Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan

Periodic Program Review (PPR)

Literatures of Modernity (MA)

Last Updated: October 12, 2018
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 Literatures of Modernity (MA). 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

As a young program, designed in and for the 21st century, the MA in Literatures of Modernity has benefitted from the opportunity to rethink what an MA in English can be and do. Within the context of English studies, the MA in Literatures of Modernity introduces students to the contours of the debate around the thematic of ‘modernity’ and creates an intellectual environment for exploring and querying its implications.¹ This focus reflects a dynamic approach to literary study that enlists literary and comparative methodologies. With a strong focus on experiential learning, the MA 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 program cultivates the development of scholarly acumen and professional skills through courses, employment opportunities (teaching, marking, and research assistantships), hands-on activities, and practica.

Our graduate degree is distinctive in comparison to the MA degrees in English offered, for instance, by the University of Toronto, York University, and Queen’s University. Instead of comprising a general program of literary study that abides by national, generic, or periodized approaches, the MA in Literatures of Modernity provides students with an opportunity to intersect literary studies with the particular topic of modernity. While providing a unique focus on modernity, the degree also prepares students for employment in related literary fields or to pursue doctoral studies. Consequently, the degree allows students to hone practical and critical skills that will ready them for careers in a wide range of areas, including

¹ This thematic of modernity is described in the introduction to our Self-Study Report.
cultural consulting; jobs in publishing institutions such as literary agencies, university presses, trade book publishers, and literary magazines; and the teaching of literature and writing. For others, the degree provides the foundation for PhD studies in English or related fields, such as Comparative Literature, Communication and Culture, Cultural Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Visual Culture Studies and Art History, Library and Information Science, and Book History.

The structure of the program, in accordance with Ryerson’s mandate for practical learning, includes a number of exceptional opportunities for hands-on learning in Practicum placements, RAships, and in elements of coursework. The Practicum program in particular has proven to be a distinctive feature of our MA program, and has evolved to include some very rewarding opportunities for our students (in local cultural organizations as well as further afield, such as at the Iceland Writers Retreat).

Our courses are equally distinctive in their conception, in relation to the program’s attention to issues and topics relevant to modernity. Our approach to course design has been progressive insofar as we aim to foreground cross-disciplinary and trans-media approaches, while providing a solid grounding in the more traditional subject areas and skills associated with a Master’s level degree in English.

The relatively small size of our program, and the fact that we do not have resources directed to PhD students, enable us to offer all of our students opportunities for professional and personal development as research, teaching, and graduate assistants—in our undergraduate courses, alongside faculty, and through research centres such as the Modern Literature and Culture Research Center, the Children’s Literature Archive, and the Center for Digital Humanities. The size of the program also allows us to offer a high level of student mentoring and support; students build lifelong relationships both with faculty and among themselves, due to the intensive and collaborative nature of their experiences in the program. The strength of our faculty, and our research productivity, has been instrumental in creating and supporting both the core and extra-curricular activities we have been able to offer.

Our location at the heart of a vibrant urban centre is very much to our advantage, offering resources and opportunities that complement Ryerson’s, and facilitating direct access to diverse cultural industries. This ultimately makes it easier for our students, especially those who undertake the Practicum, to leverage their contacts and develop networks beyond the program.

While we have never failed to meet our admissions target numbers (set annually by the Yeates School of Graduate Studies), and have often exceeded it, our application numbers

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2 Note that we do not plan to develop a PhD program.
have occasionally fluctuated in line with variations that are both Ryerson and sector-wide. We have in some years, however, encountered unevenness in student preparation as a result of admitting students who are promising but not as academically strong as we would like. We are conscious that at times we lose some of our strongest applicants to other universities with deeper pockets. Thus, funding in relation to student scholarships and support is a clear area where we are often held back. This extends to OGS and SSHRC funding for our MA students, which is now allocated centrally; typically we have only one OGS and one or two SSHRC-funded students each year, and to preserve our competitiveness, this number must increase.

