FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

Cyclical Program Review of Undergraduate and/or Graduate Programs
Department of English
Faculty of Arts
2024-2025
September 16, 2026

I. Program(s) reviewed

- Honours BA in English Major in English
- Master of Arts English Literature
- Master of Arts English Literature with Concentration in Creative Writing
- Master of Arts English Literature and Specialization in Medieval and Renaissance Studies
- Master of Arts English Literature and Specialization in Feminist and Gender Studies
- Doctorate in Philosophy English Literature

II. Review process (outline of the visit)

The Final Assessment Report on the above programs was prepared from the following documents: (a) the self-study brief produced by the academic unit; (b) the post-visit external review report; and (c) commentary from Geoff Rector, the Director of the Department of English, and the response from Marc Charron, Dean of the Faculty of Arts.

This on-site visit took place on September 30 and October 1, 2025, as part of the cyclical review process for the undergraduate and graduate programs. The review team consisted of Andrea Cabajsky, Université de Moncton, and Jason Wiens, University of Calgary.

The external reviewers met with Alain St-Amant, Vice-Provost, Academic Affairs; Christopher Fennell, Associate Vice-Provost, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies; Marc Charron, Dean, Faculty of Arts; Jada Watson, Vice-Dean, Academic Affairs, Faculty of Arts; Geoff Rector, Chair, Department of English; and members of faculty, support staff and students.

III. Summary of program quality reports[1]

a. Strengths

- Coherence of program learning outcomes and curriculum:
    - Teaching and evaluation methods are aligned with the learning objectives of both undergraduate and graduate programs.
    - Course learning outcomes are aligned with the program learning outcomes.
- Programs exhibit a balance between traditional areas of enquiry and contemporary ones. Courses and degree pathways in non-traditional areas include Indigenous, African and Asian literatures.
- Co-op options at the BA and MA levels make the English programs unique among Canadian universities.
- Programs feature a mix of class sizes, with a good number of small classes, allowing discussion between students and professors.
- Students report that the quality of teaching is very high, and the professors are very accessible and supportive.

- Particular strengths of the BA:
    - Upper-year course offerings in the BA program have been enriched by the addition of new courses in Contemporary Literature, Children's Literature, Young Adult Literature, and Critical Theory.
    - Experiential learning opportunities include class trips to Library and Archives Canada, The National Arts Centre, and the Ottawa Writers Festival.

- Particular strengths of the MA:
    - Four pathways: (i) thesis, (ii) Major Research Paper, (iii) Coursework only, and (iv) COOP.
    - Students are trained for both academic and non-academic careers.
    - Work experience in the form of teaching assistantships and grader-ships

[1] Based on the documents prepared during the review process, often cited verbatim.

- Particular strengths at the PhD level:
    - Guaranteed teaching assistantships.
    - Professional development workshops.
    - Opportunity to organize annual graduate student conferences.
    - Opportunity to create and deliver courses.
    - High quality of mentoring delivered by professors.
    - High success rates in applications for the main scholarship programs, e.g. SSHRCC and OGS.

- The Minor and MA in Creative Writing are also very popular.

b. Challenges

- Challenges at multiple levels:
    - Shrinking contingent of regular faculty members.
    - Few of the students who participate in the COOP programs (BA and MA) report finding meaningful employment.
    - Many students are confused about the process for appointing teaching assistantships and what is required to apply for them.

- Challenges particular to the BA:
    - Since the thesis option is no longer offered, students who continue to graduate studies may find themselves at a disadvantage.
    - A significant number of courses in the catalogue are not offered regularly.
    - Capacity to teach upper-year courses in Indigenous Literatures is limited.
    - Many students have expressed concern about the reduction in the use of research essays as an evaluation tool. On the one hand, the rise in the availability of generative AI has increased the risk of plagiarism. On the other hand, for those who don't cheat, it remains the most effective tool for developing their skills in research and argumentation.

- Challenges particular to the PhD:
    - Average time for completion is long.
    - Funding packages are not competitive.
    - Lack of research assistantships to provide employment to graduate students during the summer.

