



MONITORING TRENDS IN
ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Higher Education Strategy Associates

ABOUT HESA

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Monitoring Trends in Academic Programs

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He has also provided analytical and writing support analysing factors behind student decision making concerning postsecondary institutions, including HESA's the *Early Influences Project* and the *Parental Influence Project*. He is an editor of the firm's annual State of Postsecondary Education in Canada report.

ABOUT THE COMPANY

Higher Education Strategy Associates (HESA) is a Toronto-based firm providing strategic insight and guidance to governments, postsecondary institutions, and agencies through excellence and expertise in policy analysis, monitoring and evaluation, and strategic consulting services. Through these activities, HESA strives to improve the quality, efficacy, and fairness of higher education systems in Canada and worldwide.

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Designed by Robert Burroughs





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INTRODUCTION TO MONITORING TRENDS

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WELCOME

Every year, new postsecondary academic programs are developed and old ones refined. New learning objectives are identified, work placements created, and novel courses established. At the same time, long-running programs evolve and deploy innovative approaches that might not be noticed or appreciated across the country.

This short report is the first of a series of reports Higher Education Strategy Associates will be producing, entitled Monitoring Trends in Academic Programs. This series is designed to highlight interesting new approaches to curriculum design in post-secondary education, both in Canada and beyond. It is not intended to be a comprehensive review of such; rather, it provides a brief analytical summary of some noteworthy trends and issues that we synthesize from our regular reviews of hundreds of institutional webpages and academic calendars. Our goal is to help those responsible for creating and refining new curriculum to see different kinds of options, to encourage creativity and spark new thinking when it comes to program design.

Each edition of *Monitoring Trends* will focus on a different broad field of study such as “Business/Commerce” or “Engineering”. This edition focuses specifically on trends in the social sciences and humanities. Disciplines in these fields have long dealt with softening or declining enrolments, particularly as students worry about having clear career paths following graduation. The tides may

be turning as there is increasing awareness of employer needs for strong skills in communications, writing, and critical thinking. Nevertheless, many programs remain focused on teaching their students information about their discipline, and do little to move beyond that, trusting that students will be able to make connections between that knowledge and future pursuits on their own.

In this brief document, HESA is highlighting three areas in the humanities and social sciences, focusing especially on areas that seek to connect the university to the wider world:

- 1) *Service learning*: This section highlights what some programs are doing to get their students into their community, thereby cultivating important skills and strengthening connections between the institution and the surrounding area;
- 2) *Multidisciplinary studies*: An exploration of some trends in creating concentrations to help guide students through the exciting world of multidisciplinary learning and a consideration of some well-designed programs that draw from several perspectives;
- 3) *Indigenous Studies programs and community learning*: A brief overview of some new Indigenous Studies programs and some reflections on what Indigenous Studies can teach other programs about community engagement.

HIGHLIGHTS IN SERVICE LEARNING

Cultivating skills and strengthening connections

There is growing pressure on universities to demonstrate their value to the public. One common response to this pressure is to try to break down the barriers between the institution and surrounding communities via service learning programs.

Demonstrating value and connecting to communities can take many forms, but one meaningful way this has been occurring is via the development of programs that take students out of campuses and have them apply their learning to real-world challenges. In particular, programs have developed that encourage students to tackle major community and global issues, integrating work directly into curricula.

Along with providing students with valuable work and life experience, these highlighted programs also help students demonstrate directly to communities why their studies matter. They provide compelling narratives for answering the question: “Why does your major matter?”

Service learning matters because many students want to feel that their education is making a difference, not only for themselves but for the wider community. Generation Z is generally a socially engaged cohort and have demonstrated an interest in changing existing structures of learning and providing themselves with an education that channels their energy into projects that make a demonstrable change. More prosaically, service learning provides vital communication skills and cultivates flexibility and adaptability.

