

**FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT**  
**Evaluation of Graduate Programs**  
**Information Studies**  
**Faculty of Arts**  
**Cycle: 2023–2024**  
**Date: February 5, 2025**

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**I. Program(s) reviewed**

- Master of Information Studies (MIS)
- Graduate Diploma in Information Management (GDIM)

**II. Review process (outline of the visit)**

This Final Assessment Report on the aforementioned programs is based on the following documents: (a) the self-study brief produced by the academic unit; (b) the post-visit external review report; and (c) the responses from André Vellino, Director of the School of Information Studies; and Kevin Kee, Dean of the Faculty of Arts.

The external review visit, which took place on Thursday, March 28, 2024, covered graduate programs. The review team consisted of France Bouthillier, McGill University; and Lyne Da Sylva, Université de Montréal.

For their visit, the external reviewers met with Christopher Fennell, Associate Vice-Provost, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies; Marc Charron, Dean, Faculty of Arts; Joël Beddows, Vice-Dean, Programs; and members of faculty, support staff and students.

**III. Summary of program quality reports<sup>1</sup>**

**Strengths**

The Master of Information Studies stands out for the following reasons:

- Twice accredited by the American Library Association.
- The program's bilingual nature.
- CO-OP option makes it possible for students to engage in paid employment while studying, and provides them with work experience that allows them to apply what they have learned.
- Opportunity for students to carry out research projects/theses on highly specialized subjects.
- Proximity to Ottawa-area employers (students are hired for positions in libraries, archives, museums, government agencies and the private sector).

For its part, the Graduate Diploma in Information Management is, quite simply, unique in Canada, with six courses covering the fundamentals of information management.

There is a solid and dedicated team of regular faculty members. They are supplemented by lecturers who bring their hands-on experience in the field.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the documents prepared during the review process, often cited verbatim.

## Challenges

The Graduate Diploma in Information Management presents the following challenges:

- Cohorts are very small and sometimes non-existent if no students enrol.
- With only a bachelor's degree required for admission, it begs the question whether the diploma adequately prepares students for careers in information management.

The capstone experience presents a challenge, in that it alternates between a portfolio project one year and a group project the next. This results in a very different experience for the different cohorts.

The CO-OP option in the Master's program presents the following challenges:

- Workload, as students have to take courses during their work placements.
- Overlapping requirements: capstone experience and work placement reports (two).
- Cap on CO-OP enrolment, to ensure sufficient student numbers in courses.

The Master's thesis option presents its own challenges:

- It does not attract that many students.
- The thesis consists of very few credits (12) compared to theses in other master's programs at the University of Ottawa.

Challenges were identified where the courses are concerned:

- The proportion of courses in French (35%) is too low to support bilingualism.
- Some subjects, such as management, interpersonal skills, EDI considerations and governance models, are not addressed.
- Some of the technical courses overlap in terms of content.

There are several challenges in terms of communication:

- The language requirements for the Master's degree and the diploma are not specified on the School's website or in the University calendar.
- The CO-OP option is described in different ways in the review report, on the School's website and in the University calendar.
- The website has several issues that need to be rectified (e.g., number of regular professors, courses that do not appear in the directory, etc.).

There are several challenges in terms of management of the academic unit:

- It is difficult for students to plan their semesters in advance if course offerings are not announced until just before the start of the semester.
- Professors from outside the department hold successive terms, hindering continuity in the School's growth.
- The number of regular professors is modest.
- It is difficult to anticipate in which language students will want to take which course, making operational planning more complicated.
- Administrative resources are lacking.

#### **IV. Summary and assessment of the proposed action plan<sup>2</sup>**

The external reviewers' recommendations were carefully considered by the director of the academic unit, and subsequently incorporated into an action plan that was examined by the Graduate Program Evaluation Committee (GPEC) at its meeting on February 5, 2025.

The director of the academic unit is generally satisfied with the external reviewers' report and will be implementing all of the recommendations, except for no. 5. The reason for that is given in the action plan. Other action items and timelines are clearly set out and have been approved by the Dean of the Faculty.

The GPEC considers that the arguments for not implementing recommendation 5, as put forward in the academic unit's response, are valid. The GPEC is satisfied with the academic unit's response and action plan.

#### **V. Conclusion**

The strengths and stability of the programs were borne out by the review exercise. Recommendations for continuous improvement were also identified. The GPEC would like to thank the external reviewers for their in-depth assessment, as well as everyone involved in this cyclical academic review process.

#### **VI. Schedule and timelines**

A progress report on completed actions and outcomes will be submitted by December 15, 2025.

