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TO: Digvir Jayas
President and Vice Chancellor

DATE: October 22, 2024

FROM: Lynn Kennedy
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

RE: Master of Science in Management Program Academic Quality Assurance Review

In accordance with the U of L *Academic Quality Assurance Policy and Process*, the Academic Quality Assurance Committee approved the review of the Master of Science in Management Program at its September 10, 2024, meeting.

The Self Study Committee for this review was comprised of: Vishaal Baulkaran and Tanya Drollinger (Program Review Coordinators) and Brenda Nguyen.

The review produced 4 documents:

1. Self Study Report. Written by the Self Study Committee. Received March 25, 2024.
2. External Review Report. Written by Dr. Linda Dyer (Concordia University) and Dr. Rachelle Shannahan (Memorial University) based on a site visit April 30 to May 1, 2024. Received May 30, 2024.
3. Program Response. Written by the Self Study Committee. Received June 13, 2024.
4. Dean's Response. Written by Jackie Rice, Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Kerry Godfrey, Dean of the Dhillon School of Business. Received August 15, 2024.

Self Study Report

The Self Study Report asked for External Reviewer feedback on several areas:

- What do you think are our greatest program strengths and weaknesses?
- What do you think we can do better to distinguish our thesis and BANA pathways for students who are applying for our MSc program?
- We need to be efficient and effective with our program. Do you feel that the core requirements for both pathways overlap too much, given the different emphasis of study, and are there any courses that you believe may enhance both programs?
- Do you think our marketing efforts are sufficient for a new pathway like BANA?
- How can we position the BANA pathway better to attract more students, particularly domestic applicants?
- Do you think there is value to GMAT as an admission requirement for a course-based pathway such as BANA? How is our admission compared to the standards in our program?

The body of the report noted several strengths of the Master of Science in Management:

- This is a unique program in Canada as there are few offerings of business analytics Master's degrees presently.
- The DSB has faculty that can support both the thesis and BANA pathways and the program has attracted a diverse student intake with regards to populations of both international and domestic students.
- The thesis and BANA pathways provide flexibility aligned to career goals. The curriculum develops analytical abilities, critical thinking, and research competency adhering to quality standards.

The following weaknesses and challenges were mentioned in the body of the report:

- One problem with regards to the program was the lack of differentiation when it came to individualization of the project, the major, and the degree awarded. All students believed that the projects would be individualized but were told that this was not the case and that the project would be a group project despite the area of study in which they were engaged. The BANA students who had marketing, finance, and/or international focuses would be working on the same project. This was identified as causing a great deal of discontentment as they wondered if their area of emphasis really made a difference. Another problem identified was that there was no differentiation between the thesis pathway and BANA pathway in the degree awarded.
- A focus group of students highlighted mismatches between expectations and realities for the BANA pathway regarding the applied focus, differentiation, costs, and funding opportunities (which are particularly limited for International students).
- An important reason that BANA students gave for switching to the thesis pathway was the higher level of funding from scholarships, Teaching Assistantships, and Graduate Assistantships that appeared to only be available to students pursuing the thesis pathway. There was a feeling that it was unfair to BANA students who faced an increased need to pursue funding for the MSc program as they were faced with unexpected costs from fees and midsemester tuition costs.

- Survey data indicates inconsistent messaging and unclear communication of basic program details on the website. The website is confusing, unclear and in its current state is difficult to navigate.
- The BANA pathway lacks feedback mechanisms from industry at present.
- While areas of satisfaction exist, surveys also revealed issues related to advising, course availability, costs, and alignment with research/professional goals.
- There is a lack of marketing communications support to develop awareness of the thesis pathway and new BANA offering as well as a lack of targeted marketing to potential domestic and international students.
- The program fees are not clearly indicated on the MSc website, nor are they indicated adequately in the offer letters sent out by the register's office.

Recommendations from the body of the report:

- The website needs immediate improvements for clarity and accuracy of program details. Review cycles should be implemented.
- Mechanisms for regular collection of student, graduate, faculty, and industry partner feedback would enhance continuous improvement efforts.
- Relationships with external faculty enrich the learning experience for thesis students; more engagement is needed with industry partners for the BANA pathway.
- There is a huge potential for revenue generation from the BANA pathway as it is course based, and student tuition and fees cover the cost and more. This program has the potential to help revive shrinking numbers in the MSc program by enrolling more student choosing the BANA pathway.
- There are abundant job opportunities for graduates of the BANA pathway as data analytics is a growing field.

