



**Graduate  
Studies**

**Office of the Vice-Provost and Dean**  
Yeates School of Graduate Studies

## **Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan**

Periodic Program Review (PPR)

**Master of Professional Communication (MPC)**

Last Updated: April 08, 2021

## **FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT**

In accordance with the University Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), this final assessment report provides a synthesis of the external evaluation and the internal response and assessments of the graduate program in Professional Communication (MPC). This report identifies the peer review identified strengths of the program, together with opportunities for program improvement and enhancement, and it sets out and prioritizes the recommendations that have been selected for implementation.

The report also includes an Implementation Plan that identifies who will be responsible for approving the recommendations set out in the final assessment report; who will be responsible for providing any resources entailed by those recommendations; any changes in organization, policy or governance that will be necessary to meet the recommendations and who will be responsible for acting on those recommendations; and timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Master of Professional Communication is designed to provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to address complex communication issues facing organizations in the 21st century. The program's strengths include its balance of theory and practice, the interdisciplinary expertise and interdisciplinary research of the faculty, and the holistic approach to communication afforded by the program's courses, major research paper and internship. With a strong focus on experiential learning, the MPC program echoes the spirit of Ryerson's educational mission: to foster intellectual, social, and cultural development in the context of advancing knowledge in response to existing and emerging societal needs.

The MPC program has a number of aspects that make it unique in Canada, including its structure as a full-time, one-year master's program and the integration of an internship and major research paper, both of which are required. Moreover, its location at Ryerson in downtown Toronto enables students to connect with industry leaders, startups, and the individuals and executives developing tomorrow's communication strategies and technologies today. In accordance with Ryerson's mandate for practical learning, the program includes skills-based elements in across the four required courses and three electives as well as experiential learning opportunities for hands-on learning in the form of internship placements, research assistant positions, work opportunities at ProCom's Centre for Communicating Knowledge, and course assignments. The program has an in-take of approximately 25 students per year. The relatively small size of the MPC program, and the fact that we are able to focus attention and mentoring on one cohort at a time given that the program is one year long, enables us to closely monitor our students' success, respond quickly to problems when they arise, and create opportunities for their professional and personal development as researchers, future professional, and graduate assistants.

The MPC program has many strengths, including its capacity to attract and retain strong students, the employment of our graduates in a wide range of organizations and types of professional communication, our ability to attract new faculty members with strong research programs and external funding, and our growing list of internship partners. We anticipate that future changes to the program will focus primarily on issues related to the structure and positioning of program components, in particular the MRP and the internship, to better support the students in their research projects and their preparation for careers in professional communication. More generally, we will continue to strengthen

the program by, for example, expanding and consolidating our local connections with the city of Toronto and the professional organizations that make it such a rich environment for professional communication opportunities; expanding and deepening the content of our required and elective courses by continuing to hire new faculty with diverse research programs; and expanding our network of internship partners and building stronger links with alumni who are now becoming leaders in the fields that create the internship opportunities held by our students.

Going forward we believe that the MPC program is in an excellent position to adapt to the changing needs and interests of our students. It remains a young program and as it approaches its tenth birthday a new cohort of 10 permanent faculty members who have been hired since the program's launch in 2010 will collaborate with established faculty members to build upon the program's strengths while being responsive to changing professional communication contexts, technologies, disciplinary directions, and students' needs and expectations.

Our first program review process has been an excellent opportunity for us to reflect on the original vision for the program, how the program and the School more broadly have evolved since the program's launch, and where we would like to go in the future. We are very pleased with the success of our program and the success of our graduates and are excited to continue building on these achievements. We look forward to updating our program so that we can continue to provide our graduates with an experience that is academically rigorous; theoretically, practically, and ethically grounded; and career-oriented -- elements we believe our students need to be leaders in their professions and to connect meaningfully with audiences and stakeholders in the 21st century.

## **PERIODIC PROGRAM REVIEW AND PEER REVIEW TEAM**

### **Master of Professional Communication (MPC)**

The graduate program in Professional Communication (MPC), Faculty of Communication & Design (FCAD), submitted a Self-Study Report to the Yeates School of Graduate Studies that outlined program descriptions and learning outcomes, an analytical assessment of the program, program data including data from student surveys and the standard data packages. Course outlines and CVs for full-time faculty members were also appended.

The PRT site visit was conducted virtually on June 4, 2020. The visit included interviews with the University and Faculty Administration including the Provost and Vice-President Academic, FCAD Associate Dean, Vice-Provost and Dean Yeates School of Graduate Studies (YSGS); Associate Dean YSGS, Graduate Program Director of the Graduate Program, and meetings with Faculty, a group of current students, and support staff.

The Peer Review Team (PRT) for the Periodic Program Review (PPR) of the graduate program in Professional Communication (MPC) consisted of Dr. Jay Dolmage, University of Waterloo; Dr. Terry Flynn, McMaster University; and Dr. Stéphanie Walsh Matthews, Ryerson University.