With the next accreditation review slated for the fall of 2028, a meeting will be held in 2025 to explore the possibility of linking the accreditation process with the cyclical review.

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<sup>2</sup>The academic unit's response and action plan are appended.

## Unit's Response and Action Plan

### Faculty

- Faculty of Arts

### Unit:

- School of Information Studies

### Program(s) reviewed:

- Master of Information Studies/Maîtrise en sciences de l'information
- Graduate Diploma in Information Management/Diplôme d'études supérieures en gestion de l'information

### Cycle:

- 2023–2024

### Date:

- September 20, 2024

### General comments

The Director of the Information Studies program received the external review report that was produced in conjunction with the cyclical review in June 2024.

The external reviewers were very enthusiastic about the master's program. At the same time, they provided constructive suggestions for enhancing the curriculum. They acknowledged that our program stands out owing to its innovative and bilingual nature, that the "MIS curriculum is very consistent and solid," and that the program meshes well with the University's strategic plan. We are very pleased that the reviewers recognized that our program "is meeting societal needs related to issues in our information society" and that graduates are well prepared for the job market, demonstrating the effectiveness and relevance of the program.

The report makes five recommendations. As indicated below, we believe that some of them are high priority, while others require further exploration over the longer term. We take all of the recommendations seriously, and we are confident that they will make our program even stronger. The recommendations and our responses are presented below.

### **Recommendation 1: Stabilize enrolment in the MIS.**

Stabilize enrolment in the MIS: We need to recruit a stable and adequate number of high-quality students to keep the program viable. This recommendation requires two major steps: 1. Review the program requirements regarding the CO-OP option (number of optional courses, capstone experience), a key aspect of the program, in order to increase enrolment and facilitate completion; 2. Implement an internal and external marketing and communications strategy (update the website, plan actions targeting the community and social media, create a student handbook and keep it up-to-date, etc.).

#### **Unit's response:**

We acknowledge that establishing a stable cohort of new students has been and remains a high priority for the School. We have needed and continue to need marketing support in order to have a continuous influx of new students. Curriculum improvements were made by the Curriculum Review Committee in 2023–2024. They include changes to the requirements of the CO-OP program and to compulsory/optional courses and the capstone experience (ISI 6995).

These changes will undoubtedly help increase demand for our program. Although the University's website—one of the chief marketing tools for recruiting students—has been roundly criticized by all the departments in the Faculty of Arts, we believe that it is also one of the easiest issues to fix.

However, we also understand and acknowledge that the structure of the CO-OP program can place heavy workload requirements on students, making their progression through the program somewhat more challenging compared to that of their non-CO-OP counterparts. Up until a few years ago, the School of Information Studies could consider the time and effort students put in to CO-OP placements as academic credits. However, changes to university policies beyond the School's control resulted in the academic credits for the CO-OP option being discontinued. We also had to introduce the credit courses ISI 6011 *Projet de recherche appliqué I / Applied Research Project I* and ISI 6012 *Projet de recherche appliqué II / Applied Research Project II* (with both worth just six units over an eight-month period).

The typical academic pathway of a CO-OP student in our program requires the completion of 45 units over two years, just like for non-CO-OP students. During first year, CO-OP students, like all other students, take four compulsory courses in the fall, followed by two compulsory courses and two optional courses in the winter. In the summer, CO-OP students complete a CO-OP work placement (associated with an applied research project for academic credits). Second year includes another CO-OP work placement and a second applied research project in the fall. To keep up with non-CO-OP students, CO-OP students must take an additional optional course in the summer and another optional course in the fall. Since they work during the day, these courses have to be scheduled in the evening. While this limits options somewhat for CO-OP students during the summer of their first year and the fall of their second year, our program is designed to make these choices possible.

CO-OP students, like all other non-research paper students, have to take the capstone course (ISI 6995), because it can be difficult to determine if an individual CO-OP work placement, or even the Applied Research Project courses, meet the requirements of the capstone course, i.e., provide evidence that our students have acquired all of the requisite competencies.

All of these aspects of the CO-OP program were reviewed by the Curriculum Review Committee. We have concluded that our CO-OP program cannot be substantially altered, given the constraints imposed by the University's CO-OP program administration and the fact that it continues to meet our students' needs in large part.

Furthermore, the student handbook for 2024–2025 has been updated (and made available online). Our social media communications strategy, previously focused on Twitter, is currently being revamped. We

have worked, and continue to actively collaborate, with the employer community and associations (e.g., ARMA) on targeted recruitment initiatives. We are also aware of other potential student sources, such as the Library and Information Technician program at Algonquin College.