External Review Report

The External Review Report contained five (5) recommendations for improving the Master of Science in Management program:

1. Add a two-year minimum work experience admission criterion for the course-based pathway.
2. Remove the declaration of major requirement for course-based business analytics-focused students unless that major can be Business Analytics.
3. In all marketing communications, focus on the MSc in Management pathways: thesis-based (independent in-depth research); and course-based (broad based experiential applied analytical project-based), while backing off the messaging that PhD is the only next step for the thesis-based students given that many graduates take their degrees into industry. On the website, provide a clearer visual depiction of the two pathways also depicting the depth of the thesis route and the breadth of the course-based pathway. Clearly articulate the nature of a thesis for the original research component of the thesis-based pathway. Clearly articulate the nature of the applied experiential components of the course-based pathway to set full and proper prospective student expectations.
4. Ensure faculty members are fairly and directly compensated for thesis supervision. This may have the result of engaging more faculty members to supervise thesis-based students. Similarly,

incent faculty members to become course-based faculty mentors and/or champions who identify industry opportunities for experiential applied projects for the course-based students.

5. The Organizational Behaviour and Human Resource Management area appears to need bolstering. Ideally, the prospective hire(s) in this or any other disciplinary area would be made aware that having analytics expertise would be an asset, and a focus on teaching analytics would be a job requirement.

The following direct quotations taken from the report note challenges discussed in the body of the report:

- “Marketing efforts in support of the MSc are presently perceived as insufficient for both pathways, described as slow, centralized, not well financed, and, at times, confusing and misleading. Updating the website to present clear program structure options with attention to the target audience for each route should be the highest priority. Rich and accurate descriptions of in-program student experiences, case descriptions of career outcomes, spotlights on the degree at work and testimonials of current students and alumni can be helpful in articulating the value propositions of each pathway.”
- “We heard that in some discipline areas, the weight of thesis supervision and delivering the Major Seminar courses is carried by a limited number of faculty members. The increase in workload for those who agree to supervise graduate students is not compensated apart from being allocated graduate assistance. Feelings of inequity were expressed given all faculty members benefit from the course load of four, which is meant to account for faculty members’ participating in the graduate program. We caution that this may eventually lead to resentment. We believe that supervisors’ extra effort must be recognized and rewarded. Even if there is just modest compensation (for example, three completed MSc theses = one course release or some level of research funding), it will also attest that thesis supervision is appreciated.”
- “DSB must be mindful in its view and handling of international students who may perceive the fee structure to be a less than equitable approach as compared to the thesis-based and domestic student fee structure. Even if the students in the two streams are separated, the disparity in resources and fees is not a secret. Students must see a clear and credible vision of why the course-based program is worth the additional fees. This must be achieved without diminishing the perceived value of the thesis stream for those students whose wish is to proceed to an industry-based (as opposed to an academic) career. One possibility would be to add work experience to the admission requirements of the course-based stream in the same way that MBA programs require two years of experience in most universities.”
- “Another note of caution pertains to appealing primarily to the international student market. This student body requires programming that is appropriate not only in terms of being in line with IRCC stipulations but also in line with their expectations about mode of delivery. The reliance of HyFlex technology for what is promoted as in-person programming does allow for individuals to connect virtually from their own discrete spaces and could potentially be classified as online programming. The use of the HyFlex delivery mode must be clearly articulated to leverage that it is meant to “bridge” its two campuses. Leveraging the University’s infrastructure and technology can be helpful in driving enrollment.”
- “It was unclear to us that the course offerings in the present form of the course-based route are adequate. Granted that the “shared” first term that is identical for both thesis and course-based students is a short-term measure. We heard little complaint about this shared term. However, the courses cross-listed with the Computer Science curriculum did not seem satisfactory; several faculty members were unconvinced that these courses, which focus on coding, are

adequate for wider goals of business analytics. Beyond this, some of the same issues with six-week courses apply here. Although we do not have sufficient knowledge of the content to make a confident recommendation, the half-courses Business Analytics II and Communicating Analytics Findings, might conceivably be paired into a full 3-credit hour course."

