FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

Evaluation of Undergraduate and Graduate Programs (Harmonized)
Programs in Conflict Studies at Saint Paul University
Cyclical Review Period: 2021–2022
Date: November 10, 2022

I. Evaluated Programs:

- Honours B.A. in Conflict Studies
- Major in Conflict Studies
- M.A. in Conflict Studies
- Ph.D. in Conflict Studies

II. Outline Evaluation Process (outline of the visit)

This final assessment report for the evaluation of the above programs was prepared from the following documents: (a) the self-study report produced by the academic unit, (b) the report of the external evaluation following the visit, and (c) the response by the Director, School of Conflict Studies, Jean-François Rioux, as well as the response by the Dean of the Faculty of Human Sciences, Aurélie Lacassagne.

The visit was conducted virtually due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The reviewers were provided a comprehensive self-study brief that had been previously approved by the program committee on January 31, 2022, then presented and discussed at the School Assembly on February 3, 2022.

The site visit, which took place June 7-8, 2022, was conducted by Eva Malisius (Royal Roads University) and Ali Ghanbarpour Dizboni (Royal Military College of Canada).

The following individuals and groups of people were met by the external evaluators: 1) senior management from the University of Ottawa: Associate Vice-Provost of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, Sylvie Lamoureux, and Director, Program Evaluation, Marcel Turcotte; 2) senior management from Saint Paul University: Rector, Chantal Beauvais, Vice-Rector of Academic and Research, Jean-Marc Barrette, Dean of Human Sciences, George Smith, Vice-Dean of Human Sciences, Hélène Tessier, and Director of Conflict Studies programs, Jean-François Rioux; 3) 10 full-time and 10 part-time professors; 4) management and support staff; and 5) several francophone and anglophone students from both undergraduate and graduate programs.

Materials considered by the external evaluators were all provided via a SharePoint site and included the following: strategic and promotional materials, student work and exams, course outlines, and faculty CVs. The reviewers also consulted publicly available materials such as program and universities' websites.

III. Summary of Reports on the Quality of Programs

EMPHASIZING THE STRENGTHS AND IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES

The external evaluation report, along with the self-study report, emphasises key strengths and challenges.

STRENGTHS

- Complete bilingualism (at the faculty and university level).
- In comparison to other programs, the program's small size, including smaller class sizes, offers students greater availability to, and a closer relationship with, the faculty and staff.
- The student experience is strong at all three levels of the conflict studies programs.
- The 2+2 initiative attracted more diverse students and strengthened the program's professional orientation.
- The program's curriculum, hiring, and structure have been adapted, renewed, and reformed to bring them more in line with empirical, professional, and ultimately societal needs.
- The undergraduate and graduate Conflict Studies programs have a strong reputation, both locally and nationally, among universities.
- Interdisciplinarity of the programs

CHALLENGES

- Students have mentioned difficulties in translating their knowledge into relevance for conflict intervention practice and employability in general (perception of missing skills).
- Although the program requirements and associated learning outcomes are clearly formulated, the communication of them to students should be improved.
- The program's small size and Saint Paul University's financial restraints limits opportunities for experiential learning.

IV. Program Improvements

The programs under evaluation are in conformity with the standards of the discipline. The following recommendations aim at maintaining or increasing the level of quality already achieved by the programs.

Recommendation #1: Provide internship options at the undergraduate and graduate level, supported by dedicated internship advisers.

Recommendation #2: Review elective courses to generate space for evolving trends in the field and add skills building focused courses.

Recommendation #3: Introduce required course featuring Indigenous content at all levels to broaden the knowledge base of conflict studies graduates.

Recommendation #4: Review doctoral seminar content.

Recommendation #5: Review course relief for the academic program administrative roles, and hiring administrative support for the program office.

Recommendation #6: Establish more financial support options and bursaries for MA and PhD students.

V. Action Plan

It is important to note that the School has welcomed all of the recommendations made by the external evaluation team, with no major objections. Indeed, the areas of concern identified by the external evaluators are consistent with those already expressed in the School's self-evaluation report.