Table 1: Benefits of service learning

For students	For the community	For the institution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased capacity for complex problem solving and managing ambiguity Improved sense of personal efficacy and moral development Greater intercultural understanding Improved community engagement post-graduation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human resources to help achieve community goals Provide new energy and ideas for community aims Create more direct community-HEI ties and improve relations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different publication opportunities through service-based education and research Improved networking opportunities with different faculty members and community members Enhanced research commitment

There are two main forms service learning can take: the first is service learning within a program, where a department makes efforts through course material, experiential learning, and volunteering opportunities to connect students to various causes and issues. The second is service learning across programs, where a central office or body provides supports for students from a range of different programs who are seeking to engage in service learning.

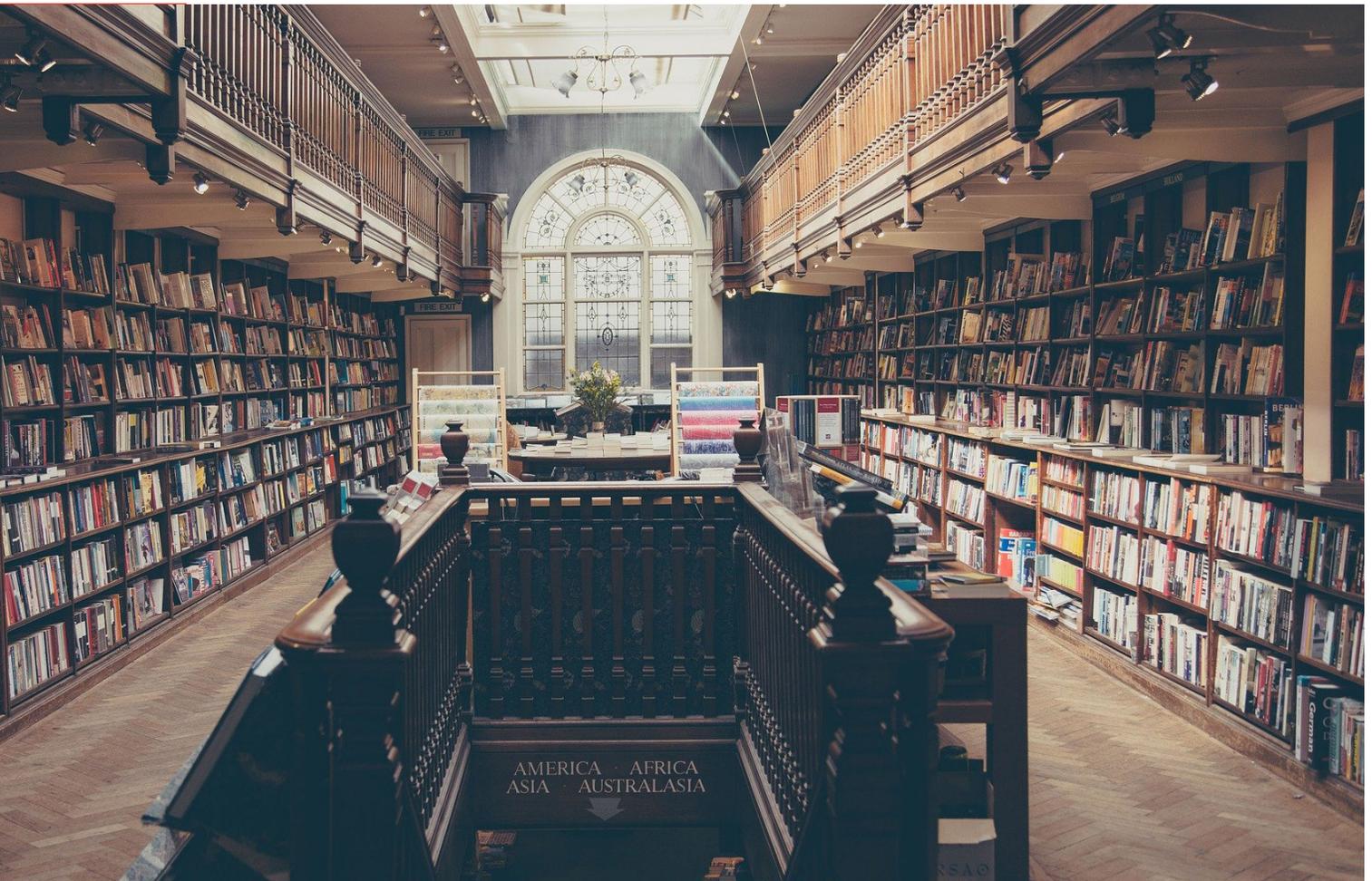
WITHIN PROGRAMS

There are humanities and social sciences programs that aim to have their students tackle major global social and development issues directly through their studies. This approach is particularly common in programs in areas such as peace and conflict studies or international development.