- "Course-based students apparently find it odd that they must choose a discipline such as Finance or Marketing as a major, but there is only one discipline focused course offered within their program. Going forward, it would be useful to reconsider the necessity of course-based students choosing a major, unless that major is business analytics. The experiential project also needs attention. Apparently, students expected it would be more hands-on, involving interactions with employees and business managers, as well as data. Unfortunately, there were challenges getting sufficient projects for each student to have the internship-like experience they expected. If the program grows to the desired cohort size of 20 students, getting enough industry partners to fulfill the students' expectations of "work-integrated learning" will be even more difficult."

The following direct quotations taken from the report note the opportunities discussed in the body of the report:

- "We encourage DSB to adopt the Lethbridge High Level Bridge as a symbol of the high level of graduate management education provided by the University of Lethbridge's DSB. In incorporating the imagery and landscape surrounding the Lethbridge campus - something no other institution can do - and in employing a bridge metaphor, DSB has an opportunity to clearly position itself as a bridge in three key respects: in bridging the academic and applied approaches to studying management with the two stream MSc; in bridging the Lethbridge and Calgary campuses via HyFlex technology; and in bridging learners to their next destination, which could be to higher education (e.g. PhD) or to exciting employment opportunities that require deep thinkers and expert problem solvers. Conveying that the journey is personal complements the small, personalized features of the program to reveal a significant competitive advantage."
- "New faculty hiring should go beyond seeking business analytics specialists with technical skills that are currently in vogue. We recommend recruiting new faculty members for disciplinary expertise (e.g. OB/HR) with preference for candidates who are equipped with a toolkit of multiple methods and analytical capabilities. Such scholars can adequately and sustainably support both thesis and course-based learners, and in this way, efficiencies can be achieved. Finally, ensuring faculty members are fairly and directly compensated for thesis supervision may result in encouraging the engagement of more faculty members to supervise thesis-based students. Similarly, incenting faculty members to become champions who identify industry opportunities for experiential applied projects for the course-based pathway may serve to encourage more faculty involvement from the course-route perspective."
- "To enhance the student experience, we recommend the appointment of one or more faculty mentors to facilitate feelings of connection and support for the course-based students to overcome feelings of neglect and exploitation. New-student orientation sessions should provide opportunities and encouragement to interact with their cohort, their supervisors, and potential mentors for the course-based pathway."
- "It was confusing to discover that listed courses could be worth 3-credit hours, 1.5 credit hours or zero credit hours. When we enquired why Statistics I and Statistics II were half courses in different terms, there seemed to be no reason. Merging half-courses whenever possible may be desirable given that shortened courses tend to become compressed, with greater breadth than

depth, leading to pedagogical and administrative difficulties. We also understood from our interviews that half (six-week) courses are less attractive to faculty members, compared to 12-week, 3-credit hour courses. Some combinations, like the two statistic courses in the above example, seem a natural pair to be merged, and there are likely other half-courses that could be combined with minimal content-related impact. Moreover, we heard from more than one person that a Qualitative Methods course was vital for their thesis work, and from another that coverage of quantitative research methods lacked depth. Research methods courses are important maintain and bolster.”

- “The DSB requires more human resources to support its graduate students. To enhance graduate student and faculty member experience, we recommend orientation sessions to let new students know about the opportunities for interacting with faculty members and their cohort and for availing of mentoring. The appointment of a faculty advisor/director compensated by a small stipend, research funds, or partial course remission can facilitate feelings of connection and support for the course-based students, as opposed to feelings of neglect and exploitation. To enhance the faculty experience, as many feel stretched, we recommend direct compensation for thesis supervision. This would encourage broader faculty participation and would serve to encourage enrollment. If administrative capacity allows, we would also suggest that DSB consider multiple intakes per academic year given that single intake may not be competitive enough and synchronous course delivery only may not be flexible enough to be appealing to domestic and part-time learners.”