**Decanal response:**

The Dean congratulates the School on carrying out such a detailed analysis of the CO-OP component of the program. We will continue our efforts to make this option easier and more attractive to students in order to increase enrolment in the programs. The Faculty of Arts is continuing its efforts to improve the website, but this is a long process. We are hoping that an imminent change in leadership in the communications office in the Faculty of Arts will help us make progress on that file.

**Action items for recommendation 1:**

<b>Action 1</b>
<p><b>Description: Curriculum review</b>          The School reviewed the entire curriculum to assess its relevance to the needs of our students and employers.          This review included an assessment of the integrity of the CO-OP program and the capstone experience, as well as the introduction of new items such as a “research paper.” Courses that had not been taught for several years were removed, and new ones designed to meet our students’ and employers’ needs were introduced. It was determined following the review that the CO-OP program cannot be altered significantly.</p>
<b>Priority level:</b> * 2
<b>Owner:</b> Curriculum Review Committee, consisting of the full-time members of the School of Information Studies.
<b>Timeline:</b> October 30, 2024 – implementation scheduled for 2026–2027
<b>Program changes?</b> Yes

<b>Action 2</b>
<p><b>Description: Marketing support</b>          The Director of the School is continuing to actively canvass the Faculty of Arts, in the hope that it will provide additional marketing support to the School. However, these resources, like all administrative resources, are shared among several departments, and their availability remains strongly affected by the University’s current budget constraints.</p>
<b>Priority level:</b> * 2
<b>Owner:</b> Director of the School
<b>Timeline:</b> March 2025
<b>Program changes?</b> No

\* Priority level: 1. URGENT – IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED 2. IMPORTANT – ACTION REQUIRED WITHIN 18 MONTHS (MAXIMUM) 3. SUGGESTED: ACTIONS SHOULD BE DEVELOPED AND DISCUSSED, AND BE IMPLEMENTED BY MID-CYCLE (WITHIN FOUR YEARS).

<b>Action 3</b>
<b>Description: Website redesign</b>
<b>Priority level:* 1</b>
<b>Owner:</b> Director of the School and Faculty of Arts Web team
<b>Timeline:</b> January 2025
<b>Program changes?</b> No
We are working and we will continue to work closely with the Faculty of Arts website design team to improve the accessibility and usefulness of the site as a recruitment tool. However, we must acknowledge the limited resources at the University's disposal for those efforts, which are specifically aimed at the students in our school. We already have a student handbook containing most of the information needed by students wishing to learn more about our program. All we have to do is to make this content available through a flexible website structure, which has to be initiated at the faculty level. This process is already under way.

### **Recommendation 2: Provide administrative support for the School**

Provide administrative support for the school: The School of Information Studies is at crossroads more or less—should we maintain the status quo or become a full-fledged academic unit? The current status quo is creating multiple tensions in terms of the School's objectives. To become a full-fledged academic unit, we need dedicated support staff to assist the School with admissions, communications, course organization, work placements, and student-lecturer relations.

#### **Unit's response:**

We fully agree with the recommendations in this review. The School has a crucial need for dedicated administrative support in carrying out all the aforementioned tasks, including admissions, communications, course organization, work placement management, as well as student-lecturer relations. Dedicated support is also essential for document management in SharePoint, as well as for major administrative tasks in connection with American Library Association (ALA) accreditation reports and periodic reviews. Without that support, achievement of the School's strategic objectives and its evolution as a full-fledged academic unit will be significantly compromised.

#### **Decanal response:**

The Faculty of Arts is continuing to explore the best options for providing quality service to students and professors in our units, including Information Studies. We will continue our efforts to better align the specific needs of this unit with staff dedicated to its program, and with specialized agents dedicated to certain files, such as research and course scheduling.

\* Priority level: 1. URGENT – IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED 2. IMPORTANT – ACTION REQUIRED WITHIN 18 MONTHS (MAXIMUM) 3. SUGGESTED: ACTIONS SHOULD BE DEVELOPED AND DISCUSSED, AND BE IMPLEMENTED BY MID-CYCLE (WITHIN FOUR YEARS).