IV. Opportunities for program improvement[2]

Recommendation 1: Improve program flexibility

Recommendation 2: Improve the graduate student experience

Recommendation 3: Improve the Co-op experience

Recommendation 4: Improve the TA experience

Recommendation 5: Adopt innovative approaches to hiring in needed areas

V. Summary and assessment of the proposed action plan[3]

The recommendations made by the external reviewers were carefully considered by the unit's leadership and subsequently incorporated into an action plan, which was reviewed by the Senate Program Evaluation Committee (SPEC) at its meeting held on September 16, 2026.

The leadership of the academic unit has accepted all the recommendations from the external evaluation. The actions to be taken and the timetable are clearly defined and have been approved by the Dean's Office. The SPEC is satisfied with the academic unit's response and action plan.

VI. Conclusion

The review exercise confirmed the strength and stability of the programs offered, and it identified recommendations for their ongoing improvement. The members of the Senate Program Evaluation Committee would like to thank the external reviewers for their detailed assessment, as well as all the stakeholders involved in this cyclical program review process.

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[2] Reproduced verbatim from the External Evaluation Report.
[3] The academic unit's response and action plan are appended.

VII. Schedule and timelines

A progress report that outlines the completed actions and subsequent results will be submitted to the evaluation committee by December 15, 2028.

The next cyclical review will take place in no more than eight years, in 2031-2032.

Unit Response and Implementation Plan

This document will be submitted to the Ontario Universities Quality Assurance Council and posted on the University's website. It should be written in only one language, English in this case. At the end of the process, the document will be translated into the other language.

Faculty:

- Faculty of Arts

Unit:

- Department of English

Programs evaluated:

- Bachelor's Degree in English (Honours)
- Bachelor's Degree in English (Major)
- Master of Arts in English
- Doctor of Philosophy in English

Cyclical review period:

- 2024-2025

Date:

- 4/7/2026

General comments:

On January 23, 2026, the English program was made aware of the External Review Report produced in the context of the cyclical program evaluation. We were extremely pleased with the positive evaluation of our undergraduate and graduate programs. Given that the English program has committed to providing an outstanding education and student experience, we were gratified to see that the external reviewers found that "English professors have demonstrated an outstanding degree of commitment to the life of the department, to undergraduate and graduate programs, and to student wellbeing." Likewise, we were pleased to read that the "evaluators were struck by the level of student satisfaction regarding quality of teaching and quality of mentorship." The report makes five recommendations, of which two are considered high or urgent priority. We take all the recommendations seriously and feel confident that, by addressing them, our program will be even stronger. The recommendations and our responses are included below.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Improve program flexibility

Unit response:

The evaluators recognize that our Department "has made recent changes to the degree structures at both undergraduate and graduate levels to provide more flexibility for students" and that these "recent curricular changes align with the 'Transformation 2030' Strategic Plan's objectives of improving the ability of students to complete programs in a timely way, while maintaining high academic standards." However, as we know well from conversations with faculty and, most immediately, with our own students, there are areas in which we can improve. The evaluators suggest some potential measures which agree with our own on-going initiatives– including "lightening the mandatory course load in Years 1 and/or 2 of the BA program [and] merging 4000-level with graduate courses where possible," both of which have already been discussed in departmental committees– as well as others, such as "introducing an article-based doctorate into the PhD program," which we have not. We will task both undergraduate and graduate committees with reviewing these options and others, with the goal of balancing our desire to maintain high standards and the integrity of our program with the need to improve program flexibility.

Decanal response:

The Dean's office encourages the department to review the program requirements, as lightening the mandatory course load would offer greater flexibility, but also improved time to completion. This initiative is in keeping with the President and Vice-Chancellor's vision of program revitalization, which includes simplification of course requirements and increased flexibility for our students. At the same time, lightening the mandatory course offerings will have a positive effect on scheduling, and has the potential for creating opportunities to introduce new topics.

