

**External Reviewer's Report—Print Futures Program—
Douglas College—July 19, 2012**

**Reviewer: Dr. David Black, School of Communication and Culture,
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How to build enrolment in Print Futures: Two approaches

The working premise here is that the Print Futures curriculum is substantially fine—that the enrolment problem has little to do with the courses offered or the “generalist” whom the program aims to educate. The obstacle, this reviewer believes, is that the current diploma is not defined as an academic credential nor located in the College's organizational environment in ways suited to Print Futures' success. This is made worse by the fact, as compared to the conditions in which the program was founded in 1991, that many more competing options are now available to students interested in communications on the mainland—be this defined singly or in combination as the academic study of communication, professional practice, or media production relating to radio, TV and digital technologies. This growth in the disciplinary options available to students of communications tracks nationally with what has been a massive growth in such programs throughout Canada since the mid-1990s.

The two approaches here are not offered on an exclusive “either/or” basis; the two can co-exist and support each other. If the two were developed in tandem, it is assumed that the Print Futures courses initially in each would be identical and cross-listed to the other program; that is, students in either the post-graduate or the BA Print Futures courses would share a course and a classroom, and no effective distinction would be made between the students or their assignments or experience in general. Over time, the Print Futures post-graduate curriculum and the Print Futures content in the BA might diverge in ways that allow each to cover different dimensions of professional writing, editing, and document design. For example, the BA courses might assume an audience (presumably, younger and more typical of entering BA students) with aptitude but no prior experience of these things. The post-graduate credential, to contrast, might offer a more advanced curriculum closer in spirit and substance to that of an MA. More detail and ideas relating to both structures are offered below.

1. Turn Print Futures into a post-graduate (post-baccalaureate) diploma

Print Futures is currently defined as a diploma program, and hence open to everyone with a high school English Grade 12 “C” grade (which is the general Douglas entrance requirement). Students can and do enter direct from high school or after some years of prior employment; this accounts for 40% of entering students. Further, the program's self-report indicates that about 60% of entering students have a college or university diploma, a bachelor's degree, or a graduate degree.

The difficult question that surfaces here is: is someone with a Grade 12 “C” and perhaps little life or work experience ready for a program as demanding in rigour and literacy as Print Futures? Likewise, are they prepared to share a classroom for two years with students with BAs and even (though the percentage is small at 3%) graduate degrees? To be sure, there are other elements to the program’s deliberate admissions process: writing samples, reference letters, a group or individual interview. But it remains that a given Print Futures cohort is likely to have students possessing a greater range of ability and experience than a typical college diploma. Writing and editing ability and the cultural capital that supports it more sharply differentiate students—separating the less from the well-prepared—than general knowledge of subject matter in arts and social sciences subjects. So students entering Print Futures from high school, as contrasted with those entering with BA degrees are (with obvious precocious or experienced exceptions) not operating on a similar plane.

Moreover, if marketed specifically as a post-baccalaureate diploma, Print Futures may appear a more attractive choice to the legions of students looking for options after completing BAs. If offered as a post-BA program, Print Futures could even repackage itself as a more streamlined diploma completed over 12 or 18 months; two years of full-time study that lead to a diploma (rather than an MA) for a student with a BA or even an MA is a significant commitment. Since students in recent years are arguably more cost-conscious about education than was true historically, the two years of full-time study may even be now dampening enrolment.

As stated above, a post-graduate version of Print Futures could offer itself as a more advanced experience. It could provide BA or MA graduates with a program with a 12- or 18-month curriculum. For example, in an 18-month structure, students could be exposed to an intensive series of courses in professional writing, editing and document design over a year. Then, with that advanced but comprehensive training done, they could spend the remaining six months in a structure that combines a more specialized course(s) in a subfield of writing, editing and design interest—perhaps built around a major writing, editing and design project—with a co-op term in that same area of specialization. These areas of specialization could be varied as market conditions change and new and emergent skills are asked of professional writers and editors.

The capacity to develop specialized areas of curriculum and to offer students a deliverable major project—a book, a major technical document—to work on was echoed in this reviewer’s interview with Maureen Nicholson. The post-graduate diploma could also be an incubator for enrichment of the BA, and vice versa; the value of incubator courses of some kind was underlined in the Print Futures self-report. It should be noted that the program’s self-report already identifies courses that might be relocated in a “sample post-degree diploma” on page 23.

