

Four Year Report (2026)

Medieval and Renaissance Studies 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: Susannah Ferreira (University of Guelph), Robin Vose (St. Thomas) and one internal reviewer, Angela Book (Brock University).
3. The virtual site visit occurred on March 7, 9, 10, 2022.
4. The Final Assessment Report was approved by Senate on November 16, 2022.
5. The academic programs offered by the Department of Medieval and Renaissance Studies 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 |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|----------------------------|------------|
| Combined Major (Honours and Pass) | X | | | |

6. The next review of the Medieval and Renaissance Studies programs will be in 2029/30.

B: Recommendations

Recommendation #1

That all possible avenues be explored to further publicize the MARS program and associated events within the University and the broader community.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation. With pandemic-related restrictions lifting, the Centre has already resumed promotions and event planning.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Responsible for approving: | Centre |
| Responsible for resources: | Dean |
| Responsible for implementation: | Centre |
| Timeline: | Dean of Humanities to report by the end of academic year 2022-2023. |

| Actions | Responsibility | Year One | Year Two | Year Three |
|---|----------------|----------|----------|------------|
| Action #1 Active exploration of a variety of avenues to promote the program and associated events. | Centre | T | T | O |

Explanation of Actions Taken, Status and Results:

Over the past four years, the Centre has endeavoured to actively publicize the MARS program and its events within the University and the broader Niagara region. Every academic year the Centre holds two MARS Speaker Series talks with participation of faculty from various Humanities academic units (History, Music, English, Classics & Archaeology, and Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures). Students and faculty attend these talks and students receive CWC credit for attending. The Centre has co-organized events in collaboration with other units (CLAS, MLLC, MIWSFPA), including film screenings and roundtables with other units and community partners as part of Black History Month. In 2024, the Centre launched the annual Virgulti Lecture, an event that draws attendees from the broader local community and from the University. In 2025, the Virgulti Lecture had a total attendance of 69 people, many from the Niagara region as well as strong student and faculty attendance. Moreover, to publicize the program and its events, the Centre holds a welcome drop-in session in September. In this social gathering, prospective students can learn about the program by chatting with current MARS students and faculty. The Centre has created new promotional materials (including brochures), and the Centre’s website is updated regularly with images and news. To publicize its study-abroad program, the Centre has organized a student symposium showcasing the experiential component of the Isle of Man field course (MARS 3F51 *The Viking and Medieval Isle of Man*). In April 2025, the Centre organized a recruitment event that brought 40 high school students to Brock from two Niagara region secondary schools to learn about the Middle Ages and Renaissance

through hands-on activities. The Centre plans to hold a similar event in April 2026. The Centre continues its collaboration with the MARS student club (BUMARS) to encourage engagement with pre-modern culture through several university-wide events. In October 2025, the Centre held two information sessions to publicize the 2026 study-abroad course, MARS 3F52 *Social History of Renaissance Florence*. The information sessions were well attended, and the field course ended up being oversubscribed.

Recommendation #2

That steps be taken to offer MARS study abroad opportunities on a regularized, stable basis at least once every 2-3 years.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation. The Committee believes that the Centre, in consultation with Brock International, is best positioned to determine appropriate strategies to move forward with regularized and stable study abroad opportunities for students.

Implementation Plan (2nd Priority)

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|---------------------------------|---|
| Responsible for approving: | Centre |
| Responsible for resources: | Centre |
| Responsible for implementation: | Centre |
| Timeline: | Dean of Humanities to report by the end of academic year 2023-2024. |

| Actions | Responsibility | Year One | Year Two | Year Three |
|---|----------------|----------|----------|------------|
| Action #1 Development of strategies to offer study abroad opportunities. | Centre | T | T | C |
| Action #2 Creation of study abroad courses. | Centre | T | T | O |

Explanation of Actions Taken, Status and Results:

In consultation with Co-op, Career and Experiential Education (CCEE), other units in the Faculty of Humanities and the Dean of Humanities’ Office, the Centre has regularized its study abroad course to run every two years (on even years). In 2024, The Centre offered a new study abroad course—MARS 3F51 *The Viking and Medieval Isle of Man*. The course was offered in April-May 2024, and it was fully subscribed, with the number of applicants exceeding available spots. In May 2026, the Centre is offering MARS 3F52 *Social History of Renaissance Florence*. The course was also oversubscribed by highly qualified applicants. The Centre is currently developing study-abroad opportunities for 2028. The study-abroad courses remain very popular with students and draw considerable attention to the MARS program.