The Vice-Dean, Academic Affairs and Pedagogical Innovation is ready to support the department when needed as they begin to work on the actions outlined below. However, a note should be made about merging 4000-level and graduate courses: we need to be careful with how these courses are scheduled and the enrolment in each course to ensure that we are not introducing issues for graduate students. Notably, the current version of the Institutional Quality Assurance Process notes in section 2.3.3 Program Requirements for Graduate Programs Only that "graduate students in the program [are] required to take a minimum of two-thirds of the course requirements among graduate-level courses." In addition, the glossary defines a "graduate level course" not just as one offered by a graduate program, by institutionally approved graduate faculty, with learning outcomes aligned with graduate level expectations, but in which "*the majority of students are registered as graduate students*" (*emphasis added*). Any changes to the course offering that might merge 4000-level courses with graduate courses should be taken with great care to ensure that these requirements are met.

* PRIORITY LEVEL: 1. URGENT-IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED 2. IMPORTANT-ACTION TO BE IMPLEMENTED WITHIN A MAXIMUM OF 18 MONTHS 3. ADVISED-ACTION TO BE DEVELOPPED AND DISCUSSED, THEN IMPLEMENTED BY MID-CYCLE, I.E., WITHIN FOUR YEARS

Actions to be undertaken for recommendation 1:

Action 1
Description: Introduce a program modification to reduce the number of 1st-year program requirements, most likely by removing ENG 1141 (Reading the Contemporary World) from the list of required first-year courses.
Priority level*: Important
Assigned to: Undergraduate Director; members of the Undergraduate Committee; in consultation with the Vice-Dean Programs
Timeline: September 2027
Curriculum change? Yes

Action 2
Description: Undertake an internal process to study and evaluate the program requirements at the 2000/ 2nd-year level, including the 2000-level literature survey courses (2105, 2106, 2107, 2108), the Critical Conversations courses (2180, 2181, 2182, 2183, 2184, 2185), and the second-year seminar (ENG2124), with the goal of increasing program flexibility at this stage of the degree.
Priority level*: Important
Assigned to: Undergraduate Director; members of the Undergraduate Committee; in consultation with the Vice-Dean Programs
Timeline: September 2027
Curriculum change? No

Action 3
Description: Undertake an internal process to study the feasibility of merging 4000-level undergraduate seminars with graduate seminars.

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Priority level*: Important
Assigned to: Department Chair, Graduate Director, Undergraduate Director; members of the Department's Undergraduate and Graduate Committees; in consultation with the Vice-Dean Programs
Timeline: September 2027
Curriculum change? No

Action 4
Description: Undertake an internal process to study and evaluate the feasibility and/ or desirability of implementing an article-based program at the doctorate level, which might answer concerns about length to completion times.
Priority level*: Important
Assigned to: Graduate Director, members of the Department's Graduate Committee; in consultation with the Vice-Dean Programs
Timeline: September 2027
Curriculum change? No

RECOMMENDATION 2: Improve the graduate student experience

Unit response:

In their report, our evaluators noted that the "need for a more competitive student funding package" was a significant problem for our graduate students: it impacts their satisfaction with the program, their educational experience, as well as their time to completion. Since the time of the evaluators' visit, our graduate student funding has again been decreased. This accentuates the problem, both for individual, incoming graduate students and for our graduate program as a whole. We have already seen a drop in the numbers of graduate student acceptances for 2026-2027 as a result. However, we were pleased to note that, in their visit with the Dean and Vice-Dean Programs, the evaluators were told that "the Dean's Office could provide "top up" funding to secure acceptance from particularly attractive applicants who may receive more competitive offers from other universities." We welcome that news and look forward to coordinating efforts with the Faculty to use these funds to help answer the concerns about graduate student experience.

