



Thanatology
Final Assessment Report & Implementation Plan
September 2025

Faculty / Affiliated University College	King's University College	
Degrees Offered	Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)	
Date of Last Review	2016-2017	
Modules Reviewed	Honours Specialization in Thanatology Specialization in Thanatology Major in Thanatology Minor in Thanatology	
External Reviewers	Dr. Kathy Kortess-Miller School of Social Work Lakehead University	Dr. Erica G. Srinivasan Psychology Department University of Wisconsin at La Crosse
Internal Reviewer	Dr. Christine Tsang Chair, Dept of Psychology Huron University College	Evan Abbey Honours Specialization in English Language & Literature
Date of Site Visit	January 16 & 17, 2025	
Date Review Report Received	February 13, 2025	
Date Program/Faculty Response Received	Program: March 27, 2025 Faculty: June 3, 2025	
Evaluation	Good Quality with Report in Two Years	
Approval Dates	SUPR-U: October 21, 2025 ACA: October 28, 2025 Senate (for information): November 14, 2025	
Year of Next 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 Thanatology Program delivered by King's University College.

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 Academic Dean, King's University College.

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 Undergraduate Program Review Committee (SUPR-U) 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 undergraduate cyclical review process that is made public; all other documents are confidential to the Program, King's University College, and SUPR-U.

Executive Summary

The first course examining death and dying was offered at King's in 1976. From that one course the program grew. A Certificate in Loss, Grief and Bereavement was launched in 1994. A Minor was added in 2007, and the Major was added in 2009. Thanatology became a department in 2021; prior to that it was a stand-alone program part of the Department of Interdisciplinary Programs.

Offering 37 half-courses across its modules, and with a modular enrolment of 90 students in 2023-2024, the program's mission is to inspire students to: i) view death, grief, loss, and transition with greater acceptance, ii) live a more intentional and purposeful life both personally and professionally, and iii) optimally support others through loss and transition.

The self-study was informed by dedicated focus groups with students and practicum preceptors. Equally a student survey asked about life in the program, what students liked, what they found challenging, workload concerns and how they thought the Thanatology program might be improved. Other data sources included a dedicated practicum survey and experiential needs assessment. The development of the self-study narrative was guided by several faculty/staff retreats and was supported by a curriculum mapping exercise.

The external reviewers of the Thanatology Program offer four recommendations with considerations for further enhancement.

Strengths and Innovative Features Identified by the Program

- Only undergraduate degree program in Thanatology across North America, establishing continental leadership in this area of undergraduate education.
- Courses are offered online, in-class (day and evening) and in hybrid modalities. This flexibility provides the opportunity to study while living at a distance.
 - Pioneering online delivery since 1998, demonstrating long-standing commitment to accessible education.
- Trauma-informed and culturally safe teaching approach grounded in EDID principles.
 - Integration of Indigenous perspectives emphasizing relational autonomy.
- Strong professional connections through membership in numerous disciplinary and professional organizations.
- Courses are increasingly embracing inclusive and adaptive assessment by offering creative alternatives to traditional essays, incorporating reflective practices, and evolving content to meet changing societal needs.
- Strong student engagement: 1) vibrant Thanatology Student Club with robust social media presence; 2) diverse programming from "death cafés" to theatrical

performances; 3) High student satisfaction with interdisciplinary nature and strong sense of departmental belonging; and 4) Students report excellent preparation for both professional careers and everyday life.

- Grief Symposium brings together international scholars and actively engages students in collaborative research partnerships.
- Extensive Practicum Network including 33 established preceptors; diverse practicum placements across varied settings including hospitals, funeral homes, and community organizations.
- 65% of program graduates pursue graduate studies and others are successfully employed across diverse sectors such as law, medicine, academia, and psychosocial oncology.
- Current students identify the principal strengths of the program as program content and scope, creative and flexible papers/projects, use of media and guest speakers, small class sizes, as well as passionate and approachable instructors.

Principal Concerns and Areas of Improvement Identified and Discussed by the Program

- Critical staffing and succession decisions lie ahead: 1) imminent faculty retirements creating urgent succession planning needs; 2) unsustainable workload with most professors working over 60 hours per week; 3) heavy reliance on part-time instructors who teach the majority of courses; 4) greater need for dedicated administrative support.
 - Struggle to find people who are uniquely qualified to teach within this “one-of-a-kind” department.
- Lack of dedicated time and support for faculty and student research. Limited full-time Faculty equally hinders ability to offer a thesis option.
- An inability to offer a standalone certificate has led to a loss of community-based adult learners.
- Limited experiential learning opportunities—due to practicum competition, faculty resource constraints, and postponed international experiences—restrict program enrichment.
- Student feedback highlights issues such as lack of course consistency and continuity and limited career preparation for those not pursuing graduate studies.
- There is a large number of students who are not enrolled in a Thanatology Minor, Major, Honours Specialization, or Certificate, but are taking Thanatology courses as electives.