For instance, Dalhousie University's Department of International Development Studies has two experiential learning courses (one in Canada, one abroad) that connects students to a volunteer-driven organisation, such as the Halifax Immigrant Learning Centre, the Nova Scotia-Gambia Association, or Clean Nova Scotia.

Learning from these experiences is solidified through an end of year symposium where students share and reflect on their experiences. Students in the program are also exposed to a wide range of approaches in global and community-driven development through a module-based introductory course that draws on the expertise of four different professors over the course of a semester.

Table 1 source: adapted from “What is Service Learning or Community Engagement?” Vanderbilt University, Center for Teaching.



One of the most detailed programs in this area in Canada is the University of Waterloo's Peace and Conflict Studies program. This program stands out for a couple of reasons: firstly, it has four detailed streams (Development, Human Rights and Social Justice; Applied Conflict Resolution; Violence and Non-Violence; and Religion and Culture), and second the program is attached more broadly to the institution's culture of community engagement, including an open dinner program and to its longstanding connection to the Mennonite community (through religious faith is not a prerequisite for the program). The program also has connections to conflict management and mediation along with internships with local and global organisations.

One field that is consistently dedicated to service learning is environmental studies. As a discipline that is generally directly concerned with the interplay between humans and the surrounding environment, environmental studies programs commonly encourage their students to take their studies into the com-

munity. There are numerous examples of this: the University of Saskatchewan's Environment and Society program provides a blend of arts and science courses and has senior students complete projects targeting sustainability challenges on campus and in the community; the University of Freiburg in Germany emphasises their program's links to the city's reputation as a green city. Indeed, several environmental studies programs are directly animated by a sense of mission—for example, York University's program states that:

Our vision is to direct and combine the diverse energies, assets and activities of the Faculty of Environmental Studies to become the premier location for interdisciplinary, analytical and collaborative research, education and action on critical and changing environmental issues.

As part of this mission, the Faculty developed an "Urban Gardening and Sustainability" course in 2019, where students worked in an urban community garden, making connections

with the Maloca Community Garden and learning directly about community food scarcity and sustainability issues and what role community gardening may have in alleviating those challenges.

A key challenge going forward is to bring out disciplines that have not traditionally forged deep ties with the surrounding community. In history, for example, this can take the form of public history courses; usually public history is a masters-based program, though the University of Brandon and Assiniboine Community College recently combined to offer a joint program in public history that connects students to local care homes and community museums and then has students compete college courses to improve their media knowledge.

ACROSS PROGRAMS

Developing ties with a central community-based learning program like the University of Alberta’s or creating courses that oblige the student to connect with community organisations are two strong ways to develop skills, increase confidence, and demonstrate the value of a university education to external groups.

As a number of people with undergraduate degrees proliferates, earning premiums are no longer enough to convince students that university matters. Creating connections with the surrounding community has never been more urgent or more aligned with student interests. There are several disciplines with long standing efforts in service learning—the number of disciplines involved needs to expand.

Often, service learning happens when a program, through a specific course or a program outcome. However, some universities offer this sort of education as an option that is available for multiple programs. For instance, Laval University offers a *Profil en développement durable*, which is a twelve-credit program that can be included as part of several different undergraduate programs, including chemistry, engineering, psychology, and public affairs. The *Profil* has three main goals: to familiarise students with the general concept of sustainable development; to allow students to acquire knowledge about sustainable development that is specific to their field; and to work on a project informed by sustainable development.

As an example, a student in psychology can work on themes relating to equality and solidarity, access to psychological knowledge, and identifying ways to mitigate the emergence of mental health issues. Students completing this *Profil* may then apply to take a course of at least 135 hours in a community of mental health organisation that deals with these issues on a daily basis.

