

Final Assessment Report Recreation and Leisure Studies Undergraduate Programs (reviewed 2023/24)

A. Summary

1. The Department's Self-Study was considered and approved by the Senate Academic Review Committee (ARC) December 15, 2023.
2. The Review Committee consisted of two external reviewers: Peter Morden (Concordia University) and Elizabeth Halpenny (University of Alberta), and one internal reviewer, Hilary Brown (Brock University).
3. The site visit occurred March 13-14, 2024.
4. The Reviewers' Report was received April 15, 2024.
5. The Senate Undergraduate Program Committee (SGSC) response was received May 22, 2024.
6. The Department response was received May 28, 2024.
7. The Dean, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, response was received June 3, 2024.
8. Annual Implementation Reports will be submitted from 2025-2028.
9. The next Cyclical Academic Review is scheduled to take place in 2031/2032.

The review was conducted under the terms and conditions of the June 2023 IQAP. The Self-Study was prepared prior to the ratification of the 2023 IQAP.

Program Outcome Categories:

Based on their knowledge of the discipline, the content of the Self-Study and the interviews conducted during the site visit, the Review Committee gave the programs the following Outcome Categories:

Program(s)	Excellent Quality	Good Quality	Good Quality with Concerns	Non-Viable
Bachelor of Recreation and Leisure Studies (Honours)		X		
Bachelor of Recreation and Leisure Studies with Major		X		
Bachelor of Recreation and Leisure Studies (Pass)			X	
<p><i>If you have chosen 'Good Quality with Concerns', please summarize the specific concern(s) briefly below. If you have chosen 'Non-Viable', please summarize the specific reason(s) below.</i></p> <p><i>The specific concerns with the "pass" program relate to a) college transfer students and b) equity. Given the number of credits that are awarded to certain college transfer students, there is a possibility that a small fraction of the program requirements will be taken while at Brock; nevertheless, leading to a bachelor's degree. This has ramifications for the student experience as such students spend minimal time in interaction with their disciplinary peers and leave the program sooner, as well. The lack of any meaningful, outward distinction between graduates of the "pass" or "major/honours" leads to a perception of inequitably earned credentials. While there are obviously very good reasons to pursue a 20 credit program, those for whom the credential is a driving factor are not playing on a level field.</i></p> <p>[BRLS 3-Year Pass program was approved to be Discontinued by Senate April 17, 2024.]</p>				

Executive Summary:

The Reviewers wrote:

The Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies (RECL) is offering quality education and learning opportunities to undergraduate students. They are achieving this successfully despite an overallocated budget with no flexibility for innovation and the loss of FTEs that have not been replaced.

To address the learning needs of contemporary students and challenge cultural norms and systems, RECL has drafted a comprehensive strategic plan that prioritizes effective and important changes such as embedding decolonization and inclusion in teaching and learning practice and reaffirming commitment to traditions such a meaningful engagement with local communities and other stakeholders.

The degree providers are proud of their continued excellence in delivering a multitude of experiential education opportunities, training in reflective practice, and emphasis on research and teaching that recognizes the diversity of populations served by recreation and leisure practitioners and scholars.

Well positioned in the recreation and leisure degree landscape in Canada, Brock's RECL program provides 3 distinct concentrations of study -- one, the Outdoor Recreation concentration is different from other recreation and leisure programs in southern Ontario. The others, Community Recreation (CR) and Therapeutic Recreation (TR) are fields with burgeoning labor market needs (i.e. due to retirements, an aging population, and societal interest in fostering multi-generational wellbeing.)

While enrollment in RECL declined after the most recent program review, last year an increase was experienced. With increased promotional efforts, continued review of the curriculum relevance and delivery effectiveness, and with commitment to principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion along with reconciliation and decolonization -- we believe the program will continue to thrive.

Taking advantage of existing resources on campus (e.g., research collaboration, Indigenous knowledge experts, joint hires), engagement in creative approaches to addressing financial sustainability, and the collegial atmosphere among faculty members in the RECL program are essential elements for fostering future success.

