



Theory and Criticism
Final Assessment Report & Implementation Plan
May 2026

Faculty / Affiliated University College	Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Faculty of Social Science, Faculty of Information and Media Studies	
Degrees Offered	M.A., PhD	
Date of Last Review	2017-2018	
External Reviewers	Dr. Robert Gibbs Professor, Department of Philosophy University of Toronto	Dr. Nathan Brown, Professor, Department of English Concordia University
Internal Reviewers	Dr. Krzysztof Kapulkin, Professor, Department of Mathematics	Kaitlyn Wade, PhD Candidate, Computer Science
Date of Site Visit	March 3 & 4, 2026	
Date Review Report Received	March 24, 2025	
Date Program/Faculty Response Received	Program Response: April 22, 2026 Faculty Response: April 17, 2026	
Evaluation	Good Quality	
Approval Dates	SUPR-G: June 15, 2026 ACA: September 8, 2026 Senate (for information): September 18, 2026	
Year of Next Review	2033-2034	
Progress Report	June 2029	

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 Theory and Criticism Program, delivered by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Faculty of Social Science, Faculty of Information and Media Studies (FIMS).

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 Arts and Humanities.

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 Subcommittee on Program Review - Graduate (SUPR-G) and the Senate Committee on Academic Curriculum and Awards (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 Theory and Criticism Program, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Faculty of Social Science, FIMS, the School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS), and SUPR-G.

Executive Summary

The Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism was created in 1986 as Canada's only Centre for interdisciplinary theoretical research housed between the Faculties of Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences. Since the inception of its MA program in theory in 1990, the Centre has been the preferred destination for students of excellent caliber from Canada and from abroad, and this tradition has continued at the doctoral level since the launching of the PhD program in 2002. With total enrolment in the MA at 21 students and 45 students in the PhD (in 2023-2024), the Theory and Criticism program is now supported by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the Faculty of Social Science, and FIMS. Core faculty are drawn from not only these but also the Don Wright Faculty of Music and the Affiliated University Colleges (Huron and King's).

The interdisciplinary study of theory and criticism requires an understanding of the presuppositions and limits of the disciplines under discussion and of what it means to work across these disciplines. The program fosters this understanding in courses that take up theoretical issues from a number of disciplinary perspectives and that also work across these disciplines. Independent research, in both courses and the thesis, requires students to delimit a field of study and to articulate the borders of their own work as well, to come to an understanding of where their work cannot yet go.

The self-study was informed by a survey and focus group session with current students as well as an anonymous survey of faculty members affiliated with the program. The external reviewers shared a positive assessment of the graduate Theory and Criticism Program. They offer four recommendations with considerations for further enhancement.

Strengths and Innovative Features Identified by the Program

- The students run their own journal of theory, *Chiasma*, which includes peer-reviewed articles, interviews, and book reviews. The students also regularly organize and host conferences and seminars.
- In varied professional development offerings, students have the opportunity to hone their skills in writing grant applications, applying for conferences, writing and delivering conference papers, academic publishing, and navigating the academic (and non-academic) job market.
- A vibrant speaker series where students have the opportunity to serve as respondents, ask questions, and converse with speakers more informally. Students also run "Theory Sessions", a forum for their own works in progress.
- Generous financial support for students to offset the cost of travel for research and scholarly conferences.
- Active commitment to EDI, decolonization, and Indigenization. The program embeds these principles across its curriculum (e.g., course on "Psychoanalysis and Indigenous Critical Theory"), maintains a faculty-student Equity Committee,

and has updated the Core Qualifying Exam reading list to include antiracism and decolonization theory.

- The Centre participates in Western's Centre for Transitional Justice as an affiliated program so that students can participate in the Collaborative Specializations in Transitional Justice and Environment and Sustainability.