Likewise, the University of Alberta has a Community Service Learning (CSL) program that has a wide range of designated courses across a wide range of fields. The CSL office also works with community organisations to arrange partnerships and provide them with students who commit at least 20 hours of volunteer work. Students can complete a certificate in CSL to demonstrate their commitment to work with various organisations and to signify their dedication to civic engagement.

What makes the Laval *Profil* and the Alberta CSL programs particularly stand out is how different programs have a series of courses that students select to ensure that their studies in a wide range of fields are focused on sustainable development in a way that is relevant to their chosen discipline. This helps to ensure that these challenges are not confined to a specific discipline and may attract students from fields in more traditionally vocationally oriented fields.

Table 2: Summary of service learning types

Service learning within program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draws connection between courses and specific issue relating to the discipline • Allows an entire class to engage in a community-based project • Can attract students to a specific major
Service learning across programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows students greater flexibility in combining a wide range of programs with service learning • Can draw on multiple disciplines and encourage students to make connections • Usually requires some increased initiative and planning on the part of the individual student

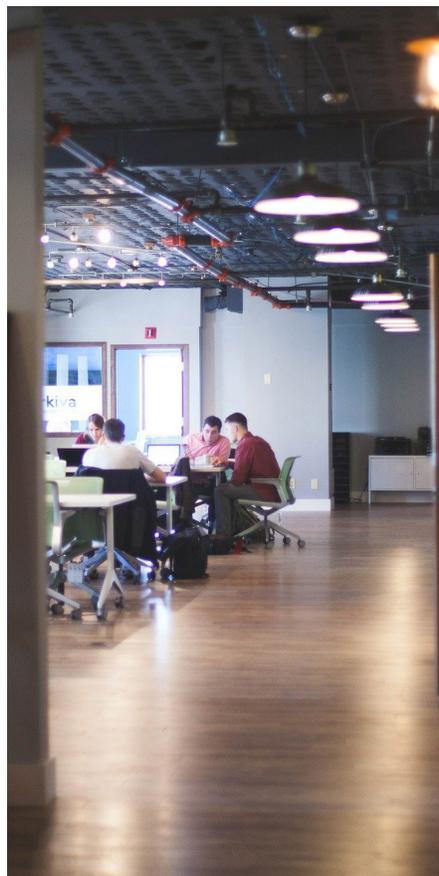
FRONTIERS IN MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

Beyond a disciplinary approach

Many students want flexibility and the ability to follow their interests across disciplinary boundaries as they learn and discover. However, HESA's previous research and interviews with prospective students also demonstrated that students often desire some degree of guidance and direction—they want to be able to explore new ideas while also feeling like there is a system in place to support their intellectual adventures.

For years, universities offered students the ability to complete dual and combined majors as a way to facilitate multidisciplinary learning. However, more recently the trend has been towards the development of multidisciplinary degrees and specialisations that provide students with more guidance through their undergraduate degree, while also providing the flexibility to study a range of approaches. These programs, as well as interdisciplinary ones, that allow for a high degree of individual self-direction ask a great deal of individual students, and the rigour of that education can fall under question.

Well designed multidisciplinary learning can fulfil employer needs. Again and again, employers call for graduates who are adaptable and able to work with a wide range of teams and projects. A degree that draws from several specialisations can help signify to employers that a student has the mental aptitude to tackle various problems and the commitment to learn about issues from multiple perspectives. None of this is to suggest that focused



degrees will become obsolete—there will always be a need for people with a strong, deep knowledge of a narrower subject area—but there are some intriguing examples of programs that cut across disciplines for students with a wide-ranging curiosity.

There are two main approaches here: the first is concentrations or specialisations that can be added onto a traditional major, adding variety to an existing program. The second is new multidisciplinary programs that are designed from the ground up to provide education for emerging challenges or areas. This section then considers how some select programs use concentrations to give shape to their multidisciplinary programs.

