

**Faculty of Arts and Humanities
4-year plan 2015-16 to 2018-19**

The Faculty Plan

Section I: Strategic Priorities

Our goal is to be the academic destination of choice for Arts and Humanities students and scholars from across Canada and around the world.

To achieve this goal, over the next four years we will pursue five priorities:

1. Pedagogical Innovation and Development
2. Increased Internationalization
3. Engaging Alumni/Engaging the Community
4. Building on Research Excellence
5. A Culture of Communication

These five elements are interwoven in various ways that will become apparent as each is described in greater detail. They also closely track the four pillars of the University's most recent strategic plan, *Achieving Excellence on the World Stage*.

1. Pedagogical Innovation and Development

Western's Faculty of Arts and Humanities currently attracts students of an enviably high calibre. Our entering class has, for some time, had either the highest or second highest entering average of any comparable Faculty in Canada. The results are evident in various ways, and were most recently demonstrated via the Undergraduate Awards competition where Arts and Humanities students contributed 7 of Western's 12 "highly commended" students in this prestigious international essay competition. However, this standing, together with the University's exceptionally high minimum entering average, means that we are necessarily seeking to draw students from an exclusive (and hence relatively small) pool. These are students who have the grades and the talent to go pretty much wherever they want, and we are competing with all of the top schools in Canada and North America. We recognize that in order to attract such students we must give them a reason to choose Arts and Humanities at Western. Above all, we must ensure that we continually develop creative, relevant and stimulating academic content. A vibrant curriculum, informed by strong research, is our best asset. Over the next four years we will be focusing our energies on the following four key pedagogical elements.

a. Experiential and Community Service Learning

The Faculty, working with the Student Success Centre, is already the largest purveyor of experiential and community service learning at the University. This fact may come as a surprise to those outside the Faculty, who often wrongly assume that the Arts and Humanities are not “practical” or “engaged”. The longstanding collaboration with the Student Success Centre will be expanded, with connections being extended to various community institutions including Museum London, Owen Sound’s Tom Thomson Gallery, Pillar Non-Profit, Aeolian Hall, and various community groups. International efforts in Rwanda, Guatemala, and Cuba will continue and strategically expanded.

b. Expanded Digital Opportunities

As the flow of digital information continues to expand exponentially, the Faculty must take advantage of the opportunities that this brings to our doors. Building on the success of the Department of Philosophy in the first round of the Ontario Online Initiative, the Faculty will acquire and develop approaches and techniques that will allow us to deliver course content in innovative ways. Such developments will need strong support from the Teaching Support Centre’s e-learning resources. A key element will be the acquisition of readily accessible and customizable digital “templates” that make it possible, indeed easy, for professors to deliver online teaching, and facilitate online communication. To be effective, faculty members must be able to focus their attention on the delivery of academic content.

Further work will be done to foster the Digital Humanities at Western in order to develop digital competencies specifically relevant to the work of Arts and Humanities students (as well as competencies that will allow our students to reach out to other disciplines, and to the wider world of digital creativity and employment). “Big Data” is increasingly both a research tool and an object of research for Arts and Humanities students and scholars. Collaborations with partners in other disciplines and Faculties is essential to the success of this enterprise.

c. Putting Critical Thinking and Communication in the Foreground

The Faculty will ensure that its traditional strengths in the development of critical thinking and effective communication are highlighted among the learning outcomes of all its courses. Curriculum mapping will bring out the ways in which critical textual, linguistic and visual analyses are powerful tools for engaging with the information rich environment of today’s social, political, creative and work spaces. Learning outcomes will provide accessible metrics for the impact of these essential skills.

d. Curriculum Informed by Research

The Faculty is committed to the proposition that vibrant pedagogy depends on excellent research. When leading researchers deploy excellent teaching strategies, including the elements enumerated here, students are provided with the best possible learning opportunities.

2. Increased Internationalization

The Faculty is already heavily engaged in international teaching and research. Classical Studies is engaged with the Vindolanda field school at Hadrian's Wall, as well as other digs in Greece and Italy. French Studies and Modern Languages and Literatures are international in every possible way – research subjects and partnerships, exchanges, personnel and students. Film Studies has particular strengths in Latin American, American, Polish, Japanese and German Cinemas. English and Philosophy enjoy international reputations that draw graduate students from around the world to join leading edge research programs. Visual Arts has studio artists who exhibit their work around the world, and art historians who are recognized experts on European and Latin American artists. Finally Women's Studies and Feminist Research is engaged in significant research in India and the West Indies. Our reach truly extends around the globe.

