Western UNIVERSITY·CANADA

Library and Information Science
Final Assessment Report &
Implementation Plan
May 2025

Faculty / Affiliated University College	Information and Media Studies (FIMS)	
Degrees Offered	MLIS, PhD	
Date of Last Review	2015-2016	
External Reviewers	Dr. André Vellino School of Information Studies University of Ottawa	Dr. Luanne Sinnamon School of Information University of British Columbia
Internal Reviewers	Dr. Immaculate Namukasa, Associate Dean (Graduate), Education	Cherin Chung Ph.D. Candidate, French
Date of Site Visit	February 3 & 4, 2025	
Date Review Report Received	March 25, 2025	
Date Program/Faculty Response Received	Program – May 7, 2025 Dean – May 7, 2025	
Evaluation	Good Quality	
Approval Dates	SUPR-G: June 23, 2025 ACA: September 9, 2025 Senate (for information): September 19, 2025	
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 program in Library & Information Science housed in Western's 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 Decanal Office, 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 Graduate Program Review Committee (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 graduate cyclical review process that is made public; all other documents are confidential to the Faculty of Information and Media Studies, the School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS), and SUPR-G.

Executive Summary

Graduate degrees in Library and Information Science (LIS) have been offered by the University of Western Ontario since 1967, with the founding of the original School of Library and Information Science and the establishment of the Master of Library Science degree. The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in LIS was instituted in 1973. The Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) program is reviewed regularly by the major North American accrediting body, the American Library Association (ALA) and has been accredited since 1969. In 2022-2023 full-time enrolment in the MLIS was at 96 students with 161 enrolled part-time. For the same academic year, there were 19 full-time PhD students with 9 enrolled part-time.

To inform the self-study, the MLIS and PhD LIS graduate programs undertook student surveys and focus groups. The MLIS limited duties instructors were equally surveyed with follow-up interviews. In addition, a retreat with faculty and students was facilitated by Western's Centre for Teaching and Learning in March 2024.

The external reviewers shared a positive assessment of the Graduate Library and Information Science Program offerings. They offer three overarching recommendations with considerations for further enhancement.

Strengths and Innovative Features Identified by the Program

- Canada's longest-standing MLIS co-op program, offering paid work experience across diverse sectors including libraries, government, museums, and corporations.
- Collaborations to support rural libraries' IT needs and accessibility planning projects with the London Public Library.
- Excellent facilities and resources, including the award-winning FIMS & Nursing Building, a faculty-supported FIMS Graduate Library with specialized collections, dedicated computing labs and makerspace, and extensive support from Western Libraries.
- Robust research culture exposes students to specialized research labs and the WAFAR program, which brings together interdisciplinary and international teams of scholars to address major issues.
- Strong EDIDA focus, with learning outcomes grounded in social justice and elective courses that deepen understanding of topics like accessibility, antiracism, aging, Indigenous knowledge, digital equity, and critical librarianship.
- Student surveys consistently highlight the program's flexibility, featuring three annual admission points, multiple delivery formats, full-time completion in as few as three terms, part-time options, and the ability to switch between full-time and part-time status.

- Newly approved MLIS online delivery option responds to strong demand for online courses and improves accessibility for students facing barriers like disability or location.
- Professional development opportunities prepare students for the changing employment landscape and further study through a workshop series organized by the MLIS Student Council.

Areas of Improvement Identified and Discussed by the Program

- Decline in faculty capacity due to unfilled retirements is limiting program development across multiple dimensions: 1) fewer LIS-focused faculty available for required courses; 2) faculty being shared across programs; 3) gaps in key areas like metadata and classification; and 4) restricted potential for online program growth due to limited expertise.
- Limited Duties instructors feel undervalued due to lack of transparency in course assignments, exclusion from program planning committees, and insufficient compensation for committee work and research.
- PhD students report facing critical financial challenges that impair academic progress.
  - Limited funding for conferences constrains professional development opportunities for PhD students.
- Expectations regarding time to completion do not accurately reflect student experiences. Surveyed students feel program requirements don't align with expected timelines, with financial challenges being a key factor in delayed completion.
- Professional development can be inconsistent and is largely dependent on individual supervisors. There is little formal support for job search skills like CV preparation and a need for more workshops on publishing in LIS and FIMS.
- Outside of Co-op, there are limited experiential learning opportunities, particularly for international students.
- Concerns exist regarding preserving the distinct LIS disciplinary identity within the interdisciplinary FIMS faculty.