Review Process

As part of the external review, the review committee, comprising two external reviewers, an internal Faculty reviewer and 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 (Academic Programs)
- Director of Academic Quality and Enhancement
- Interim President, King's University College
- Interim Academic Dean
- Associate Academic Dean
- Associate Dean of Research
- Director of Enrolment Services & Registrar
- Director of Information Technology Services
- Director of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Decolonization
- Associate Librarian, Acquisitions & Collection Strategies
- Chair, Department of Thanatology
- Administrative Staff
- Program Faculty
- Program 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) of the King's Thanatology Program. The FAR is collated and submitted to SUPR-U 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 innovative and responsive to the context in which their students are learning despite its ongoing sustainability concerns. The program has extremely dedicated faculty and staff who centre student learning. Students overwhelmingly indicate that they value the Thanatology program and would choose to receive this unique education again if they had the decision to repeat. The small class sizes and student-centred approach make the Thanatology program very attractive to students alongside the unique course offerings and knowledgeable, compassionate faculty.”*

Strengths of the Program

- Robust and current curriculum that addresses emerging topics such as climate, grief and social justice. Compared to similar programs (largely at the Master's

level), it provides broader and more contemporary coverage, integrating theoretical foundations with real-world relevance across diverse contexts.

- Faculty demonstrate exceptional academic and professional achievements, including awards for teaching excellence, research publications, and international recognition through speaking engagements and media contributions.
- Serves students of varied ages and professional backgrounds by offering flexible course formats – online, hybrid, and in-person – and scheduling options that accommodate those balancing work, caregiving, or career transitions.
- Dedicated administrative support, strong collaboration with the writing centre for its essay-focused curriculum, and effective assistance from the research office in securing funding.
- The Program is highly respected in the field and is the only place in North America that offers an undergraduate degree in Thanatology. The existence of the program at King's is a major strength.

Areas of Concern or Prospective Improvement

- Current program structure is unsustainable, with only one tenured faculty member expected in Fall 2025, heavy reliance on part-time instructors, recent retirements and resignations have left the department unable to consistently offer required courses, compromising its ability to meet program objectives and learning outcomes.
 - While a new 2-year LTA position offers temporary relief, long-term development and stability require permanent faculty appointments. *(Associated with Recommendation #1)*
 - A number of required courses were not offered or available to students looking to complete their degree requirements. This was understood to be due to a lack of available faculty to teach the core courses of the program. *(Associated with Recommendation #2)*
- Consider pausing the practicum until more support is available; provide students with a curated list of volunteer opportunities to maintain experiential engagement. *(Associated with Recommendation #2)*
- Consider removing the required research course from the curriculum. Students could take a cross-listed research course that provides foundational research skills relevant to Thanatology *(Associated with Recommendation #2)*.
- Re-assess delivery modalities in light of some feedback received from Faculty and students indicated high work implications and learning curves. *(Associated with Recommendation #3)*.
- Regular syllabus updates along with consultation with the EDID office, and active recruitment of diverse faculty, students, and Indigenous voices are required to address systemic inequities in education. *(Associated with Recommendation #4)*.

Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations and Program/Faculty Responses

The following are the reviewers' recommendations in the order listed by the external reviewers. Recommendations requiring implementation have been marked with an asterisk (*).

Reviewers' Recommendation	Program/Faculty Response
<p>Recommendation #1: Succession and Instructional Capacity*</p> <p>To allow the program to realistically stabilize, given impending retirements, the recommended timeline below could enable King's to secure a minimum number of full-time positions by the summer of 2027:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convert one LTA position to a TT position by July 2025. • Continue with the current search for an LTA for hire by July 2025. • Conduct a search in Winter 2026 for a new TT line effective July 2026. • Conduct a search in Winter 2027 for a new TT line effective July 2027. 	<p>Program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 2-year LTA has been cancelled due to budget constraints. An LTA position will continue to convert to a tenure track position. • Budget allocations enable the continuation of two full-time faculty, and CUPE hires for the foreseeable future. • One limited-term appointment has been converted into a full-time tenure-track position. Given budgetary constraints, the program will be supported by two full-time faculty and a strong complement of long-time part-time faculty. <p>Faculty:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One LTA position is being converted to a full-time tenure-track position effective July 1, 2025. • The previously planned LTA addition has been withdrawn due to budgetary constraints. • The Academic Dean's Office will consider further hiring requests based on strategic and budgetary considerations.
<p>Recommendation #2: Required Courses*</p> <p>The following courses should be the foundational courses for the Thanatology degree in the specialization, major and minor streams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Thanatology 1025A/B • Topical Issues in Thanatology 2225A/B (consider including aspects from the principle of Palliative Care) • Bereavement and Grief 	<p>Program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Program continues to foster interdisciplinary collaboration by cross-listing courses with varied departments. Plans are underway to expand elective offerings to Social Work and to introduce a Philosophy professor to teach Ethics, enhancing curricular support across programs. • The Honours Specialization Program (HSP) has been suspended, with admissions paused indefinitely. The department remains committed to supporting the major and minor programs.