In terms of resources, while we are on the whole well served, the library presents some limitations. Recently, the arrangement that provided our students with borrowing privileges at Robarts Library at the University of Toronto was terminated. Meanwhile, our own library has faced an additional $450,000 cut to base funding, and it reports that it is not in a position to subscribe to any new resources.

Despite these funding issues, many new opportunities are opening up to the program as it becomes more established and our presence grows both locally and globally. Recently, we have been able to expand the roster of Practicum placement partners. In some cases, we have been approached by new partners, while in others we have reached out ourselves—and some of this has been a result of the focus the university has placed on internationalization. This latter initiative is one on which we can capitalize, particularly as Toronto itself grows as a key hub for diverse cultures and creative industries.

The consolidation of the White Wall Review into the Department of English offers us increased opportunities for student involvement, opening up the possibility for building the production of the journal into a professional skills course at the MA level. Similarly, the recent move of the Centre for Digital Humanities and the Children’s Literature Archive into the special collections area of the library will raise their profiles, improve facilities, and enhance existing student involvement. As we approach our tenth anniversary, we also have the opportunity to encourage more contact and mentorship between cohorts and reconnect with our alumni.

Finally, there is the opportunity provided by the program review itself, to reflect on what we have achieved, and to ask ourselves what we would like our program to look like at the end of another eight years. In our Developmental Plan we have outlined how the program will change in the short-term through the increased numeracy and value of student awards; the implementation of the Graduate Writing Café; the addition of more specific career workshops earlier in the program; and the development of courses by our new faculty.
The longer vision for the program involves updating our website, reconnecting with our alumni to celebrate our tenth anniversary, and increasing the outreach to other graduate programs at Ryerson. The program would also benefit from reintroducing the role of Teaching Assistant Coordinator to better support our students. Moreover, in order to ensure maximum administrative support for our students, we hope to secure from the Dean’s Office a commitment to reinstate the two (as opposed to the one, beginning in 2018-2019) course releases from the Graduate Program Director’s teaching load—since our Program’s inception, every GPD has had two course releases per year. In addition to extending and consolidating our local connections in the city of Toronto, the program will also explore ways to capitalize on the burgeoning Ryerson International initiative, such as increasing international opportunities for our students either through exchanges, Practicum placements, and partnerships.

Having come to the end of our first review process, we appreciate this opportunity for substantive self-reflection. We are proud of our accomplishments to date. Moving forward, we are excited to continue building on our strengths. We remain committed to fostering excellence in scholarship, professional skills development, and practica experience through our unique MA in English Literature.
Periodic Program Review and Peer Review Team

Literatures of Modernity (MA)

The graduate program in Literatures of Modernity (MA), Department of English - Faculty of Arts, 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.

Two external and one internal arm’s-length reviewers were selected from a set of proposed candidates. The Peer Review Team (PRT) for the Periodic Program Review (PPR) of the graduate program in Literatures of Modernity (MA) consisted of Dr. Heather Murray (University of Toronto), Dr. Stephen Powell (University of Guelph), and Dr. Jeremy Shtern (Ryerson University).

The appraisal committee spent two days at Ryerson. The visit included interviews with the University and Faculty Administration including the Provost and Vice-President Academic, Faculty of Arts 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 PRT site visit was conducted on May 28 and 29, 2018. The PRT report was communicated to the Associate Dean, YSGS on June 27, 2018, and the response to the report from Literatures of Modernity was communicated on July 31, 2018.

Program Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities

The Peer Review Team identified program strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for program improvement and enhancement, outlined below.

