Western UNIVERSITY · CANADA

English
Final Assessment Report & Implementation Plan
August 2026

Faculty / Affiliated University College	Faculty of Arts and Humanities	
Degrees Offered	Master of Arts (MA), Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)	
Date of Last Review	2017-2018	
Fields of Study	American Literature; Canadian Literature; Cultural Studies; Indigenous Literature and Literary Criticism/Theory; Nineteenth-Century British Literature; Old and Middle English Language and Literature; Postcolonial Literature; Renaissance; Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature; Textual Studies; Twentieth-Century British and Irish Literature; Women's Literature and Gender Studies	
External Reviewers	Dr. Ian Higgins, Professor, Department of English University of Victoria	Dr. Eleanor Ty Professor, Department of English, Wilfried Laurier University
Internal Reviewers	Dr. Laura Murray, Associate Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences	Huilin Niu, PhD Student
Date of Site Visit	March 25 - 26, 2026	
Date Review Report Received	April 10, 2026	
Date Program/Faculty Response Received	Program Response: May 15, 2026 Faculty Response: May 15, 2026	
Evaluation	Good Quality	
Approval Dates	SUPR-G: September 21, 2026 ACA: October 6, 2026 Senate (for information): October 23, 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 English Graduate Program, delivered by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

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 English Graduate Program, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS), and SUPR-G.

Executive Summary

The English M.A. and Ph.D. graduate programs at Western emphasize the deep study of literature and culture through research, writing, and analytical skills. The fields of study have benefitted from long-term stability and maintain many core areas of expertise including: Medieval and Renaissance studies, Canadian Literature; Nineteenth-Century British Literature; Postcolonial Studies, American Studies, Theatre and Performance Studies, and Indigenous Studies. The program participates in the collaborative specialization: Transitional Justice and Post-Conflict Reconciliation. Students in the MA program develop a critical, self-reflexive, and independent approach to research and scholarship, studying literary and cultural productions in a range of traditions, genres, and media, learning to locate their own research in these fields within the context of past and current scholarship. Students in the PhD program learn to

produce original research and advance the state of scholarship, developing competencies that will enable them to work as instructors in academia, as researchers, or in any field calling for high-level analytic and communication skills. The MA program features two options: 1) 4.0 course-based, or 2) 3.0 course-based plus an independent research project (both 3-term). Total enrolment as of May 2025 included 14 students in the MA program, and 55 in the PhD program.

The self-study was informed with dedicated input from current graduate students, graduate faculty, and alumni. An in-person student focus group was held in January 2025, and online surveys were conducted with students, faculty, and with recent alumni.

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

Strengths and Innovative Features Identified by the Program

- Enriched student experience via the Graduate Development Workshops, the Writer-in-Residence annual showcase, and the Graduate English Society which hosts special events including the Fieldnotes Graduate Speakers Series, and opportunities to participate in conferences which include current and former students as participants and organizers.
    - The “Working Within and Beyond the University” course provides students with opportunities to meet with former PhDs who have taken up careers in Human Resources, government positions, curriculum designers, media, academic support and industry.
    - All eligible students must apply for SSHRC and OGS, with writing workshops hosted by the department to support this process.
- Inclusion of graduate students at the program and departmental level, with a Graduate student representative on the Committee on Graduate Studies, the Visiting Speakers’ Committee, and the selection committee for the Writer-in-Residence.
- A guaranteed annual travel stipend of professional conferences or research.
- The Graduate chair holds one-on-one advising meetings with incoming PhD students and Year 2 PhD students.

Concerns and Areas of Improvement Identified and Discussed by the Program

- Improving communication with current and prospective students including: the program website, social medical communications, and broadcasting student research opportunities.
- Need for the development of a Graduate Handbook to help clarify and provide a single, coherent guide for information on expectations, regulations, procedures to complement the program website.
- A more detailed and usable student feedback form for Teaching Assistants.