But as the report makes clear, improving the graduate experience extends beyond these specifically financial aspects of graduate student life to include matters of experiential learning, teaching opportunities, informal contexts of training and professional development, and the

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social life of the department. One of the ways that we might be able to coordinate these concerns is through a review of the number and type of courses that we currently assign to PhD students as instructors; we might also work to coordinate changes coming to our suite of ENG service course (ENG1100, 1120, 1112, 1131, etc.) with the needs of graduate students for corrector and TA positions. The annual Graduate Student Conference, held in March with the financial and logistical support of the department, was a model of how we as a department can better coordinate efforts to support graduate student experience. For example, we coordinated the Department's Literary Futures Departmental Guest Lecture Series with the graduate conference so that we were able to pay for a second keynote speaker. The department also agrees with the evaluators' suggestion that the revival of the Department's long-standing Canadian Literature Symposium, through SSHRC and Faculty support, would be a powerful way to support graduate student experience and renew the Department's public profile.

Decanal response:

The Dean's office recognizes the pressures that all departments face in declining funding for our graduate programs and encourages the department of English to consider (as outlined in their response) the possibility of instruction opportunities for their doctoral students; not only would this increase the amount of funding for PhD students, it would also provide more advanced work experiences.

The department should also be encouraging faculty to apply for more research grants and their 4th year undergraduate students and incoming and returning graduate students to be applying for external funding from OGS and SSHRC. The Vice-Dean of Academic Affairs and Pedagogical Innovation is working on developing a workshop for grant preparation to ease the burden on departments.

At the same time, the Vice-Dean of Research and Creativity would be an excellent resource for funding for conferences and other research-related projects on campus not just through SSHRC support, but also through the Faculty's grants for conferences on campus.

Actions to be undertaken for recommendation 2:

Action 1
Description: Review the processes by which courses in our program are assigned to PhD students as instructors, with the goal of increasing those numbers, especially in literature courses.
Priority level*: Important
Assigned to: the Departmental Chair and Graduate Director, in coordination with the Vice-Dean Programs.
Timeline: September 2028
Curriculum change? No

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Action 2
Description: Renew and reinforce support for graduate student initiatives, including the Graduate Student Conference and similar student-run events; coordination of Departmental and Graduate student speakers' events.
Priority level*: Important
Assigned to: Graduate Director, members of the Department's Graduate Committee, Faculty members of the department as a whole
Timeline: On-going; there cannot be a specific timeline for this particular goal.
Curriculum change? No

Action 3
Description: Work with the Canadian literature professors in the English Department, in an effort coordinated with Lettres Françaises and Indigenous Studies, to work on the revival and reconceptualization of the department's long-running CanLit Symposium, with the specific intention of integrating graduate students into the planning and organization of the conference via SSHRC support.
Priority level*: Important
Assigned to: Department Chair, Canadian Literature professors in the department
Timeline: On-going; there cannot be a specific timeline for this particular goal.
Curriculum change? No

RECOMMENDATION 3: Improve the co-op experience

Unit response:

We were both pleased to see the attention brought by the evaluators to our Co-op programs, which are described as important "strengths" that make "Uottawa English unique," and disheartened to note that this topic generated the "highest" and most animated "degree of student dissatisfaction" in the evaluators' visit. And yet, this dissatisfaction, especially among Master's level students, came as no surprise to us, given that we have been tracking the success of the Co-op program over the past few years. We agree with both our students' dissatisfaction and with the

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evaluator's hopes that we can improve the Co-op experience for both undergraduate and graduate students, since these programs "align well with the objectives of the "Transformation 2030" Strategic Plan, which aims to strengthen and expand experiential learning for every student," represent a significant means of setting "the English programs apart from other Canadian universities," and help answer public perceptions about the job prospects and marketability of an English degree.
However, especially after a meeting with representatives from the Co-op program on March 3, we recognize that many of the problems facing students in job placements are due to market forces and institutional changes, especially in the Federal government, that are beyond the control of either the department or the Co-op Office. As the evaluation report recommends, we would like to ask for continued and renewed "institutional support"– from the Faculty, the Co-op Office, and the university administration– "to rescue the Co-op programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels." We will continue our discussions with the Co-op office to see how we might improve and expand job opportunities for students, and will take all possible measures on our own ends to improve the program, but we cannot make or implement these changes on our own.