Recommendation #3

That MARS explore opportunities to make further links between its curriculum and local historical resources, including museum and library collections housing pre-modern texts and/or artifacts.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation. The Committee believes that the Centre is best positioned to determine appropriate strategies to rebuild linkages to local historical resources and resume field trips.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)

Responsible for approving: Centre
Responsible for resources: Centre
Responsible for implementation: Centre
Timeline: Dean of Humanities to report by the end of academic year 2022-2023.

| Actions | Responsibility | Year One | Year Two | Year Three |
|---|----------------|----------|----------|------------|
| Action #1 Continued support and exploration of links between curriculum and local resources. | Centre | T | T | O |
| Action #2 Development of off-campus field trip opportunities. | Centre | D | T | O |

Explanation of Actions Taken, Status and Results:

The Centre has generally achieved the improvements suggested while continuing to explore additional opportunities. The Centre has strengthened its collaboration with Archives and Special Collections at Brock University. Students in MARS 4P01 utilize the facilities as part of their course activities during the academic year. In 2023, the professor who teaches the course and the head of Archives and Special Collections won the MLA-EBSCO Collaboration for Information Literary Prize, for their work in MARS 4P01 Sources and Methods of Medieval and Renaissance Studies. Other outreach with local historical resources includes a visit by students in CLAS/MARS 3P09 to the ancient coin collection at McMaster Museum of Art, in 2025. The film screenings and roundtables organized in 2024 and 2025 offered students opportunities to reflect on early modern culture and on historical and current colonization practices, through the lens of contemporary film makers. The Centre is currently investigating potential visits to the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, to the Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, and to the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto.

Recommendation #4

That MARS collaborate with Library and IT services personnel to develop further “Digital Humanities” initiatives aimed at enhancing research, teaching, and/or experiential learning.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation. The Committee expects that the Centre will work with the Library, Information Technology Services (ITS) and the Brock LINC and move forward as appropriate in the development of digital initiatives.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)

Responsible for approving: Centre
Responsible for resources: Centre
Responsible for implementation: Centre
Timeline: Dean of Humanities to report by the end of academic year 2022-2023.

| Actions | Responsibility | Year One | Year Two | Year Three |
|---|----------------|----------|----------|------------|
| Action #1 Further development of “Digital Humanities” initiatives. | Centre | T | T | O |

Explanation of Actions Taken, Status and Results:

The Centre continues to explore additional opportunities and initiatives. Initiatives during the last three years include research and design of an ArcGIS website on courtly love and knighthood in MARS 2P95 *Reading the Middle Ages: the Heroic and the Chivalric*; podcast creation in MARS 2P89 *Medieval Art, Architecture and Society* and MARS 3P97 *The World of the Renaissance and Beyond*; and the new course HIST/MARS 2P58 *Gaming History*, which is now offered regularly. In addition, two of our faculty direct ongoing well-regarded digital Humanities projects in their respective disciplines (the Decima Project and The Pulter Project).

Recommendation #5

That the MARS program be provided with the institutional support and acknowledgement necessary to continue its excellent work.

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 program 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:

Not Applicable as “ARC considers the recommendation to be not accepted as it lies outside of the Committee’s jurisdiction.”

C. Unit Summative Analysis and Evaluation**1. To what extent has the Department achieved the improvements suggested by the reviewers?**

The Centre has been successful in achieving the improvements suggested by the reviewers. The top two recommendations (publicizing the MARS program and events and regularizing the study-abroad program) have been priorities for the Centre and their achievement have remained on target since the completion of the Academic Review process in 2021-22. The Centre has endeavoured to actively publicize the MARS program and its events within the University and the broader Niagara region community. As noted in detail under Recommendation #1, every academic year the Centre holds two MARS Speaker Series talks with participation of faculty from various Humanities academic units (History, Music, English, Classics & Archaeology, and Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures) and the Centre launched the annual Virgulti Lecture. Additionally, to publicize the program and its events the Centre continually updates its printed promotional materials and its events on the Centre’s website and makes regular use of the available social media channels. Regarding the program’s study-abroad opportunities, the centre has regularized its study-abroad course by offering it every other year.

The Centre has generally achieved the improvements suggested around strengthening its links between the program and local historical resources. As noted in detail above, the Centre has strengthened its collaboration with Archives and Special Collections and undertaken other outreach with local historical resources. The Centre is also currently investigating potential visits to the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, to the Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, and to the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto. On recommendation 4 (Digital Humanities initiatives), the Centre continues to explore additional opportunities and initiatives.

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

While it should be noted that the Review Committee assigned an “Excellent Quality” rating to the MARS program, the implementation of the reviewers’ recommendations has had an overall positive impact on the program. Most notably, the program has gained increased visibility because of concerted efforts to publicize the MARS program and related events. The Centre has

continually updated its printed promotional materials and information available on its website for prospective and for current students and has started holding the annual Virgulti Lecture. The Centre has continued the annual MARS Speaker Series with good attendance from students and faculty. The Centre continually supports its student association (BUMARS) in organizing events—events effectively publicized via social media channels. Supporting BUMARS and publicizing MARS events has fostered an intentional community of students and faculty interested in the study of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The Centre has seen the number of majors remain steady in the last three years, an indication that increasing the Centre’s profile and the concomitant community building has had positive results. The regularization of the study-abroad program has helped boost the Centre’s profile and to attract prospective students. The information sessions for the study-abroad course attract anywhere from 30 to 40 students, while the two courses we have offered have been oversubscribed. Student testimonials from the Isle of Man course speak of the value of such field course experience: “This experience was life changing, and something I will remember and cherish forever;” “This trip was an eye-opening experience that changed my life;” “Learning in castles is much more fun than in the classroom!”

