

Four Year Report (2026)

Communication, Popular Culture and Film

Graduate and undergraduate Programs

(reviewed 2021-22)

A. Summary of Review

1. This review was conducted under the terms and conditions of the IQAP approved by Senate on May 25, 2016 and the Codicil to the Brock IQAP, approved by Senate December 15, 2021, which served until the revised IQAP was fully approved by the Quality Council and Senate in 2023.
2. The Review Committee consisted of two external reviewers: Anne MacLennan (York University), Charles Tepperman (University of Calgary) and one internal reviewer, Laura Cousens (Brock University).
3. The virtual site visit occurred on April 4, 5, 7, 2022.
4. The Final Assessment Report was approved by Senate on November 16, 2022.
5. The academic programs offered by the Department of Communication, Popular Culture and Film that were examined as part of the review are listed below, with the reviewers having assigned the following outcome categories:

Program (s)	Excellent Quality	Good Quality	Good Quality with Concerns	Non-Viable
MA Popular Culture				X
BA Business Communication (Honours, Pass, with Major)	X			
BA Media & Communication Studies (Honours, Pass, with Major)	X			
BA Film Studies (Honours, Pass, with Major)	X			
BA Popular Culture (Honours, Pass, with Major)			X	

Additional information associated with the outcome categories, as subsequent major modifications were made.

- The MA in Popular Culture program was discontinued in 2020/21.
- The BA in Popular Culture (Honours, Pass and with Major) was placed on a low-enrolment review and subsequently discontinued in 2024/25.

6. The next review of the Communication, Popular Culture and Film programs will be in 2029/30.

B: Recommendations

Recommendation #1

Build on the innovative and successful Business Communications program by extending experiential learning opportunities.

Supporting text:To facilitate the growth of these opportunities and deepen their grounding in Communication Studies, additional faculty expertise in organizational communication is required...

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be not accepted as it lies outside of the Committee's jurisdiction. ARC encourages the Department to extend experiential learning opportunities using existing resources, and in consultation with the Faculty of Social Sciences Experiential Coordinator. Additionally, the Committee expects that the Department will proceed through normal channels of advocacy for resources.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation not accepted as it lies outside of the jurisdiction of the Committee.

Explanation of Actions Taken, Status and Results:

The 2023 faculty hire (Professor Kate Cassidy) in the Organizational Communication tenure track position has created additional faculty expertise in organizational communication with an emphasis upon extending experiential learning opportunities in CPCF. The hallmark of this has been COMM 4F00. Planning is ongoing to ensure COMM 4F00 is as attractive as possible for all CPCF students. This course was initially designed to offer a capstone experience and experiential education in a manner that is unique and impactful at Brock. In 2024 it was selected as one of ten initial programs in Canada to participate in the Quality Work-Integrated Learning (QWIL) Certification Pilot through CEWIL Canada (Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada, the lead organization for work-integrated learning in Canada). This course is a model of student experience-focused programming at the university. Furthermore, CPCF has undertaken more education of first to third year students about the content and value of COMM 4F00 to better highlight the industry-based work-integrated learning experiences available within the department.

In addition to COMM 4F00, Professor Cassidy is also bringing her experiential lens to other courses in the CPCF curriculum. This is not limited to Professor Cassidy, however. Professor Smith regularly brings communication experts into her courses to emphasize the link between in-class learning and real-world applications. See, for instance: <https://brocku.ca/brock-news/2025/10/government-data-experts-offer-glimpse-into-careers/>.

Also, each year the department hosts the CPCF Campaign Challenge, a business case competition that showcases CPCF students' excellence in pitching, communication, and creativity. This student experience-focused initiative is an extracurricular event that offers students a chance to network with industry professionals and demonstrate their branding expertise by addressing a contemporary issue, taking classroom knowledge and applying it to the real world.

Recommendation #2

Develop program offerings on decolonization, particularly in the area of Indigenous Media and Popular Culture.

