



Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

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TO: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
FROM: Jennifer S. Simpson, Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
DATE: October 19, 2020
SUBJECT: Master of Philosophy in the Humanities Program, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

The below memorandum addresses the Master of Philosophy in the Humanities program in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), and specifically the possibility of suspending the program. The memorandum begins with background information, and then outlines efforts in HSS to identify a Director and next steps. Ideally, this memorandum will support greater understanding related to the possibility of suspending the program, particularly in relation to responsibility for the role of Director.

Background

The Master of Philosophy in the Humanities is a unique program that offers robust support for cross-disciplinary work within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. (Memorial University offers a Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Interdisciplinary) program, which allows for cross-disciplinary work drawing on different Faculties and Schools at Memorial University.) Over the last three decades, the Master of Philosophy program has attracted exceptional students and strong cohorts of, most recently, approximately 20 students annually. This program has undoubtedly been an important part of HSS.

Typically, ASMs are appointed to significant service roles in Faculties and Schools at Memorial University. Since my arrival at MUN in the fall of 2017, the role of Director of this program has been filled by a teaching term appointment on a year-to-year basis. At Memorial University, ASMs carry out most of the significant service roles. The Provost and Vice-President Academic has indicated the importance of identifying an ASM to serve as Director, and has denied the possibility of a regular term appointment. There are a variety of ways to interpret this decision. I do not read this decision as a devaluing of the program or its significance. Rather, I understand this decision as one that is aligned with the practice of relying on ASMs to perform service roles within a Faculty. (The distinctions between a teaching term and regular term appointment are primarily related to fewer courses and an expectation of research for the latter. A regular term appointment, with a teaching load of five courses, is the most appropriate for this role.)

Steps Taken in HSS to Identify an ASM as Director

The Dean's Office began issuing calls to ASMs for expressions of interest for this role on April 23, 2019. There have been multiple calls for the role of Director sent to ASMs in HSS, of which there are approximately 165. To date, no ASM has committed to standing for the role. The challenges related to identifying a director from ASMs in HSS have been addressed at several Heads meetings (including meetings held on February 20, 2019 and March 20, 2019; December 18, 2019; January 29, 2020, and February 19, 2020).

The item has been on the agenda at several Faculty Council meetings as well (including those held on November 6, 2019; January 8, 2020; February 5, 2020; and March 4, 2020). An email was sent out to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences on January 28, 2020 that indicated next steps. Between the months of October 2019 through December 2019, a Heads subcommittee met and recommended that an Advisory Board support the Director of the program. In response to calls for ASMs to serve on the Advisory Board, only one individual came forward.

Recent Discussion and Next Steps

For this program to succeed, at a minimum, the Dean's Office must make a recommendation of an ASM for the role of Director, and this recommendation must be formalized by Faculty Relations. I am in a position where I am unable to recommend an ASM for the role of Director. I communicated this at the October 7, 2020 Faculty Council meeting.

Tom Nault, Memorial University Registrar, has confirmed that in the case of graduate programs, the suspension of a program is typically not noted in the calendar. (Program closure is treated as a calendar change, and goes through the respective processes for calendar changes.) I am suggesting that the program suspend admission of students effective immediately through fall 2022. This would allow students who were accepted into the program with a fall 2020 start date to complete their program (with arrangements made for any students who do not complete in the typical two years).

I am glad to address questions about the above at the November 4 Faculty Council meeting.

[Note: This version of the memorandum replaces an earlier version with a slight change to the last two sentences on the first page.]

cc: Dr. Mark Abrahams, Provost and Vice-President (Academic) Pro Tempore
Memorial University of Newfoundland Faculty Association (MUNFA)