Western UNIVERSITY · CANADA

Media and Communication Studies
Final Assessment Report & Implementation Plan
October 2025

Faculty / Affiliated University College	Faculty of Information and Media Studies	
Degrees Offered	B.A.	
Date of Last Review	2016-2017	
Modules Reviewed	Honours Specialization in Media, Information and Technoculture Major in Media, Information and Technoculture Minor in Media, Information and Technoculture Honours Specialization in Media and the Public Interest Major in Media and the Public Interest	
External Reviewers	Dr. Liam Mitchell Associate Professor Trent University	Dr. Stuart Poyntz Professor Simon Fraser University
Internal Reviewer	Dr. Jan Plug Associate Dean, Faculty of Arts & Humanities	Vishnu Sripathi 4th year, Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences
Date of Site Visit	March 3 & 4, 2025	
Date Review Report Received	April 25, 2025	
Date Program/Faculty Response Received	Program: June 17, 2025 Faculty: June 17, 2025	
Evaluation	Good Quality	
Approval Dates	SUPR-U: November 18, 2025 ACA: November 25, 2025 Senate (for information): December 5, 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 Media and Communication Studies (MACS) Program delivered by the 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 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 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, FIMS, and SUPR-U.

Executive Summary

The undergraduate modules at FIMS are key components in the Faculty's broader mandate within the university to provide innovative, interdisciplinary academic programs that examine information and media industries, cultures and technologies. These modules provide students with a critical, interdisciplinary, and creative undergraduate education that underscores inclusion, social justice, and engagement across local and global contexts. Overall program enrolments in 2023-2024 were at 991 students.

The Media, Information and Technoculture (MIT) modules provide a broad and balanced approach that combines media theory, history, and research and analysis. They enable students to understand and analyze the complex relationships among media, communication, and information cultures, industries and technologies from an interdisciplinary perspective. The Media and the Public Interest (MPI) modules connect issues of communication, media, information, and technology to social justice issues such as democracy, equity, class, race, and gender. Students in MPI examine social movements and how media can be used to further these causes.

The self-study was informed by an online survey of faculty members to identify program Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Challenges, and Aspirations and a survey of Year 4 MIT and MPI students. In 2024, the program learning outcomes were revised ahead of a collaborative faculty project mapping individual courses against the learning outcomes. In November 2024, a curriculum retreat was held to discuss the next steps emerging from the surveys and mapping exercise.

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

Strengths and Innovative Features Identified by the Program

- In 2024, applications increased by 30%, leading to a 33% increase in enrolments. Early 2025 data suggests continued growth.
    - Rebranding the program to MACS significantly improved visibility and appeal, leading to increased interest from both domestic and international students.
- MACS implemented initiatives targeting first-generation, international, Indigenous, and LGBTQTS+ students - expanded advising services, one-on-one onboarding, and the successful Supported Learning Group pilot for first-year students, now extended with multi-year funding.
- Undergraduate research provides students with opportunities to engage in interdisciplinary, socially impactful research projects addressing topics such as reconciliation, mental health, and community memory. A research portal also connects students with faculty-led projects, reinforcing their role as junior research partners.

- Students engage in interdisciplinary and global conversations through study abroad programs, with about 20% of Western's exchange participants coming from MACS.
- Significant curricular and capital investments in media production courses to support experiential learning and career development.
- Students indicated a high level of satisfaction with the Lab and Studio Spaces that are available for undergraduate teaching.

Concerns and Areas of Improvement Identified and Discussed by the Program

- MPI modular enrolments are at an all-time low, likely due to past soft undergraduate enrolments, a heavy course load, fewer elective options, and a module name that may no longer resonate with students.
- Limited elective choices in the MPI modules and registration system constraints can cause frustration for students trying to plan their academic paths.
- FIMS is exploring ways to expand student engagement with EDIDIA content, including potentially requiring a course focused on these issues.
- The Work Integrated Learning pilot faced logistical and ideological challenges, including mismatches between course outcomes and partner needs, and student concerns about unpaid labor.
- Program monitoring should be resumed, in particular the use of exit surveys with students.
- MACS is considering several program enhancements, including: integrating writing across the curriculum, partnering with the Writing Program for a joint module, introducing a second-year course on Indigenous media perspectives, and launching a Major in Digital Communications. Faculty development will focus on generative AI, TA collaboration, and EDIDIA integration.
- A proposed "4+1" pathway would allow eligible MACS students direct entry into FIMS graduate programs, strengthening recruitment and mentoring opportunities.