- Ongoing faculty attrition and limited diversity have reduced graduate course variety, supervisory capacity, and expertise in emerging areas.
    - Lack of faculty renewal and development funding limits expansion in areas such as digital humanities, public humanities, creative writing, internships.
- More opportunities to design and teach courses and to develop communication, partnership, and career-related skills within the formal program.

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, Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies
- 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
- Members of the Western Libraries Team
- Dean, Faculty of Arts and Humanities
- Associate Dean, Research, Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies, Faculty of Arts and Humanities
- Department Chair
- Graduate Chair
- Program Faculty Members
- Graduate Program Staff
- Graduate Students

Following the site visit, the external reviewers submitted a comprehensive report of their findings which was sent to the Program and Decanal Office 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 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 Department's current faculty have an excellent record of high quality and influential research and the program has an admirable record of training students who go on to post-degree success, including in academic*

appointments across the country and internationally in a period of declining opportunities."

Strengths of the Program:

- High-calibre scholars with influential research, strong publication and grant records, teaching and book awards, and national and international disciplinary recognition.
- Enduring reputation in literary history, particularly Medieval, Early Modern, Romantic, Victorian, Canadian literature, and European and Continental Theory.
- Students praise the program's leadership, administration, mentorship, supervisory guidance, and commitment to their success.
- Active student research and conference participation, and strong post-graduation outcomes across academic and non-academic employment.
- Strong completion rates in the MA program.
- Robust library holdings, special collections, archives, and Scholars Lab access support research, while archival assignments, exhibitions, visiting artists, conferences, and emerging creative-critical work provide innovative learning opportunities.

Prospective Areas of Improvement for the Program to Consider

- Proactive faculty renewal to hedge anticipated retirements that may substantially reduce teaching, supervision, research capacity, and established areas of strength.
- Greater alignment among faculty renewal, curriculum transformation, learning outcomes, and the cultural and racial diversity of the student body and surrounding community.
- Address uneven supervisory loads, variable faculty participation in graduate teaching, limited communal study space.
- Course offerings and supervision could better reflect contemporary and emerging areas, including global Anglophone and diasporic literatures, Critical Race and Refugee Studies, digital technology, environmental studies, life writing, graphic novels, popular culture, and other newer genres.
- Increase dedicated refinement and support for PhD time to completion, the candidacy transition, the relationship between learning outcomes and TA employment, assessment of course-design skills, pathways for students without TAships, and treatment of applicants with non-typical backgrounds.

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: Develop a Handbook for graduate students and faculty available as soon as reasonably possible and ideally in the form of a downloadable pdf. The program should complete a graduate handbook that serves as the authoritative reference for its policies, requirements, and practices, complementing rather than duplicating the website. Drawing on existing website and self-study content, the handbook should be developed in consultation with students and faculty. It should clearly outline course requirements, options for study outside the Department, examinations, dissertation submission processes, and sample timelines for PhD years three and four. Particular attention should be given to clarifying the purpose, format, assessment criteria, and approval process for the Chapter Milestone. The handbook should also explain typical TA responsibilities and expectations within the applicable collective agreement.	**Program:** The graduate chair and graduate coordinator have begun drafting a Graduate Handbook: we have copied the website material, compared other graduate handbooks and have begun a draft outline of the contents. The reviewers' suggestions for specific content is noted and will be addressed. **Faculty:** The Faculty supports the program's response.
Recommendation #2: Decide on and set in motion a process of strategic planning for desired renewal of personnel and programs in the short to medium term (the coming two to five years). The process could involve a retreat or focused planning meetings guided by advance questions and benchmarking. Planning should consider plausible future configurations of the Department, balance established strengths with emerging fields, connect undergraduate and graduate needs, and advance EDI, decolonization, and Indigenization. It should also address artificial intelligence, alternative career preparation, professional development, dissertation expectations, and the continued cultivation of distinguished research.	**Program:** The Department Chair has begun the strategic planning initiative for the department. In the spring, he arranged planning meetings (2) with the department officers and program directors to evaluate our current and projected directions for the future. These include faculty renewal, curriculum renewal, and further integration of English and Writing programs. Planning will continue into 2026-27 under the direction of the chair in order to carry out the suggestions listed here for subcommittee groups to address priorities and concerns. AI, for example, is a topic addressed in the department's undergraduate program IQAP review (2025-26) and strategic planning for the graduate program can be integrated with those plans. Hiring, likewise, affects both graduate and undergraduate programs, so discussion of priorities about