The program’s assessment of its strengths, as provided in their self-study, seem in line with our judgments. In particular, we wish to highlight the following:

1. A clearly focused and distinctive program of study founded on well-articulated objectives that are being achieved effectively and with value to the students (and that also pay dividends to the department’s faculty, the university, and the larger academic community).
2. Coursework that grows out of the faculty’s broad SRC interests and that leads students to opportunities for intensive research projects, practice-based learned in the Practicum stream, and the potential for career enhancement or further advanced study.
3. The innovative and distinctive Practicum option, which is particularly well-conceived and successfully run.
4. Consistent engagement with Ryerson’s distinctive educational mission and urban setting, effected through courses, through the program’s dual emphasis on academic work and practical education, and through outreach to Toronto’s employers, and cultural and arts institutions, through the Practicum program.

5. A laudable sense of cohort among the program’s students and a cohesive commitment of the faculty to the program’s continued strength and development. This is evidenced by the faculty’s willingness to rethink and reshape aspects of the program on an on-going basis in response to student suggestion, and an openness to providing constructive feedback on the part of students.

6. Strong interest in the program, as shown by admissions pool data (in a saturated English MA market), coupled with excellent on-time completion rates that evidence strong student motivation and good program management.

7. Excellent faculty SRC productivity that is deployed to support innovative coursework and research opportunities for students and that leads as well to the provision of funding and training opportunities in the form of RAships supported by external grants.

The program’s assessment of its weaknesses in its self-study is to the point, but we judge most of the weaknesses identified in that report to be of relatively minor importance in light of the program’s strengths. Some—such as difficulties keeping students on track in the summer term and a sense that students aren’t perfectly prepared—are common to all one-year MA programs and probably most graduate programs; these weaknesses have apparently not done much in any case to damage the completion rates of the program.

The identified limitations of the Ryerson’s library holdings for English graduate studies are hard for us to assess, as stated above, given the time limitations of the site visit. It would certainly be worth exploring the renewal of Ryerson’s previous arrangement with the University of Toronto so that graduate students might have easier access to the Robarts holdings, or considering a way to subvent Literature of Modernity students with identifiable needs for Robarts materials. We presume that the number of Literature of Modernity students with such needs would be small, so at the current rate of $25 for summer stacks access (or $310 for borrowing privileges for more extensively printed- based projects) the cost of supporting MRP students who require Robarts resources would be relatively modest.

We believe that the program has identified key opportunities in its self-study. In particular, we note the program’s continuing reflection on its unique name. As discussed above, that name does carry certain risks because of its uniqueness, but to this point has certainly not hampered the growth and flourishing of the program.
But, as the faculty have written, this review is indeed an opportunity for the program to think further about the full value of its name and perhaps to sharpen its engagement with different dimensions of that title. We believe, for example, that the program should consider the role of creative writing (as the faculty have suggested) to make sure that the program neither marginalizes this part of the discipline nor that it loses focus on the academic study of the already numerous literatures that Literature of Modernity seeks to engage with. As new faculty enter the program, or as it is pulled in new directions by other factors (faculty departures, student interest, fiscal realities), it will continue to be important to extend such discussions, not to delimit the program artificially (or to the exclusion of certain faculty) but to provide for future and current students a clear and compendious notion of what literatures of modernity means for the program. In undertaking such discussions, the faculty may indeed wish to find a new name for the program, but we believe they should do so only if they are convinced that it would provide a distinct advantage to the current name, which has already become well-known (if not always well-understood) in other Canadian departments.
Recommendation 1: Continue to sharpen, and more effectively communicate, the program identity and focus on “modernity”.

Program Response
Agreement. Literatures of Modernity will discuss ways to better define the meaning of “modernity,” and the title of the program. Discussions will be held in both the GPC and the Department of English during the 2018-2019 academic year.

**YSGS Response**
YSGS supports the program response.

Recommendation 2: Streamline the Foundations course to function more specifically as a gateway course to the field of modernity/modernities studies.

Program Response
Ongoing. Literatures of Modernity has been working to address issues related to the Foundations course and will continue to discuss further restructuring during the 2018-2019 academic year. The GPD will lead these discussions in the GPC.

**YSGS Response**
YSGS supports the program response. YSGS notes that any changes to the course description would be considered a Category 1 minor program modification under Policy 127. YSGS will support the program as needed for any curriculum modifications, per Policy 127.