As a result of this alignment between the challenges identified in the self-study report and in the external evaluation report, the School is committed to responding and implementing the report's recommendations, within the resources available to it. Several initiatives are already underway, and more are being considered for the medium and long term. These include hiring more regular faculty and administrative support staff; identifying recruitment strategies to improve the quality of students in the three programs; and implementing curricular changes to support the students' learning experience through additional internship opportunities, elective courses to reflect trends in the field, incorporating more Indigenous course content, and placing a greater emphasis on practical conflict resolution skills. The commitment to recruit 4 doctoral students each year is realistic for the current faculty size' capacity to provide supervision and mentoring.

VI. Conclusion

Although the School of Conflict Studies' faces many challenges, it is also resilient thanks to the leadership of its director and faculty and support staff, as well as the understanding of the student body. Reforms to improve the program are already underway, but current resources limit what can be achieved. Unless there is substantial and priority support from the University, it will be difficult for the School, despite its committed faculty members and dedicated administrative staff, to make rapid improvements in the short term as the needs are so great.

Schedule and Timelines

A progress report that outlines the completed actions and subsequent results will be submitted to the evaluation committee by December 15, 2024. The next cyclical review will take place in no more than eight years, in 2028-2029. The self-study brief must be submitted no later than June 15, 2028.



Unit Response to the External Review Report and Action Plan

Faculty:

• Human Sciences

Department:

School of Conflict Studies

Programs evaluated:

- Honours B.A. in Conflict Studies
- Major in Conflict Studies
- M.A. in Conflict Studies
- Ph.D. in Conflict Studies

Cyclical review period:

• 2021-2022

Date:

• October 3, 2022, revised and translated January 30, 2023.

General comments:

In the spring of 2022, Professors Eva Malisius of Royal Roads University and Ali Ghanbarpour Dizboni of the Royal Military College of Canada studied the undergraduate and graduate programs offered by Saint Paul University's School of Conflict Studies and virtually visited our university on June 7 and 8. They produced an evaluation report on July 14, 2022. This document responds to the evaluators' suggestions.

First of all, we would like to thank Professors Malisius and Dizboni for their detailed and professional work and for the kind and critical attention they have shown in the study of our self-assessment report and during the consultations with our professors, students and administrators. Their report is full of very valid observations that complement and reinforce our self-assessment, but also highlight other problems and make very relevant suggestions.

The evaluators generally appreciated the form and management of our programs and the tone of their report was very positive. However, they made six main recommendations for our school at the end of their report, with half receiving high priority and the other half receiving medium priority. This report will offer possible solutions for these six items.

The evaluators, in the text of their report, also made several recommendations and suggestions on a wide range of topics. We will address some of these additional issues in the last part of our lengthy response appended to this action plan.

^{*} PRIORITY LEVEL: 1. URGENT-Immediate action required 2. IMPORTANT-Action required within 18 months (maximum) 3. ADVISED: DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGY-Action to be discussed and must be in place by mid-cycle (within 4 years)

Recommendation 1: Provide internship options at the undergraduate and graduate level, supported by dedicated internship advisers

Unit response:

The issue of internships has been high for many years in the preoccupations of students and professors in our university. We have alluded to this question in all previous self-evaluation reports, and external examinators have always noted that the lack of internship and co-op opportunities was deplored by students and constituted a notable lacuna in our programs. The lack of experiential learning is flagrant all over Saint Paul university, due to the lack of resources in our small institution.

However, some recent developments augur well for the development of this form of learning. A new person responsible for internships has been hired by the university in August of 2022. In her mandate, a strong emphasis is put on consolidating the cooperation between the university and our regular institutional partners, and on finding new places of internships for our students. Professor Rioux has already talked to the new person in charge of internships to encourage her, to assure her of our cooperation, and to make sure that the needs of our school are understood and taken into consideration.

Given the demand from students for paid internships, notably with the Federal government, the Forum of Conflict Study will consider the possibility of creating an "internship stream," or "practical stream" option in our program. This way, we could have a small cohort of students that could be sent to government offices. Naturally, the implementation of such a project will ultimately depend on the capabilities of the university.