Program Response

In their Program Response, the Self Study Committee addressed the recommendations from the External Review Report:

1. Add a two-year minimum work experience admission criterion for the course-based pathway.

We respectfully disagree with this recommendation. We believe that this may further negatively impact enrollment in this program. The benefits of adding a minimum work experience to the admission criterion must be carefully analyzed. The committee believes that the course-based program’s aim is to get students ready for a job in analytics. Thus, those students who wish to upgrade their skills would be the prime target of our program. As such, a requirement of work does not fit with the goals of the program. If increased rigor in the admission process is the aim of the reviewers, we believe that there are better ways to achieve this. For example, perhaps for those individuals who make the B-list of applicants, we may consider them after conducting a selection interview to assess their fit for the program. This may allow us to accept more applicants without compromising our admission standards. Furthermore, it would also align with increasing diversity in our program as we consider applicants who are nontraditional or do not necessarily fit the mold of ‘ideal’ candidate.

<p>2. Remove the declaration of major requirement for course-based business analytics-focused students unless that major can be Business Analytics.</p>	<p>We agree with this recommendation. The assistant Dean of Dhillon grad programs is currently working on the approval process to make general management the only major in this program.</p>
<p>3. In all marketing communications, focus on the MSc in Management pathways: thesis-based (independent in-depth research); and course-based (broad based experiential applied analytical project-based), while backing off the messaging that PhD is the only next step for the thesis-based students given that many graduates take their degrees into industry. On the website, provide a clearer visual depiction of the two pathways also depicting the depth of the thesis route and the breadth of the course-based pathway. Clearly articulate the nature of a thesis for the original research component of the thesis-based pathway. Clearly articulate the nature of the applied experiential components of the course-based pathway to set full and proper prospective student expectations.</p>	<p>We agree with the reviewers' recommendation. The Assistant Dean of Dhillon Grad programs should formulate a strategy to articulate the nature of each program and its benefits clearly. Also, we agree with the external reviewer in their analysis of the University's marketing efforts for both the BANA and Thesis options. The reviewers state, "Current marketing efforts are neither sufficient for the thesis-route nor for a new pathway like BANA".</p>
<p>4. Ensure faculty members are fairly and directly compensated for thesis supervision. This may have the result of engaging more faculty members to supervise thesis-based students. Similarly, incent faculty members to become course-based faculty mentors and/or champions who identify industry opportunities for experiential applied projects for the course-based students.</p>	<p>This is a fair recommendation. The Dean will have to formulate a strategy to fairly and directly compensate for thesis supervision. Several other Canadian institutions offer partial credit for supervision as an incentive to encourage faculty members to participate in the supervision of the thesis.</p>
<p>5. The Organizational Behaviour and Human Resource Management area appears to need bolstering. Ideally, the prospective hire(s) in this or any other disciplinary area would be made aware that having analytics expertise would be an asset, and a focus on teaching analytics would be a job requirement.</p>	<p>This is an appropriate recommendation, and the Dean, in conjunction with the Assistant Dean of Dhillon Grad programs, should formulate a plan to increase the faculty complement in this area.</p>

Dean's Response

The Deans of the School of Graduate Studies and the Dhillon School of Business responded to the five (5) recommendations from the External Review Report:

