



Media Studies
Final Assessment Report & Implementation Plan
November 2025

Faculty / Affiliated University College	Faculty of Information and Media Studies (FIMS)	
Degrees Offered	MA, PhD	
Date of Last Review	2016-2017	
External Reviewers	Dr. Miranda Campbell Communication and Culture Program Toronto Metropolitan University	Dr. Adel Iskandar School of Communication, Simon Fraser University
Internal Reviewers	Dr. Cameron Anderson Member of SUPR-G Faculty of Social Science	Brianna Gonga-Cave PhD Candidate Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry
Date of Site Visit	March 24 & 25, 2025	
Date Review Report Received	September 3, 2025	
Date Program/Faculty Response Received	Program – October 21, 2025 Faculty – October 21, 2025	
Evaluation	Good Quality	
Approval Dates	SUPR-G: December 8, 2025 ACA: January 6, 2026 Senate (for information): January 16, 2026	
Year of Next Review	Year of next cyclical review: 2032-2033	
Progress Report	June 2028	

Overview of Western's Cyclical Review Assessment Reporting Process

In accordance with Western's Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the Final Assessment Report (FAR) provides a summary of the cyclical review, internal responses, and assessment and evaluation of the Graduate Media Studies Program delivered by the Faculty of Information and Media Studies.

This FAR considers the following documents:

- the program's self-study brief;
- the external reviewers' report;
- the response from the Program; and
- the response from the Dean, Faculty of Information and Media Studies.

This FAR identifies the strengths of the program and opportunities for program enhancement and improvement, and details the recommendations of the external reviewers – noting those recommendations to be prioritized for implementation.

The Implementation Plan details the recommendations from the FAR that have been selected for implementation, identifies who is responsible for approving and acting on the recommendations, specifies any action or follow-up that is required, and defines the timeline for completion.

The FAR (including Implementation Plan) is sent for approval through the Senate Subcommittee on Program Review - Graduate (SUPR-G) and ACA, then for information to Senate and to the Ontario Universities' Council on Quality Assurance. Subsequently, it is publicly accessible on Western's IQAP website. The FAR is the only document from the cyclical review process that is made public; all other documents are confidential to the Graduate Media Studies Program, Faculty of Information and Media Studies, the School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS), and SUPR-G.

Executive Summary

The home of the Media Studies graduate program, the Faculty of Information and Media Studies (FIMS), is an interdisciplinary, non-departmentalized faculty formed by the 1996 merger of the former Graduate Schools of Library and Information Science and Journalism. FIMS introduced a Master of Arts (MA) program in Media Studies in 2002 which is designed to be completed in three terms (one calendar year). In 2005, a 4-year Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) program was introduced comprising coursework, written and oral comprehensive exams and a thesis based on original research.

The Media Studies program offers opportunities for students to conduct advanced, interdisciplinary, critical, community-engaged research across media and disciplines. Enrolment in the MA Program in 2022-2023 was 10 students, with the PhD Program at 38.

The self-study was informed by student surveys and focus groups (independently for the MA and PhD) as well as a faculty survey and faculty and staff workshop.

The external reviewers shared a positive assessment of the Graduate Media Studies Program. They offer five recommendations with considerations for further enhancement.

Strengths and Innovative Features Identified by the Program

- Supportive student community with social opportunities and student-led initiatives like mediations and conferences.
- Faculty are well-known scholars with diverse expertise and strong networks, providing students access to conferences and research opportunities.
- Commitment to critical and progressive approaches via scholarship emphasizes materialist, historical, feminist, critical race, and anti-oppressive methodologies.
- Several research labs and large-scale projects provide training and financial support for many of Media Studies PhD students.
- Many courses designed to bridge disciplinary approaches and to enable students from a variety of information, communication, and media-related perspectives to talk together about theories, concepts, and research problems.
- Media Studies have a range of professional workshops (e.g., on grant writing, publishing, CV preparation) to augment their regular course offerings.
 - Increasing number of invited professionals and alumni give talks aimed at professionalization.
- Shift from 2-year thesis-based MA to 1-year project-based model that aligns with sector trends and student needs.
- Research-creation option in the MA offers an Independent Research Project (IRP) which allows for scholarly or research-creation projects, supporting alternative knowledge mobilization formats.

