

TO: Mike Mahon
President and Vice Chancellor

DATE: March 30, 2015

FROM: Robert A. Boudreau
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

RE: First Nations Transition 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 First Nations Transition Program (FNTP) at its February 27, 2015 meeting.

The Program Review Committee for this review was comprised of Michelle Hogue (Program Review Coordinator), Esteban Gomez-Riviere, Marilyn Lamb, and Muriel Mellow. The review produced four documents:¹

1. *Academic Quality Assurance Review (AQAR), First Nations' Transition Program: Self Study Report 2014* (received July 19, 2014) – Self Study Report, developed by the FNTP Self Study Committee.
2. *External Review Report on the First Nations Transition Program, University of Lethbridge* (received November 11, 2014) – External Review Report by Julie Pelletier (University of Winnipeg) and Ross Hoffman (UNBC) based on their site visit of September 11-12, 2014.
3. *Response to External Review Report on the Academic Quality Assurance Review of the First Nations' Transition Program, University of Lethbridge* (received January 5, 2015) – response of the Self Study Committee to the external review.
4. *Dean's Response to Quality Assurance Review of the First Nations Transition Program* (received February 23, 2015) – response to the review, written by Craig Cooper, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science.

¹ All documents are available upon request.

Self Study

The Self Study Report noted the following strengths of the FNTP:

- The program is an important entry point into university for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) students who would not otherwise be able to attend.
- The program and the faculty members involved in it are committed to the successful transition of FNMI students to the U of L.
- The program avoids the problem of upgrading programs in which university is still an unknown environment.
- The program encourages interactions between students and faculty.
- A Coordinator and Learning Facilitators are dedicated to the program.
- In surveys many students credit the program in their academic success.
- FNMI students who complete the program are retained at greater rates than other FNMI students.
- As of December 2013, of 122 students who entered the FNTP before 2008-09, 18 have graduated from the U of L. These graduates did not qualify for general admission.
- The program has received endowment funding for scholarships, bursaries, and a speaker series.
- Top students in the program receive scholarships and bursaries for their U of L studies.
- The program has received local and national recognition.

The report contained several challenges for the FNTP:

- Given increasing competition from other transition programs, the FNTP needs to be more aggressively marketed.
- Funding for the program is inconsistent.
- Dividing students into Arts and Science-bound and Health Sciences-bound streams results in timetabling issues.
- Students view break time between classes as free time, when this time is intended as work and study time.
- Students have inconsistent attendance, for a variety of reasons, and some do not understand the commitment required for a university education.
- There are some technological barriers for students, such as access to Internet, computers, and printers.

Several future directions were listed:

- Develop a first semester schedule for core courses so that both streams have a similar foundation.
- Increase the visibility of the FNTP by more aggressively promoting the program features in southern Alberta and beyond.

- Make the program available to any FNMI student entering the U of L who wants to access the foundation and supports available.
- Use past FNTP students as mentors for incoming students.
- Include the FNTP and its courses in the Calendar, online timetable, and online documents from the Registrar's office.
- Further develop the FNTP speaker series.

The report asked for the advice of the External Reviewers on the following agenda of concerns:

- How can the FNTP be modified to address the shifting needs of students?
- The FNTP should be present in the Calendar and online documents.
- How can accessibility and awareness be increased for the FNTP to increase enrolment?
- How can the false perception of the FNTP as an upgrading or remedial program be changed to more accurately reflect its purpose?
- How can a common set of first semester courses be established so they form an equitable foundation for all students?
- Is it feasible to make the program accessible to all FNMI students who enter the U of L?
- What are some strategies for boosting attendance?
- What are some strategies for ensuring a smoother transition into university study?
- How can we create more permanent, full-time roles, versus secondments?

External Review

Overall, the External Review Report concluded that the FNTP is successful in facilitating the success of FNMI students, but that the major threats to the program are its "dispersed staffing structure" and the absence of a long-term plan.