A note on terminology: this section is exploring multidisciplinary programs, which are programs that bring disciplines together while still retaining boundaries between those different disciplines. Interdisciplinary programs, though similar, combine approaches together to create a distinct and coherent new field drawing from various disciplines and can be

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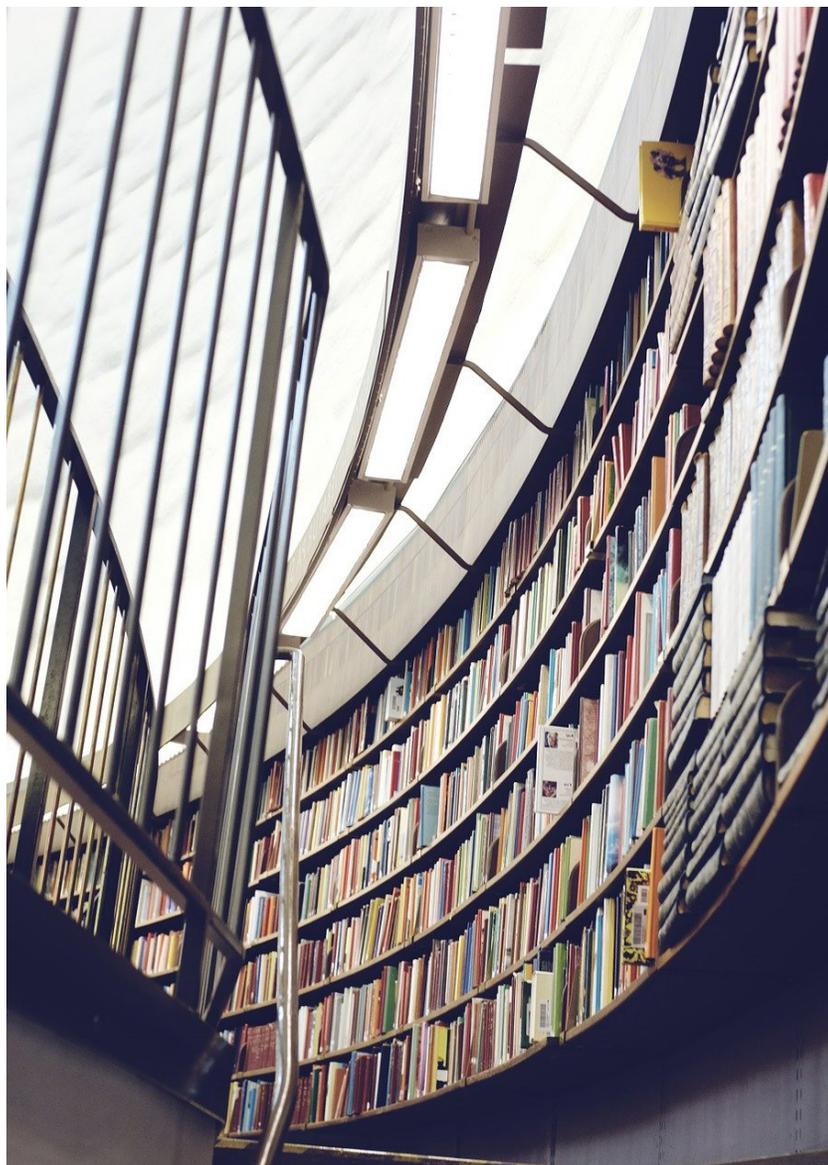
identified by the high number of courses that are specifically listed as being from that discipline. Long-standing interdisciplinary programs include environmental studies and women and gender studies. However, the exact distinctions between the terms are not explored in great detail in this report. Nor are explicit interdisciplinary programs (e.g., a PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies), which are reasonably common across Canada; the focus here is on programs that draw on different disciplines but do so in a way that is structured for students.

CONCENTRATIONS

The most common form of concentration is a selection of grouped upper year courses that students may complete¹. These are usually courses within a discipline that are organised in a way that helps guide student course selection, particularly for their upper year courses. Programs that are at root more interdisciplinary in focus tend to have specialisations that draw from several programs—Simon Fraser’s international studies major, for example, has concentrations that allow students to take courses in economics, history, gender studies, political science, and from other departments.

