhere in UBC.
- Carefully manage the following goals of undergraduate education: developing high quality undergraduate education experiences, increasing awareness of SLAIS among undergraduate students, and increasing the number of high-quality candidates for SLAIS's masters programs.

School's Response:

The School recognizes and is taking steps to address the following: (a) further establish its vision and identity as the iSchool, (b) with the Faculty of Arts, work to create a better communication strategy for the School that articulates its goals and strategies with reference to the concerns of the Faculty of Arts, UBC, and the wider community, (c) create better internal documentation to support enrolled students and to recruit new students, (d) communicate with stakeholders to gain input on its programs and communicate its strategies, (e) plan for the development of an Advisory Board.

To improve identity, communication and outreach to communities, the School has initiated: (a) a new and broader mission statement to better reflect its identity as an iSchool and (b) focus groups with stakeholders at the annual Association of Canadian Archivists meeting and with local librarians and archivists in Vancouver.

The School recognizes that a decision on new directions also has consequences for the organization of existing programs and there will be a need to revisit the structure of the existing degrees. As well, the need to align the structures of the MAS and MLIS degrees is essential for the future management of the Dual MAS/MLIS program.

Evaluation for full accreditation with the American Library Association (ALA) is of major importance to the MLIS program. The following is planned to support the accreditation process: (a) a consultant will be hired to prepare the initial draft of the Program Presentation, and (b) a strong strategic plan for the MLIS program will be determined that addresses past and upcoming faculty retirements and the Acting status of the Director of the School in advance of the October 2016 site visit.

The School recognizes the importance of engaging with other units within UBC and has already begun informal liaison with the School of Journalism to explore possibilities and discussions with the Provost's Office and with other Faculties on Data Science. The potential for joint initiatives will also be a consideration for the New Programs Working Group as members consider iSchool directions and opportunities, and synergies with other departments and centres on campus.

Faculty's Response:

The Faculty has appointed an Acting Director and authorized searches for two new tenure-track faculty members in 2015-16. The Dean's office is also working closely with the School on governance and communications issues raised in the External Review.