Concerns and Areas of Improvement Identified and Discussed by the Program

- Current format for field exams lacks clarity, consistency, and equity; students and faculty express confusion and anxiety. Requires clearer guidelines and possibly structural overhaul.
- A need to establish clear areas of strength and revise courses, website, and recruitment strategies to reflect Media Studies' unique identity.
- As part of fostering community in the program, students desire more informal networking and social events with faculty.
- Renewed recruitment strategy would help to attract stronger and more diverse applicants to the MA and PhD programs.
- Intranet outdated and difficult to use; unclear guidelines for scholarships, awards, and progression milestones.
- Limited financial support for PhD students; no guaranteed funding beyond year four; stipends considered low compared to cost of living.
- Some inconsistencies in supervisory support during exams and thesis stages; need for clearer expectations and mentoring culture.
- Students report frequent course cancellations due to low enrollment and desire more transparency and polling on course interests.

Review Process

As part of the external review, the review committee, comprising two external reviewers, one internal reviewer and a graduate student reviewer, were provided with Volume I and II of the self-study brief in advance of the scheduled review and then met in-person over two days with the:

- Vice-Provost, School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies
- Associate Vice-Provost, School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies
- Acting Vice-Provost, Academic Planning, Policy and Faculty
- Associate Chief Librarian and Team Members
- Dean, FIMS
- Associate Dean Graduate & Postdoctoral, FIMS
- Graduate Chair
- Graduate Committee Members
- Graduate Program Staff
- Program Faculty Members
- Graduate Students

Following the site visit, the external reviewers submitted a comprehensive report of their findings which was sent to the Program and Dean for review and response. Formative documents, including Volumes I and II of the Self-Study, the External Report, and the Program and Decanal responses form the basis of this Final Assessment Report (FAR).

The FAR is collated and submitted to the SGPS and to SUPR-G by the Internal Reviewer with the support of the Office of Academic Quality and Enhancement.

Summative Assessment – External Reviewers’ Report

External reviewers shared that *“the Media Studies MA and PhD programs are small but mighty programs that demonstrate good quality and rigour.”*

Strengths of the Program

- A culture and spirit of engagement and reflexivity in the Media Studies programs.
- Faculty are highly regarded scholars, actively engaged in research and teaching. Their collegial atmosphere and integration of their research into the curriculum are highlighted as major strengths. Students praised faculty quality and mentorship.
- Dedicated student spaces, classrooms, and library resources are impressive and conducive to learning and community building.
- Student theses and publications demonstrate rigorous and high-quality research.
- Good track records for MA students to complete the program in the allocated one year.

Prospective Areas of Improvement for the Program to Consider

- Ongoing reflexivity on EDI in program structure and environment, including reflexivity on a balanced inclusive academic culture that does not promote overwork.
- The shift to a one-year MA program has created a compressed timeline, causing stress and overwork for students. The IRP may be unrealistic within this timeframe.
- Need for continued clarity about the scope, parameters and timelines of the PhD Program. In particular, how to successfully navigate the comprehensive exam.
 - Four-year funding cap does not align with longer completion times.
- Fields exams are noted as a potential roadblock and slowdown student progress. Need for further clarity regarding the scope of these exams.
- Expand recruitment and program visibility efforts and allocate resources for website updates to showcase program strengths and faculty accomplishments.
- Current support information appears fragmented. Suggest creating a clear program handbook or FAQ guide for easy access to essential information.

Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations and Program/Faculty Responses

The following are the reviewers' recommendations in the order listed by the external reviewers.