The PRT report was communicated to the Associate Dean, YSGS on September 9, 2020, and the response to the report from graduate program and the Faculty was communicated on December 15, 2020.

## **PROGRAM STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, AND OPPORTUNITIES**

The PRT cited several strengths of the MPC in their report, including the program having a strong complement of faculty, both tenure-stream and non-tenure-stream, and noted faculty producing innovative scholarship and research in the form of academic books, peer reviewed journal articles, chapters in books, feature films, and conference papers. The PRT chose to outline the program weaknesses and opportunities within the recommendations below.

## **PRT RECOMMENDATIONS**

The PRT made a total of 7 recommendations which are listed below.

- Recommendation 1:** Cross-Graduate Program Collaborations and Course Access
- Recommendation 2:** Reduce class size and provide more support for MRP supervision
- Recommendation 3:** Increase writing support and instruction
- Recommendation 4:** Move current research methods course to Fall semester
- Recommendation 5:** Better onboarding of new faculty members
- Recommendation 6:** Consider a course-based MPC option
- Recommendation 7:** Enhanced Internship Opportunities

## Summary of PRT Recommendations with Graduate Program, Faculty Dean, and YSGS Responses + Implementation Plan

PRT Recommendation	PRT Rationale	MPC Response	Timeline, Responsibility, and Action Plan	FCAD Response	YSGS Response
<p><b>Recommendation 1:</b> <b>Cross-Graduate Program Collaborations and Course Access</b></p>	<p>Students have requested additional access to courses and professional opportunities as they pertain to critical issues (race, gender, political landscape) that are usually provided via elective courses. These need to be enhanced in these courses.</p>	<p>The MPC program will continue to incorporate the expertise of our recently hired and tenured faculty. Additionally, the MPC program will continue to pursue cross-graduate program collaborations (with particular focus on FCAD and Faculty of Arts courses).</p>	<p>2021-2022: MPC GPD, MPC GPA, ProComm Chair</p> <p>Offer a wider range of courses by formalizing cross-graduate program collaborations while actively incorporating newly hired ProComm faculty.</p>	<p>The faculty supports a decision to deepen the program’s commitment to exposing its students to critical intersectionality both through course study and professional opportunities.</p>	<p>YSGS is happy to support the program in finding ways to increase student access to courses and professional opportunities. It should be noted that programs can allow their students to take a limit number of courses from other programs with approval from the GPD and the other program.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 2:</b> <b>Reduce class size and provide more support for MRP supervision</b></p>	<p>Graduate level classes of 25 put an extra strain on the instructor to provide timely and meaningful feedback to students. This is amplified during the MRP supervision process especially when there are a limited number of supervisors available.</p>	<p>The MPC program agrees with the PRT that the size of the MPC cohort – 25 students per year – is causing extra strain on our instructors, particularly their ability to offer timely and meaningful feedback on written assignments and MRPs.</p>	<p>2021-2022: MPC GPD, MPC GPA, ProComm Chair, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies (FCAD).</p> <p>We discussed reducing the MPC program’s annual intake with FCAD’s Associate Dean of Graduate Education. These discussions resulted in an agreed upon initial reduction in MPC cohort size from 25 students, to 22-23 students.</p>	<p>FCAD supports reducing the MPC program’s cohort size from 25 students to 22-23 students.</p>	<p>The program and FCAD can choose to reduce their intake targets but need to be aware of the potential resource implications in doing this. YSGS is happy to work collaboratively with the program and FCAD in addressing this concern.</p>

PRT Recommendation	PRT Rationale	MPC Response	Timeline, Responsibility, and Action Plan	FCAD Response	YSGS Response
<p><b>Recommendation 3:</b></p> <p><b>Increase writing support and instruction.</b></p>	<p>The professional communications sector is based on the written and spoken word.</p> <p>Those that excel in the profession enter the sector with excellent written and oral skills.</p>	<p>The PRT's affirmation of the need to place even more emphasis on writing skills concurs with ProComm's longstanding commitment to writing excellence, but also to their ongoing observation that this is an area that needs ongoing attention and increased resources.</p>	<p>2021-2022:</p> <p>MPC GPD, MPC GPA, ProComm Chair, Ryerson Writing Centre</p> <p>A reduction in class size and offering two sections of core courses will enhance instructors' ability to give individual attention to MPC students and their written work.</p>	<p>FCAD-supported reduction in overall cohort should address some of these problems. The Faculty supports the plan to engage with the Writing Centre for further support.</p>	<p>YSGS recommends exploring all ways to improve writing support including editorial feedback from course work, reducing class section sizes, and utilizing the resources from the Student Life and Learning Support Centre. The program should be aware of the potential impact of reducing enrollment on resource allocations.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 4:</b></p> <p><b>Move current research methods course to Fall semester.</b></p>	<p>This course moved to the Fall would allow students to learn about the various research methods utilized in professional and applied research methods. Those interested in the MRP could then opt to also complete a specialized research course for academic research.</p>	<p>The MPC program agrees with the PRT's recommendation to shift some of the emphasis on research methods to the fall term; however, we do not feel that adding methods to the fall should result in a loss of research methods in the winter, since this is the term that immediately precedes MPC students beginning work on their MRPs.</p>	<p>2021-2022:</p> <p>MPC GPD, MPC GPA, ProComm Chair, MPC faculty</p> <p>We suggest a more deliberate focus on research methods be incorporated into the communication theory core course (PC8002) that MPC students take in the fall. This course would become a blended theory and methodology course.</p>	<p>The Faculty supports MPC's innovative approach to solving this problem.</p>	<p>YSGS is fully supportive of introducing the learning of research methodology as early as possible. The program is advised to refer to Policy 127 when making any changes to its policy.</p>