<p><i>1. Add a two-year minimum work experience admission criterion for the course-based pathway.</i></p>	<p>The course-based pathway is intended to build job ready skills in business analytics. Having a work experience criterion put this into 'MBA territory' which would only serve to further confuse the applicant market. The Program Committee is working to split the course-based pathway of from the MSc Mgt to become a stand-alone degree in business analytics. We recommend addressing that first so as to remove the existing confusion around the purpose of each pathway. After that change has been in place for a year then further evaluation should take place as to whether admission requirements for the BANA program, the MSc Mgt, and the M Mgt (newly approved) are clear and differentiated enough to tie into the goals of each program.</p>
<p><i>2. Remove the declaration of major requirement for course-based business analytics-focused students unless that major can be Business Analytics.</i></p>	<p>We agree that declaring an MSc Mgt major is an administrative formality and needs to be revised so all "BANA" students are essentially general management or MIS majors only (or may not need any major at all). The removal of BANA from the MSc Mgt and the creation of the MBAN program will solve this problem.</p>
<p><i>3. In all marketing communications, focus on the MSc in Management pathways: thesis-based (independent in-depth research); and course-based (broad based experiential applied analytical project-based), while backing off the messaging that PhD is the only next step for the thesis-based students given that many graduates take their degrees into industry. On the website, provide a clearer visual depiction of the two pathways also depicting the depth of the thesis route and the breadth of the course-based pathway. Clearly articulate the nature of a thesis for the original research component of the thesis-based pathway. Clearly articulate the nature of the applied experiential components of the course-based pathway to set full and proper prospective student expectations.</i></p>	<p>These suggestions, as part of a strategy to clearly articulate the nature and goals of each program, are useful. It will be important to ensure that there are resources to be able to build and maintain a future student's resource that provide this type of clarity for students. The DSB is in the process of creating a digital marketing strategy for all DSB graduate programs to raise awareness in the marketplace. The University overall needs significantly more resources dedicated to marketing activities particularly at the graduate level and in relation to course-based/revenue generating programs, and it would be beneficial for all of the Deans to advocate for a resource who could be dedicate to this type of work for graduate programs.</p>
<p><i>4. Ensure faculty members are fairly and directly compensated for thesis supervision. This may have the result of engaging more faculty</i></p>	<p>Dean, SGS: This is an ongoing discussion across the institution. There needs to be a consistent approach across the institution around engagement and</p>

members to supervise thesis-based students. Similarly, incent faculty members to become course-based faculty mentors and/or champions who identify industry opportunities for experiential applied projects for the course-based students.

acknowledgement of work in graduate mentorship and supervision. The clarification of the course-based vs the thesis-based streams may help faculty to understand where they might best want to engage and work with students.

Dean, DSB: The University needs to explore a model which addresses faculty concerns and engagement in thesis based graduate programs. For course-based programs, faculty would be assigned teaching duties as per current practice, however, additional supervisory duties, and possibly major project supervision will need a modified model for assigned duties/compensation.

5. The Organizational Behaviour and Human Resource Management area appears to need bolstering. Ideally, the prospective hire(s) in this or any other disciplinary area would be made aware that having analytics expertise would be an asset, and a focus on teaching analytics would be a job requirement.

The School and program committee will need to review the engagement of different discipline areas within the program. With current resource constraints, the disciplines offered as majors in the program may need to be radically reconsidered and reviewed to determine future viability.

Consulting the External Reviewer Recommendations, the Program Response, and Deans Rice and Godfrey, the Academic Quality Assurance Committee made the following 6 (six) recommendations for action which the Program must report on in 1 and 3 years:

1. The School of Graduate Studies and the Dhillon School of Business will continue work on the applications to the Ministry of Advanced Education to split the Master of Science in Management and the Master of Business Analytics programs.
2. The Master of Science in Management program will work with the Dhillon School of Business Dean's office to clarify communications around the two distinct streams of the Master of Science in Management program, including requirements, mode of delivery, and benefits of the different options.
3. The Dhillon School of Business will complete a review of all elements of both streams of the Master of Science in Management to ensure that these programs prove to be viable for current students, paying special attention to the AQA external report and alignment with the current budget context. This review should include, but is not limited to:
 - a. an examination and revision of curriculum;
 - b. transparency of fee structures;
 - c. how experiential learning is offered to students.
4. The Master of Science in Management program will work with the School of Graduate Studies and the Dhillon School of Business Dean's offices to identify ways to increase and improve the pool of candidates for admission to both streams of the program.
5. The Dhillon School of Business will review inclusion of different discipline areas within the Master of Science in Management program and strategize future hires accordingly.
6. The Dhillon School of Business and the School of Graduate Studies will explore how it can best support the majors in both streams within the Master of Science in Management, including but not limited to:

- a. Supervision and mentorship;
- b. Fostering collaboration and community between students in both streams;
- c. Graduate student advising;
- d. Ensuring equity in TA position considerations.

The Academic Quality Assurance Committee is satisfied that the Master of Science in Management academic quality assurance review has followed the U of L's academic quality assurance process appropriately and acknowledges the successful completion of the review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Kennedy", with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr. Lynn Kennedy
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee
Associate Professor, Department of History and Religion

cc Michelle Helstein, PhD.
Provost & Vice-President (Academic)