UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

FACULTY OF LAW

LLM Program Curriculum Review

2019

1. Summary

The Faculty of Law's LLM is known locally, nationally and internationally for its specialization in energy, natural resources and environmental law. This area of research is of current interest and will continue to be of critical importance in the 21st century. The Masters of Law has both a thesis-based and a course-based stream. Recently, the faculty began offering a general thesis-based LLM for students who wish to take courses and write a thesis in areas other than the specialization. The course-based LLM is currently limited to the specialization. The faculty does not at this time have a PhD program, but it has graduated three PhD in Law students as special cases.

The main purpose of this curriculum review is to determine how well the LLM program and its courses further student learning and how the program and courses can be enhanced. More particularly, the review set out to answer its guiding questions. The guiding questions were established by the Graduate Studies Committee, which acted as the Curriculum Review Committee for the purposes of this review. The first question is designed to focus on the graduate student perspective. The latter two questions draw upon two "foundational commitments" of the University: to sharpen the focus on research and scholarship and enrich the quality and breadth of learning.[1]

The questions are: (i) Does our current curriculum and does our current LLM program meet student needs? (ii) How can we enrich the quality and breadth of learning in our LLM program? (iii) Does the LLM program help to sharpen our faculty's focus on research and scholarship?

In order to help answer these questions, two surveys were conducted, one of academic staff and sessional instructors, and one of graduate students who are currently in the program or who have recently completed it. The survey data was presented and feedback was sought. In addition, a curriculum mapping exercise was done, based on program learning outcomes ("PLO"s) developed by the Graduate Studies Committee for the purposes of this curriculum review. Utilizing the course outlines, curriculum mapping was done by the Graduate Studies Committee for core courses that are offered in our specialization during the next academic year.

The curriculum review has confirmed that the existing LLM program is highly valued by our students, who say that it meets their academic and career needs, and who value the quality of instruction. Faculty members saw more room for improvement but would recommend it to potential students. The curriculum mapping exercise revealed that students would welcome greater interdisciplinarity and familiarization with international and comparative sources of law.

The feedback from our surveys indicated that both students and instructors strongly supported creating a PhD in Law program. A PhD in Law would provide opportunities for students to conduct advanced legal research in a variety of areas. Instructors indicated that a PhD program

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[1] University of Calgary, *Research Plan*, *2018-23*, at p. 1.

would assist with their research and scholarship and enrich the quality and breadth of learning in the faculty. Faculty members would be able to build doctoral training into their grant applications.

Feedback from the surveys also indicates support among faculty and graduate students for broadening the course-based LLM so that it offers courses outside the specialization. Our faculty survey indicated that most believed that a general, course-based LLM would increase the breadth and quality of learning in the LLM program. Expansion of the number of graduate students will also further the goal of the Academic Plan to increase the number of graduate students studying at the university.[2]

Three recommendations were made and related action items proposed. First, it is recommended that we apply for a PhD in Law program. Second, it is recommended that we pursue offering a general, course-based LLM, one that includes courses outside of the specialization area. Third, it is recommended that PLOs be developed for our proposed PhD program with assistance from the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning and, relatedly, that a review of PLOs be undertaken for the LLM program in co-ordination with the JD curriculum review of 2020-21.

2. Overview

For the purposes of curriculum mapping, the program learning outcomes for each graduate student are to:

- Become an expert in the current state of an area of law, including all major perspectives and issues;
- Have a full understanding of the theoretical foundations of an area of law;
- Become fully aware of the limits of current research of an area of law, and ways in which it may develop in the near future;
- Have the ability to research, synthesize and identify patterns within an unfamiliar area of law;
- Have the ability to develop and articulate new positions and arguments by applying existing legal knowledge to a new problem or circumstance;
- Have well developed critical thinking skills;
- Have well developed persuasive writing skills;
- Have the ability to draw on other disciplines to develop a legal position or argument; and
- Have the ability to draw on international or other comparative sources of law to develop a legal position or argument.

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[2] University of Calgary, *Academic Plan, 2018-23*, at p. 11.

The full-time Thesis-based Master's of Law consists of two elective courses and two required courses, Law 703: Graduate Seminar in Legal Research & Methodology and Law 705: Graduate Seminar in Legal Theory. In addition, a thesis must be written and orally defended.

The Course-based Master's of Law consists of five elective courses, Law 703: Graduate Seminar in Legal Research & Methodology and Law 706: Major Research Paper. At least two of the elective courses must include a writing requirement. It may be taken on a part-time basis.

3. Guiding Questions

Does our current curriculum and does our current LLM program meet (current and prospective) student needs?

How can we enrich the quality and breadth of learning in our LLM program?

Does our LLM program help to sharpen our faculty's focus on research and scholarship?

4. Action Plan

On the basis of the evidence the curriculum mapping exercise and the student and instructor surveys, the following action plan is put forward.

Recommendation	**Offer a PhD in Law program in which students can study in any legal area for which supervision is available.**
Action Item	Apply for a PhD in Law program.
Timeline	2 years
Responsibility	Graduate Studies Committee
Data Source(s)	Faculty survey; student survey; unit reviews; strategic plans; student inquiries (approximately 12 over the last year); knowledge of previous graduate student placement in PhD programs; enrollment statistics from other programs
Rationale	Responds to student needs and institutional priorities; it is in the Strategic Plan, and has strong faculty support.
Evaluation	Curriculum Review
Comments	There is strong faculty and student support for this recommendation.

Recommendation	**Offer a course-based general LLM program.**
Action Item	Consult with faculty members on the design of a general course-based LLM program. Apply to create a general course-based LLM.
Timeline	1 year
Responsibility	Graduate Studies Committee
Data Source(s)	Faculty survey; student survey; previous unit reviews provide guidance

Rationale	Responds to current and prospective student needs; broadens benefits and responsibilities of supervision among faculty.
Evaluation	Curriculum Review
Comments	There is faculty support for this recommendation indicated in the survey. Broadening of the LLM will have to be carefully planned and the faculty will need to apply to the University, as it did when it broadened the thesis-based LLM.

Recommendation	**Develop and evaluate program learning outcomes for the proposed PhD program. Review the program learning outcomes for the LLM and their proper degree of satisfaction in coordination with JD curriculum mapping.**
Action Item	Meet with Teaching and Learning Staff to develop and evaluate PLOs in conjunction with the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning for the proposed PhD. Coordinate a review of the LLM PLOs and their degree of satisfaction with the JD curriculum mapping.
Timeline	One month to develop the PhD PLOs.
Responsibility	Graduate Studies Committee
Data Source(s)	Curriculum mapping
Rationale	The PhD program is currently being developed. Feedback from the Decision Support Team is to refine and further develop the draft program learning outcomes. Since graduate studies courses are also JD courses, the PLOs should be reviewed in coordination with the JD curriculum mapping.
Evaluation	Self-evaluation
Comments	It would be useful to review the LLM PLOs in light of the JD curriculum mapping in 2020-21.

5. Conclusions

This curriculum review has confirmed that the existing LLM program is highly valued by our students, who say that it meets their academic and career needs, and who value the quality of instruction. Faculty members see more room for improvement, but the majority would recommend it to prospective students. The points of potential improvement that emerged from the curriculum mapping exercise suggest that the learning outcomes for the LLM program should be reviewed in conjunction with the upcoming JD curriculum review to ensure that the learning outcomes in shared courses are appropriate for both groups of students.

The feedback from our surveys revealed strong support for creating a PhD in Law program, for expanding the course-based LLM program, and for continuing to work toward improving the delivery of the existing programs.