Recommendation 3: Raise the minimum admission GPA to B+ in final two years of an undergraduate program.

Program Response
To be considered based on the availability of guaranteed secure funding from the Administration. This issue will be discussed in the GPC and a recommendation will be developed. Pending the outcome of those discussions, the GPD will submit any potential admission GPA change to YSGS by Feb 2019 for implementation by Fall 2020 (if needed).

**YSGS Response**
YSGS supports the program response to evaluate its admission criteria. YSGS notes that any changes to the admission requirements would be considered a
Category 3 minor program modification under Policy 127. YSGS will support the program as needed for any changes to the requirements, per Policy 127.

YSGS also notes that centrally allocated graduate scholarship funding is derived from our Provincial government grant allocation that is based on eligible FTE enrolments. Making target at the program, Faculty, and university levels is the pathway to stability in funding.

It is not currently possible for YSGS to guarantee funding as it is subject to annual budgetary decisions that are outside its purview. Funding guarantees do not reconcile with the government’s funding model or the annual budget process of the university. YSGS, however, continues to advocate for strong central support for graduate student funding.

YSGS also encourages the program to explore other sources of student funding, particularly graduate student stipends and research assistantships funded through faculty research grants.

Recommendation 4: Improve TA training available to Literatures of Modernity students; add a TA coordinator role

Program Response
Agreement. Literatures of Modernity is committed to improving its TA training. In 2018-2019, the GPD will work with the Department Chair and the current TA coordinator to explore expanding the duties of the TA coordinator throughout the year.

YSGS Response
YSGS supports the program response.

Recommendation 5: Expand instruction in the teaching of writing either through enhanced TA training or in a dedicated course/module.

Program Response
Agreement. Literatures of Modernity will work to increase workshops offered through Learning and Teaching Office (LTO), and discuss options for a “teaching writing” module/course. This will be discussed in the program’s GPC and the GPD will liaise with the Department Chair and representatives from the LTO, Career Centre, and YSGS.

YSGS Response
YSGS supports the program response. An Associate Dean from YSGS, either for Students or Programs, will participate in any consultations as needed.
Recommendation 6: Provide and post brief course descriptions and/or draft syllabi for both Fall and Winter courses at the time of Fall enrollment for better informed course choices.

Program Response
Agreement. Literatures of Modernity will implement this recommendation beginning in the Fall 2018 semester.

YSGS Response
YSGS supports the program response.

Recommendation 7: Consider in hiring plans the addition of a specialist in early literatures with a focus on the transition from medieval to renaissance.

Program Response
To be considered. The GPD will discuss this recommendation with the Department Chair and the DHC during the 2018-2019 academic year.

YSGS Response
YSGS supports the program response. YSGS further notes that any appointments need to be considered in the context of departmental- and faculty-level planning. The appointment of new faculty is outside of the purview of YSGS. YSGS also urges the program to consult with the Dean of Arts on this recommendation.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Restructure funding and awards information (internal and external) on the department website for prospective students.

Program Response
Agreement. Literatures of Modernity will undertake a website overhaul, including funding and awards, during the 2018-2019 academic year. This will be discussed in the GPC and lead by the Department Website Committee.

YSGS Response
YSGS supports the program response.

Recommendation 2: Create a sustainability plan that prepares for offering the program – including funding and experiential learning – in the event that there are gaps or departures in faculty SSHRC projects.
Program Response
Agreement. The GPD will discuss this issue with the Department Chair, and engage in dialogue with the Offices of the Dean of Arts and YSGS. This will be completed during the 2018-2019 academic year.

YSGS Response
YSGS supports the program response. The Associate Dean, Programs in YSGS will participate in any discussions with Literatures of Modernity and/or the Faculty of Arts on this issue if needed.