So to summarize, a post-graduate diploma in professional writing, editing, and document design would have these benefits:

- Offer a 12 or 18 month structure (to better compete with other competitor programs)

and be sensitive to the greater cost-consciousness of students)

- Address BA and MA graduates looking for advanced and career-friendly skills
- Avoid having to mix recent high school graduates and BA/MA graduates in the same classroom, allowing instructors to address students with a consistent and higher level of work experience, cultural capital, and writing history
- Serve as an incubator to the proposed BA (and vice versa)
- Allow the Print Futures courses to be coded at an appropriate level (than the current 1xxx and 2xxx numbers)

A potential structure for the post-graduate diploma might look like this:

12 months: Advanced but comprehensive curriculum in professional writing, editing, and document design
6 months: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Several specialized options, sensitive to market conditions and differentiating the program more clearly from competitors, could be offered• For example: writing and managing audio-visual content in media-rich environments; science communication; transmedia design; marketing; writing and fundraising in non-profit and government sectors• Such courses would allow students to produce a major project, e.g. an edited book, a significant technical document• A co-op option could be available

2. Integrate Print Futures as a major component of a new BA program in LLPA

“As a discipline, we don’t agree about what courses should be offered, what courses should be required, or what should be contained in our basic, gateway courses—those courses that often introduce new majors to the field or are required of all students in general education.”

Morreale, S. and Backlund, P. (2002) “Communication Curricula: History, Recommendations, Resources”. *Communications Education*, Vol. 51, No. 1, January, pp. 2-18.

As the preceding quote avails, communications is one of the few disciplines that lack a standard curriculum. Part of this has to do with its relative youth; communications research in its modern sense started in the 1930s, and the first academic departments devoted to communications teaching opened in the mid-1940s in the U.S. Part also derives from the fact that communications straddles the arts and social sciences, borrowing with abandon from English, philosophy, and fine arts in the arts, and from psychology, sociology, political science, linguistics and history in the social sciences. This

makes the discipline internally dissonant, and precludes it from marking intellectual territory or even developing a firm canon. It's not surprising then that communications programs—especially those that are academic and/or professional in nature (media production programs in radio, TV and digital media by nature being more standardized)—show up in a disconcerting number of forms. (See appendix A for a sample of program names from the U.K. Compare this to the far narrower range of program titles identifying the study, for example, of English literature, economics, or classics.)

Communications is therefore a fungible discipline. What this means for Print Futures and Communications is that the programs have a good deal of freedom to work with the courses and resources each have together, rather than to import a curriculum that doesn't readily align with what is already available at Douglas. That there is appetite for the development of a stronger communications presence at Douglas was reflected in interview with Maureen Nicholson.

“What needs to be heard is that communications is a major field,” she said. “There are lots of people interested in it, and lots of students studying it. This college could explore some of those opportunities more aggressively than it has done.”

The case for a BA that would combine Print Futures' existing curriculum with actual and potential courses from Communications, and perhaps with other courses sourced from kindred LLPA programs like English, Women's Studies and Gender Relations, Modern Languages, Performing Arts, and Creative Writing, is compellingly clear. Such a BA could be more than just a Print Futures-Communications co-production. It could join the new BA in Performing Arts as the Faculty's signal contribution to the College's BA-creating endeavour. Moreover, it would allow LLPA to offer degrees in two very contrasting areas that round out the Faculty's admirable range: one (jointly-administered) BA in performance, and one (produced from programs and departments within LLPA exclusively) expressive of formal academic and professional knowledge. It would also provide stimulus for the supporting LLPA programs to generate new courses, notably university transfer credits.

In interview, the issue of whether Print Futures' reformulation within a four-year structure would damage the integrity of the tightly-woven curriculum and the cohort experience its students now receive was raised. Maureen Nicholson assuaged those concerns. “I think it's possible [to preserve the program's integrity in a four-year structure],” she said. “The way I've been thinking about it is the program becoming more permeable, as opposed to opening the floodgates.”

Let's assume for the purposes of a thought experiment that this degree was called “Professional Writing, Communication, and Publishing.”

“Publishing” is intended as something more than just a “nod” to the document design elements in the current Print Futures program. “Publishing” is added because professional writers, in the contemporary workplace, are being asked to publish content too, be it in print or web-based form. Such publishing includes document design, but also

is concerned with finding audiences, bundling written content with other media-rich materials, and delivering and measuring the effectiveness of the eventual product. Even elements of project and communication management should be considered part of “publishing” here.

