



BA, Journalism
BA, Minor in Journalism

External Review Report

February 1 & 2, 2024

External Review Team Members

Frances Bula
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OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE SELF-STUDY REPORT

Criteria: The Self-Study Report provides a data-supported analysis of the program's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges.

Standards for Assessing the Report:

- Strengths and areas of improvement identified in the report are supported by data and external review findings;
- Recommendations are supported by data, a clear rationale, and external review findings.

The External Reviewers:

- ☒ Validate the Self-Study Report's findings and recommendations
- ☐ Do not validate the Self-Study Report's findings and recommendations

Rationale for this Determination:

The faculty team has clearly put in a lot of research and thought into changes that need to be made (or at least considered) to the program.

There was a lot of information and assessment of the current situation, past changes, and future possibilities presented here. It was challenging for the review team to try to address all of it, as there were a number of questions posed informally throughout the self-study report for the team to answer, as well as lengthy lists of recommendations and considerations.

In general, what the team heard from everyone was the following:

1. There is an ongoing tension as the department tries to encourage more enrolment in upper-level courses by reducing the pre-requisites for them while at the same time dealing with a concern from students and faculty that it's hard to teach upper-level courses because there is such a wide range of knowledge and experience when enrolment is more open. On the positive side, we heard that KPU has not had to cancel any upper-level Journalism courses recently due to low enrolment, which other departments often need to do.
2. Another contributor to the tension is that students who do go on to major in journalism say that they feel they do not get introduced to basic concepts of news judgment, story pitching, story production, and editing until quite late in the program.
3. Along with that, they seem to consistently say they feel they don't get enough "real newsroom-type" experience in covering breaking news stories, as opposed to doing a lot of more feature-style or non-time-hooked news stories. They specifically mentioned wanting more of that newsroom experience for broadcast, so that they are producing something more like actual television- or radio-news stories as opposed to podcasts
4. There were some comments about the need for more diversity in the material presented in class, in the make-up of faculty, and in the opportunities to bring in visiting professors or speakers. At the same time, many commented on past positive experiences working with local First Nations on projects and KPU's links in general with local First Nations.

Clearly, the faculty is aware of much of this, particularly the first three.

Because of all the concern about attracting as many students as possible to journalism courses, while at the same time not wanting to have too much of disparity among students, that leaves faculty trying to walk a careful line between complete openness and a certain amount of restrictiveness. The faculty appears to be well aware of this throughout the self-study report.

REVIEWERS' VALIDATION OF THE SELF-STUDY REPORT CHAPTERS

CHAPTER 2: Curriculum Review

Criteria: This chapter provides a clear profile of the program graduates, relevant program learning outcomes, and a curriculum mapping assessment that adequately identifies any gaps in the program's curriculum. The assessment is supported by appropriate evidence and conclusions.

Standards for Assessing this Chapter:

- Strengths and areas of improvement identified in this chapter are supported by data and external review findings;
- Recommendations in this chapter are supported by data, a clear rationale, and external review findings.

The External Reviewers:

- ☒ Validate the Self-Study Report's findings and recommendations
- ☐ Do not validate the Self-Study Report's findings and recommendations

Rationale for this Determination:

The curriculum review was thorough, and includes information about journalism programs at other post-secondary institutions in BC, examining KPU's unique position as Metro Vancouver's only university offering a four-year Bachelor of Journalism degree.

The eight recommendations provided at the end of this chapter consider options to address many of the issues that students and faculty brought up.

Additional recommendations, if any, identified by the ERT— include a rationale for each recommendation:

The self-study report frequently brought up the question of reducing pre-requisites to encourage larger enrolments in particular classes, especially at the upper level.

It does not appear that pre-requisites are excessive and it's not clear how they could be reduced any further for upper-level courses without having an impact on the quality of work that can be expected in a senior story-production course. Yes, it means your upper-level courses are small, but that does not seem to be a concern for administration and the reality is that this is a small program that, no matter what contortions you go through, is not going to be able to offer courses at the frequency and range of Carleton or Toronto Metropolitan. Students choose KPU because it is close to them geographically and relatively affordable, not because they are comparing course options across the country.

There is some potential for reducing pre-requisites for some lower-level production-type classes that could bring in more students and potentially encourage more of them to pursue at least a minor in journalism and take more classes at the upper level.