In the eventuality of the creation of a graduate certificate in conflict resolution, an internship option could also be created. Our forum will soon discuss the goals and shape of this diploma, and the Director will make sure to submit for discussion the possibility of experiential learning for students not already employed full-time.

It is also expected that the development of our Centre for Informal Dispute Resolution (CIDR) will result in more internships over the years. This spring and summer, we have already hired two paid interns to help in the preparation of workshops on trauma and conflict resolution, and on the development of ombuds work in view of new challenges and opportunities. More activities and remunerated contracts are in sight for CIDR, involving several outside partners, and the internship openings will be quite interesting for our students oriented towards practical interventions and management work.

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The Dean's office is strongly committed to support the School in this matter. It already added human resources and will liaise with relevant stakeholders to develop internship opportunities.

Priority Level*	Actions to be undertaken	Assigned to	Timeline	Curriculum change?
1	Support the work of the new internship person to increase the number and quality of internships	Dean Director	Academic Year 2022-23	No
2	Find new places of internships with the Dean's office, in collaboration with our partners outside the university	Dean Director	Academic Year 2022-23	No
2	Start consultations and discussion on possibility of a practical stream with internship or coop option	Director	Academic Year 2022-23	No
3	Possible implementation of a practical stream at the BA level	Director Dean	April 2024	Yes

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Recommendation 2: Review elective courses to generate space for evolving trends in the field and add skills building focused courses.

Unit response:

The School of Conflict Studies recognizes the need to periodically review its course offerings and intends to improve its selection of topics. We will explore the possibility of offering more electives to our students, but this will require consultations with our professors and administrators and will take some time.

Indeed, during the discussions of our forum, we often found that professors would like to add other topics in our list of courses. Some of these topics correspond to those suggested by the evaluators, but there are many other themes that can be considered because of the diversity of study topics, disciplinary backgrounds, and research methods of our professors.

For example, in recent years, several special topic courses have addressed conflict issues in different regions of the world (Africa, Middle East, South Asia, East Asia, Latin America, China, Russia) because many students request courses focused on international conflicts. The introduction of topics should always be considered in relation to the multiple demands and interests of our students.

We offer several practical courses at the B.A. level, but we will be thinking about adding more. In recent years, we have sometimes used special subject ratings to provide additional training to our students. Recently, we have considered offering specialized and complementary training through our Center for Informal Dispute Resolution (CIDR).

Our programs already include many optional courses, and we have to offer everything in both languages. Any decision on the addition of new courses often involves the elimination of courses and this requires extensive reflection and consultation with faculty, students, and administrators at the university.

The possibility of introducing new topics as part of the special subject courses is the approach we envisage in the short term. Specialized professors and researchers could teach selected topics such as those suggested by the evaluators as early as next spring.

Another approach to improving course offerings (and often used by us) is to offer a course from another school to our students with a Conflict Studies rating. For example, in the fall of 2022, Professor Richard Feist of Philosophy offered ECS 5120 Selected Topics in Conflict Studies: Military and Peacekeeping Ethics. One or more consultations with professors from other schools will be considered to add optional courses relevant to our students and related to the expertise of teachers from other schools. Eventually, when Saint-Paul University offers its planned program on ethical issues in the environment, some of the courses may be configured to be relevant and accessible to Conflict Studies students.

Finally, we have a project to create a one-year practical certificate at the master's level. As part of this degree, we will be able to add a number of practical courses, including the courses on ethics and professional conduct and on mediation and negotiation that were suggested by the evaluators.

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The dean's office plans to request the hiring of a new professor in 2023 whose profile will be that of a practitioner (in mediation, negotiation and/or diplomacy) in order to improve the offer of practical courses focused on professional skills. In addition, in the fall of 2022, the Dean's Office is implementing a new way of developing the course load within the Faculty that aims to increase collaborations between the different schools in order to allow everyone to benefit from the specialties of the faculty and also, thanks to transcoding, to increase the course offer for the student body.