Concerns and Areas of Improvement Identified and Discussed by the Program

- Tightening budget and the resulting reduction in cohort sizes.
- Persistent gender imbalance and small applicant pool.
- Opportunity to bring more new scholars and faculty to the program, emphasizing the importance of connecting new faculty members to students and to the spirit of the program.
- Expand and better integrate professionalization workshops, with an opportunity to restore a regularly taught core course in methods and professionalization to the program.
 - o Students and faculty have identified a gap in structured preparation for the study of theory and the qualifying exams that could be served by a core course.
- There currently is no co-op program established for graduate students, but there may be opportunities in the future to connect students with community programs.

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, Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies
- Vice-Provost, Academic Planning, Policy and Faculty
- Director, Office of Academic Quality and Enhancement
- Administrative Coordinator, School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
- Dean, Faculty of Arts and Humanities
- Associate Dean Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies, Faculty of Arts and Humanities
- Program Director
- Program Faculty Members
- Graduate Program and Departmental Staff
- 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 program is *“excellent by every educational metric. Founded 40 years ago, the Centre is still at the leading edge of graduate education in its field, with brilliant students, renowned professors, and a strong curricular structure.”*

Strengths of the Program:

- Distinguished faculty complement, diverse in methods and disciplines.
- Outstanding student quality, publications, and time-to-completion.
- Funding is competitive and generous.
- Non-dogmatic or restrictive approach to inquiry, cultivating the intellectual freedom of the students (and the professors), and fostering critical thinking in relation to human values.
- Particularly rigorous multi-stage process of assessment for the MA program.
- The uniqueness of the program draws talented and intelligent students who would not always fit in a more discipline specific graduate program.

Prospective Areas of Improvement for the Program to Consider

- Development of a core course, mandatory in the first year of the program, which would be coordinated by the Director and co-taught by faculty affiliated with the program (associated with recommendation #3).
- Bring together all partner Faculties through regular Steering and Advisory Committee meetings (associated with recommendation #1).
- Restore full-time, dedicated Graduate Program Coordinator to maintain continuity and institutional knowledge (associated with recommendation #2).
- Build structured occasions for sustained faculty engagement, for instance through the organization of *faculty colloquium* meetings on a monthly basis (associated with recommendation #3).
- Work toward more even distribution of supervisory duties among affiliated faculty members (associated with recommendation #4).
- Support the Centre's autonomy as essential to its interdisciplinary culture and international standing.

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: Strengthen Tri-Faculty Governance and Program Autonomy To sustain the role of all three faculties in the governance of the program, it is recommended that the Steering and Advisory Committee meet annually. The Committee should also approve a new four-year academic plan.	Program: The Steering and Advisory Committee typically meets annually. During this meeting, the Director discusses some of the big picture issues regarding the Theory Centre, including: budget, admissions trends, program design modifications, recent student and faculty success, and the Theory Centre's long-term vision (4 year plan). The Steering and Advisory Committee has met intermittently in recent years. The Theory Centre Director will ensure that the Steering and Advisory Committee meets annually. At the upcoming meeting in May 2026, the Director will also present a new four-year academic plan. The Director will be able to present the big picture issues to all members of the committee so that information and knowledge about the Theory Centre can be properly shared and flow among all involved faculties. This annual meeting will help to reaffirm our connections across the three faculties. Faculty: The Dean's office supports the program's response.
Recommendation #2: Restore a Dedicated Full-Time Program Coordinator Because of the unique graduate education structure of the program, it is recommended to staff the Graduate Coordinator Position with a single administrator in a full-time role, handling the range of administrative tasks the program requires, including financial management, TA appointments, faculty affiliations, student progress, and advising.	Program: The Theory Centre has been fortunate to have a full-time staff Program Coordinator, until recently. The persons that we have had in the Program Coordinator role have provided immense knowledge, stability, and support for the daily operations of the Theory Centre. The Program is now in a period of transition without any person fulfilling the role of Program Coordinator. Some of the duties of the role have been parceled to other staff members in the faculty to fill in on a short-term basis. The Program urges support and have asked for the replacement of a Program Coordinated as a single position in a full-time role. The request is that the Arts and Humanities Faculty support the rehiring of this position. An alternate plan is to work with available staff in the Faculty who would be trained to support the program. Faculty: The Dean's office recognizes the many years of valuable service of the previous Program Coordinator. Staffing, however, is a budgetary decision that requires looking at the needs of the Faculty as a whole.