Reviewers' Recommendation	Program/Faculty Response
Recommendation #1: Clarify the roles of faculty and support staff and create a clear flowchart so students know where to direct questions and access support efficiently.	Program: The Media Studies program provides comprehensive support through faculty advisers, program chairs, the Associate Dean Graduate (ADG), and the Graduate Student Services (GSS) team. In Fall 2025, a dedicated orientation was reinstated to clarify administrative processes and communication with GSS staff. Contact information has been made more prominent on the Intranet, and a visual guide outlining milestones, supervisory roles, and reporting requirements will be distributed to faculty and students. Additionally, the program plans to strengthen communication and clarify roles within the GSS team to improve overall support. Faculty: The Media Studies program has already started a formal orientation where administrative information and a flow chart is shared with graduate students. This is a good approach to mitigate heavy lifting by the Graduate Program Director (GPD) and ADG. As well the relocation of key information on the internet will also add clarity as to who to contact in what circumstances. It is also a great idea to provide additional resources to supervisors to help navigate communication channels.
Recommendation #2: Reassess the feasibility of the one-year MA program, considering a capstone paper instead of original research or marketing the program as accelerated if research remains a requirement.	Program: The Media Studies Program Committee is reviewing the MA structure and has determined that a four-term option is not practical due to timing issues for graduates. Proposed changes include reducing course requirements for the one-year option and adjusting IRP length, as well as introducing two distinct pathways: a revised one-year program and a thesis-based two-year option with a potential PhD fast track to attract a broader range of students. Additionally, efforts are underway to shift MA students from tutorial duties to grading-only roles in the first year to ease workload for both students and faculty. Faculty: We support the plans outlined by the program and acknowledge that reflection and restructuring is already underway. The considerations will help assess what can be accomplished in the new one-year degree and what adjustments are required in terms of the number of required and elective courses. We agree that the proposed changes to the GTA workloads will be helpful and reduce student stress.

Recommendation #3: Expand recruitment efforts, pitching the MA and PhD programs in ways that showcase the quality of the students and the faculty as well as program strengths and focuses. Allocate resources for an improved website and outreach strategy.	Program: The faculty communications team is rebuilding the website using updated institutional templates, introducing a modern design, improved navigation, and new features such as reorganized homepages and program graphics. Media Studies content has been refreshed with a new tagline, recruitment language, student research highlights, and plans for faculty research showcase pages. Additionally, a targeted digital advertising campaign will run on social media in late Fall 2025 to promote the MA program, generating engagement data to inform future outreach strategies. Faculty: The faculty acknowledges the challenges with recruitment and welcomes the development of new web pages that feature a modernized aesthetic and improved navigation. It is great to see that not only the features and organization of the web page has been updated, but also the recruitment language and inclusion of MA IRP projects of past students. This will showcase the program's strengths and focus to prospective students. The program worked closely with the FIMS communication team and specialist as well as FIMS computing services.
Recommendation #4: Further expand and build on EDI efforts, integrating EDI into program structure, beyond course content. Reflect on inclusive and equitable program culture, and steps to mitigate overwork and burnout amongst faculty and students.	Program: Media Studies graduate students are actively included in faculty-wide initiatives to strengthen equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), with recent events covering research ethics and GBSV training. Additional measures include expanded TA workshops addressing EDI-related issues, bystander/upstander training, and plans for an EDI recognition badge through combined modules. Broader efforts focus on enhancing inclusivity and reducing burnout by increasing IRP support, adjusting TA assignments, revising program structure, and offering mental health, self-care, and professional development workshops. The program also aims to improve accessibility through multi-format information, social activities, and faculty support for supervision. Faculty: The program is taking multiple steps to expand and build on EDI efforts to create an inclusive and equitable program culture. The program has proposed a number of important changes, including more support for the IRP, changing TA assignments, reconsidering overall structure of program at the MA level and potentially reducing the number of electives required for both MA and PhD, which will reduce workload and increase work/life balance addressing issues of inclusivity and equity. Additionally, the provision of information in multiple formats is a well-thought-out strategy to engage varied learners and create more points of contact for all members of the Media Studies program. The use of a pilot digital advertisement campaign is a good strategy to recruit graduate student and also gather statistics on click through rates.