Review Process

As part of the external review, the review committee, comprising two external reviewers, an internal faculty reviewer, and an internal 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)
- Acting Associate Vice-Provost (Academic Planning, Policy and Faculty)
- Director of Academic Quality and Enhancement
- Associate University Librarian
- Dean, Faculty of Information and Media Studies

- Associate Dean (Undergraduate), Faculty of Information and Media Studies
- Undergraduate Program Chair
- Administrative Staff
- Program Faculty
- Program Students

Following the virtual 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 MACS Program. The FAR is collated and submitted to SUPR-U by the Internal Faculty Reviewer with the support of the Office of Academic Quality and Enhancement.

Summative Assessment – External Reviewers' Report

External reviewers noted that *"the MACS Program is strong, popular with students and engaged in field defining research. MACS has been led by stable and committed leadership since the last external review and has undergone some faculty renewal in both research and teaching streams."*

Key Strengths of the Program

- A large program with strong enrolment that contributes to Western's national reputation and regional recruitment success.
- The faculty member cohort is very strong and includes field-defining scholars whose research and teaching are excellent.
- Students describe the field school (Special Topics in MIT: El Salvador: Mining, Acro-Toxics, and Environmental Crisis) as a life-changing experience.

Prospective Improvements for the Program to Consider

- Approximately 50% of courses are delivered by Limited-Duties faculty on short-term appointments (associated with Recommendation #1).
- Need for focused review of MPI aiming to enable faculty to renew the modules and its fit within MACS (associated with Recommendation #2).
    - There may be ways to draw upper-year non-majors to take MPI courses in third year by massaging pre-requisites.
- Further integration of non-Western, decolonized histories and scholarship into the curriculum (associated with Recommendation #3).

- The structured nature of the MACS modules produces challenges getting into upper-year classes required for graduation (associated with Recommendation #5).
- Expanding both Creative Arts and Production (CAP) and Digital Communication (DC) through adequate resourcing would be an ideal way to enable more students to take CAP and DC in the first place, as well as making it easier for CAP students to take DC courses.

Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations and Program/Faculty Responses

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

Reviewers' Recommendations	Program/Faculty Response
Recommendation #1 The University dedicate resources to expand the number of tenure-track faculty in order to address imbalance which results in the Program being under-resourced, thereby, impacting curriculum, program renewal, and ability to sustain research reputation.	**Program:** The program recognizes the challenges of balancing the competing needs of the five graduate programs and the relatively small cohort of tenured and tenure-track faculty at FIMS with this recommendation. The Associate Dean Undergraduate (ADU) works closely with the Associate Dean Graduate to assign teaching. The ADU has been attentive to opportunities to conserve resources through ensuring that most courses exceed course minimums set by the university, as well as working with Undergrad Program Chair (UPC) to ensure core courses, where possible, are taught by full-time faculty members. Upcoming retirements may exacerbate this situation, especially in the short-term, but the program is hopeful that as tenure track faculty receive tenure and are promoted, more of their teaching may become available within the undergraduate program. **Faculty:** The Faculty recognizes and appreciates the careful deployment of limited faculty resources across the graduate and undergraduate programs. With confirmed retirements of three faculty members who teach primarily in the undergraduate program over the next two years, the Faculty will be working with IPB to maximize faculty resources for the unit, within the constraints afforded to us by the current financial and enrolment conditions.
Recommendation #2 Pursue a faculty-led renewal of the fit, focus and name of the MPI modules; reducing their resourcing or closing the modules are explicitly not recommended as MPI is a culture carrier in the faculty, and its renewal will also align with opportunities for faculty hiring presented by planned faculty retirements.	**Program:** In April, the UAC (Undergraduate Affairs Committee) unanimously approved a 3-year suspension of admission to the second year of the MPI program in order to examine and restructure the program in light of the changing political conjunction between youth culture and social movements. The Faculty will consider the possibility of providing students with a MACS + X option, or, alternatively, offering the MPI program as a minor open to students across the university. **Faculty:** The Faculty recognizes the centrality of topics covered in MPI at the same time as it is aware of the various challenges of delivering an under-enrolled module, both in terms of resources and in terms of optics. The former issue is particularly germane given the directives from IPB and the Office of the Provost in eliminating under-enrolled courses and as such it is in conflict with the specific recommendation that the unit should not reduce resourcing or close the module. The Faculty supports the program led decision to suspend admission to the program whilst a viable alternative is explored to develop this area into a sustainable module. It should also be noted that cultural carriage is a strained idea for a program without students. The Faculty will seek approaches to cultural change that sustains commitments to social justice and community placement while engaging a new generation of undergraduates.