Recommendation #3: Foster Faculty Engagement Through Structured Programming Two measures are recommended in this respect: a) the organization of a faculty colloquium meeting on a monthly basis, at which faculty affiliated with the program present their own research. b) the development of a core course which would be co-taught by faculty affiliated with the program.	Program: The program has the challenge of creating forums for intellectual and social community since there is no standing faculty and faculty offices are dispersed across campus. We welcome having more structured opportunities for student and faculty discussions: a) Standing faculty at the Theory Centre do regularly deliver talks in the Theory Sessions Speaker Series. The program will formalize a more consistent faculty colloquium and mobilize the Research Committee, which helps to solicit speakers. The program anticipates being able to schedule a faculty colloquium at least once a semester. b) In 2025-2026 the program reintroduced a pilot course designed for incoming students to focus on methods and skills in critical theory. A modification to the program will be initiated by instituting this course as a requirement for all first year MA and PhD students. Faculty: The Dean's office supports the program's response.
Recommendation #4: Improve Distribution of Supervisory Responsibilities The program should work toward a more even distribution of supervisory duties among affiliated faculty. Two possible ways of achieving this are: a) The admissions committee could identify a faculty advisor to each student when reviewing the files and making offers. Or b) A process could be implemented whereby each student meets with the Graduate Program Leadership committee at the end of the second semester in the program to discuss possible supervisors and how their preference accords with the current distribution of supervisory duties.	Program: The Program recently added a policy that a faculty member can only take on a maximum of one new student per year. Although students are not asked to have a supervisor before they are admitted to the program, students are connected with potential faculty supervisors when they enter in first year. The program also ask that students in the first year contact several faculty to get to know their potential interests. In order to have a more even distribution of supervisors across the faculty, we will be able to institute a meeting with each student and the Director. At the end of the first semester, the Director will be able to advise the student as to possible supervisors and their availability. This meeting will allow for the Director to encourage a better distribution of supervision across the core faculty. Faculty: Although the Dean's office supports the program's response, we also encourage the program to keep 4a) in mind, particularly if they find it difficult in the future to distribute supervisory roles more evenly and fairly. Since a similar process of assigning advisors to incoming students has been implemented in Philosophy, the program could consult with the Philosophy graduate chair about how to achieve 4a).

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: Strengthen Tri-Faculty Governance and Program Autonomy	- Ensure that the Steering and Advisory Committee meets annually. - Present a new four-year academic plan at the spring 2026 meeting.	Program Director	By June 2026, then ongoing
Recommendation #2: Restore a Dedicated Full-Time Program Coordinator	- Provide the support for the rehiring of this full-time position, as budgetary priorities allow. - Alternatively, or in the interim, train available staff in the Faculty to support the program.	Dean's Office; Program Director	By December 2026
Recommendation #3: Foster Faculty Engagement Through Structured Programming	- Formalize a more consistent faculty colloquium at least once per term. - Mobilize the Research Committee to help solicit speakers. - Recommend that faculty also include other program affiliate members as guest speakers in their classes. - Initiate a program modification to institute a core course as a requirement for all first year MA and PhD students (the one piloted in 2025-2026).	Program Director; Research Committee	By December 2026
Recommendation #4: Improve Distribution of Supervisory Responsibilities	- Discuss and decide on a feasible and effective approach, which may consist of: - o Instituting a meeting with each student and the Director at the end of the first term of the program. - o Assigning advisors to incoming students.	Program Director; Steering and Advisory Committee	By January 2027