Decanal response:

The Dean's office recognizes the pressures on the department as a result of changes in market forces that have led to a decline in the volume of co-op opportunities for English students. This has been a growing concern, and the Vice-Dean of Academic Affairs and Pedagogical Innovation is prepared to support the department as needed.

While this situation is one that will require some additional thought to improve, there are other opportunities on campus for experiential learning for the department to consider for undergraduate students. One of the In-Depth Experiential Learning Stream (IELS) offered through Career Development and Experiential Learning (CDEL). To date, this stream has only been taken up by programs in Social Sciences, but CDEL is developing a new model to render the stream more adaptable to other Faculties, including Arts. The stream is akin to a Minor of 30 credits, but has courses geared toward experiential learning that create opportunities for developing skills and competencies for their professional career. This does not result in a paid opportunity, like co-op, but it does help create pathways for co-op-like experience through courses (and the stream is noted on the final degree and transcript). Other opportunities on campus include participation in the new intensive "innovation" micro-courses in Arts (the Arts Labs), Social Sciences (FSS Challenges), Telfer (Innovation Sprints), and Medicine (Co-Create Sprints), which are designed to bring students together from across all corners of the campus to collaborate around social challenges.

Similar opportunities to not yet exist at this scale for graduate students but has been readily discussed in program revitalization meetings with the Vice-Dean of Academic Affairs and Pedagogical Innovation. Many departments have expressed interest in a stage or community-engagement opportunities for students at the graduate level; this could be an opportunity for the MA in English as well.

Actions to be undertaken for recommendation 3:

Action 1

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Description: Improve communications on the English Department website.
Priority level*: Urgent
Assigned to: Department Chair, Undergraduate Director, coordinator of English Department's Digital and Media Outreach committee
Timeline: With tech and website support from the Faculty, to be completed by September 2026.
Curriculum change? No

Action 2
Description: Integrate a clearer, better-informed discussion of the Co-op program into both our Undergraduate and Graduate Orientation meetings, by inviting a representative from the Co-op office to speak at these presentations.
Priority level*: Urgent
Assigned to: Undergraduate Director and Graduate Director; representative of the Co-op Office
Timeline: Starting in September 2026 and ongoing.
Curriculum change? No

Action 3
Description: Increase, improve, and coordinate communication between English Department and Co-Op Office, especially during the student application process.
Priority level*: Urgent
Assigned to: Department Chair, Undergraduate Director, and Graduate Director.
Timeline: Starting in September 2026 and ongoing.
Curriculum change? No

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RECOMMENDATION 4: Improve the TA experience

Unit response:

The report points to TAships for our graduate students as both "a program strength" and, from "the administrative side of things, … a significant source of dissatisfaction among students." In interviews with the evaluators, our PhD students in particular pointed to "the guaranteed TAships" as a major "deciding factor" in their acceptance of offers from our department, which therefore need to be supported and sustained to ensure the health of the graduate program. However, student evaluations of the administration of these positions are much less positive, pointing to what are effectively HR issues like the administration of contracts and communication, as well as concerns about the courses and kind of work they are assigned. We too are concerned that PhD students, hoping to continue on to academic posts, should have more access to teaching in literature courses. However, some of these problems intersect with budgetary matters that are beyond our control. We can, however, take significant measures to improve the administration of these courses and communication with our students.

Decanal response:

The Dean's office recognizes these challenges faced by the department of English. The Vice-Dean of Academic Affairs and Pedagogical Innovation is working on a faculty strategy for improving opportunities for PhD students to allow for creating more academic (teaching) opportunities to them from the very start of their program. Opening up these types of opportunities to them, would allow for grader/corrector and other teaching assistantships to be guarded for MA students. The Vice-Dean can be of help with any of the actions below, particularly as it concerns improving communication with students.

Actions to be undertaken for recommendation 4:

Action 1
Description: Complete the process of re-writing the handbooks for our service courses (e.g. ENG1100), which offer guidance both to instructors and to especially TAs. This initiative, undertaken by the Department in coordination between the Undergraduate Director and one of our LTAs directly answers many of the concerns addressed in the report, including transparency, communication, and the administration of TAships.
Priority level*: Important
Assigned to: Undergraduate Director and G. Santor
Timeline: September 2026 and on-going.

