

UTQAP Cyclical Review: Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan

1. Review Summary

Program Reviewed:	Finnish Studies, BA (Hons): Major, Minor
Division/unit in which program is housed:	Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures Faculty of Arts & Science
Commissioning Officer:	Dean, Faculty of Arts & Science
Reviewers (Name, Affiliation):	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Professor Andrew K. Nestingen, Department of Scandinavian Studies, University of Washington2. Professor Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, Department of Central, Eastern, and Northern European Studies, University of British Columbia
Date of Review Visit:	March 18, 2019
Date Reported to AP&P:	May 6, 2020

Previous Review

Date: November 2004

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

1. Undergraduate Programs

The reviewers observed the following strengths:

- Unique program is an asset for the University, “a major contributor to the study of Finland in North America and beyond”
- Commendable breadth and range of language and cultural courses

The reviewers identified the following areas of concern:

- Reviewers expressed concern about the emphasis upon grammar instruction in language courses

The reviewers made the following recommendations:

- Adopt proficiency goals for undergraduate language program and follow University’s Language Task Force recommendations

2. Graduate Programs (n/a)

Faculty/Research

The reviewers observed the following strengths:

- Strong leadership role of the program director in developing and sustaining the program and in promoting this field of studies throughout North America

The reviewers identified the following areas of concern:

- Upcoming retirement of the director of Finnish Studies and sole full-time faculty member in the Program

The reviewers made the following recommendations:

- Careful planning for smooth transition to next program director

Administration

The reviewers observed the following strengths:

- Reviewers felt the Program was well housed in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures and that good collegial relationships prevailed.
- Laudable and timely goal of establishing a chair of Finnish Studies

The reviewers made the following recommendations:

- Encourage more cross-fertilization between Finnish and Estonian Studies
- Strengthen Finnish language and literature library resources
- Establish a five-year plan for fundraising for the program

Last OCGS review(s) date(s): n/a

Current Review: Documentation and Consultation

Documentation Provided to Reviewers

Terms of reference; Self-study and Appendices; Previous review report including the administrative response(s); Access to all course descriptions; Access to the curricula vitae of faculty.

Consultation Process

Reviewers met with the Dean, Faculty of Arts & Science, and Vice-Dean, Academic Planning, Faculty of Arts & Science; Chair, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures; Finnish Studies Program Lead; Administrative staff including Undergraduate Coordinator, Graduate Coordinator, Department Administrator, and Business Officer; members of relevant cognate units including Chairs from Estonian Studies (Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy), Chair of History, Undergraduate Coordinator, Department of Linguistics, Acting Chair, Department of East Asian Studies; and undergraduate students.

Current Review: Findings and Recommendations

1. Undergraduate Program

Unless otherwise noted, all bulleted comments apply to all programs reviewed.

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- Overall quality
 - Impressive, high-quality program with strengths in course design and delivery
 - Positive image of the program as developed in the self-study is “fully justified”
 - As the sole Canadian source for university-level Finnish Language study in Canada, program’s existence speaks to the University’s commitment to language education and the “vibrant, culturally rich environment” of Toronto
 - “The University -- and the Faculty of Arts and Science in particular -- are to be commended for their almost three decades of support and they rightfully should take pride in this program.”
- Curriculum and program delivery
 - Language course content situates Finnish language within contemporary culture and students engage with modern, everyday usage including blogs and social media
 - Popular, appealing “gateway” courses in topics such as Vikings, Scandinavian crime fiction, Scandinavian cinema, and Old Norse Mythology attract students and increase program visibility
- Innovation

- Innovative course instruction methods include community interaction, online communication, and inter-institutional projects
- Student engagement, experience and program support services
 - Students expressed deep commitment to their studies and to the program
 - Student-organized clubs enhance student experience and help to sustain their commitment
- Quality indicators – undergraduate students
 - Students praised the program and expressed interest in further course delivery innovations

The reviewers identified the following **areas of concern**:

- Curriculum and program delivery
 - All course content is developed and delivered by one faculty member
- Quality indicators – undergraduate students
 - No increases expected in low program enrolments

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Curriculum and program delivery
 - Continue developing and offering attractive “gateway” Finnish and Swedish courses to help grow program enrolment
 - Program would benefit from additional perspectives and teaching methods

2. Graduate Program (n/a)

3. Faculty/Research

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- Research
 - Program is delivered by director who maintains active, productive research program on functionality in language, which supports innovative Finnish program curriculum and contributes to the broader field of second language acquisition studies

The reviewers identified the following **areas of concern**:

- Faculty
 - Concerns regarding workload capacity, lack of support, and long-term sustainability for program director and sole faculty member
 - Unlike other North American Finnish language programs, the program cannot currently leverage the availability of graduate student interns funded by the Finnish government to support the delivery of its program

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Research
 - Provide teaching relief for program director to support continuing research and new course development
- Faculty
 - Explore ways to leverage graduate student interns funded by the Finnish government to support the delivery of the program

4. Administration

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- Relationships
 - Impressive energy, commitment, and collegiality among faculty members in the Slavic Department, where the Finnish program is housed.
 - Size of program enables close relationships between students and program director as well as connections to external Finnish community
 - “One of the great strengths of the program is its combination of core energy and close relationship to local institutions”
- Long-range planning and overall assessment
 - Excellent work of program director and sole faculty member
 - Relatively low cost to operate program aligns with program enrolment
- International comparators
 - One of eight Finnish Studies programs in North America
 - Program offers exceptionally high-quality Finnish language instruction; “unique in Canada and equivalent to several Research 1 universities in North America.”

