Bachelor of Arts Program Review Summary Report, 2022

Programs Reviewed:

Bachelor of Arts, 3- and 4-year:

3-year, General

4-year majors:

- Anthropology
- English
- French
- History
- Humanities
- Labor Studies
- Political Economy
- Political Science
- Psychology
- Sociology
- Women's and Gender Studies

University Certificates:

- Counselling Women
- French Language Proficiency

University Diploma:

- Arts

External Review Team Appointed by the Provost & Vice President Academic:

- Dr. Amitavi Chowdhury, Associate Professor and Chair of Undergraduate Studies, Department of History, Queen's University
- Dr. Alice Pitt, Senior Advisor, Markham Academic Strategic Planning, York University
- Dr. Simon Sigue, Professor and Associate Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Athabasca University (Internal Observer for site visit only)

Key Milestones:

- Program Review Kick-off: January 17, 2021
- Self-Study Approval by BA Program Council: September 2021
- Self-Study Approved by Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty Council: October 2021
- Virtual Site Visit: February 24-25, 2022:

- Receipt of External Reviewer Report: April 14, 2022
- Program Response Report to Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences Faculty Council: November 4, 2022
- Program Response Report to Academic Planning, Priorities and Standards Committee (APPSC) of General Faculties Council: January 19, 2023
- Public Posting of BA Program Review Summary Report, January 20, 2023
- Annual Program Update to APPSC: June 2024

Overview of Program Strengths and Weaknesses as Described by External Review Team:

The reviewers' report acknowledges the BA's fulfillment of, and commitment to, AU's mission as an open and distance university. The report confirms that "the program and the individual disciplinary or interdisciplinary subject areas meet provincial and national standards in quality, range, and depth of knowledge, skills and value" (p.3) and that the BA is a "healthy, engaged, and rigorous program" (p.3) for both visiting and program students, and further that it effectively balances learning outcomes and core concepts and methodologies.

Recent pedagogical changes, such as development of collaborative units, the emphasis on writing courses, and commitment to curriculum mapping, along with recent continuous improvement efforts and faculty strategic planning have strengthened the BA core and the learning opportunities available to students. Support services for BA students are impressive and responsive, although there is a need to further incorporate these supports into the learning process so that all students benefit, not just those who are self-motivated to reach out for support.

The level of Faculty research and scholarship is high, and there is good success in obtaining research grants and awards. While BA faculty are committed to AU's research mission, the reviewers proposed a greater integration of faculty members' research and scholarship by connecting course design to individual faculty research interests.

The discrepancy between course enrollment and the number of parchments awarded is noted, with a suggestion that the divide between visiting and program students warrants further attention. The reviewers further suggest a need for greater socialization elements within the program and its courses, increased work integrated learning activities, more visual and multimedia content in courses (balanced with what can be done in Moodle while awaiting the new LMS implementation), and greater focus on fulfilling the community and social involvement aspect of the BA's mission.

External reviewer recommendations are addressed in the Program Council Action Plan below.

Dean's Summative Response

The BA external review report emphasizes characteristics of the BA program (high quality course and program offerings that are accessible to students outside the synchronous, classroom model) that comprise its identity and strength, and which manifest themselves in program pedagogy and faculty

commitment to students in the program. The recommendations made by the reviewers are sound. The extent to which they will be achieved (and the timeliness of meeting these recommendations) will depend on three factors:

1) The implementation of the Integrated Learning Environment, and in particular the Brightspace learning management system (LMS). The features, functionality and accessibility of the new interface will determine the ability of FHSS to enhance students' interactions with faculty, advisors, tutors and other students, and thus to build the online, digital community that is the desired outcome.

2) Changes to processes and regulations that are developed and implemented centrally.

3) The meeting of resource requirements. All programs, including the BA, need resources to support current faculty needs, the hiring of new faculty, and to ensure the development and maintenance of high-quality courses continues. These require a commitment on the part of administration to resource faculty requests as appropriate, when made.