Supporting text: ...Although there is strong support for this among CPCF faculty members, additional faculty expertise in Indigenous Media is required....

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to develop program offerings on decolonization to be accepted. However, budget allocations lie outside of the Committee’s jurisdiction. Therefore, ARC expects that the Department will proceed through normal channels of advocacy regarding the hiring of additional faculty in the area of Indigenous Media and Popular Culture.

Implementation Plan (2nd Priority)

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 23/24.

Actions	Responsibility	Year One	Year Two	Year Three
Action #1 Discuss at annual retreat.	Department	T	T	T
Action #2 Consult other Departments re: cross listings.	Chair	T	T	T

Explanation of Actions Taken, Status and Results:

Given the lack of success in CPCF’s prior attempts to obtain tenure stream positions with a focus on decolonization and anti-racism in media and communication, CPCF has continued its commitment to Indigenous education and decolonization of research and curriculum. Instead of hiring additional members with expertise in Indigenous media, the department has focused on expanding Indigenous communication practices including media representations and media industries within courses. In addition to pedagogy efforts, CPCF’s current Chair and Academic Administrator are members of the President’s Advisory Committee on Human Rights, Equity, and Decolonization (PACHRED). Our Academic Administrator has augmented Indigenous connections and opportunities in 4F00, our capstone course. Also, multiple faculty members participated in a course (“Critical & Courageous Conversations Series on Understanding Power, Equity and Justice Through an Intersectional Lens”) with Shaka Licorice, Brock University’s Anti-Racism & Inclusion Advisor.

Recommendation #3

Streamline program requirements for CPCF programs by reducing the number of specified courses required.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation. The Committee expects that the Department will work with the Centre for Pedagogical Innovation and move forward as appropriate in the streamlining of program requirements.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2022/23.

Actions	Responsibility	Year One	Year Two	Year Three
Action #1 Film Studies working group has decided on changes, reducing required courses significantly. To be submitted to UPC October 2023.	Film Faculty Members	T	T	C

Explanation of Actions Taken, Status and Results:

While Film Studies changes were deemed complete in 2025, ongoing revisions to degree offerings continue to try and streamline programs and facilitate student retention and success. Multi-year planning undertaken in summer 2025 identified further opportunities for streamlining in FILM given the need to modify program requirements due to the possibility of future shrinkage in the faculty complement. Beyond FILM, the streamlining of program requirements for COMM programs is also being explored in 2026 due to CPCF's participation in the Curriculum Development Initiative. Beyond that, discussions of systemic changes to Brock University's degree architecture auger further changes to CPCF programs. We thus anticipate a further reduction in the number of specified courses required for the department's various programs.

Recommendation #4

Create capstone courses for CPCF programs.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation. The Committee recognizes that the Department will consider creating capstone courses in the context of a larger discussion about curriculum.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2022/23.

Actions	Responsibility	Year One	Year Two	Year Three
Action #1 Changed description and title of our Experiential fourth year course.	Department	C		

Explanation of Actions Taken, Status and Results:

Having deemed this item complete the previous year, no further largescale changes have been made to COMM 4F00. However, there are a few items of interest that the department are pursuing regarding this course. It is cross-listed currently (as COMM 4F00 and FILM 4F00). Its enrollment is made up almost exclusively of COMM students. Even though the complement of FILM students is much smaller, the department has actively encouraged more FILM overlap, considering its nature as a capstone course for the entire department. Also, enrolment in the course is currently restricted to majors. This year we promoted this course to other departments, seeking to further publicize the CPCF experience and drive further enrolment. Finally, the full-year course format may restrict interest or student ability to enroll in this course, so proposed changes to course architecture at Brock University (and conversion of full-year courses to half-credit offerings) may impact 4F00, moving forward. We are developing contingency plans for this if necessary.