Concentrations or specialisations differ from a minor in that they can shape a student’s major, and they usually focus on upper year courses. For instance, Ryerson requires that a student complete six one-term courses to receive a specialisation. They are often acknowledged on a transcript, though they do not necessarily materially alter the weight of the degree for employers. Students can emphasise their concentration on their applications. Generally, institutions use concentrations to indicate to prospective or early-year students what they can study while completing their degree. They also function as an implicit statement of what the department or program prioritises in their pedagogy and research.

¹ Note: some institutions, like Brown University, call their major programs “concentrations”—these are not the concentrations being referred to here, which can be better understood to be subfields of specialisation within a major.



Berkeley has recently developed an approach to creating interdisciplinary concentrations that should be monitored by other institutions. Their Townsend Center for the Humanities developed “course threads”, which are organised by theme and can be best understood as credit clusters or mini-minors. Current available threads include: Culture and Globalisation, Historical and Modern City, Humanities and Environment, Science and Society, and Visual Cultures. To complete a thread, students complete at least three courses within a thread and then have the option to participate in a semester-end symposium. Upon completion of the symposium, they receive a certificate acknowledging they completed a thread, which they can include in subsequent applications.

These threads provide a pathway for students to explore a theme across disciplines while also requiring reasonably minimal administrative work from programs. Each thread has an assigned coordinator, but otherwise participating programs appear to participate mainly through listing any courses that might apply to a thread. These threads facilitate multidisciplinary learning, whereby students draw on knowledge from different programs. While there is no direct enrolment data available, Berkeley has been running symposia for these threads since at least 2011.

PROGRAMS

Multidisciplinary programs are ones that draw on several different departments to study an area (or areas) of inquiry that are of collective interest. They differ from interdisciplinary fields like environmental studies in that they do not create their own programs or departments; rather, they draw on the research and teaching from multiple faculty.

Cognitive science/systems

Cognitive science (or systems) is a long-standing example of such a program. These programs seek to draw together courses from several disciplines in order to engage with big questions around artificial intelligence, human-computer interaction, language processing, and other issues. While cognitive science/systems is a long-running discipline with programs stretching back to the 1980s, the growing urgency of questions around artificial intelligence and machine learning are making the questions considered by the field increasingly pressing. While there are differences between the programs at UBC, Simon Fraser, Queen’s, and Toronto, a commonality is that they have students take courses in a variety of fields, including computer science, linguistics, and philosophy, as well as cognitive science-specific courses.

Cognitive science/systems is a compelling example of how philosophy can be connected to other fields. For example, UBC’s Cognitive Systems program has a BA in Mind, Language, and Computation, which is the program’s philosophy stream. Likewise, Toronto offers a BA stream in Thinking and Reasoning. Directing courses towards specific social and intellectual questions from a range of approaches demonstrates how disciplines can combine to provide programs that are coherent, challenging, and timely. In general, cognitive science/systems programs require students to take a range of specific courses from a range of disciplines, providing a fairly guided pathway for more humanities-oriented students to follow while exposing them to computer science and other fields².

Multidisciplinary programs [...] differ from interdisciplinary fields [...] in that they do not create their own programs or departments; rather, they draw on the research and teaching from multiple faculty.

As a more mature multidisciplinary program, cognitive science/systems is able to attract a reasonable significant number of students, despite the challenges in navigating a number of disciplines. In the United States, major institutions such as Berkeley, Carnegie Mellon, John’s Hopkins, Michigan, MIT, UPenn, and Yale offer cognitive science courses, and graduated between 17 students (Carnegie Mellon) and 287 students (Berkeley) in 2017-18. The major popularity of this program in Californian institutions is especially notable—beyond the high number of Berkeley graduates, UCLA graduated 69 students while Davis graduated 46. These numbers demonstrate that these sorts of skills are in high demand in the high technology sector.