**Action items for recommendation 2:**

<b>Action 1</b>
<b>Description: Consultation with administrative support services</b> The Director of the School will be meeting with the Director of Administrative Services in the Faculty of Arts to apprise her of the School's current administrative support needs. This meeting will identify potential solutions that align with the University's available resources, and explore immediate opportunities for shared or reallocated administrative support, taking the University's fiscal constraints into account in particular. This requisite support will cover admissions, communications, course organization, and student-lecturer relations, in addition to highlighting the need for increased support for document management (e.g., SharePoint) and preparation of ALA accreditation reports and periodic reviews.
<b>Priority level:</b> * 2
<b>Owner:</b> Director of the School, in co-operation with the Director, Administrative Services.
<b>Timeline:</b> December 2024
<b>Program changes?</b> No

**Recommendation 3: Review the relevance of the Graduate Diploma in Information Management in conjunction with the Minor in Digital Humanities.**

Review the relevance of the Graduate Diploma in Information Management in conjunction with the Minor in Digital Humanities. Despite interest in the Graduate Diploma, we need to ask ourselves whether this program has a real future, due to lacking job opportunities for students and its relevance to the overall objectives of the School. A Minor in Digital Humanities would seem to have much more potential for attracting bachelor's students to the field of information studies.

**Unit's response:**

We fully understand the reviewers' concern about the limited value of the Graduate Diploma in Information Management for students, due especially to the lack of accreditation by the ALA and inadequate employment prospects. However, it should be noted that this program readily builds on the courses already offered in the Master of Information Studies, and that it does not generate any significant administrative overhead for the School. In addition, since students who enrol in the Graduate Diploma are generally information professionals looking to upgrade their skills, the program offers a definite advantage for this group.

Furthermore, we fully agree with the reviewers on the need to make the Minor in Digital Humanities a priority. This program has considerable potential, not only as an undergraduate field of study, but also as a channel for recruiting students into our Master of Information Studies. We are also exploring a potential partnership with another undergraduate program in written communication in French led by the Département de français, which could play a similar role in recruiting students for our master's program.

**Decanal response:**

The Dean concurs with the academic unit and supports its approach.

\* Priority level: 1. URGENT – IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED 2. IMPORTANT – ACTION REQUIRED WITHIN 18 MONTHS (MAXIMUM) 3. SUGGESTED: ACTIONS SHOULD BE DEVELOPED AND DISCUSSED, AND BE IMPLEMENTED BY MID-CYCLE (WITHIN FOUR YEARS).



**Action items for recommendation 3:**

<b>Action 1</b>
<b>Description: Review the relevance of the Graduate Diploma as part of a program review</b> The Curriculum Review Committee has examined the relevance of the Graduate Diploma program and concluded that it continues to offer value for information professionals while pursuing the objective mentioned in Action 2 to strengthen our connections with the Minor in Digital Humanities.
<b>Priority level:* 2</b>
<b>Owner:</b> Curriculum Review Committee
<b>Timeline:</b> September 2024
<b>Program changes?</b> No

<b>Action 2</b>
<b>Description: Strengthen the Minor in Digital Humanities.</b> In collaboration with the Faculty of Arts, strengthen the Minor in Digital Humanities by developing strategic initiatives to increase its visibility to undergraduate students. The goal is to strengthen academic and career pathways, thereby facilitating the transition to the Master of Information Studies, while offering a rewarding and cohesive pathway beginning at the undergraduate level.
<b>Priority level:* 2</b>
<b>Owner:</b> Director of the School of Information Studies, Director of the Minor in Digital Humanities, and Dean of the Faculty of Arts
<b>Timeline:</b> To be implemented by the beginning of the 2025–2026 academic year.
<b>Program changes?</b> No

**Recommendation 4: Review professors’ workloads in connection with student supervision.**

Review professors’ workloads in connection with student supervision: Some professors in particular are heavily involved in supervising projects, theses and work placements. While this can be normal, there are limits, as the situation has repercussions on the professors’ research capability. This recommendation is related to the first one (review program requirements) and the second (step up administrative support). It is also needed in order for professors to be able to work on their research programs.

**Unit’s response:**

Our school is very attuned to this recommendation. Workload is indeed a major concern among our professors. Although several initiatives have been undertaken at the Faculty of Arts over the past year to review workload allocation under the Dean’s leadership, both for the Faculty’s teaching staff as a whole and for our School, no consensus has been reached on an equitable system that could be applied to the entire Faculty.

We concur fully with the reviewers’ observations and reiterate our comments in recommendation 2, underscoring the School’s urgent need for increased administrative support, particularly to alleviate the burden related to accreditation, document management and recruitment of new students.

\* Priority level: 1. URGENT – IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED 2. IMPORTANT – ACTION REQUIRED WITHIN 18 MONTHS (MAXIMUM) 3. SUGGESTED: ACTIONS SHOULD BE DEVELOPED AND DISCUSSED, AND BE IMPLEMENTED BY MID-CYCLE (WITHIN FOUR YEARS).