Recommendation #5

Evaluate feasibility of BA Popular Culture Program.
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ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation. The Committee believes that the Department and Dean are best suited to determine the viability of the program going forward.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2022/23.

Actions	Responsibility	Year One	Year Two	Year Three
Action #1 Add to Departmental Retreat agenda.	Department	T	T	C

Explanation of Actions Taken, Status and Results:

The BA in Popular Culture has been deemed unfeasible. The undergraduate degree in Popular Culture degree currently is being discontinued (year two is currently closed). This follows the discontinuation of the MA in Popular Culture in 2021. This may necessitate revisiting the name of the department, as there will be no more “Popular Culture” as a formal degree option in the Department of Communication, Popular Culture and Film (though we anticipate continuing to offer a minor in popular culture and may develop a certificate or micro-certificate in Popular Culture Studies). All PCUL courses will likely disappear completely (either migrating to FILM or COMM or an integrated course code in the future, representing the new department name).

Recommendation #6

Improve condition and repair of classroom technology for film/media courses.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be not accepted as it lies outside of the Committee’s jurisdiction. It is expected that the Department will proceed through normal channels of advocacy for resources.

Implementation Plan
Recommendation not accepted as it lies outside of the jurisdiction of the Committee.

Explanation of Actions Taken, Status and Results:

While this recommendation was not accepted as it lies outside of the jurisdiction of the Academic Review Committee, the Department has continued to proceed through normal channels of advocacy for resources. Sometimes, in fact, CPCF has acted through extraordinary channels, considering the ongoing crisis that is audio-visual and computer and projector support at Brock. It seems, compared to the past, budgetary cutbacks have meant that AV assistance has been less available when needed and it has been required more regularly. Reports of faulty equipment in classrooms that make screening films (or even presenting slideshows) impractical are increasingly common. CPCF faculty members have sat on the Information Technology & Infrastructure Committee and in 2025 invited Brock University’s new Associate Vice-President of Information Technology Services to attend some of our classes to see how we use the technology in the classroom and what the state of the technology is now. We are not just complaining about the condition of classroom technology for film/media courses. We are actively advocating for the need to redress this.

Recommendation #7

Develop stronger departmental culture (supports, incentives, mentorship) around funded research and grant funding.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted. The Committee believes that the Department is best positioned to determine appropriate strategies to develop a stronger culture around funded research, grant funding, and student support.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2022/23.

Actions	Responsibility	Year One	Year Two	Year Three
Action #1 Invite a representative from the Office of Research (ORS) to a Departmental meeting.	Department	T	D	T
Action #2 CPCF research will be promoted through the FOSS newsletter, the FOSS Research Symposium Series, CRISS applications	Department	T	T	T

Explanation of Actions Taken, Status and Results:

CPCF faculty continue to be promoted through the Faculty of Social Sciences (FOSS) newsletter and have participated in the “Building Better Research” workshop series offered by Brock's Library and Office of Research Services. CRISS internal grants are no longer provided for individual research, but CPCF continues to develop a stronger departmental culture around funded research and grant funding as evidenced by some of the following:

In September 2025, Professor Koerber received an \$8,000 author publishing grant from the Awards to Scholarly Publications Program (ASPP) of the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences / Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The book is to be published in March 2026: <https://a.co/d/eLKIRx3>

Continuing her earlier work, Professor Chen published a co-authored peer-reviewed article in 2025, “Coping with Anti-Asian Sentiment: A Qualitative study of appraisals and coping strategies against discrimination” (*Asian American Journal of Psychology*). She also was co-author on a chapter, “Examining the content and engagement strategies of mental health influencers on Instagram” in the Routledge book, *Disability and Digital Marketing* and continues to pursue knowledge mobilization

and public-facing scholarship related to this research. Additionally, Professor Chen is currently involved in a multi-disciplinary research project as a co-applicant on a New Frontiers in Research Fund (NFRF) Exploration grant. She has also applied as the principal investigator for a 2026 Insights Development Grant (IDG) through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

Professors Chen and Cassidy collaborated to present research on generative AI at the Canadian Communication Association in Toronto and at the Digital Regulation in the Public Interest event at Brock University (as well as the Niagara Community Observatory). This was highlighted in the Brock News (<https://brocku.ca/brock-news/2025/01/businesses-must-plan-before-leaping-into-generative-ai-nco-research>).