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Curriculum change? No

Action 2
Description: Improve communication with graduate students entering the program, in particular regarding the assignment and administration of TAships. This will involve better communication in graduate student orientation events, and increasing the involvement of and access to the Departmental Admin staff during this orientation process.
Priority level*: Important
Assigned to: Graduate Director, Undergraduate Director, Departmental Admin staff
Timeline: Starting in Sept. 2026 and ongoing.
Curriculum change? No

Action 3
Description: As noted in Recommendation #3, we will undertake a review of the processes by which graduate students are assigned TAships and instructor positions in our service and literature courses, ideally in concert with larger re-evaluations of the service courses, to work towards getting more graduate students working and assisting in literature courses.
Priority level*: Important
Assigned to: Chair, Graduate Director, Undergraduate Director
Timeline: On-going
Curriculum change? No

RECOMMENDATION 5: Adopt innovative approaches to hiring in needed areas

Unit response:

Both in the context of student responses and in their own assessment of our program, the evaluators at several points in the report stress our need for faculty renewal. As they observe, "The principal challenge to maintaining this high-quality student experience comes from the

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shrinking contingent of faculty members, whose dedication and sacrifice can only do so much." With two recent retirements and the death of one professor, our numbers have been reduced to 17 APUO members (FTE), only one of whom is at the Assistant Professor level. (NB these numbers include our Creative Writing professors.) With the average age of the English Faculty being 56 at the moment of the self-study document's submission, these recent retirements will soon be followed by many more among a large cohort nearing (early) retirement age. We are almost certainly to have two more retirements next year– and more to follow in the very short term. Thus, like the evaluators, we are concerned about the long-term health of the program and were pleased to see that, in conversation with the evaluators, the "Vice-Provost, Academic Affairs… noted how small the faculty contingent in English had become." As the evaluators conclude, "It will be crucial to replace retiring professors while also hiring in at least one new area, at the very least to ensure that adequate human resources remain in place to implement the proposed recommendations, below, which have been conceived to be realistic, context-aware, and actionable." The hiring of new professors to Assistant Professor, tenure-track positions is crucial to the maintenance of the program, the viability of the graduate program, the renewal of our research commitments, and the long-term health of the department and Faculty.

In the report and in their recommendations, the evaluators suggest that – with these principles of being "realistic, context-aware, and actionable" in mind– we look most immediately at finding innovative ways to hire someone to teach Indigenous Literature at upper levels. Such a hire would support our own efforts "to decolonize the curriculum overall," to update the curriculum, and to "offer courses and degree pathways in non-traditional areas of study." It would also agree with the University's Indigenous Action Plan and our new President's efforts to Indigenize the campus. Hoping to understand the challenges and possibilities of such a hire, I met with the Chair of Indigenous Studies, the Director of Indigenous Affairs, and our own Dean. Noting the report's suggestion that one such innovative means towards an Indigenous Literature hire might be via the Canadian Research Chair program, I also met with the Faculty's Vice-Dean of Research. My goal in all these meetings was to figure out, first and foremost, what would be the best possible version of such a hire and, secondly, what would be the realistic obstacles. I was encouraged by all these conversations and, while very much recognizing that many of the constraints on such a hire are out of the hands of the department, we remain optimistic that we might be able to make such a hire in the near future.

Decanal response:

The Dean's office acknowledges the evaluators' recommendation and the department's response. Faculty renewal is a shared priority and is part of ongoing discussions with the Director of English, as outlined above.

Actions to be undertaken for recommendation 5:

Action 1
Description: Work with the Dean's office and the Faculty as a whole towards the renewal of the English Department faculty generally, and in particular towards the hiring of a professor of Indigenous Literature.

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Priority level*: Urgent
Assigned to: Department Chair, members of the DTPC
Timeline: Ongoing; given the situation, there can be no set timeline.
Curriculum change? No

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