Recommendation 3: Update the program’s outcomes to more explicitly address its existing commitment to urban engagement (i.e., the program’s engagement with its urban locale outside the university through various partnerships with presses, publications, and advocacy organizations is commendable but needs to be better recognized in its outcomes).

Program Response
Agreement. This will be implemented by the GPC for the Fall 2018 semester.

YSGS Response
YSGS supports the program response. YSGS encourages Literatures of Modernity to consult with the Curriculum Development Consultants in the Office of the Vice Provost Academic if any updates to the program’s learning outcomes are made.
## Implementation Plan
### Academic Recommendations

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<tr>
<td>Continue to sharpen, and more effectively communicate, the program identity and focus on “modernity”.</td>
<td>Agreement. LitMod will discuss ways to better define the meaning of “modernity,” and the title of the program. Discussions will be held in both the GPC and the Department of English during the 2018-2019 academic year.</td>
<td>YSGS supports the program response.</td>
<td>Discuss ways to better define meaning of “modernity,” and title of program. A stronger definition will be added to the website.</td>
<td>GPC and Department of English</td>
<td>2018-19; in particular, the issue will be raised at the first Graduate Council meeting on November 13, 2018.</td>
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<td>Stream-line the Foundations course to function more specifically as a gateway course to the field of modernity/modernities studies.</td>
<td>Ongoing. LitMod has been working to address issues related to the Foundations course and will continue to discuss further restructuring during the 2018-2019 academic year. The GPD will lead these discussions in the GPC.</td>
<td>YSGS supports the program response.</td>
<td>The GPD has already enhanced the focus on theorizing modernity in the fall 2018 Foundations course via lecture material and final term project on “modernity key words.”</td>
<td>GPC and GPD</td>
<td>In winter 2019, the GPC will discuss the GPD’s fall 2018 lectures and assignments related to strengthening the focus on modernity.</td>
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<td>Raise the minimum admission GPA to B+ in final two years of an undergraduate program.</td>
<td>To be considered based on the availability of guaranteed secure funding from the Administration. This issue will be discussed in the GPC and a recommendation will be developed. Pending the outcome of those discussions, the GPD will submit any potential admission GPA change to YSGS by Feb 2019 for implementation by Fall 2020 (if needed).</td>
<td>YSGS supports the program response to evaluate its admission criteria. YSGS notes that any changes to the admission requirements would be considered a Category 3 minor program modification under Policy 127. YSGS will support the program as needed for any changes to the requirements, per Policy 127. YSGS also notes that centrally allocated graduate scholarship funding is derived from our Provincial government grant allocation that is based on eligible FTE enrolments. Making target at the program, Faculty, and university levels is the pathway to stability in funding. It is not currently possible for YSGS to guarantee funding as it is subject to annual budgetary decisions that are outside its purview. Funding guarantees do not reconcile with the government’s funding model or the annual budget process of the university. YSGS, however, continues to advocate for strong central support for graduate student funding. YSGS also encourages the program to explore other sources of student funding, particularly graduate student stipends and research assistantships funded through faculty research grants.</td>
<td>GPC to discuss and Recommend. The GPC began discussing the issue at the first GPC meeting of the year (September 2018), and initial desires to see the average GPA increase to a B+ were tempered with concerns related to the lack of guaranteed funding to secure higher-caliber students.</td>
<td>GPC and GPC</td>
<td>Pending outcome of ongoing discussions, submit admission GPA change to YSGS by Feb 2019 for implementation by Fall 2020.</td>
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<td>Improve TA training available to LitMod students; add a TA coordinator role.</td>
<td>Agreement. LitMod is committed to improving its TA training. In 2018-2019, the GPD will work with the Department Chair and the current TA coordinator to explore expanding the duties of the TA coordinator throughout the year.</td>
<td>YSGS supports the program response.</td>
<td>Expand duties of a dedicated TA coordinator throughout the year</td>
<td>GPD and Chair, TA Workshop Coordinator</td>
<td>The issue is on the GPD’s agenda for the October 23, 2018 GPC meeting, and discussions will be ongoing throughout 2018-2019.</td>
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<td>Expand instruction in the teaching of writing either through enhanced TA training or in a dedicated course/module.</td>
<td>Agreement. LitMod will work to increase workshops offered through Learning and Teaching Office (LTO), and discuss options for a “teaching writing” module/course. This will be discussed in the program's GPC and the GPD will liaise with the Department Chair and representatives from the LTO, Career Centre, and YSGS.</td>
<td>YSGS supports the program response. An Associate Dean from YSGS, either for Students or Programs, will participate in any consultations as needed.</td>
<td>Increase workshops offered through Learning and Teaching Office (LTO), and discuss options for “teaching writing” modules/course</td>
<td>GPC, GPD, Department Chair, LTO, Career Centre, YSGS</td>
<td>The issue is on the GPD’s agenda for the October 23, 2018 GPC meeting, and discussions will be ongoing throughout 2018-2019.</td>
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<td>Provide and post brief course descriptions and/or draft syllabi for both Fall and Winter courses at the time of Fall enrollment for better informed course choices.</td>
<td>Agreement. LitMod will implement this recommendation beginning in the Fall 2018 semester.</td>
<td>YSGS supports the program response.</td>
<td>Implementation beginning Fall 2018</td>
<td>GPD and GPA</td>
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### Administrative and Financial Recommendations