Priority Level*	Actions to be undertaken	Assigned to	Timeline	Curriculum change?
1	A new process will be put in place in 2023 to review course assignments within the Faculty in order to make better use of the expertise of current faculty (e.g., environment, new technologies, Indigenous worldviews) and maximize human resources.	Dean	Winter 2023	No
2	Consultations on topics that can be added and which could be removed from the BA and MA	Director	Academic year 2022-23	No
1	Open special topic courses on new topics starting in spring 2023	Director	Academic year 2022-23	No
3	Modify course offerings at BA and MA, if necessary	Director	Decisions before April 2024	Possible
2	Consultations on the development of an MA level program devoted to conflict resolution and elaboration of a plan	Director	Academic year 2022- 23	No
3	Implementation of a MA one-year diploma including practical courses	Director Dean	Before April 2024	Yes

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Recommendation 3: Introduce required course featuring Indigenous content at all levels to broaden the knowledge base of conflict studies graduates.

Unit response:

Our School is sensitive to indigenous issues and related topics are already covered across many courses in our existing curriculum. Among these courses, we have one at the bachelor level which is a compulsory course: HTP 1106 *The First Peoples of Canada |* HTP 1506 *Premiers Peuples du Canada*. We offer at the BA level ECS 2126 *Indigenous Peoples and Conflict |* ECS 2526 *Peuples autochtones et conflits* which is offered every year on a language-based rotation. We replicate the same type offering at the MA level with the course ECS 5316 *Indigenous Cultures, Conflict and Coexistence |* ECS 5716 *Cultures indigènes, conflits et coexistence*.

Several of our compulsory and optional courses often dedicate at least a class (and sometimes a larger section) to this theme. Among these courses, at the bachelor level, we can identify:

- ECS 2192 Inequality, Conflict and Social Justice / ECS 2592 Inégalités, conflits et justice sociale;
- ECS 2124 Local and Community Responses to Conflict / ECS 2524 Attitudes locales et communautaires face aux conflits, and
- ECS 3140 Gender Relations and Conflict / ECS 3540 Rapports sociaux de sexes et conflits.

At the master's level, we can identify the following courses:

- ECS5101 Identity-Based Conflict / ECS5501 Conflits identitaires
- ECS 5110 History of Conflict Resolution / ECS 5510 Histoire de la résolution des conflits
- ECS5112 Trauma, Healing and Reconciliation / ECS5512 Traumatismes, guérison et réconciliation
- ECS5114 Genocide and Reconciliation / ECS5514 Génocide et réconciliation
- ECS 5313 Spirituality and Conflict / ECS 5713 Spiritualité et conflits
- ECS 5315 Gender Relations and Conflict / ECS 5715 Rapports sociaux de sexes et conflits.

As mentioned earlier, we could add more special topic courses dealing with Indigenous questions. Courses on *Restorative Justice* and *First Peoples of Canada*, *Conflict and Conflict Resolution in Indigenous Communities*, or *Conflicts over Land Rights*, for example, could be quite popular with students.

Concerning the introduction of an additional (Indigenous) *Research Methods* course, for now, this will prove difficult to implement, given the limited number of courses available at that level. For now, the indigenous question is already included in our methods course at the graduate level (ECS 5103 *Research methods*). Our instructors in this course all cover important aspects that affect the research on indigenous issues (i.e., epistemological issues in terms of differences in research and production of knowledge; and how to conduct inclusive research including indigenous populations).

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This being said, our School recognizes the importance of indigenous research methods. Greater emphasis on observation methods respecting indigenous cultures will be incorporated within the structure of the existing methods course. Inviting research methods experts from Indigenous communities is also a possibility.

It is worthwhile pointing out that a growing number of our students seem to have taken an interest in indigenous issues in recent years, for several reasons including the excellent work of our Knowledge Keepers from the *Indigenous Initiatives Service*, the stimulating courses at the bachelor level of Professor Anny Morissette, and the horrific discoveries made recently in connection with residential schools. We believe that our program should respond to this increased interest from our students.

Decanal response:

The Faculty is already engaged in discussion on this matter. The Faculty is committed to do proper consultations with Anishinaabe elders and stakeholders and seek their approval. Four micro-programmes on Indigenous issues and governance are currently under development; two of these programmes will be offered as of September 2023.