The reviewers identified the following **areas of concern**:

- Relationships
 - Lack of integration of Finnish program within the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures
 - Program students do not feel a strong connection with the Department, which can negatively impact student morale
- Organizational and financial structure
 - Issues around communications (e.g., emails and social media announcements), and the general position of the program as a small minority within the larger department, can lead to perceptions of neglect of the program by the department
- Long-range planning and overall assessment
 - Program lacks a permanent funding arrangement; currently funded with short-term grants from the Finnish National Agency for Education and the Canadian Friends of Finland

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Organizational and financial structure
 - Encourage open and/or mediated communication between representatives of the program and the department, to establish shared best practices and common goals and to help the program become more fully integrated within the department
 - “Despite current climate difficulties we recommend that the Finnish Program continue to be housed in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures”
- Long-range planning and overall assessment
 - Establish a long-term funding stream for the Finnish Studies program through collaboration between the university, the department, the local Finnish community, and the Finnish Ministry of Education



2. Administrative Response & Implementation Plan

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF ARTS & SCIENCE

February 25, 2020

Professor Susan McCahan
Vice-Provost, Academic Programs
University of Toronto

Re: UTQAP cyclical review of Finnish Studies

Dear Professor McCahan,

Along with the faculty, staff and students of Finnish Studies, I am pleased with the external reviewers' assessment of Finnish Studies and its programs: Hons. BA, Finnish Studies (Major); Finnish Studies (Minor). The reviewers complimented Finnish Studies as it "*speaks to the University of Toronto's commitment to language education, and it reflects the vibrant, culturally rich environment of its home city ... and they rightfully should take pride in this program.*"

The quality of this program notwithstanding, as per your letter dated January 10, 2020, the review report raises a number of issues and challenges. I am writing to address the areas of the review report that you identify as key. The responses to these items and implementation plan are separated into immediate- (six months), medium- (one to two years), and longer- (three to five years) terms, where appropriate, along with who will take the lead in each area. The Dean's office has discussed the reviewers' comments through consultation with the Chair of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures and senior leadership within the Dean's office to develop the following implementation plan incorporating the reviewers' recommendations.

Implementation Plan

The reviewers encouraged finding ways to consolidate support for Finnish Studies at U of T, while acknowledging the current program has seen fluctuating and low enrolment.

Immediate-term response: We are pleased to see that the reviewers emphasized the achievements and successes of the Finnish Studies major and minor. Nevertheless, the review has highlighted the overall low student interest in this area. Total enrollments across years 2-4 of the program have been consistently low, ranging from 2 majors in Fall 2009, to 4 majors and 7 minors in Fall 2019. Finnish Studies typically admits 1-2 new students each year to each of the major and minor. It is not clear that enrolment is fluctuating to any significant degree, given these very low numbers where an increase of one student can amount to a 100% increase in enrolment in any given year. We do note that the major was successful in attracting 2 new students in 2019. Small numbers in individual courses can be beneficial for students; when they lack a cohort group, however, they may lose out on some of the important academic enrichment that comes from class discussion and engagement. We will be working with the Chair to discuss

curricular options that will provide core curriculum shared with other streams in Slavic Languages and Literatures. This will lead to a more stable and sustainable curriculum and will enable Finnish Studies students to be part of a larger student cohort.

Medium- to longer-term response: A&S is home to a number of small programs and recognizes the value of teaching less commonly taught languages. Nevertheless, it will be important for the Dean's office to work with the Chair to evaluate whether changes to the current program design will yield a more sustainable future for the program. If it appears that the major will not be viable in the longer-term, it may be more beneficial to focus efforts on supporting the minor.

The reviewers noted that despite high praise for their courses, the students voiced concerns that all teaching in the program is done by a single instructor: "The only critical comment we heard from them was...that they would appreciate a second, different take on cultural matters." The reviewers also observed that reliance on a single instructor also impacts the sustainability of the research that is done in relation to the undergraduate program. The reliance on a single faculty member also does not provide the diverse perspectives expected in a program of study.

We share the reviewers' concerns about a program in which the curriculum is delivered by a single instructor. This is problematic from a pedagogical perspective. As the reviewers note, students are learning about subject matter from only one perspective. In addition, one person cannot possibly be an expert in all subject matter included in a program. Moreover, this puts the program on unstable footing, making it impossible for one instructor to take any kind of leave without putting the program in jeopardy.