B. Program Strengths

The reviewers noted the following strengths:

There are a variety of strengths, including faculty cohesion, student body cohesion, experiential education, and course breadth/diversity.

Faculty cohesion within the RECL department is among its most notable strengths, especially given the lack of cohesion that seems to have characterized the department for much of the time since the last review. Partly as a result of faculty transfers or retirements, in addition to directly addressing the issue with the help of a consultant, the negative climate that prevailed has been exchanged for a work environment that is not predominantly characterized by tension and conflict.

Given the relatively small enrolments across the three concentrations, it is perhaps not surprising that students expressed feeling a strong affiliation for their fellow students. This sentiment is certainly augmented through joint experiences beyond the classroom. Indeed, some students noted that their experience in the program, and with their peers, was qualitatively better following their first field experience, a camping trip, as a cohort.

That experiential components appear throughout the curriculum is clearly helpful in this regard. Although a primary purpose is to develop skills and competencies not possible through regular classroom instruction, the development of a sense of community and social capital cannot be overlooked. It is often these sentiments that provide additional motivation as students pursue their degree, and it is often these experiences which develop lasting, affective bonds between the students and the institution.

A final specific strength lies in the diversity of courses offered in the department that serve the distinct programs. The curriculum provides special focus on particular population groups (e.g., youth; persons with disabilities), spans disciplinary boundaries (e.g., social psychology; ecology), and allows students to develop relevant knowledge and specific competencies relative to their concentration. Of note is the amount of coursework devoted to research methods, which is uncommon in comparator programs. Thus, the department positions its students well to pursue a career following graduation or to continue with research-based graduate education.

C. Opportunities for Improvement and Enhancement

Note: Supporting/clarifying text was provided for each recommendation.

Recommendation #1: Continue efforts to embed EDI & decolonization within department culture & coursework.

The Department responded:

We accept this recommendation and as a department recognize the need to “Continue efforts to embed EDI & decolonization within department culture & coursework.” Although initiatives (e.g. RECL 2P94 -Indigenous Communities and Recreation) and departmental representation on a faculty wide anti-racism taskforce looking to better understand our students’ experiences regarding inclusion and representation currently exist, future work can ensure a more holistic departmental effort. It is important to note that the CCEE team has a Career Curriculum Consultant for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion which is a resource to be explored.

Moving forward, a multi-pronged approach that focuses on faculty and staff education, embedding DEII in curriculum, and supporting students with diverse identities will be pursued. To address recommendation #1: EDI and decolonization, the department identified various efforts to investigate:

1. an annual review of what is being done within our undergraduate curriculum and research that highlights EDI and decolonization.
2. a curriculum review to determine where Indigenous and decolonization content could be further embedded.
3. the development of a land-based Indigenous outdoor education course and/or position.
4. engaging in a collective learning process on decolonization, Indigeneity, and EDI with annual activities and goals. This will be aligned with the results of the annual review (point 1) and the self-study of our students’ experiences regarding inclusion and representation.
5. the development of an Indigenous CRC position (when available).

Contributing to our department’s ability to achieve success with this recommendation is the alignment of this work with our departmental Strategic Plan’s Priority Statement #5: Foster a culture of inclusivity, accessibility, reconciliation, and decolonization.

The Undergraduate Programs Committee responded:

UPC will expect to see some items submitted regarding course descriptions, leading to additional work. This will not be problematic.

The Dean of Applied Health Sciences responded:

I am in support of the Department’s well considered plans to continue their already considerable efforts in imbedding EDI & decolonization in departmental culture and coursework. The muti-pronged plan outlined in their response is focused, appropriate and achievable and I commend their work and sincerity in this effort which is also an important component of Brock’s and the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences official plans.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation. The Committee expects that the Department is best positioned to determine appropriate strategies to continue embedding EDI and decolonization within department culture and coursework.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department/Dean
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Applied Health Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2024-25.