Our goals in this area are to increase international student enrolments, to increase participation by Western students in international exchanges, study abroad and community service learning, and, finally, to increase research collaborations with international partners.

a. Attracting International Students

At the undergraduate level we need to highlight our strengths in teaching, research and pedagogical innovation. The leading candidate in this regard is the School for Advanced Studies in the Arts and Humanities (SASAH), which has already had some success in attracting international students. The Faculty will have to work closely with Admissions and Recruitment to identify appropriate global audiences for what is, in effect, an intensive liberal arts learning opportunity, delivered at moderate cost.

At the graduate level, the Faculty's ability to accept international students is bounded only by our capacity to provide funding to incoming students. In a number of programs, international students are easily among the very best applicants that we see. To overcome the financial limitation, the Faculty will need to explore various funding grant opportunities that would allow individual researchers to provide financial support to international students. The Faculty will also seek foundation and donor support for international scholarships. The Faculty will also seek to recruit government sponsored students – we have enjoyed some success on this front, particularly in the Linguistics MA.

b. Increasing participation in exchange and study abroad programs

The Faculty will need to make a concerted effort to explain the value of international study. Then, it will need to back up this commitment by finding scholarship funds to assist in defraying the additional costs of international exchanges, and by eliminating, where possible, non-monetary barriers to international travel. Such barriers include dealing with student concerns that international study may delay their progress to graduation (due e.g. to a need to acquire specific courses) or affect their progress to graduate or professional schools (because of poorer than expected grades derived from international sources). Many of these issues have already been addressed institutionally by Western or by the Faculty, but many students are wary. They require both reassurance and effective information. Go Global awards have been an effective vehicle for funding international travel and the Faculty will aggressively pursue further opportunities in this line.

c. Enhancing International Research

At a fundamental level, the main issue here is simply to support our faculty's research – as noted, it is already inherently international. The research issues are described more fully in the next section of this plan. Three specific proposals to be highlighted here are, first, the securing of seed funding to promote cross-institutional partnerships. Second, working with other Faculties at Western to identify and connect with appropriate international research groups. And third, making extensive use of the Visiting Scholar Program to bring distinguished international scholars to Arts and Humanities.

3. Engaging Alumni/Engaging the Community

Without question, the single biggest threat to the health and wellbeing of the Faculty is the mistaken belief that the Arts and Humanities are somehow divorced from the “real world” and that, as a result, A&H graduates stand no chance of securing meaningful employment. One striking fact about this pervasive but erroneous view is that it persists in the face of extensive empirical evidence to the contrary. Government of Ontario statistics show that approximately 90% of Humanities graduates are employed 2 years after graduation. And note that this figure does not include those students who go on to pursue professional, graduate or technical certification post-graduation, and so attain an even higher rate of employment.

This anti-Humanities ideology is so entrenched that, when its proponents are faced with the empirical evidence of employment statistics, they advert to the anecdotal claim that all of those who are employed are in menial, low wage jobs. When this proves, likewise, to be false (again, according to government statistics), then the argument shifts yet again to the claim that the jobs are not related to the fields of study in Arts and Humanities. At a certain point, one is entitled to conclude that there is an ideological prejudice in the mix, and empirical evidence, facts and

logical argument are insufficient to cut through the fog of distortions, presumptions and fallacies. The sad result is that prospective students who would both enjoy and benefit from an Arts and Humanities education are dissuaded from applying to our programs. It is clear that the Faculty cannot, by itself, hope to overcome these kinds of attitudinal biases that have now been entrenched as media tropes (though they should more accurately be described as “urban legends”). We need allies to help us demonstrate that our subjects are, and indeed always have been, relevant to and integrated into the community outside the academy. Historically, the Faculty has not been good at networking, at providing our students contacts in the community beyond the academy. That has to change.

A crucial first step in this undertaking is the mobilization of our alumni as ambassadors for our brand of education. Our outreach consistently uncovers alumni who have used their skills and knowledge to achieve success in a wide variety of fields and career paths. Their stories are compelling and need to be made available across a wide range of media. Second, as noted above in discussing pedagogy and curriculum, we need to engage the community both for the sake of our students’ education, and to allow the community to become better acquainted with what we do. To enhance our level of communication, we will, third, develop the *Public Humanities @Western*. This organization was built by English graduate students and post-doctoral students, and has now expanded to include undergraduates as well. Their goal is to build bridges between the University and the community by sponsoring lectures, performances and festivals that bring representatives of each group to the other’s “turf”.

It is absolutely necessary to start with the local community – to ensure that Londoners know what our Faculty can contribute to the city, and that our students appreciate what they can learn from being immersed in the life and history of the city in which they live. But we also need to develop the idea of a “community of communities” that extend from London to all parts of Canada and the continent, and from there, in various ways across the globe.

As we invigorate our network of alumni, we must work to integrate them as crucial partners in the process of education and research. Feedback from alumni about our teaching practices is essential. We must also work with our alumni to develop internship and apprenticeship opportunities for our students. Eventually, we will also need to develop these relationships into the possibility for fundraising and program support. While we cannot rely solely on alumni to fund pedagogical and research initiatives, they are a crucial source of information and support of all kinds, including financial and in-kind.