Priority Level*	Actions to be undertaken	Assigned to	Timeline	Curriculum change?
2	Increase and ameliorate indigenous content of BA courses, and add new courses, as regular or special topic courses	BA coordinator	Before Sept. 2023	No
2	Increase and ameliorate indigenous content of MA courses, and add new courses, as regular or special topic courses	MA coordinator	Before Sept. 2023	No
2	Increase and ameliorate indigenous content of MA/PhD methods seminar	PhD coordinator	Before Sept. 2023	No
3	Modify course offerings at BA and MA, if necessary	Director	Before April 2024	Possible

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Recommendation 4: Review doctoral seminar content.

Unit response:

Over the last two years, the question of reviewing the PhD program in its entirety, to allow for a timely completion of the comprehensive exams, has been in our discussions with some frequency. Some of the changes we could introduce go in the direction of the evaluators' suggestions, namely strengthening the core conceptual basis in conflict studies through mandatory courses, while also rethinking the focus of the seminar in terms of content (i.e., number of themes, less than seven?) and format.

Currently the two-year-seminar has three core elements to help the students towards their comprehensive exams. For each of the themes, a professor with expertise on the dimension presents its conceptual basis. Then each student, based on his or her research thesis, intellectual context and epistemological orientation or *courant de pensée*, choses to discuss one, two or three readings, focusing the presentation on how his or her work connects to the dimension, while situating it in the larger field of conflict studies. After that, a written essay (10 to 15 pages) is assigned focusing on students' research topic, its theoretical basis, and the answer to the question in relation to the comprehensive exam. In essence, these elements mirror the requirements and theoretical preparedness for the comprehensive exam. All works (presentations and written assignments) are thoroughly commented by the PhD seminar instructor, providing concrete suggestions on how to improve the quality of the paper, how to better focus the analysis for the comps and what methodological and theoretical elements to rethink, adjust and take further into consideration.

However, not all the students have the same academic background, professional training, writing and analytical skills which would allow to quickly define the theoretical directions and methodological approaches for their research. Therefore, the challenges to concisely frame their research differ from one student to another, leading to a different pace towards the comprehensive exam and the thesis more generally. The same goes for methodological skills, some to build more than others.

We thank the evaluators for the suggestion and will certainly undertake a thorough discussion with the professors about the content of the program and the format of the seminar we would like to have. For instance, some of the options discussed up to now are, among others, whether to have (1) more mandatory courses, or (2) propaedeutic periods – 1 to 2 semesters, (3) to shorten the PhD seminar from two years to one year or (4) reduce the number of themes discussed in the seminar; or (5) even reviewing the requirements for the comprehensive exam. All this will be the subject of an in-depth discussion among faculty and with PhD students, in order to clarify students' expectations, better respond to their needs and better equip them towards comprehensive exams and an independent research work.

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The Dean's Office unreservedly supports an in-depth review of the structure of the doctorate, particularly with regard to the core research seminar. The strengthening of the seminar on methods has meant that a compulsory course in conflict theories seems to be a promising avenue.

Priority Level*	Actions to be undertaken	Assigned to	Timeline	Curriculum change?
1	Elaborate precise proposals for reforming the PhD seminar	PhD coordinator	Before January 2023	No
2	Consultation with professors and students on the proposals	PhD coordinator	Before April 2023	No
3	Implementation of modifications to the seminar	PhD coordinator	Before April 2024	Yes

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Recommendation 5: Review course relief for the academic program administrative roles and hiring administrative support for the program office.

Unit response:

We are very pleased that the examiners have sympathized with us about the breadth of management issues related to our school. The administrative requirements imposed on the principal and faculty of a small university can be quite high, given that the institution has limited financial resources and cannot benefit from economies of scale in the delivery of its services.

Recent pressures due to the pandemic, the creation of CIDR, program evaluations, and high staff turnover in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences have been particularly challenging for the Director of Conflict Studies and several other professors involved in administrative work. During the darkest days of the pandemic, the faculty office could only rely on two full-time employees, one of whom was often on sick leave. It was during this difficult time that we produced our self-assessment report.

Fortunately, this painful situation is coming to an end. A new dean has been appointed, and she is very aware of the challenges facing our school. Since the fall of 2022, the faculty now benefits from a new team, including two full-time and one part-time administrative assistants, and an internship coordinator.