PRT Recommendation	PRT Rationale	MPC Response	Timeline, Responsibility, and Action Plan	FCAD Response	YSGS Response
<p><b>Recommendation 5:</b> <b>Better onboarding of new faculty members.</b></p>	<p>The PRT recommends that when new ProComm faculty are hired to teach at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, a specific orientation program is developed to ensure that there is a fit between the new faculty and the MPC instructional and supervisory requirements.</p>	<p>The MPC program agrees that new faculty members should be contributing to the MPC program early in their career through teaching MPC courses and supervising MPC students.</p>	<p>2021-2022: MPC GPD, MPC GPA, ProComm Chair, MPC faculty</p> <p>The MPC program will ensure that new faculty are made aware of local teaching norms and graduate supervision expectations, and that new faculty are given early opportunities to contribute to the graduate curriculum.</p>	<p>FCAD supports the program in onboarding new faculty members to engage in graduate education and has contributed to this endeavor by connecting directly with them to underscore their roles as potential supervisors and to encourage them to become members of YSGS.</p>	<p>While the recruitment and training of new faculty members is outside the purview of YSGS, it agrees that raising awareness of graduate education with new hires will be for the benefit of all.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 6:</b> <b>Consider a course-based MPC option</b></p>	<p>For those students who are not intending to pursue further graduate studies and are interested in gaining further industry knowledge and skills, the MRP doesn't seem like a proportional and effective use of their summer term. Industry/sector specific courses could be offered as electives during this time, which would also</p>	<p>The MPC program is committed to the Major Research Paper / Project component of the program, particularly since it requires MPC students to engage in original research in an area related to professional communication.</p>	<p>2021-2022: MPC GPD, MPC GPA, ProComm Chair</p> <p>The PRT's recommendation will be brought to the MPC Curriculum Committee for discussion; implementing this change would require support from the committee as well as our Graduate Program</p>	<p>The Faculty supports the curriculum changes that the program deems necessary for serving the diverse interests of the students provided that these are academically sound, economically feasible and supported by input from industry partners.</p>	<p>YSGS notes that, if pursued, this would be considered a major curriculum modification that should be worked on about 1 year in advance of the planned implementation date. Policy 127 and the YSGS Associate Dean, Programs, should be consulted when working on major curriculum modifications.</p>

PRT Recommendation	PRT Rationale	MPC Response	Timeline, Responsibility, and Action Plan	FCAD Response	YSGS Response
	<p>require fewer MRP supervisors.</p>		<p>Council and would likely take several years for the approval of curriculum changes and the development of new courses.</p>		
<p><b>Recommendation 7: Enhanced Internship Opportunities</b></p>	<p>In discussions with current students and alumni of the program, there was a general sense that the MPC internship course/program was under-resourced and dependent on individual students to source their own opportunities. Current students commented on cancelled events in 2019 and a lack of support from the MPC program.</p> <p>With the decision to hire and support a dedicated Internship staff member, this should provide future students with greater clarity and assurances of obtaining an internship at an earlier time in the program.</p> <p>Furthermore, observable</p>	<p>The MPC program is pleased the PRT identified the MPC internship program as needing additional resources and support. The staff position devoted to MPC internships has been made permanent and now resides under the umbrella of FCAD. This move to centralize and administer internships at the faculty level will create synergies across FCAD departments and internship programs.</p>	<p>2021-2022: MPC GPD, MPC GPA, ProComm Chair, MPC Internship Coordinator, MPC internship faculty representative</p> <p>The MPC program convened a meeting with the GPD, MPC internship coordinator, and MPC faculty internship representative to discuss how to improve current internship learning objectives, as well as ways to refine and clarify the host employers understanding of internship terms, outcomes, and objectives. We agree that all MPC internship opportunities should be</p>	<p>The Faculty supports the MPC in strengthening internship opportunities between the program and hosts.</p>	<p>YSGS supports the program and Faculty responses.</p>

PRT Recommendation	PRT Rationale	MPC Response	Timeline, Responsibility, and Action Plan	FCAD Response	YSGS Response
	<p>and reportable learning objectives should be established</p> <p>and discussions with the host employer should be established to ensure agreement on the terms and outcomes of the internship.</p> <p>The PRT strongly recommends that the MPC program endorse paid internships for its program students.</p>		paid.		

A report on the progress of these initiatives will be provided in the Follow-up Report which will be due in one year from the date of Senate approval.