<p>The program should pause other required courses until the full-time faculty complement reaches three (3). For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pause Thanatology 3360A/B until faculty resources are increased and then revisit the practicum and reconsider the course's purpose and learning outcomes • Pause Honours Specialization of Thanatology. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In response to resource constraints, several courses have been cycled out for the upcoming academic year. To streamline offerings and improve efficiency, the department has collaborated with administration to develop a course rotation calendar and is consolidating several courses. • Thanatology 3360A/B will still be offered as it is a highly valued experiential learning course that aligns with the King's University College strategic plan. <p>Faculty:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Academic Dean's Office supports: 1) pausing admission to the HSP – current students in the HSP would be supported to program completion; 2) the continued interdisciplinary collaboration in support of the program.
<p>Recommendation #3: Medium of Delivery Decide on one delivery modality. In-person delivery appears to be better aligned with the current resources and goals of King's University College.</p>	<p>Program: The online, in-class, and hybrid course delivery models are central to our department and have been in place for over twenty-five years of our almost fifty-year history. The online courses are seen as critical by students. This direction also aligns with our strategic plan and provides flexibility for the future. The students have a desire for flexibility. The core courses are offered online and in-person.</p> <p>Faculty: King's primary student constituency continues to be students seeking an in-person experience, with some flexibility afforded by some online learning. The Academic Dean's Office will continue to support the program in making strategic and responsive choices regarding instructional modalities.</p>
<p>Recommendation #4: EDID* Faculty should collaborate with the King's EDID Office to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nominate a faculty "champion" who will liaise with the EDID office and learn to review course syllabi with an EDID lens. 	<p>Program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no longer an EDID office at King's University College; an advisor and consultant on equity, diversity, inclusion and decolonization is retained. • Syllabi is being revised to ensure EDID is included; presently, this is the responsibility of faculty members; however, a system of double checking will be put in place for all courses offered.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider including the EDID office in any community or knowledge mobilization events hosted by the department.• Consider emphasizing the required HR language throughout the recruitment process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HR language now includes mention of intersectionalities of race, gender, Indigeneity, sexual orientation and numerous others. <p>Faculty: Due to restructuring, King's will embed equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization in several offices rather than one stand-alone Office in order to support stronger curricular integration of EDID. The current Director of EDID has transitioned to role of EDID Advisor. The Academic Dean's Office supports the program's intentionality regarding EDID across courses and in hiring practices.</p>
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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 Program Chair, and the Academic Dean are responsible for enacting and monitoring the actions noted in Implementation Plan. The number of recommendations prioritized for implementation has been reduced; recommendation #3 was not prioritized in the implementation plan below, given that both the Program and Faculty deem it not to be actionable, as articulated in their responses above.

Recommendation	Proposed Action and Follow-up	Responsibility	Timeline
Recommendation #1: Succession and Instructional Capacity To allow the program to realistically stabilize, given impending retirements, the recommended timeline below could enable King's to secure a minimum number of full-time positions by the summer of 2027: 1) Convert one LTA position to a TT position by July 2025; 2) Continue with the current search for an LTA for hire by July 2025; 3) Conduct a search in Winter 2026 for a new TT line effective July 2026; and 4) Conduct a search in Winter 2027 for a new TT line effective July 2027.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversion of one LTA position to a full-time tenure-track position. • Consideration of further hiring requests based on strategic and budgetary considerations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Dean 	By September 2025 (LTA to TT)
Recommendation #2: Required Courses The following courses should be foundational for the Thanatology degree in the specialization, major and minor streams: 1) Introduction to Thanatology 1025A/B; 2) Topical Issues in Thanatology 2225A/B; and 3) Bereavement and Grief. The program should pause other required courses until the full-time faculty complement reaches three (3). For instance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pause Thanatology 3360A/B 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to strengthen interdisciplinary collaborations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Finalize elective offerings with Social Work. • Suspend admission to HSP. Support current HSP students through to completion. • Continue cycling out selected courses, collapsing and combining 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair • Academic Dean 	By September 2026

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pause Honours Specialization of Thanatology. 	<p>courses, and increasing class size caps as needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the practicum as a key experiential learning opportunity aligned with the KUC strategic plan. 		
<p>Recommendation #4: EDID Faculty should collaborate with the King’s EDID Office to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nominate a faculty “champion” who will liaise with the EDID office and learn to review course syllabi with an EDID lens. • Consider including the EDID office in any community or knowledge mobilization events hosted by the department. • Consider emphasizing the required HR language throughout the recruitment process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit all syllabi to make certain principles of EDID are included. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop a formal review system to ensure EDID content is strategically integrated across program courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair 	<p>By September 2026</p>