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:

- Associate Vice-Provost of the School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies
- Acing Vice-Provost, Academic Planning, Policy and Faculty
- Director, Office of Academic Quality & Enhancement

- Dean, Faculty of Information and Media Studies
- Associate Dean, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
- Graduate Chairs
- Acting Associate Chief Librarian
- Director, FIMS Graduate Library
- Graduate Program and Department 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/Decanal response form the basis of this Final Assessment Report (FAR) of the FIMS Graduate Program. 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 LIS graduate programs are long standing, respected and effective programs. The MLIS program demonstrates notable flexibility with multiple entry points, various completion timelines, and a forthcoming online delivery mode which expands accessibility. The program succeeds well in balancing theoretical and practical knowledge in its curriculum, offers practical co-op opportunities for its students, and provides a broad range of faculty expertise.*"

Strengths of the Program

- Excellent facilities, including modern classrooms, and a dedicated graduate library.
- MLIS maintains ALA accreditation with curriculum regularly updated to reflect current priorities, including Indigenous perspectives, AI, data ethics, and community-based experiential learning.
- Highly qualified faculty members bring extensive research experience across diverse areas, including libraries, information ethics, health information, policy, globalization, and intellectual property.
  - Strong commitment to teaching, student growth, and fostering an intellectual climate of inquiry and social justice.
- Specialized research labs offer students opportunities to engage in impactful, funded research, with student publications reflecting current LIS issues like diversity, decolonization, and tech ethics.

- Incorporation of EDIDA into program-level learning outcomes, complemented by five decolonization and Indigenization content modules linked to each core course.
  - Faculty conduct diversity citation audits on course syllabi to monitor representation in readings and course materials.
- New online program format will include students in remote communities and those experiencing other impediments to in-person learning. This online delivery format may attract international students, aligning with the program's goals.
  - Part-time option, spanning 8 terms to 4 years, accommodates working professionals.
- Students value the interdisciplinary and flexible nature of the program.
- Revised Comprehensive Exam format improved student experience and accelerated progress toward the proposal stage.

Prospective Improvements for the Program to Consider

- Staffing challenges impact both teaching quality and research capacity. There is a priority need to hire and retain Indigenous faculty. (*Associated with Recommendation #1*)
- MLIS program's heavy reliance on part-time faculty, while offering structural flexibility, places significant teaching load on full-time faculty which limits their ability to offer research-driven elective courses. (*Associated with Recommendation #1*)
- Students report a need for clearer communication during admissions regarding registration options, costs, and study demands, particularly for the intensive one-year MLIS option that suits only certain student profiles. (*Associated with Recommendations #2*)
  - Students also feel underinformed about key aspects of their programs, funding, and available graduate services, indicating a need for improved internal communication strategies.
- Incoming Ph.D. students would benefit from information about funding structures and how external and internal funding operate. (*Associated with Recommendations #2*).
- Structural issues create barriers to student success and satisfaction. A notable gap exists between Ph.D. expected timelines and actual time-to-completion. (*Associated with Recommendation #2*)
- MLIS 12-month timeline proves unrealistic for many students due to heavy workload. Students extending to 16 or 20 months pay higher costs for the same number of courses, causing confusion and dissatisfaction. (*Associated with Recommendation #2*)
- Some students face challenges in selecting courses aligned with their career goals and would benefit from additional support such as faculty advisors, group advising sessions, and curated course clusters. (*Associated with Recommendation #2*)

- Limited local co-op opportunities force some MLIS students to relocate for placements; the online program may help by allowing students to find placements in their regions. (*Associated with Recommendation #3*)
    - Alternatives like practicums or professional experience courses that allow students to gain hands-on experience may respond to the co-op program's limited accessibility.