	maintaining our traditional fields and expanding them can be considered at both levels/programs. **Faculty:** The Faculty supports the program's response.
Recommendation #3: Ensure that PhD students admitted to the program are reasonably likely to have appropriate supervisors and committees for their likely dissertation topics. Recognizing that students' interests may evolve, admissions decisions should more carefully consider the alignment between proposed projects and current or anticipated faculty expertise, particularly amid uneven supervisory workloads and forthcoming personnel changes. At the same time, admissions should not be limited too narrowly by the existing faculty complement, as this could restrict engagement with emerging areas of English literary studies. These considerations should inform broader strategic planning for faculty renewal, curriculum development, and the program's continued excellence and viability.	**Program:** This recommendation has begun to be addressed in the admissions process: This year and last year the Committee on Graduate Studies (also the admissions committee) was explicitly asked to consider the merit of applicants as well as who might supervise the student's proposed project. This year the admissions meeting was given a table of current supervisions to adequately assess supervisors' availability. The reviewers note that this suggestion has direct bearing on the faculty complement: our anticipated retirements and need for renewal. Our newest hire is already attracting students to his field; another hire in 2027-28 should result in similar capacity for the kinds of projects that applicants propose. **Faculty:** The Faculty supports the program's response.
Recommendation #4: More systematic and planned (two-year) rotation of graduate courses to serve at least two purposes: to provide as wide a range as reasonably possible of courses to MA and PhD students; and to allow for a similarly wide participation of faculty in offering graduate seminars. A systematic two-year rotation of graduate courses could help improve planning, course allocation, curricular breadth, and recruitment by communicating anticipated offerings to prospective students. Given the limited number of annual offerings, the program should reconsider the value of full-year courses and encourage broader faculty participation in graduate teaching. Course proposals should extend beyond established period and national categories to include cross-period, cross-cultural, contemporary, and popular topics	**Program:** Course planning is organized by the Graduate Chair in consultation with the Department Chair. Faculty propose graduate courses which usually reflect their research projects. The Graduate Chair has recognized the need for encouraging faculty who have not taught to do so and to offer fresh courses. This effort will continue along with more careful attention to rotation of courses. Although the Graduate Chair has attempted in recent years to expand offerings and the faculty who teach, these have been constrained due to undergraduate teaching needs, administrative secondments or duties, sabbaticals/leaves, and lack of hiring in the department. **Faculty:** The Faculty supports the program's response.

such as young adult literature, speculative fiction, adaptation, food studies, and detective fiction. A more balanced rotation could diversify student choice while reducing the recurring concentration of courses in Early Modern literature.	

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: Develop a Handbook for graduate students and faculty.	• Finalize a graduate handbook in consultation with the Committee on Graduate Studies and the Graduate English Society.	Graduate Chair	By January 2027
Recommendation #2: Decide on and set in motion a process of strategic planning for desired renewal of personnel and programs.	• Complete a strategic planning process (to include faculty renewal, curriculum renewal, AI).	Department Chair, Graduate Chair	By December 2027
Recommendation #3: Ensure that PhD students admitted to the program are reasonably likely to have appropriate supervisors and committees for their likely dissertation topics.	• Review the effectiveness and impact of the process of matching applicants and supervisors trialed in the 2026 admission cycle. Determine any adjustments.	Graduate Chair	By September 2027
Recommendation #4: Plan (two-year) rotation of graduate courses to provide as wide a range as reasonably possible of courses to MA and PhD students; and to allow for a similarly wide participation of faculty in offering graduate seminars.	• Encourage faculty who have not taught to do so and to offer fresh courses. ○ Expand offerings where possible. • Plan a dedicated rotation of courses and a communication strategy for anticipated offerings to prospective students.	Graduate Chair, Department Chair	By June 2028