On the other hand, the task of principal now counts as two educational rebates, which we believe is more realistic. In the last two years, our director had benefited from these six rebate credits because of the demands for the periodic evaluation and the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic. It appears that this relief will be automatic in the future.

That said, we are aware that other administrative tasks performed by our professors would merit a reduction of at least three credits. A few years ago, the university abolished the rebates for research centers. We will continue to call for them to be reinstated. However, it seems to us that the main position for which we should be granted relief is the management of CIDR. This center dedicated to strengthening the practical skills of our students and professionals in the field of conflict resolution is growing rapidly and will soon offer workshops, internships, symposia, interventions, and consultations. It is expected that we will solicit SPU in the future to raise 3 credits for the Director.

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The Dean's office is well aware of these issues and the new dean will tackle them in consultation with all the relevant parties. A full administrative team is now in place at the Dean's office and is there to support the director in his work. The Dean will support the CRID in its endeavour to look for external contracts which would be a good way to ensure a full-time coordinator position.

Priority Level*	Actions to be undertaken	Assigned to	Timeline	Curriculum change?
1	Evaluation of the functioning of the Human Sciences secretariat and improvement of the operations and services offered at our school	Dean Director	Before April 2023	No
2	Applications for course releases for CIDR and the CRC	Director	Before April 2023	No

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Recommendation 6: Establish more financial support options and bursaries for MA and PhD students.

Unit response:

This recommendation is crucial if we want to have a better quality of students at the MA and PhD levels and a timely completion of graduate studies. Only in the last two years, we have lost at least two strong international candidates for questions related to timely visa delivery and lack of financial means to support themselves.

We will study the possibility to create a funding package for our PhD students comprised of the basic scholarship, additional sources, and guaranteed employment in the university as teaching, research, or administrative assistants. Many universities now advertise such packages to attract candidates, and we should do the same. A similar approach could be used for the MA as well, but on a lower financial scale. This will be subject to discussions and eventually negotiations with university's high administration and we hope to find the required support on the matter.

One possible solution is to find external support for additional bursaries for graduate students in Conflict Studies. Last year, we presented to the faculty five projects to be financed through external fundraising. The one aiming at better financing our PhD students through scholarships was determined as the priority by the executive of the Faculty of Human Sciences. We can now expect some developments on that front because the university has recently hired an employee to take charge of fundraising. The Dean of Human Sciences is very committed to this question and is in regular contact with the high administration regarding possible external funding.

On the other side, some more efforts will be mobilized to provide support for all the MA and PhD students who are academically stronger and eligible for more competitive scholarships, such as OGS and SSHRC, among others, with designing of their research proposals and application packages. The university already organizes one event in September to present graduate students with the available opportunities for scholarships. Yet such opportunities should be up to date and regularly refreshed in the university's website (which has not always been the case).

For our PhD students, at the beginning of the academic year, we organize an additional event during the first class of the seminar to present strategies how to prepare and apply for the highly competitive fellowship (OGS and SSHRC in particular) and offer support with the application package from the seminar instructor and thesis supervisor. This year, two of our PhD candidates got an OGS and a SSHRC fellowship for the next three years; another MA student got the SSHRC fellowship but had to decline it, as he is finishing the MA within a year. The contribution of the thesis supervisors remains of utmost importance to ensuring the success of the MA and PhD candidates towards designing their research proposal and obtaining fellowships.

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The Dean has already talked about this topic with the new manager, Alumni and Development Office (ADO) who will identify alumni and organizations willing to give bursaries. The Dean is also engaged in discussion with the research office to foster and support grant applications of graduate students. The research office created in summer 2022 a new position entirely dedicated to support grant-writing applications for professors and students.

Priority Level*	Actions to be undertaken	Assigned to	Timeline	Curriculum change?
2	Follow and support efforts from the university to find external money for our graduate students	Dean Director	Before September 2023	No
1	Encourage graduate students to apply to receive grants and fellowships	MA Coordinator PhD Coordinator	Before January 2023	No
2	Increase financial package for PhD students	PhD Coordinator	Before September 2024	No