

FACULTY AGENDA ITEM

Date: 3/22/21

Submitted by: Kelly Erby

SUBJECT: Deletion of the Masters of Liberal Studies

Description: This is a proposal to delete the M.A. in Liberal Studies (MLS)

Rationale: see attached.

Financial Implications: None

Proposed Effective Date: *Fall 2021*

Request for Action: Approval through WUBOR

Approved by: *AAC on date*

FAC on date

Faculty Senate on date

Attachments Yes No

1. Reason for this program deletion?

Background

The Masters of Liberal Studies (MLS) was originally put forward for program deletion in March, 2019. It was approved by the CFC-CC on 10/29/19 and by the CFC on 11/05/19.

The CAS General Faculty voted in 3/4/20 that consideration of the deletion “*be removed from the agenda on the grounds that we are being asked to ‘act’ when the actions have already been taken, in violation of the procedures laid out in the faculty handbook (footnote here), and thus for us now to endorse those already-taken actions would be to endorse a transparently sham model of shared governance.*”

A footnote accompanied the motion adopted by CAS faculty: “*The absence of a concurrence by the division (the blank spot on the submitted form) either kills the initiative or compels an alternative approach in which the dean communicates in writing its reasons for non-concurrence. See Faculty Handbook sections 8. D. A. iv. and 8. F. 2. In relation to the deletion of the MLS program, the division level does not apply (although in other comparable cases, concurrence of all divisions has been sought rather than the concurrence of none of them). Nevertheless, as the dates on the submission itself makes clear, CFC approval followed, rather than preceded the actual deletion of the program.*”

For reference, Section 8. D. A. iv. of the Faculty Handbook states that among the responsibilities of the division is:

“iv. review and make recommendations concerning curriculum changes proposed by departments within the division.”

Resubmitted Rationale for Deletion of the MLS Program

The MLS has been administered through the CAS Dean’s office. As acknowledged in the footnote to the adopted motion referenced above, the division-level concurrence to the proposed deletion does not apply here; however, in an effort to address the concerns of the CAS General Faculty, CAS is submitting a revised proposal that will be reviewed by each of the five CAS divisions and then the CAS general faculty. We think the deletion is a reasonable action and we hope that when divisions review this revised and resubmitted rationale they will come to the same conclusion.

At the time the decision was made by the Dean and the Associate Dean/Director of the MLS Program to stop accepting new students, enrollments in the MLS had dropped precipitously over the previous five years. The required research course for the degree, LS 600, averaged 2 MLS students/course during the last three years it was offered. By the fall 2016, there were only 3 students enrolled in the MLS program. Although enrollments for the MLS have never been large, this represented a significant decline.

CAS MLS DEGREES AWARDED												
	AY08	AY09	AY10	AY11	AY12	AY13	AY14	AY15	AY16	AY17	AY18	AY19
	0	1	0	3	5	7	1	5	2	3	4	2

Such low enrollments are indicative of an academically unsustainable program. The Higher Learning Commission (HLC), Washburn's accrediting body, requires that "the institution's policy and practice assure that at least 50% of courses applied to a graduate program are courses designed for graduate work, rather than undergraduate courses credited toward a graduate degree." However, with such small enrollments, MLS courses have only been viable when combined with undergraduate courses. The academic quality of a graduate degree becomes suspect when most of the students in the courses are undergraduate students, and has limited appeal to students when it cannot offer robust dedicated graduate-level courses. Although the MLS has not required much in the way of resources (e.g., no separate budget and no dedicated faculty), it does not seem that we can offer a true graduate experience with so few graduate students. It also appears the situation is unlikely to change. Nationally, data suggests that the master's market is saturated (see [here](#), for example). Demand among working professionals tends toward online programs and programs directly tied to career skills, career advancement, or change in careers. The MLS has been a face-to-face program that "is designed to develop students who understand the integrated nature of learning." Neither the format (face-to-face) nor the content (liberal arts and sciences integration) of the MLS seems to be a good fit for today's post-baccalaureate students.

In response to the concern of the CAS General Faculty that *"as the dates on the submission itself makes clear, CFC approval followed, rather than preceded the actual deletion of the program"* the CAS deans office wants to make clear that the program is, in fact, not considered deleted until it has been approved by the Board of Regents. Such deletion would occur only after the proposal had been approved by CFC, CAS General Faculty, Faculty Senate, General Faculty, and finally, the Board of Regents. It is true the MLS program stopped admitting students in spring 2018. This is standard practice whenever a program is being revised or reconsidered. For example, Kinesiology stopped taking students into the Bachelor of Science in Athletic Training program when its national accrediting body decided that the professional degree for athletic trainers was a Master's degree. In this case, the cessation of new majors occurred significantly before the program was officially deleted. Likewise, the Department of Education stopped taking students into a graduate program while the program was being extensively revised. It is nonetheless true that programs are not "actually deleted" until such deletions are approved by Washburn's systems of faculty governance and the Board of Regents.

2. Complete Description:

Students must take LS 600 Introduction to Graduate Research in Liberal Studies and three interdisciplinary seminars. In addition to these core interdisciplinary seminars (12 credit hours) and individualized study (15 hours which may be courses dual-listed at the 300/600 level), this 30-hour program culminates with a 3-credit capstone experience. The Student Learning Outcomes include:

- Demonstrated the ability to complete graduate-level independent academic research using both primary and secondary sources.
- Demonstrated a mastery of the formal conventions of scholarly writing.

- Acquired an understanding of the interconnection among the various academic disciplines so that "interdisciplinary becomes an active approach to understanding and interpretation.
- Acquired the ability to put these skills into practice by writing and designing a capstone project that carefully analyzes a specific problem and that does so by placing that problem in a context that transcends disciplinary boundaries.

3. Is the program being deleted from the catalog being replaced with another program?

No.

4. Is the content of this program being distributed to another program?

Not specifically. However, the CAS is committed to providing elective interdisciplinary courses and teaching opportunities, particularly at the upper-division level. Many of the courses that were developed for the MLS program can continue to be taught at the upper division level and new interdisciplinary courses will be supported. The MLS was a catalyst for creative collaborative curriculum and we would like to continue offering these types of courses. We are currently looking at ways to more systematically encourage such offerings.

5. Does this change affect any other departments?

Yes. Numerous CAS departments offer courses that could be counted towards the MLS degree. However, given the small number of MLS students, the effects on enrollment should be minimal. The graduate cross-listing of these courses will continue to be offered for individuals who are interested in taking them for graduate credit (e.g., potential CEP instructors who need additional graduate hours in a discipline).