Associate Professor Karen Smith is a Chancellor’s Chair in Teaching Excellence at Brock (2025-2028) with a scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) plan focused on ethical educational technologies. A speaker series or symposium on Ethical Edtech is anticipated for 2027-2028 in relation to this award. Associate Professor Smith is also an active collaborator with Brock’s Inclusive Education Research Lab (see <https://inclusiveeducationlab.com/>) and pursuing internal and external grants as part of this. She is also collaborating on an application which was selected as the 2025 institutional nominee by Brock University for the Robbins-Ollivier Award for Excellence in Equity Award from the Canada Research Chairs program.

Recommendation #8

CPCF should expand their support of student-focused extracurricular events.

Supporting text: ...CPCF could apply for a student ambassador for social events, rebounding from Covid isolation.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to expand student-focused extracurricular events to be accepted and in the process of implementation. However, budget allocations lie outside of the Committee’s jurisdiction. Therefore, ARC expects that the Department will proceed through normal channels of advocacy regarding the hiring of a student ambassador.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)

Responsible for approving: Department
 Responsible for resources: Department
 Responsible for implementation: Department
 Timeline: Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2022/23.

Actions	Responsibility	Year One	Year Two	Year Three
Action #1 Agenda item for Film Studies retreat, March 2023.	Film Faculty Members	C		

Action #2 Added to Departmental Retreat agenda.	Chair	T	C	
Action #3 The CPCF Student Society once again (post COVID) organizing social events.	CPCF Student Society Liaison	O		

Explanation of Actions Taken, Status and Results:

CPCF continues to employ Student Ambassadors who regularly lead initiatives directed at student recruitment, retention, and engagement. This year we have had four student ambassadors, two of whom are dedicated to assisting with CPCF’s annual Campaign Challenge event (see <https://brocku.ca/social-sciences/cpcf/cpcf-campaign-challenge/>). These ambassadors lead digital outreach efforts and host in-person networking events to generate student interest and involvement in the event. Other ambassadors are tasked with generating student involvement in other extra-curricular departmental programming. For instance, CPCF hosted a Halloween movie screening and organized student participation for the first time in Brock University’s Homecoming Grape Stomp. In addition, with the assistance of a newly hired Digital Media Coordinator, CPCF is actively pursuing a greater presence on ExperienceBU, the University’s portal for information about student clubs and organizations, events, workshops, and co-curricular experiences. While the CPCF Student Society did not have an active presence the year prior, interested and motivated students and faculty look to revitalize the largely dormant CPCF student society.

C. Unit Summative Analysis and Evaluation

1. To what extent has the Department achieved the improvements suggested by the reviewers?

CPCF is of the opinion that we have, wherever possible, fully integrated the reviewers’ recommendations into both our day-to-day operations and our efforts looking ahead to the future. Our ongoing academic objectives align with the University’s priorities as outlined in the Academic Plan (see below). They also correspond with the University’s Strategic Plan, as we seek to transform our students through curiosity and creativity (with a healthy serving of critical acumen), equipping them with the courage to reimagine the future by deploying knowledge and skills gained from the CPCF curriculum. The improvements suggested by the reviewers have directly contributed to this.