In regard to the strengths of the program, the report commented:

- The program aligns with the U of L's values, mandates, and planning documents.
- The curricula and learning environment aligns with the program objectives.
- The coordinator, faculty, and support staff are dedicated to the success of the program.
- The retention and completion rates are excellent.
- Former students are satisfied with their experience in the FNTP.
- Student learning outcomes align with program objectives.
- Several former students have been influenced by the FNTP to follow academic paths that fall outside of those that FNMI students have traditionally followed.
- Faculty associated with the FNTP have strong track records in research and scholarship.

Several weaknesses and challenges were noted in the report:

- The program has a dispersed staffing structure. There are only three staff members dedicated to the FNTP, and the Coordinator position is not a regularized faculty position.
- The staff have a dispersed reporting, supervision, and evaluation structure. They report to and/or are evaluated by a range of individuals, some of whom are outside the program, including: the Dean of Arts and Science; the Dean of Health Sciences; various department Chairs; and the Head Librarian.
- Some faculty reported that their departments and/or supervisors think they are overqualified to teach in the program.
- The dispersed staffing structure makes it difficult to provide cohesive professional development activities for FNTP staff.
- The Library provides training, guidance, and classroom space. It is not clear how much of this support depends on particular Library staff.
- There is a lack of laboratory access and scheduling for the FNTP.
- The rotation of academic advisors in the Academic Advising office means that FNTP students may be advised by individuals who are not familiar with their needs.
- Support for FNTP students in developing writing skills is lacking. The Writing Centre is overwhelmed and understaffed.

There were four recommendations contained in the body of the report:

- Expand the Elders program and the speaker series.
- Increase the length of time of the FNTP orientation to better address student needs and availability.
- Consider having the Learning Facilitator from the Faculty of Arts and Science support former FNTP students in their subsequent academic years.
- Establish formal relationships between the FNTP and the various units that provide support to the program.

The report concluded with eight main recommendations:

1. Develop and implement, with necessary financial support, a long-term plan for the FNTP.
2. Regularize the FNTP Coordinator position as a full tenure-track position. Clarify where the Coordinator's "tenure home" is and how the Coordinator will be evaluated.
3. Develop a structural and/or procedural way to maintain the core faculty and instructors for the FNTP.
4. Hold regularly scheduled meetings for FNTP faculty and staff.
5. Consider accepting all FNMI students who are interested in the program, even if they meet U of L admission requirements.
6. Dedicate 20% of one Academic Advisor's work assignment to the FNTP cohort, and ensure they remain responsible for the cohort through their transition to the regular academic stream.

7. Develop a vision or mission statement for the FNTP, in consultation with current and former students and Elders.
8. Continue to promote the program, internally and externally.

Program Response

In their response to the External Review Report, the Self Study Committee noted:

- Expanding the Elders program would benefit all FNMI students and the whole community, but without available funding this expansion is unlikely.
- The Speaker Series has been expanded to two one-hour sessions per week. In the future, the Speaker Series will be converted into a credit course, perhaps titled Success Skills Series, with standardized material.
- The FNTP orientation will be expanded to a full week in the last week of August.
- The Self Study Committee share the External Reviewers’ concerns about the dispersed staffing structure and the Coordinator position not being a regularized faculty position.
- The Self Study Committee agree that a teaching assignment for the FNTP should be promoted as desirable for dedicated teachers.
- Professional development of FNTP faculty is a need. The FNTP Coordinator has a Teaching Fellowship and as part of this they will provide teaching workshops, which can be targeted in part to FNTP faculty.
- Expanding and formalizing relationships between the FNTP and more departments would educate others about the program.
- The FNTP has adequate laboratory access.
- Ongoing communication between the FNTP and academic advising will be important.
- FNTP students have good preparation in writing though WRITING 0500.