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: **Faculty Complement** 1.1 Increase efforts to include Limited Duty faculty in program governance. 1.2 Prioritize the recruitment and retention of Indigenous faculty. 1.3 Program growth should be contingent on an increase in the number of full-time LIS faculty.	**Program:** 1.1 The LIS program includes Limited Duties (LD) faculty in its governance through representation on the MLIS Program Committee (MLISPC) and regular Zoom meetings with core course instructors. To further strengthen their involvement, the program will: 1) Maintain a mailing list for timely communication; 2) Include LD faculty in events held for full-time faculty members, as applicable; 3) Improve LD faculty profiles on the website; and 4) Explore mentorship and integration opportunities for LD faculty to further foster community connection within FIMS. 1.2 The Dean's Office is responsible for recruitment and retention of faculty members. The program notes that this investment aligns with the EDIADI focus within the program. 1.3 The program agrees that MLIS program growth should depend on increasing LIS faculty and acknowledges that program quality would suffer without adequate faculty resources. **Faculty:** The Dean's Office: 1.1 supports efforts to involve Limited Duty Faculty in governance, along with the initiatives highlighted in the program's response. 1.2 continues efforts to recruit Indigenous faculty. In 2021, FIMS hired two Indigenous faculty members—one gained probationary status in 2024, while the other left for another institution. A recent Tier II CRC applicant was recruited but not shortlisted by the university search committee. The Faculty will take every recruitment opportunity to appoint and support Indigenous faculty colleagues, and agree that recruiting Indigenous LIS scholars with expertise in Indigenous Studies is important to sustain curricular developments. 1.3 agrees that MLIS growth depends on increase in full-time LIS faculty. Current faculty recruitment includes a probationary appointment to the MLIS program to begin July 1, 2025. Enrolments in the online MLIS will be monitored and positions will be requested accordingly.

Recommendation #2: Strengthen student advising and communication	**Program:**
2.1 Improve communication regarding funding structures, limitations, and caps for PhD students. 2.2 Provide PhD applicants with realistic total program costs. 2.3 Develop a streamlined communication approach for LIS graduate students. 2.4 Clarify communication regarding the implementation plan for the online program and articulate expectations for students in the hybrid option. 2.5 Provide increased guidance for MLIS students.	2.1 An audit will be conducted to clarify doctoral funding information online. Workshops and faculty support for external scholarship applications will continue. The program supports continuing the successful Dean's PhD Completion Bursary. A new Tri-Council program appears to be expanding funding eligibility to international students. 2.2 The Graduate Affordability Calculator is now included in SGPS and FIMS welcome letters, with links to TA and scholarship info. Funding breakdowns are available via SGPS' MERCURY platform, which FIMS will help keep updated. The LIS PhD website will be updated with median completion times and funding model data. 2.3 Graduate Services Staff send essential, time-sensitive communications. The program is considering a blog-style intranet for easier access to announcements. Orientation will clarify communication channels. Instructors will receive Brightspace best practices to reduce email volume. Weekly office hours will be held by the GSS Manager to support students with administrative matters. 2.4 An email sent on April 15, 2025, addressed student questions about the online MLIS pathway and invited further discussion with the Grad Chair. Student questions can equally be addressed at the weekly administrative office hours. 2.5 FIMS is working with Computing Services and the MLISPC to tag courses with career paths and display this on the MLIS website/intranet. This topic can also be discussed during weekly administrative office hours. A trial course selection session will be held before each registration period. **Faculty:** The Dean's Office supports: 2.1 the program's audit of doctoral funding information. The FIMS PhD Completion Bursary has supported students annually since 2023, with a total of eight bursaries awarded over three years. A review will follow the third year to consider renewal. 2.2 the program's efforts to share funding information, including the SGPS Graduate Affordability Calculator, are appreciated. Adding data on LIS PhD median completion times to the website is also seen as a valuable improvement. 2.3 the program's efforts to streamline communication are appreciated, especially given the urgency of some messages. The Dean's Office is considering a digest format to consolidate key updates and reduce email overload. 2.4 the program has now communicated with students about the online and hybrid MLIS pathways. The Dean's Office supports the initiative to hold weekly office hours for ongoing student support. 2.5 tagging courses with career paths on the MLIS website/intranet will help students make informed choices. Weekly office hours will further support students by providing guidance and program information.