Recommendation #2: Make increased use of existing institutional and community resources to support enrolment growth.

The Department responded:

We accept recommendation #2 as we work to “Make increased use of existing institutional and community resources to support enrolment growth.” One of the outcomes of our strategic plan efforts was a realignment of departmental committees and the “marketing and external relations” committee has accomplished many key activities that combine alumni work with student learning since the last program review. Annual alumni day events in our classrooms culminated with an ambitious but well received 40@40 alumni campaign in 2023. Moving forward, our efforts in this area can evolve to collaborate more with institutional supports and resources while building upon the momentum gained to this point.

To address recommendation #2: institutional and community resources, the department identified various efforts including:

- 1) exploring the idea of forming an Alumni Advisory Committee/Alumni Champions Advisory Committee that can meet annually to support the ongoing initiatives of the department and provide strong links to industry partners.
- 2) continuing to coordinate efforts with the office of Marketing and Communications (MARCOM) and Recruitment to ensure the department voice is accurately portrayed.
- 3) inviting FAHS marketing personnel to a departmental marketing and external relations committee meeting on an annual basis to explore unrealized potential opportunities.

[please note the staff person primarily responsible for departmental social media work is the Undergraduate Academic Advisor, not the Experiential Education Coordinator, as noted above]

Contributing to our department’s ability to achieve success with this recommendation is the alignment of this work with our departmental Strategic Plan’s Priority Statement 2: Realize a

streamlined and effective marketing plan that distinguishes us in academic (colleges and universities) and research settings.

The Dean of Applied Health Sciences responded:

I am in support of the Department’s continued efforts to enhance student recruitment. Their work to date has resulted in some modest but significant increases in enrollment and other changes that the department has already initiated (e.g. Standalone Bachelor of Therapeutic Recreation degree) will also soon yield positive enrollment results. The further, well considered, plans in this regard, outlined in the Departmental response will also work to benefit departmental enrollments.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation. The Committee expects that the Department is best positioned to determine appropriate strategies to make increased use of existing institutional and community resources to support enrolment growth.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department/Dean
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Applied Health Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2024-25.

Recommendation #3: Search for entrepreneurial and creative solutions to address budget limitations.

The Department responded:

We accept recommendation #3 in principle: “Search for entrepreneurial and creative solutions to address budget limitations” due to the restrictions of engaging in entrepreneurial activity at Brock University at the departmental level. That withstanding, the department did identify three actions that would contribute to this recommendation.

- 1) Conducting a curriculum review to identify courses which could be cross-listed.
- 2) Committing to examining the department's existing three micro-certificates (Outdoor Recreation Leadership, Recreation Programming Foundations, Therapeutic Recreation Foundations) and investigating how to re-tool these existing opportunities to better align with the needs of students and industry competencies. As part of this effort, we will connect with Brock’s Professional and Continuing Studies department for support.
- 3) Identifying and beginning to explore/cultivate relationships with industry partners for possible grants, in-kind donations, and other revenue generating opportunities.

Contributing to our department’s ability to address this recommendation is the alignment of this work with our departmental Strategic Plan’s Priority Statement 1: Offer coherent,

relevant, sustainable RECL programs that resonate with students, meet their diverse needs, represent our community focus.

The Dean of Applied Health Sciences responded:

I am in support of the Department’s plans to enhance cost savings and revenue generation. It is likely that University and Faculty wide efforts to identify courses which could be shared by departments (I am not sure that cross-listing would always be necessary), will be something that would be supported and favoured by the Dean’s office. Other efforts regarding micro-certifications and continuing education development will also be likely to lead to modest but important “profit sharing” with the Department. And plans to work with industrial partners would also be welcome.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted for consideration. The Committee expects that the Department will consider entrepreneurial and creative solutions to address budget limitations as part of larger curriculum discussions.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department/Dean
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Applied Health Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2024-25.

D. Summary of Recommendations:

First Priority:
Recommendation(s): 1,2,3