The self-study report talks about the need for some better course definition and mapping to ensure that students are progressing through courses in a logical and skill-building way, especially for courses that are focused on news-story production. We encourage faculty to continue working on that, in order to eliminate any duplications and to demonstrate a clear path of steps towards advanced skills.

Finally, the self-study report mentions the idea of making "COMM 2100 Media Ethics and Law" a required course for the degree, an idea that some students seemed to like, and that seems to make sense for a Bachelor of Journalism degree. Certainly, it is standard in almost all journalism programs to have that as a requirement for people pursuing a full degree. The review team endorses that move.

CHAPTER 3: Program Relevance and Student Demand

Criteria: This chapter adequately assesses program's relevance, faculty qualifications and currency, connections to the discipline/sector, and student demand. The assessment is supported by appropriate evidence and conclusions.

Standards for Assessing this Chapter:

- Strengths and areas of improvement identified in this chapter are supported by data and external review findings;
- Recommendations in this chapter are supported by data, a clear rationale, and external review findings.

The External Reviewers:

- ☒ Validate the Self-Study Report's findings and recommendations
☐ Do not validate the Self-Study Report's findings and recommendations

Rationale for this Determination:

All of the recommendations in this section are well thought out and worth exploring.

Additional recommendations, if any, identified by the ERT— include a rationale for each recommendation:

One gap in this section is the absence of new efforts to improve racial diversity on the faculty. It's clear the journalism program has seen some changes in this area since its last review but it is an issue that needs additional work. This was brought up by students and another sector as an area where they think there is room for improvement.

The review team appreciates how difficult it is to recruit Indigenous and other non-white faculty. But there should be some reminder, as the faculty is working through changes following up on this review, that it is still a goal that hasn't been reached and that other strategies could be explored in the meantime.

Students and alumni mentioned the value of having INDG 1100 Introduction to Indigenous Studies. But there appears to be a desire for more content about Indigenous issues and Journalism. It may not be easy to find qualified professors who are Indigenous and want to teach full-time, but it could be worth exploring opportunities for an "Indigenous Journalist-in-Residence," funded by the university. There are some good candidates in the area, as KPU's Journalism faculty members would likely be aware.

There could also be a more conscious strategy about bringing in guest speakers, with some data-tracking. And there could be more methodical efforts to make sure that material related to Indigenous or other non-white communities is included in courses. One student mentioned that there is an Indigenous style guide available for media. At least some kind of reference to that in an introductory course that addresses newsroom practices on style, along with discussions about when a student or practicing journalist could or should use that, would be a good addition.

CHAPTER 4: Effectiveness of Instructional Delivery

Criteria: This chapter adequately examines the effectiveness of the instructional design and delivery of the program and student success. The assessment is supported by appropriate evidence and conclusions.

Standards for Assessing this Chapter:

- Strengths and areas of improvement identified in this chapter are supported by data and external review findings;
- Recommendations in this chapter are supported by data, a clear rationale, and external review findings.

The External Reviewers:

- ☒ Validate the Self-Study Report's findings and recommendations
☐ Do not validate the Self-Study Report's findings and recommendations

Rationale for this Determination:

This section, once again, is thorough. One thing it mentions is the "gap in experiential learning." This seems worth exploring.

Additional recommendations, if any, identified by the ERT—include a rationale for each recommendation:

As mentioned above, a repeated theme seemed to be that students felt they didn't get enough real-world "newsroom-type" experience.

The comments that were submitted from one of the students who participated reflected a common theme heard from all of them.

One student commented that the "strict deadlines" in the news reporting class initially seemed "daunting," but they quickly recognized their value, and they felt that more KPU journalism classes should be structured in this way to give students something more similar to a "real-world" experience. This does seem like a valuable skill for a KPU journalism major to sharpen, regardless of whether they pursue work in media, communications, government, the private sector, or any other work environment.

They commented that they worried about their lack of knowledge of writing TV or radio news segments, and were surprised at many of their classmates' lack of awareness around the basics of media law and defamation (like some other sources, this student said the media ethics and law course was very valuable and should be mandatory).

The Program Advisory Committee, struck in 2019 with professionals from the fields of both Journalism and Communications/PR, this sounds like a helpful initiative. The "news reporting" course, which was created with the PAC's input and offered for the first time in Summer 2022, was mentioned by students and faculty as being very valuable.