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<td>Consider in hiring plans the addition of a specialist in early literatures with a focus on the transition from medieval to renaissance.</td>
<td>To be considered. The GPD will discuss this recommendation with the Department Chair and the DHC during the 2018-2019 academic year.</td>
<td>YSGS supports the program response. YSGS further notes that any appointments need to be considered in the context of departmental- and faculty-level planning. The appointment of new faculty is outside of the purview of YSGS. YSGS also urges the program to consult with the Dean of Arts on this recommendation.</td>
<td>Discussion with Department Chair and DHC regarding new areas of hire</td>
<td>GPD, Chair, and DHC</td>
<td>2018-19</td>
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<td>Restructure funding and awards information (internal and external) on the department website for prospective students.</td>
<td>Agreement. LitMod will undertake a website overhaul, including funding and awards, during the 2018-2019 academic year. This will be discussed in the GPC and lead by the Department Website Committee.</td>
<td>YSGS supports the program response.</td>
<td>Website overhaul including funding and awards</td>
<td>GPC and Department Website Committee</td>
<td>2018-19</td>
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<td>Create a sustainability plan that prepares for offering the program – including funding and experiential learning – in the event that there are gaps or departures in faculty SSHRC projects.</td>
<td>Agreement. The GPD will discuss this issue with the Department Chair, and engage in dialogue with the Offices of the Dean of Arts and YSGS. This will be completed during the 2018-2019 academic year.</td>
<td>YSGS supports the program response. The Associate Dean, Programs in YSGS will participate in any discussions with LitMod and/or the Faculty of Arts on this issue if needed.</td>
<td>GPD will discuss with Department Chair, and in dialogue with the Offices of the Dean of Arts and YSGS</td>
<td>GPD and Department Chair, YSGS and Dean of Arts</td>
<td>2018-19; the GPD and Department Chair will discuss the issue fall 2018; and consult with the Dean of Arts/YSGS by winter 2019.</td>
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<td>Update the program’s outcomes to more explicitly address its existing commitment to urban engagement (i.e., the program’s engagement with its urban locale outside the university through various partnerships with presses, publications, and advocacy organizations is commendable but needs to be better recognized in its outcomes).</td>
<td>Agreement. This will be implemented by the GPC for the Fall 2018 semester.</td>
<td>YSGS supports the program response. YSGS encourages LitMod to consult with the Curriculum Development Consultants in the Office of the Vice Provost Academic if any updates to the program’s learning outcomes are made.</td>
<td>Implementation for Fall 2018</td>
<td>GPC</td>
<td>Fall 2018</td>
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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.