Immediate- medium-term response: We will work with the Chair to look at curricular options that would draw on the expertise of other faculty members in A&S. For example, the Chair is exploring the possibility of including courses from other units that would complement the Finnish language courses anchoring the program. We appreciate the Program Lead's use of guest lecturers but note that students would benefit further from courses delivered in full by other faculty members with a more diverse set of research programs and teaching styles.

The Chair is working with the Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning, to explore these and other curricular options that will provide more stability in the program curriculum.

The reviewers raised a number of concerns regarding the majority/minority dynamic between the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures and the Finnish Studies program, including issues with intra-departmental communication and student morale; they recommended improving communication and integration between the department and the program to "remove mutual misperceptions" and improve morale in the program.

Immediate- to medium-term response: Finnish Studies is administered through the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures but is not considered to be a Slavic POSt. The Chair has initiated discussions to integrate the Finnish Studies major and minor into the suite of Slavic programs, including the development of shared core curriculum. This would connect the Finnish

faculty member and students in Finnish Studies to the larger Department, enhancing communication and providing a greater sense of community.

The reviewers recommended that the department consider allowing graduate student interns from Finland to teach Finnish language courses, as has been done successfully at comparator institutions in the U.S.

Immediate- to medium-term response: The Chair is actively pursuing the option of bringing in graduate students from Finland. We note that this initiative, if feasible, would have the potential to enrich the program but will not address the more serious issues associated with the program being delivered by one person.

The reviewers raised concerns regarding workload for the program lead who is also the sole faculty member.

Immediate- to medium-term response: The Program Lead holds an appointment as a CLTA, teaching steam. This faculty member currently teaches 3.0 FCEs, which is typical of teaching stream faculty in A&S. Several of these courses involve enrolments of fewer than 10 students. The workload concerns appear to arise from additional activities relating to community engagement. The Chair will work to ensure that these activities are reasonable and within the job description for the CLTA.

The reviewers recommended finding a permanent financial arrangement to fund a continuing appointment for this position.

Immediate- to medium-term response: The position is currently funded through an endowment, the community, and the government of Finland. We appreciate this community engagement in our academic mission. The Dean's Office will work with the Chair of Slavic Languages and Literatures to examine options for a more stable arrangement in the future.

The Dean's office will monitor the implementation of recommendations through ongoing meetings with the Chair, as well as the A&S unit-level planning process. A brief report to the Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs, midway between the year of the March 18, 2019 site visit and the year of the next site visit, will be prepared.

The year of the next review will be **2026-27**.

To conclude, we appreciate that the external reviewers identified Finnish Studies' strengths and noted areas for development. Finnish Studies has already begun to move forward with plans to address the recommendations as presented by the reviewers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M Woodin". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a prominent loop at the end of the word "Woodin".

Melanie Woodin
Dean and Professor of Cell and Systems Biology

cc.

Donna Orwin, Chair, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, Faculty of Arts & Science

Poppy Lockwood, Vice-Dean, Academic Planning, Faculty of Arts & Science

Asher Cutter, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Issues and Academic Planning

Daniella Mallinick, Director, Academic Programs, Planning & Quality Assurance, Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs

Andrea Benoit, Academic Review Officer, Office of the Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science

3. Committee on Academic Policy & Programs (AP&P) Findings

The spokesperson for the Reading Group reported that the summary covered the full Review. The Group agreed that the Dean's administrative response fully addressed the issues identified. The Group had no specific additional questions or comments.

No follow-up report was requested.

4. Institutional Executive Summary

The reviewers praised the program as productive and vital, noting its unique status as the only university level Finnish studies program in Canada, and one of only eight in North America; they viewed the program as a reflection of Toronto's vibrant and culturally rich environment, and commended the commitment and innovation of the program's sole faculty member, who has introduced cutting-edge instruction methods to the Finnish classroom, and made impressive efforts to better publicize the program and increase course enrolment; finally, the reviewers noted the great enthusiasm and commitment of the program's students, who enjoy close connections to one another, the program director and the broader Finnish community. The reviewers recommended that the following issues be addressed: finding ways to consolidate support for Finnish Studies at U of T; addressing student concerns that all teaching in the program is done by a single instructor; addressing concerns regarding the majority/minority dynamic between the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures and the Finnish Studies program by improving communication and integration between the department and the program; considering allowing graduate student interns from Finland to teach Finnish language courses; addressing concerns regarding workload for the program lead who is also the sole faculty member, and finding a permanent financial arrangement to fund a continuing appointment for this position. The Dean's Administrative Response describes the Faculty, unit and programs' responses to the reviewers' recommendations, including an implementation plan for any changes necessary as a result.

5. Monitoring and Date of Next Review

The Dean's office will monitor the implementation of recommendations through ongoing meetings with the Chair, as well as the A&S unit-level planning process.

The Dean will provide an interim report to the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs midway between the year of the March 18, 2019 site visit and the year of the next site visit on the status of the implementation plans.

The year of the next review will be 2026-27.

6. Distribution

On October 26, 2020, the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan was posted to the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs website and the link provided by email to the Dean of the

Faculty of Arts & Science, the Secretaries of AP&P, Academic Board and Governing Council, and the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance. The Dean provided the link to the Chair of the Department.