Specifically, the further refinement of a CPCF capstone course and extending experiential learning opportunities have allowed us to take steps that ensure we shape tomorrow through topical research, discovery, and knowledge. Ongoing efforts to develop program offerings on decolonization ensures that CPCF continues to contribute to Brock’s mission to build sustainable futures and to promote diverse perspectives and deepen understanding of Indigenous cultures. Streamlining program requirements for CPCF programs has made it easier for students to progress through their degrees, also granting them more flexibility in their course schedules, allowing them to have a more

meaningful student experience. Re-evaluating the viability of our Popular Culture degree has allowed us to concentrate on our strengths while improving the condition of classroom technology for film/media courses is an ongoing battle. CPCF also continues to dedicate energy to expanding support of student-focused extracurricular events. The recommendation to develop stronger departmental culture around funded research has resulted in enhancement in some key areas of CPCF research and academic distinction, fostering a research culture that deepens connectivity and transdisciplinarity in our department and furthering research relationships both across the university and across national and international lines.

2. What overall impact has it had on the programs?

The overall impact of this most recent review has been largely positive. This review highlighted areas that CPCF had already identified as in need of revision (or excision, in the case of our Popular Culture programs). At the time of the review, CPCF had discontinued the MA in Popular Culture program and anticipated a new MA program in Communication, Media, Culture which was not pursued due to systemic changes to Brock University's graduate funding guidelines. That said, the review's focus on program strengths and ways to improve and enhance them has proven to be an excellent template for making iterative changes to programs within the department which has, in turn, set us up for success when it comes to multi-year planning when it comes to pedagogical choices and faculty complement changes.

3. How is the Department adopting a process of continuous quality improvement?

CPCF is continually engaged in a process of quality improvement. This involves regular meetings of COMM and FILM working groups to deliberate discipline-specific moves (such as introducing new courses, revising old ones, and making changes to course requirements with an eye to advancing student retention). The "committee of the whole" meets regularly in department meetings to focus on collective decision-making and annual retreats dedicated to larger questions such as future directions concerning academic integrity and departmental identity. CPCF opted early on to participate in the Curriculum Development Initiative. We are thus proactively investigating the elimination of pain-points in student progress through years one to four in our department. This involves identifying possible streamlining of program offerings and possible curriculum changes such as evaluating the number of required courses and patterns of cycling them, and delivery modes such as blended/online options. CPCF is actively participating in the BA in AI proposal, led by the Department of Digital Humanities. Outside of the Department of Digital Humanities, CPCF is the largest contributor of courses to the degree pathway for the program that is being considered. CPCF faculty member Karen Smith has served on the planning committee for the proposed BA in AI. Finally, CPCF is exploring the design of a combined degree pathway for Media and Film Studies. This initiative aligns with making Brock degree pathways more modular and for students to be able to combine degrees that align with their interests. It also coincides with plans to rename the department to focus on Communication and Film/Media studies.

4. How well do the programs now align with the priorities in Brock's 2023-2028 Academic Plan?

CPCF's programs align explicitly with the priorities in Brock's 2023-2028 Academic Plan. CPCF's alignment with each of these five priorities [1) High-Quality and meaningful, 2) Accessible, Flexible & Customizable, 3) Supportive & Student-Centred, 4) Equitable, Diverse, and Inclusive and 5) Future-Oriented] will be enumerated in turn:

- 1) Experiential learning within the department aims to integrate CPCF's critical curriculum and hands-on learning initiatives that directly support this priority by ensuring CPCF students receive a high-quality and meaningful education experience. Also, in the Provost's March 2025 report to Senate, CPCF Professor Karen Smith was announced as a Chancellor Chair for Teaching Excellence for her work on "Tensions, Frictions and Building Towards More Ethical Edtech." This was noted as a specific action that highlighted Brock University's priority of being "High-Quality and meaningful." Overall, CPCF's programs emphasize critical thinking, media literacy, and deep engagement with communication, film history, and cultural analysis. Students explore real societal questions about media and culture while building analytical and communication skills. These are key components of a meaningful academic experience. This was the case before the Final Assessment Report in 2022, but even more so after the fact, given our mindful implementation of recommendations and our own future-oriented focus.
- 2) CPCF faculty have been leaders in advancing accessible learning through obtaining and applying Open Educational Resources grants. Recent grant winners include Tim Dun, Karen Smith, Derek Foster, Kate Cassidy, with the latter two featured on the Faculty Spotlight section of the Centre for Pedagogical Innovation's website. Our programs are also increasingly flexible with multiple degree paths (Honours, Major, Pass) in Business Communication, Media and Communication, and Film Studies. CPCF has many students entering at irregular points and graduating on personalized schedules. As a result, our academic advising team proactively explores solutions to allow students to progress through their degrees, customizing options wherever possible to ensure their program plans are satisfied.
- 3) CPCF's programs have always focused upon providing a supportive and student-centred experience. This is evidenced in our curriculum, our events, our support of student clubs. We have a strong connection with our own departmental alumni, as has been developed by our internal Promotions and Recruitment Committee. Experiential learning has been actively promoted in CPCF, both in co-curricular student-centred events (such as the CPCF Case Competition) and in the CPCF curriculum. COMM 4F00 provides a capstone experience and a community focus emphasizing work-integrated learning and transferrable skills through internships and reflective practice. Also, specific courses such as COMM 4P65 provide students with the opportunity to apply course-based knowledge in a topical real-world campaign (<https://brocku.ca/brock-news/2023/04/social-media-students-support-united-ways-period-promise-campaign/>). Some of our faculty members have taken up the philosophy of Universal Design for Learning to ensure that students feel engaged, empowered, and

connected to their academic journey. And CPCF staff's engagement with students through academic advising and outreach is at the heart of what we do.

- 4) CPCF supports ongoing improvements in equity through advocacy, education, and change. Faculty involvement in Critical Conversations about Race Workshops as well as education and efforts to address violence and bullying testify to this. CPCF has engaged in efforts with HRE/OPC to platform EDI training in the department. CPCF recognizes that while we have gender diversity in the department, there is a lot of progress that could still be made towards achieving more racial and ethnic diversity. CPCF will continue to address this through future hiring requests (while also recognizing that increasing diversity doesn't necessarily increase inclusivity). The current Chair is investigating the creation of a CPCF EDI strategy. The first step is envisioned as the creation of a CPCF Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Charter. Future initiatives will imagine how to further integrate and highlight departmental research and course offerings that engage with diverse voices, cultural practices, and media forms. Inclusion is a goal we continue to aspire towards, modeled by actions that demonstrate how we are making reality more equitable for all.
- 5) CPCF pedagogy is future oriented. We are a department that continually updates course content to stay connected to the technologies and mediated realities that our students use and that society faces. Faculty research in film and communication focus on evolving media technologies and cultural practices. Our graduates are specifically prepared to contribute to emerging cultural industries. Algorithms, AI, social media, disinformation, etc. are integrated into all our program offerings, equipping students for a world of future employment and civic engagement. Our research and teaching are at the forefront of all professions and in every person's daily lives.

5. How does this review and its results position the Department as it moves into the next review cycle?

The review emphasized what CPCF already did well and how it could iterate change to improve. It allowed CPCF to consolidate its strengths. Implementing its recommendations, wherever possible, has made the multi-year planning process, implemented in the 2025 academic year, that much easier. We are positioned well to implement any systemic changes that might be coming related to degree architecture at Brock. The review kick-started our focus on departmental identity and streamlining of priorities. Accordingly, the next two to three years should bring sustainable changes designed to stabilize and drive enrolment and setting us up for success for the next Cyclical Academic Review that is scheduled to take place in 2029/2030.

D. ARC Final Summary

In final summary of the 2021/22 cyclical academic review of the graduate and undergraduate programs offered by the Department of Communication, Popular Culture and Film, ARC has determined the following:

1. That the Reviewers' Recommendations have been addressed satisfactorily.
2. That the Department has established a direction for next steps as it prepares for the next review cycle.
3. That the Department has achieved a broad-based, reflective, and forward-looking self-assessment.