

Department of Folklore Lay Summary

Timeline:

The AUP process was initiated in September 2016 and recommenced in June 2020. The self-study report was submitted in February 2021.

Action Plan Approval: The action plan was approved by the Folklore Department in September 2022 and was finalized in conversation with Dean Nat Hurley, Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences, in October 2022.

1. Self-study Process

We began our second AUP self-study in 2016, but for a number of reasons it was not completed at that time. Upon re-commencing the AUP process in June 2020, department members formed 6 working groups, each working on a section of the AUP. Documents generated during the previous attempt were reviewed, updated and incorporated in the report as appropriate.

Of utmost importance in our study were discussions of the extent to which recent staff changes (most notably the reduction of our senior administrative position to .5) have impacted faculty workloads and general departmental functioning, including communication. It continues to be a serious issue for our day-to-day operations and places a heavy administrative load on the Head of Department and the Graduate Officer.

At the same time we are re-building the department around our most recently hired faculty and we're excited by the fresh vision and expertise they bring to our programs. Our plan to review and revise our programs is timely in that it coincides with the University's commitment to Indigenization and addressing issues of systemic racism. This work complements and extends the core foci of the discipline. In this context, the department is committed to forwarding folklore studies and producing research of benefit to the province and beyond.

We are also beginning to address the demographic shift in our graduate student population. Increasing numbers of our PhD students are focused on developing a hybrid academic and public sector folklore career or not planning an academic career track at all. International students, many of whom already hold advanced degrees from their home countries, are seeking career advancement and wish to focus their research on their home countries or related diasporic communities in Canada. In order to best serve our students, we are developing plans to expand our curriculum and research beyond the tight regional focus of the department's first few decades while maintaining our historic engagement with the province's many cultures.

2. External Panel Review

The external panel review was delayed due to unsuccessful attempts to convene a panel in the Spring and Fall 2021 semesters. The members of the external panel were Dr. Chris Lockett (Memorial, English), Dr. Phil Branigan (Memorial, Linguistics), Dr. Laurier Turgeon (Laval, Historical Studies), and Dr. Sabina Magliocco (UBC, Anthropology). Meetings with students, staff, faculty, and other University officials were conducted entirely remotely in April and May 2022.

Throughout the external panel's report, the committee emphasized the need for increased administrative support in order for the department and the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) to meet its everyday operations and baseline goals. The external panel concurred with our plan to overhaul both our undergraduate and graduate curricula. They also suggested that we consider focusing more on critical heritage studies and public/applied folklore. Finally, they recommended that we work toward improving communication with the department.

3. Unit Response and Action Plan

The department submitted its response to the external review panel's report and its action plan to the Dean in October 2022. The department found that the external panel agreed with our identification of our strengths and the areas for improvement. Thus, our action plan centers on: 1) seeking additional staff for both the main office and MUNFLA, as well as a new academic position; 2) overhauling our undergraduate and graduate programs; and 3) improving communication within the department and from the department to the university and the community at large.

While faculty members constantly revise their course syllabi, an overall strategy to update, decolonize and Indigenize our programs is necessary. Although we do not have adequate administrative resources to underpin such an undertaking, we are committed to this task. The bulk of this work will be done by the Undergraduate and Graduate Review Committees, which will then bring their recommendations to the department. The Head of Department will pursue additional staff and will submit hiring proposals to the Dean as appropriate. The department as a whole has begun working toward more robust communication both internally and externally.