Any future program developments should be cognizant of the trend to seeing writers as content producers and publishers in workplaces that combine writing with audio-visual content, and expect those writers to format and often publish content directly rather than through professional designers or media producers. This parallels and yet exceeds the desktop revolution of the 1990s, when writers often found themselves building design elements around their texts through DTP software like Quark Express (or now, InDesign). Writers are more than just producers of words or even designers of text; they are now project managers and publishers too.

This title is meant merely as a placeholder, as it’s for the principals involved to solve. This reviewer’s advice is only that the ultimate BA program title be easily decoded and understood (see some too-clever program titles in appendix A as cautionary examples); that it correspond to naming conventions recognizable to students and faculty peers at other institutions in communications; and that it perhaps imply both academic and professional study. Such a program might look like this:

Years 1 and 2: Foundations
Programs: A selection of foundational courses from Communications, other LLPA programs (notably English, Creative Writing, and Performing Arts), plus interested and relevant programs in the College (sociology, philosophy, anthropology)
Rationale: Foundational skills provide BA students cultural literacy, knowledge of content, preparatory skills in writing and critical thinking, disciplinary understanding of communication studies

Contributing departments and programs	Courses
Communications	All relevant courses
English	Studies in English Fiction (ENGL1106) Advanced Composition and Style (ENGL1200) Studies in Canadian Literature (ENGL1101) Studies in World Literature (ENGL2310)
Creative Writing	Writing for Film (CRWR 2200)
Women’s Studies and Gender Relations	Introduction to Women’s Studies (WSGR1100) Women and Feminism (WSGR1101)
Performing Arts	Introduction to Film Studies (PEFA1116) Arts and Culture in Canada (PEFA1101)

	Arts of the Modern World (PEFA1102)
Modern Languages	Students could pursue study of a language as part of their degree, e.g., French, Mandarin, Spanish, German
Selected courses from social sciences programs at Douglas	Critical Thinking (PHIL1101), others thought appropriate



Years 3 and 4: Professional Writing, Editing, and Publishing Stream	Years 3 and 4: Interpersonal, Intercultural and Media Studies Stream
<p>The courses here would effectively reproduce the existing Print Futures curriculum.</p> <p>A co-op option, replacing the current work experience module, would allow students a more defined interval in which to pursue a single or pair of co-op terms. (Work experience in the current Print Futures program varies in length depending on the student and the work assignment.)</p> <p>Co-op could be an earned, not automatic, option. Students could be interviewed, and if thought ready for co-op, then proceed. Those not ready could gain additional credits from the interpersonal, intercultural and media studies stream.</p>	<p>CMNS3100 (Language, Institutions and Power) plus a variety of more senior communication studies in the discipline's traditional areas</p>
Rationale:	Rationale:
<p>The Print Futures curriculum would give the BA its unique character. The two foundation years would ensure that college-age students entering the</p>	<p>The Communications Department's strengths in interpersonal and intercultural communication could give this stream a distinctive character. This</p>

<p>stream would have general knowledge, critical thinking, and understanding of the communications discipline—all helpful in these students being better professional writers. Advanced placement (using PLA, Prior Learning Assessment) could be granted to students with significant workplace experience and/or some amount of post-secondary credits.</p>	<p>stream could also feature writing courses attached to Communications' capacity in work writing, but pursue this in more advanced form.</p>
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What does Print Futures need for either or both of these program options to succeed?

The program's self-report, particularly the "key recommendations" on page 1, is the best guide to the particulars here. But there is value in emphasizing some themes.

1. Continuity for part-time faculty

Currently, the program relies heavily on a rotation of part-time faculty. Such faculty don't generally establish a relationship to the program outside of the one or several courses they teach. With a degree and post-graduate diploma, there might be sufficient work to ensure continuity in hiring, and a larger program-building role for such faculty. The task of building both credentials would benefit by being able to elicit and reward sustained consulting, some sharing of program administration, and new content creation from these faculty. Indeed, a degree and diploma created with direct input from working professionals would have more relevance and legitimacy than programs merely created in-house, and enhance the marketability of the new BA.

2. Make the replacement hire in Print Futures with the future diploma and degree in mind.

3. Provide Print Futures or its future incarnation(s) with dedicated space under its control at the College.

Professional writing is not something that is done in romantic isolation; in corporate environments, it's done in collaborative and technological spaces. A writing lab with adequate equipment, notably resourced with future plans for Print Futures and Communications in mind, would be invaluable especially if enrolment expansion is anticipated.