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

The annual FAR Implementation Reports offer one mechanism for monitoring quality improvement of the MARS program. Since the first FAR report in 2023, the Centre has been on target in achieving the Reviewers’ recommendations. In addition, the Centre continually schedules Advisory Committee meetings during the academic year to address ongoing program issues as well as to monitor the quality of the program. The Advisory Committee oversees the annual UPC cycle, the academic objectives of the program, event planning, MARS book prizes awards, and planning and scheduling study-abroad courses. For example, in the current winter term (2026), the Advisory Committee will conduct a review of year 2 and year 3 requirements to improve course options for students. Moreover, the Centre’s Director contacts program majors and minors on a regular basis to ensure students are on track in fulfilling their MARS degree requirements.

An additional mechanism of continuous quality improvement is the recently implemented Four-Year Plan for academic programs (2026-27 to 2029-30). The Centre’s Four-Year Plan outlines the program’s main academic objectives as well as their progress metrics. It also describes upcoming program changes, course planning, and complement planning for the four-year period. The Centre’s Four-Year Plan serves as a concrete document which contributes to the process of continuous quality improvement.

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

[[1) High-Quality and meaningful, 2) Accessible, Flexible & Customizable, 3) Supportive & Student-Centred, 4) Equitable, Diverse, and Inclusive and 5) Future-Oriented]

The MARS program offers “a unique student experience,” as outlined in Brock’s Academic Plan, thanks to its unique combination of period-specific studies brought to life through a host of different disciplinary perspectives. Brock’s Academic Plan underscores “innovation through disciplinary and transdisciplinary scholarly activities”. MARS is the ideal embodiment of trans-disciplinarity through its fusion of the strengths of faculty homed in different departments and trained in specific disciplines that intersect with the program’s curriculum in diverse ways. MARS is flexible and customizable owing to its highly interdisciplinary basis. The participation of faculty and cross-listing of courses from across many academic units on campus lets students shape their program in relation to what fascinates them. MARS is also flexible and customizable because it is a co-major; by definition, students need to select a co-major in another discipline to graduate.

MARS is fundamentally oriented around the meaningful relationship of individuals to larger cultural structures: temporal, geographic, institutional, artistic. The program takes, as case studies, the varied histories of two contiguous eras in which individuals from all walks of life found themselves defined in relation to, and resistant to, various social and cultural structures, from royal courts to religious and military orders and state-sponsored voyages of exploration and colonization. Studying the interactions of people with these varied forms of community—a critical aspect of the MARS curriculum—offers students models to reflect on critically as they consider their own present and future participation in the forms and structures of public and private life today, both locally and globally.

MARS offers “High-Quality and meaningful” education with a strong experiential learning component in the successful study abroad courses that have been offered by MARS faculty: MARS 3F50, Heritage of Viking and Medieval Iceland (2010); HIST/ITAL/MARS/VISA 3F50, Reading the Italian Medieval and Renaissance City (2016); MARS/HIST 3F51, Viking and Medieval Isle of Man (2024); and MARS/HIST/ITAL 3F52, Social History of Renaissance Florence (2026).

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

The 2021-22 Review and the subsequent yearly reports situate the MARS program in a very good position as it moves into the next review cycle in 2029-30. The Review gave the Centre’s undergraduate program a rating of “Excellent quality,” while also identifying five recommendations. The top two recommendations (publicizing the MARS program and events and regularizing the study-abroad program) have been successfully achieved, while the two other recommendations have largely been achieved with ongoing efforts to develop further—links between the program and local historical resources and Digital Humanities initiatives. The Centre has benefited especially from publicizing the MARS program and its events within the University and the broader Niagara region community. It has also seen the benefits of regularizing the study-abroad options for students by offering field courses in 2024 and in 2026. These improvements coupled with continued support of the program’s student association (BUMARS) has helped to

foster an intentional community of students and faculty interested in the study of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Over the past three years, the program has seen the number of majors remain steady and an increase the number of minors. The number of students joining BUMARS has seen a noticeable surge and student participation in MARS events has also risen. The MARS program continues to offer flexible, “High-Quality and meaningful” education with a strong experiential learning component through successful and regular study abroad opportunities.

D. ARC Final Summary

In final summary of the 2021/22 cyclical academic review of the undergraduate programs offered by the Department of Medieval and Renaissance Studies, ARC has determined the following:

1. That the Reviewers’ Recommendations 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.