Recommendation #3: Curriculum and Assessment 3.1 Strengthen the MLIS program assessment. 3.2 Expand experiential learning opportunities for MLIS students and provide professional development for PhD students. 3.3 Explore the potential for a unified FIMS PhD program with disciplinary fields.	**Program:** 3.1 Co-op students will now create personalized learning outcomes with their employers at the start of their placement, which will be reviewed during the final assessment. The implementation of a capstone project is delayed due to major ongoing initiatives, it will be reconsidered once these are completed. 3.2 Nearly 50% of courses align with the Experiential Learning (EL) outcome. The program will audit all experiential learning to ensure it's reflected in syllabi and learning outcomes before deciding on expansion. "Own Your Future" will remain part of first-year programming, alongside FIMS 9800 and the graduate student conference. Professionalization training will continue throughout the PhD program. 3.3 Plans for a unified PhD program are currently on hold. The program is focusing on highlighting the strengths of the LIS and Media Studies graduate programs, updating the website, revising program requirements, and developing a required LIS theory course. **Faculty:** The Dean's Office supports: 3.1 the proposed strategy to enhance MLIS program assessment and agrees with the timeline for implementing an end-of-program capstone. 3.2 the plan to map experiential learning (EL) components across the curriculum to guide future offerings. The program already provides professional development for doctoral students and welcomes additional events to support both academic and non-academic career paths. 3.3 the idea of a unified FIMS PhD program has been discussed, but for now, the LIS and Media Studies committees are focused on emphasizing their distinct strengths. The topic may be revisited in the future.

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. Of note, recommendations specific to hiring are outside the scope of this review process – proposed actions below are in support of prioritizing and planning.

Recommendation	Proposed Action and Follow-up	Responsibility	Timeline
Recommendation #1: **Faculty Complement** 1.1 Increase efforts to include Limited Duty faculty in program governance. 1.2 Prioritize the recruitment and retention of Indigenous faculty. 1.3 Program growth should be contingent on an increase in the number of full-time LIS faculty.	1.1 Ensure that there is LD faculty representation on the MLIS Program Committee each term. Further strengthen LD involvement by improving LD faculty profiles on the website and exploring mentorship and integration opportunities to foster stronger community connection within FIMS. 1.2 Prioritize recruitment of Indigenous LIS scholars. 1.3 Monitor enrolments in the online MLIS and prioritize additional positions accordingly.	Dean's Office Graduate Chair	1.1 By December 2025 Follow-up as part of progress report in June 2028

Recommendation #2: Strengthen student advising and communication 2.1 Improve communication regarding funding structures, limitations, and caps for PhD students. 2.2 Provide PhD applicants with realistic total program costs. 2.3 Develop a streamlined communication approach for LIS graduate students. 2.4 Clarify communication regarding the implementation plan for the online program and articulate expectations for students in the hybrid option. 2.5 Provide increased guidance for MLIS students.	2.1 a) Conduct an audit of doctoral funding information posted online; b) continue hosting workshops and providing faculty support for external scholarship applications; c) explore new Tri-Council program funding eligibility for international students; d) continue offering the Dean's PhD Completion Bursary. 2.2 Continue providing funding information, including the SGPS Graduate Affordability Calculator; Include data on LIS PhD median completion times to the program's website. 2.3 Streamline communication ensuring time-sensitive messages are circulated; Consider a newsletter format to consolidate key updates and reduce email overload; Hold weekly office hours with the GSS Manager and applicable staff. 2.4 Hold weekly office hours for ongoing student support and addressing questions pertaining to the online and hybrid MLIS pathways. 2.5 Tag courses with career paths on the MLIS website/intranet and provide further guidance and program information at the weekly office hours.	Dean's Office Graduate Chair	By December 2025 December 2026 for item 2.5
Recommendation #3: Curriculum and Assessment 3.1 Strengthen the MLIS program assessment. 3.2 Expand experiential learning opportunities for MLIS students and provide professional development for PhD students. 3.3 Explore the potential for a unified FIMS PhD program with disciplinary fields.	3.1 Enhance MLIS program assessment, for instance by revamping the requirements for co-op students to craft individual learning outcomes with their employers at the onset of their co-op; Work towards implementing an end-of-program capstone. 3.2 Map experiential learning components across the curriculum to guide future offerings. Explore additional professional development for doctoral students to support both academic and non-academic career paths. 3.3 In due course, revisit discussion of a unified FIMS PhD program.	Dean's Office Graduate Chair	By December 2026 for item 3.1 By December 2027 for item 3.2 Follow-up on item 3.3 as part of progress report in June 2028