**Decanal response:**

The current negotiations between the University and the APUO should help us better standardize our practices for the supervision of research papers and theses at the graduate level, on a Faculty-wide scale. We hope to achieve an agreement in that regard by the end of February 2025). If we do not, the Faculty will continue its efforts to standardize the supervisory workload among professors in the same programs in an equitable manner.

**Action items for recommendation 4:**

<b>Action 1</b>
<b>Description: Review the program in conjunction with workloads.</b> A complete review of the program has been carried out, taking into account workloads as allocated by the Faculty. At this point, there is nothing else we can do in the program at the School to change the professors' workloads. Any further changes will have to wait until the Dean is able to review workload allocation for the Faculty as a whole.
<b>Priority level:</b> * 2
<b>Owner:</b> Dean and APUO
<b>Deadline:</b> To be determined based on the Dean's workload review
<b>Program changes?</b> No

<b>Action 2</b>
<b>Description: Bolster administrative support</b> In conjunction with Action 1 in Recommendation 2, the Director of the School will negotiate with the Director of Administrative Services to ensure that the School receives appropriate administrative support for the accreditation process. This support is critical for professors to be able to devote more time to teaching, student supervision and their research projects.
<b>Priority level:</b> * 1
<b>Owner:</b> Director of the School and the Director of Administrative Services
<b>Timeline:</b> By the end of the 2024–2025 academic year
<b>Program changes?</b> No

**Recommendation 5: Review the coherence of the capstone experience for the course-based and CO-OP options.**

The School would do well to revisit the terms and conditions of the capstone experience to ensure a more balanced final evaluation of each cohort of students.

\* Priority level: 1. URGENT – IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED 2. IMPORTANT – ACTION REQUIRED WITHIN 18 MONTHS (MAXIMUM) 3. SUGGESTED: ACTIONS SHOULD BE DEVELOPED AND DISCUSSED, AND BE IMPLEMENTED BY MID-CYCLE (WITHIN FOUR YEARS).

**Unit’s response:**

The Curriculum Review Committee took into consideration the reviewers’ comments and the students’ concerns that prompted them. It was concluded nonetheless that each variant of this course has a unique value as a capstone experience. Both variants are designed to assess the established learning outcomes for the entire program, such as baseline knowledge in information science, information resource research and evaluation, problem solving, communication, teamwork and professional ethics.

The first variant (**Case Study**) is a group course where students solve real-life information management problems in collaboration with institutions such as libraries, museums, and government departments. The focus is on teamwork, problem solving in these various contexts and the production of deliverables, e.g., environmental scans and best practice recommendations.

The second variant (**i-Portfolio**) is an individual course where students create an electronic portfolio highlighting their skills and experience, along with the know-how they have acquired during the program. The goal is for students to engage in personal reflection, review their academic and practical experience, and develop a plan for their career as information professionals. Students will also use multimedia tools to create a professional website.

The Curriculum Review Committee examined the advantages and disadvantages of eliminating either course, and it has concluded that we should continue to maintain both variants. One of the considerations is that in preparing the Case Study course, professors have to organize potential collaborations with the institutions concerned almost a year in advance. Having a year of “fallow” to identify these collaborations would make it possible to offer students a wider range of interesting cases. Given the constraints on faculty, it is not feasible to offer this course every year.

On the other hand, if we were to offer just the i-Portfolio every year (which would result in uniform student expectations), our course offerings would be less diverse, potentially impacting student interest. We have therefore decided to keep both course variants and to continue alternating them each year. We will address students’ concerns by improving our communications regarding the objectives and value of each course variant.

**Decanal response:**

The Dean concurs with the academic unit’s analysis and conclusion on this point.

**Action items for recommendation 5:**

<b>Action 1</b>
<b>Description: Review the capstone experience.</b> The Curriculum Review Committee examined the reviewers’ feedback and the students’ concerns regarding the two variants of the capstone experience. The Committee concluded that each variant of the course has a unique and complementary value as a capstone experience. Students will have a greater variety of options and rewarding learning experiences with the continued alternation of these two courses every other year.
<b>Priority level:</b> * 2
<b>Owner:</b> Curriculum Review Committee and the Director of the School
<b>Timeline:</b> September 2024
<b>Program changes?</b> No

\* Priority level: 1. URGENT – IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED 2. IMPORTANT – ACTION REQUIRED WITHIN 18 MONTHS (MAXIMUM) 3. SUGGESTED: ACTIONS SHOULD BE DEVELOPED AND DISCUSSED, AND BE IMPLEMENTED BY MID-CYCLE (WITHIN FOUR YEARS).