The Program Response responded to the eight main recommendations from the External Review Report:

<i>1. Develop and implement, with necessary financial support, a long-term plan for the FNTP.</i>	The FNTP will engage in long-term planning so that it meets present day needs and responds to the changing student demographic.
<i>2. Regularize the FNTP Coordinator position as a full tenure-track position. Clarify where the Coordinator’s “tenure home” is and how the Coordinator will be evaluated.</i>	Agreed.
<i>3. Develop a structural and/or procedural way to maintain the core faculty and instructors for the FNTP.</i>	Agreed. One possibility is to have two people in each involved department become familiar with the FNTP and rotate program teaching duties between them. Also, the Chairs of the departments that evaluate the faculty teaching in the FNTP need greater understanding of the program so their teaching in FNTP is recognized equitably.

4. Hold regularly scheduled meetings for FNTF faculty and staff.	The program has been holding consistent biweekly meetings. Though ideal, weekly meetings are not possible to schedule.
5. Consider accepting all FNMI students who are interested in the program, even if they meet U of L admission requirements.	Agreed.
6. Dedicate 20% of one Academic Advisor's work assignment to the FNTF cohort, and ensure they remain responsible for the cohort through their transition to the regular academic stream.	Allocating 20% of the Academic Advisor's time to FNTF is not feasible. The current Advisor has been effective, and has stayed with the program. The Learning Facilitator can have part of their duties be to track students through their subsequent years to graduation. Graduates can be approached to serve as student mentors for the FNTF.
7. Develop a vision or mission statement for the FNTF, in consultation with current and former students and Elders.	Agreed.
8. Continue to promote the program, internally and externally.	Agreed. Student ambassadors from the program could promote it within the community. These ambassadors could receive Applied Studies credit.

Dean's Response

In his response to the review documents, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science addressed the recommendations from the review:

1. Develop and implement, with necessary financial support, a long-term plan for the FNTF.	As a next step in long-term planning, the program should be restructured to address the changing student demographics. The Dean and the FNTF Coordinator must discuss resources for expanding the Elders Program and other program supports.
2. Regularize the FNTF Coordinator position as a full tenure-track position. Clarify where the Coordinator's "tenure home" is and how the Coordinator will be evaluated.	Agreed. The FNTF Coordinator will become a regularized position and will be filled by July 5, 2015.
3. Develop a structural and/or procedural way to maintain the core faculty and instructors for the FNTF.	Two faculty members should be identified in each participating department who can become familiar with teaching in the FNTF and can rotate teaching duties. In consultation with the FNTF Coordinator, participating departments should develop three-year plans for their course offerings within the program. The Chairs of participating departments should acknowledge teaching within FNTF in the Professional Activities Reports.
4. Hold regularly scheduled meetings for FNTF faculty and staff.	Agreed. The regular biweekly meetings should continue.
5. Consider accepting all FNMI students who are interested in the program, even if they meet U of L admission requirements.	Agreed. The FNTF cohort should be opened up to all FNMI students.

6. Dedicate 20% of one Academic Advisor's work assignment to the FNTP cohort, and ensure they remain responsible for the cohort through their transition to the regular academic stream.	Over the last three years an Academic Advisor who is familiar with the program has been working with FNTP students. This will continue. The Learning Facilitator should track FNTP students in their subsequent years at the U of L.
7. Develop a vision or mission statement for the FNTP, in consultation with current and former students and Elders.	An FNTP mission and vision will be developed in spring 2015.
8. Continue to promote the program, internally and externally.	Agreed. The Arts and Science Dean's office will increase communication with Recruiting about the importance of promoting the FNTP. The FNTP will be included as a regular part of the Calendar. Explore the use of student ambassadors and Applied Studies.

The Dean's Response also addressed three further points:

- **Elders Program** – The program will be expanded to three days per week.
- **Speaker Series** – Incorporate the Speaker Series as an assignment into one or two FNTP courses.
- **Student Orientation** – Expanding the Student Orientation to a full week should be explored.

The Academic Quality Assurance Committee is satisfied that the First Nations Transition Program 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,

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY:

Robert A. Boudreau

Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

Cc: Andrew Hakin, Provost and Vice President (Academic)