4. Consider a 25-person cap in future Print Futures courses so as to ensure their pedagogical soundness. This rationale is echoed in the Communications Department's pedagogy in its intercultural and interpersonal courses.

5. Develop capacity within whatever structure emerges for Print Futures for incubation of new course content.

The professional communications workplace needs great writers, editors and document designers. While this reviewer is not expert in professional writing, it's evident that the places in which graduates of Print Futures and its future incarnations are hired into are changeful ones. Capacity, for example, in working within media-rich audio-visual environments—which would benefit by knowledge of script-writing, storyboarding, digital storytelling, directing photo shoots, and the basics of videography—is recommended. Another suggestion for capacity-building is writing for transmedia. Transmedia practice is the work of creating content and coordinating the deployment of that content among multiple media platforms. This allows communicators to offer a comprehensive narrative, or to otherwise represent complex issues, optimized for the many media forms now available to professionals.

Print Futures Program Review Follow up Plan

Kathy Denton, VP Academic
December 2, 2012

Administrative policy A18.01.01, Program and Service Review, requires that a follow-up plan is developed by the Vice President as the final step in the program review process.

Print Futures submitted a comprehensive program review in April 2011. An external reviewer subsequently read the review, conducted a site visit in June, and submitted a report. The review process highlighted some clear strengths, such as the level of satisfaction expressed by program graduates and the integration of experiential learning in the program. Recommendations were provided by Print Futures and by the external reviewer. Those recommendations, as well as other information gathered in the review process, inform this follow up plan; however, not all recommendations were accepted. Some may be explored in the future.

The following recommendations merit further consideration and action within the next year or two.

Recommendations associated with program scope/structure

The Print Futures program has always attracted very well-qualified students, some of whom already have a degree. In recent years, however, Print Futures has experienced declining enrolments. The balance of full-time to part-time students has contributed to the decline, as fewer students are attending full time than in the past. Despite reduced numbers, students who have entered the program report that they are very satisfied with the quality of the program and graduates enjoy a high rate of employment. These positive outcomes are significant and any changes to the program should be considered carefully to ensure that the program maintains its positive reputation.

To enhance the program, there are two recommendations that are worth considering, which involve changing the scope of the program. First, the program may be better suited for a post-degree audience than its current target audience of undergraduate students. Changing the program from an undergraduate diploma to a post-degree diploma or a graduate diploma should be given serious consideration. These two types of diplomas serve students who have already completed a baccalaureate degree. The former is a combination of lower and upper level undergraduate courses, normally 30 credits in length, similar in depth and breadth to a second Major. The latter is a set of unique courses suitable to degree graduates and not otherwise available to undergraduate students. Faculty in Print Futures should consider which of these two options is most suitable and sustainable and

revise the program accordingly. Note that this recommendation precludes a program revision that would expand the current diploma program into a degree. A degree program is simply too risky at this time.

Second, with a change in program type, the credential name and department name should be altered. Perhaps the program should drop the “Print Futures” portion of their nomenclature and adopt Professional Writing in its stead. This change should be informed by consultation and receive the support of the LLPA FEC before it is submitted for administrative approval.

Recommendations associated with program content

With a change in program structure and scope that will occur by revising the program for degree graduates, the faculty in Print Futures will need to give careful consideration to the program content to ensure that the new, shorter program prepares graduates for employment as professional writers. Considerable thought has already been given to changes in course content, and the faculty are well informed about the profession. The only administrative constraint on course content is the expectation that the class size, or course capacity, remains at 30 or higher for each course in the program.

To add flexibility to the program, there should be room for electives, which might include special topics courses that could accommodate emerging trends in the profession or take advantage of the expertise provided by contract faculty.

One of the strengths of the current program is the opportunity for students to acquire work experience. This should be retained in any program revision.

Recommendations associated with operational matters

The program review identified a benefit to re-packaging the work available to create a second faculty position within the program. This recommendation makes sense, is desirable, and is consistent with the Collective Agreement, *if* a second position can be created from the work available following program revisions.

Although not entirely an operational matter, the admissions processes will change if the program is revised for a different target audience of degree holders. It is recommended that the admission criteria be as flexible as possible to accommodate the broadest range of students.

Finally, the program revision may result in a variety of changes to existing curriculum guidelines and course numbers. Prerequisites may have to be altered to accommodate degree graduates who may lack specific courses but who, by virtue of degree completion, have the requisite skills to succeed.