At the same time, we heard from some students who had great experiences working with The Runner, which they said is in serious need of more contributors. But this is an entirely optional, extra-curricular endeavour.

The review team does appreciate that there may be some challenges and restrictions around having journalism students working with The Runner. For example, the KPU Department of Journalism cannot oversee the publication. But considering students' desire for newsroom experience and the desire for more contributors in the real newsroom that already exists on KPU's campus, it seems like it could be worth pursuing some kind of partnership with The Runner. It might be worth exploring some kind of change to the program, where students who do not complete the ARTS 4800 Practicum course would be required to complete a certain number of hours working with The Runner, in a sort of internship or co-op model, and they earn credit for it.

One idea that came up during the interviews is having The Runner (or a section/off-shoot of The Runner) covering not only KPU campus news, but the broader Surrey-Langley community. For such a fast-growing and important part of Metro Vancouver, Surrey and Langley are covered by a relatively small number of full-time working journalists. It would not be a small or easy undertaking, but there could be opportunities for KPU journalism students to uncover some real-world enterprise stories about the broader Surrey community.

It could be worth exploring international field studies for the KPU journalism program, if the university could partner with journalism schools or organizations in other countries, not unlike the field studies undertaken by some other KPU programs including Art History. Among other benefits, this international experience might help make the KPU Bachelor of Journalism program more appealing for graduates of Langara College's two-year Journalism diploma. As the self-study report notes, although KPU has an articulation agreement with Langara so that Langara's Diploma grads can continue their studies at KPU, no Langara graduates have so far taken advantage of this opportunity. Offering them an international experience could potentially be another draw for them to come to KPU for their Bachelor degree, instead of joining the workforce with their Diploma.

CHAPTER 5: Resources, Services and Facilities

Criteria: This chapter adequately assesses program’s resources, services, and facilities from both the student and faculty perspective. The assessment is supported by appropriate evidence and conclusions.

Standards for Assessing this Chapter:

- Strengths and areas of improvement identified in this chapter are supported by data and external review findings;
- Recommendations in this chapter are supported by data, a clear rationale, and external review findings.

The External Reviewers:

- ☒ Validate the Self-Study Report’s findings and recommendations
☐ Do not validate the Self-Study Report’s findings and recommendations

Rationale for this Determination:

We heard only positive comments about the college’s available resources and facilities.

Additional recommendations, if any, identified by the ERT—include a rationale for each recommendation:

The one area where the program might look at having to boost its resources is if it does try to do more programming for “real-life” journalism experiences in print, audio, photo, and video. It sounded as though the department would need more photo, audio and video equipment in order to support a course where students did more daily newscast-style video or audio stories.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The self-study review demonstrates that the journalism department faculty are very aware of improvements that could be made and are highly sensitive to what their students and graduates are saying.

Many of the recommendations proposed are valuable. The self-study report indicates that faculty are ready to make more adjustments in the areas that have been identified as needing work.

Overall, the faculty, students and administration spoke highly of the program in general and it was a pleasure to hear their enthusiasm and reflections.

APPENDIX 1: EXTERNAL REVIEW SITE VISIT AGENDA

Kwantlen Polytechnic University Bachelor of Journalism/ Minor in Journalism External Review Remote Site Visit Agenda

February 1 & February 2, 2024

Via Microsoft Teams

Thanks to External Reviewers:

Frances Bula

Dan Fumano

Erin Ashenhurst

Thursday, February 1, 2024:

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|----------------|--|
| 12:40 - 13:20: | Introductions and Interview with Program Chair |
| 13:20 - 13:30: | Break |
| 13:30 - 14:30: | Meet with Students |
| 14:30 - 14:40: | Break |
| 14:40 - 15:20: | Meet with University Services Panel (Library Services/ Faculty Advising) |
| 15:20 - 15:30: | Break |
| 15:30 - 16:30: | Meet with Faculty |

Friday, February 2, 2024:

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| 12:30 - 13:30: | Meet with Alumni/Program Advisory Committee |
| 13:30 - 13:40: | Break |
| 13:40 - 14:20: | Meet Dean/Associate Dean |
| 14:20 - 14:30: | Break |
| 14:30 - 15:10: | Final Meeting with Program Chair |
| 15:10 - 15:20: | Break |
| 15:20 - 16:00: | External Review Team meets to discuss findings and coordinate their review. |

*All times are in Pacific Standard Time.