Recommendation #5: Build in and expand support structures for incoming students in terms of support and onboarding. Consider creating a program handbook or an FAQ guide in PDF format for easy go-to information.	Program: In Fall 2025, the Media Studies program reinstated a dedicated orientation to review administrative processes and clarify Graduate Student Services roles. Program-specific information will be added to the “Get Started” website, and the FIMS Intranet—long used in place of a physical handbook—will be rebranded as the “FIMS Online Graduate Handbook” with updated content and interface for clarity. To improve accessibility, the program will also provide key information in multiple formats, including hard copy one-page summaries and visual guides. Faculty: The program has a good plan in place to build and expand support for incoming students and faculty. The idea of providing the information in multiple formats and through various channels is a good idea.
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Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan provides a summary of the recommendations that require action and/or follow-up. In each case, the Graduate Program Chair, in consultation with the SGPS and the Dean of the Faculty are responsible for enacting and monitoring the actions noted in Implementation Plan.

Recommendation	Proposed Action and Follow-up	Responsibility	Timeline
Recommendation #1: Clarify the roles of faculty and support staff and create a clear flowchart so students know where to direct questions and access support efficiently.	- Continue to clarify administrative processes and relevant points of communication at orientation events. - Relocate information detailing who to contact for specific inquiries to a more prominent section of the Intranet. - Circulate a clear guide/one sheet advisory for all supervising faculty and students with visualizations of program milestones, important dates and reporting requirements. - Clarify the roles and strengthen communications in the Grad Services Team.	Grad Chair, Grad Student Services	By January 2026
Recommendation #2: Reassess the feasibility of the one-year MA program.	- Examine the possibility of reducing the course requirements for the 1-year option by one elective and possibly reducing the length requirements for the IRP. - Examine the possible creation of two MA options – a rejigged 1-year option and a thesis based 2-year option with a potential PhD fast track. - Transition MA student TAs/ship roles from classroom tutorials to grading only positions, at least for the first year.	Grad Chair, Media Studies Program Committee	By December 2027

Recommendation #3: Expand recruitment efforts, pitching the MA and PhD programs in ways that showcase the quality of the students and the faculty as well as program strengths and focuses.	• Rebuild the Media Studies webpages with a modernized aesthetic and improved navigation, featuring a quick glance graphic for each degree program. ◦ Include the new tagline and recruitment language, a section showcasing MA IRPs of past students, current PhD student research and updated student profiles. ◦ Add faculty research showcase pages. • Pilot a digital advertising campaign targeting social media to promote the Media Studies MA.	FIMS Communication Specialist, FIMS Computing Services, Grad Chair	By June 2026
Recommendation #4: Further expand and build on EDI efforts, integrating EDI into program structure, beyond course content. Reflect on inclusive and equitable program culture, and steps to mitigate overwork and burnout amongst faculty and students.	• Offer additional professional development offerings related to mental health, self-care and EDIDIA related issues when serving in TA roles. • Raise awareness of existing EDIDA training on campus https://www.edi.uwo.ca/edi-learning/online-modules/e_path_by_nvision.html • Plan bystander/upstander training for all graduate student cohorts in FIMS. • Create a "badge" or some other form of recognition for these extracurricular activities. • Reconsider overall structure of the MA and potentially reduce the number of electives required for both MA and PhD. • Build more support for faculty members around supervision and guidance for their students. • Provide program information in multiple formats to address a variety of needs. • Create more social activities to build more program cohesion.	Grad Chair, MS Program Committee, Graduate Student Services	By September 2026

Recommendation #5: Build in and expand support structures for incoming students in terms of support and onboarding. Consider creating a program handbook or an FAQ guide in PDF format for easy go-to information.	• Update the program’s “Get Started” webpages to include program specific information for the Media Studies program. • Rebrand the Intranet as the “FIMS Online Graduate Handbook” to provide clarity about the Intranet’s function. • Provide program information in multiple formats, including hard copy one-pages and visualizations, to address a variety of needs.	Grad Chair, Graduate Student Services	By January 2026
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