Athabasca University

Program Council Action Plan:

	Recommendation	Proposed Action	Timeline	Responsibility	Resourcing	Dean's Response
1A	Course level: peer discussion groups; Capstone courses	1. Study, investigate, inventory existing; 2. Design/ Implement pilot; 3. Study results/decide	'22-25	Program Council workgroup	FHSS	This recommendation is within the purview of the BA Program Council and has the support of FHSS.
1B	Reconsider/Regulation changes BA-Gen Studies	1. Investigate and study possibilities; 2. Design options; 3. Implement	'22-25	BA Council, Advising (note discussion has started)	FHSS	Any discussion about establishing a BA-General Studies should be after in-depth consultations with the existing BGS/CPC program councils to avoid duplication. Instead of creating a new degree (BA-Gen Studies), conversations may be had with the BGS /CPC program councils to potentially expand and revise the BGS regulations to meet the objectives articulated for BA-Gen Studies.
2	Course level: research integration	1. Investigate and study possibilities; 2. Design options; 3. Implement	'22 – '25	BA Council, Program Workgroups, Learning Design, Production Group	FHSS	The launch of the new faculty websites and the formation of research clusters (which will be listed through a dashboard or a similar platform) will increase researcher visibility to students and opportunities for students to work with faculty. Opportunities can be posted by faculty seeking research assistants, student

						volunteers and/or ideas for independent research projects. The Office of the Dean will work with faculty to ensure they create, post, and update opportunities and that they keep their research profiles actively updated.
3	Experiential/Work Integrated Learning	1. Investigate and study possibilities; 2. Design options; 3. Implement	'22-'25	BA Council, Program Workgroups (note, Advising has suggested WIL with HR for BPA)	FHSS	The Program Council should facilitate the incorporation of WIL in courses that go through the Program Council for content development. The Associate Dean, Strategic Initiatives, oversees and assists with the incorporation of work integrated learning in courses.
4	Student/University community interaction	1. Investigate and study possibilities; 2. Design options; 3. Implement	'22 – '25	BA Council can generate ideas, but cannot individually implement	FHSS	Once the ILE and new LMS have been delivered, faculty, staff and students will be able to explore features and functions related to communication and online community-building.
5	Improved multi-media use	1. Investigate and study possibilities; 2. Design options; 3. Implement	'22-'25	BA Council, Learning Design, Production group		The FHSS Course Production unit is working with faculty to include multi-media components in their courses, as they undergo course revision and development. Each new revision is showing substantial improvement in this regard.

6	Improve Advising structure for Program Students	Not really BA Program responsibility		But we will be glad to help and advise advising	FHSS/ Central	This recommendation is not within the purview of FHSS. FHSS can assist in realizing this recommendation within its means once a structure is in place.
7	Mandatory Advising and Tutor contact	Not really BA Program responsibility		But we will be glad to participate in any and all discussions	FHSS/ Central	This recommendation is not within the purview of FHSS. FHSS can assist in realizing this recommendation within its means once a structure is in place.
8	Mandatory Student Welcome to AU/FHSS/BA Program navigation 'video'	Not really BA Program responsibility, though our courses could include navigation pointers if they do not have those already		BA Council can generate ideas to help navigational pointers for students	FHSS/ Central	This recommendation will depend on the design of the centrally designed course templates in the new LMS. FHSS supports the creation of an FHSS/BA specific navigation video for visiting, and where possible, also for program students.
9	Faculty member conferences/ lectures/symposium about online and digital pedagogy and pedagogical innovation	Not confined to BA program; set up regular (every third year) conference with Med and DEd colleagues for new and interested faculty members to generate ideas and improve educational currency	'24	BA Program Council, FHSS Education	FHSS And Central or other Faculties who may be interested to join	When possible, FHSS holds an annual symposium for all faculty members to come together to share, and learn new innovations in teaching and research and to discuss strategic directions for the faculty. Faculty members can also present their work/ideas in these areas through FHSS Research Seminar and Speaker Series several times a year.

10	Increase number of teaching awards	Not really a BA Program responsibility			FHSS/ Central	Teaching awards are administered centrally. In FHSS, teaching excellence is also recognized through annual performance assessment. Also, FHSS is finalizing the creation of an award for marginalized students in honour of a recently deceased faculty member in Sociology.