Recommendation #3 Continue exploring ways that non-Western, decolonized histories and scholarship can be embedded in the curriculum. This work could be aided in part through development of a course on Indigenous Perspectives on the Media.	**Program:** Preliminary research for the development of an Indigenous Perspectives course has already begun: The ADU has hired a USRI summer student to conduct an environmental survey of comparable courses, which will act as a foundation for course development. **Faculty:** The Faculty concurs with the plan outlined in the program response, noting that at the Faculty level EDID initiatives will also benefit by being supported through the development of the FIMS EDID committee.
Recommendation #4 Consult with students to explore their perspectives and needs prior to making a decision regarding moving Media and Communication Studies 2025A/B: *Research Methods for the Digital Age* to 3rd year from 2nd year.	**Program:** The program will survey the entire graduating class of 2025 on their perspective re: moving Media and Communication Studies 2025A/B to the first term of year 3. Faculty members who are teaching required year 2 courses will be debriefed in order to gauge both their experiences this year and their feedback re: moving Media and Communication Studies 2025A/B to year 3. **Faculty:** Faculty concurs with the plan outlined in the program response.
Recommendation #5 Introduce one or more required 4th year courses to accommodate at least 250 majors and consider limiting the requirements for 3rd and 4th years in the new draft modules to allow students maximum flexibility “to choose your own adventure” in their degrees.	**Program:** Many of these issues arise from Western’s balloting system, which means that not all students register at the same time; this is an issue out of our hands. MACS is already relatively flexible in terms of ‘choose your own adventure options’ for students; however, MPI is structurally much more rigid. As noted under Recommendation #2, an upcoming MPI Faculty Retreat will reevaluate this rigid program structure. • New modules will provide students with the opportunity to take more 4th year courses. • Next year two new full-year 4th year production courses will be offered, resulting in 50 new production related 4th year course slots for students. **Faculty:** Faculty concurs with the plan outlined in the program response.

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 Dean of the Faculty is 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 The University dedicate resources to expand the number of tenure-track faculty.	• The Acting Dean, and any future Dean, will work with the Office of Institutional Planning and Budgeting, the Office of Academic Planning, Policy and Faculty Relations, and the Office of the Provost to explore all options. • Selected options will be elaborated in the annual budgeting process.	• Dean • Associate Dean Undergraduate	Follow up at 2028 progress report.
Recommendation #2 Pursue a faculty-led renewal of the fit, focus and name of the MPI modules.	• Organize a Faculty Retreat for those teaching in the program in order to kick-start restructuring plans with discussions covering: potential new names for the program, the overhauling of core courses, reconsidering rigid program requirements, and the possibility of providing students with a MACS + X option, or an MPI minor open to students across the university.	• Associate Dean Undergraduate • Undergraduate Program Chair	By July 2026
Recommendation #3 Continue exploring ways that non-Western, decolonized histories and scholarship can be embedded in the curriculum.	• Conduct an environmental scan of comparable courses, which will act as a foundation for course development. • Provide faculty with EDIDI resources related to curriculum development and pedagogy' to be collected by the Chair and housed on the Faculty Intranet.	• Undergraduate Program Chair	By Dec 2025 By Dec 2026

Recommendation #4 Consult with students to explore their perspectives and needs prior to making a decision regarding moving Media and Communication Studies 2025A/B: *Research Methods for the Digital Age* to 3rd year from 2nd year.	• Create and distribute Qualtrics survey to students. • Schedule a debrief of faculty who are teaching required year 2 courses to gauge both their experiences this year and their feedback re: moving Media and Communication Studies 2025A/B to year 3. • Scaffold year 3 courses in order to align with the qualitative digital research skills gained in Media and Communication Studies 2025A/B.	• Associate Dean Undergraduate • Undergraduate Program Chair	By Dec 2025
Recommendation #5 Introduce one or more required 4th year courses to accommodate at least 250 majors and consider limiting the requirements for 3rd and 4th years in the new draft modules to allow students maximum flexibility.	• Reevaluate the program structure at an upcoming MPI Faculty retreat. • Offer two new full-year 4th year production courses, resulting in 50 new production related 4th year course slots for students.	• Associate Dean Undergraduate • Undergraduate Program Chair	By June 2026