4. Building on Research Excellence

The Faculty has a longstanding tradition of excellence in research. We are home to a sizeable number of winners of the Hellmuth Prize (the University’s top award for research excellence), members of the Royal Society of Canada, and members of the *Ordre de Palmes Academiques* (recognition bestowed on distinguished academics by the French government). It should also be noted that the Department of English and Writing Studies and the Department Philosophy are

two of Western's three departments currently ranked by QS as among the top 100 departments in the world. In external reviews, all of our departments are consistently commended for the calibre of their scholarship.

However, the Faculty recognizes that research attainment is a kinetic enterprise, and we must enhance our capacities in order to advance our scholarly ambitions. First, the Faculty will undertake to ensure that all eligible researchers are encouraged to apply for grants, as appropriate for their discipline and topic. Second, the Dean's office, through the Associate Dean Research and Graduate Studies, will provide active support and advice to all such applicants. Together with the other SSHRC oriented Faculties, Arts and Humanities will explore ways in which we can collaborate, not just on research projects, but also in the sharing of grant writing and budgetary expertise. Mentoring of junior faculty is essential. And more attention needs to be allocated to mid-career faculty who are starting to apply for more substantial development and partnership grants. Finally, we have only recently made strenuous efforts to recognize the achievements of our colleagues by nominating them for prestigious national and international awards. These efforts need to be continued and expanded. Individual achievements, as well as the Faculty's underlying strengths in research and scholarship, need to be publically celebrated.

5. A Culture of Communication

In a climate dominated by anti-Arts and Humanities rhetoric, it is essential that the Faculty generate positive stories about the value of a liberal arts education, and the successes of Arts graduates. It turns out that these stories are not hard to find. But in order to have a real impact they require institutional support. Over the next four years, as the Faculty reaches out to alumni and the community at large, we must have the capacity to capture, process and deploy the narratives that are shared with us. In the last several years, the Faculty has had real success in this regard. Sarah Richardson, Cameron Bailey, Shelley Ambrose and Joseph Rotman (all Arts alumni) have all literally become "poster children" for Western's *Be Extraordinary* Campaign, and for the Arts and Humanities. The Nobel Prize awarded to Alice Munro also served to focus attention on the Faculty's connection to literature and creativity, a connection that is being given substantial form in the Alice Munro Chair in Creativity.

Likewise, the Faculty must shine a light on its teaching and research achievements. As with our alumni, it is not difficult to identify signal successes and contributions. But we have yet to develop a reliable way for converting these outcomes into information that is accessible to audiences both inside and outside the academy. Recently, we have managed to highlight some of this, as our faculty members have been successfully nominated for internal and external research and teaching awards and honours.

However, one needs to acknowledge that it is not easy to maintain this focus on communication. Even as SSHRC and other granting agencies stress the importance of "knowledge mobilization", individual scholars can end up feeling that this kind of outreach activity is an energy drain, and a distraction from the core mission of research and teaching. The

Faculty needs to address this possibility of “communication fatigue” from two directions at once. First, the Faculty, through the Communications Officer and the Faculty staff must provide adequate support to individuals. As in the case of e-Learning, faculty are primarily content providers, and should not be expected to be skilled in self-promotion or communicating with the media. At the same time, faculty members need to be sensitive to the value of promotion and interaction, and need to make the conveyance of information to the public sphere an automatic part of their work process. This imperative is fully consonant with the academic mission of the Faculty – our research and teaching will inform public consciousness only if our message reaches the right audience. Research and scholarship that we keep jealously to ourselves is ultimately antithetical to our academic enterprise. And we should not make the mistake of underestimating the intelligence of the broader public – while specialist research may sometimes require translation or context-setting in order to have full effect, the effort to make these adaptations is amply rewarded by the understanding, appreciation and interaction that it can engender.

In this digital age, it is clear that we must maintain a vibrant web presence, with dynamic content and full coverage of our academic activities. In addition to central Dean’s office and Departmental supports, we will provide training for any and all those in the Faculty who wish to develop web and social media skills. We will also pursue simple communicative strategies including holding an annual Research Day, either on our own or in conjunction with partner Faculties. We will periodically produce a Research Newsletter, and ensure that it is distributed to an expanded audience. And we will focus on the progress of our recent graduates, to track their path from the Faculty into their chosen careers.

The Faculty of Arts and Humanities has a proud record of scholarly success, and our graduates make significant contributions in Canada and abroad. These stories need to be acknowledged and celebrated. We have not always made enough of an effort to reach out beyond our immediate circles. We have begun to change that dynamic, and need to build communication into the foundation of our academic culture.