Table 3: Examples of Berkeley “Threads”

Thread	Purpose (from website)	Participating programs
Law and Humanities	<i>[M]akes participants aware of the importance of the humanities in relation to questions of law and literature, law and history, law and philosophy, law and music, and law and the visual arts</i>	Anthropology; ethnic studies; English; film and media; legal studies; political science; rhetoric
Historical and Modern City	<i>Introduces students to historical, theoretical, aesthetic, and other approaches to the city through a variety of interdisciplinary methods</i>	African American studies; anthropology; architecture; city and regional planning
Sciences and Society	<i>Gives students opportunities to consider how science, technology, and medicine change our horizons of political possibility and social (in)justice and how social and ethnic commitments, historical processes, and political formations shape authoritative knowledge and viable technologies</i>	Environmental science; integrative biology; geography; history; policy and management; rhetoric

² An argument may be made that cognitive science/systems is an interdisciplinary program, but we follow Nunez et al (2019), “What happened to cognitive science?” *Nature Human Behaviour*, 3 in categorising it as a multidisciplinary program.

Law in Society

Another example is the University of New Brunswick's Law in Society program, which is offered at their Fredericton campus. This program offers an example of a more loosely structure program that still centres around key questions around exploring relationships between law, policy, society, and social order. Along with taking three core courses, students can select from a curated list of courses in anthropology, business, economics, history, philosophy, political science, psychology, and sociology.

Students enter this program after completing sixty credit hours, so it is less directly guided than other programs—if students wish to complete it as a major, they do so as a double major with another program. The program is overseen by a consulting committee of instructors for six different disciplines (law, political science, philosophy, sociology, classics, and economics), and is administratively part of the Department of Sociology.

Global and International Studies

Perhaps one of the most wide-ranging multidisciplinary programs in Canadian humanities and social sciences programs is Carleton's recently-launched Bachelor of Global and International Studies. The program received ministry approval in 2014 and started to admit students the following year. During the last three years, they have admitted approximately 250 entering students, demonstrating a consistent student interest. The program is jointly hosted by the Faculty of Public Affairs and the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and particularly focuses on having students acquire multiple disciplinary perspectives on international issues.

Students in the program begin by completing a set of core courses during their first year and then choose from one of eighteen specialisations in the second year—most specialisations have a sponsoring department, such as Global Development (Economics); Globalisation, Culture, and

Power (Sociology and Anthropology); or Global Literatures (English Language and Literature). Students are also required to study a second language and complete an international education component. Students also complete core courses, each of which draw on the different participating departments (e.g., Global History-History; Ethics and Globalisation-Philosophy; Globalisation and International Economic Issues-Economics).

This arrangement of having a program hosted by two faculties and assigning specific departments responsibility for specialisations illustrates an interesting and relatively unique approach to program design. This has the effect of spreading out obligations across several departments and allows each of the programs to advertise the degree on their respective department pages as an option for students.

RULES

Our program scan highlights that there are four rules that multidisciplinary programs should consider, ensuring that students are well serviced.

1. *The program topics and key questions are well-defined and can be stated in one or two sentences.* To convince students to break from traditional disciplines, a simple and clear statement of the problems that the degree will help students solve is essential.
2. *Ensure strong faculty support for creating a multidisciplinary program, and ensure that funding models support sharing resources.* Strong multidisciplinary programs provide all their students with
- grounding by providing a core group of courses that can direct them towards different specialisations and develop and understanding of the common research questions they might consider during their studies. Developing such courses requires considerable faculty support from multiple disciplines.
3. *Determine if student interest can be met with a concentration.* This is a particularly important question for smaller institutions or in cases where there are already a large number of degrees and further divisions may weaken existing programs. Berkeley's "threads" model might be considered as a way to develop a multidisciplinary specialisation option without committing to an entirely new field.
4. *Carefully consider the number of participating departments.* In general, the participation of at least three or four departments is necessary to establish a truly multidisciplinary approach. However, if there is appetite, then more departments might be included—Carleton's Bachelor of Global and International Studies draws on over a dozen different departments, centres, and institutes, while also having two host faculties.



NEW INDIGENOUS STUDIES PROGRAMS AND COMMUNITY LEARNING

Considering emerging trends

Indigenous studies programs have long histories at a variety of Canadian institutions, but there has been growing need to make large scale changes and commit more resources in order to robustly commit to Reconciliation.

Efforts to improve Indigenous programming and services are a common feature of most Canadian postsecondary institutions' strategic plans. However, there remain significant academic and teaching burdens on the few Indigenous scholars who have managed to gain tenure.

This section provides an overview of trends in Indigenous Studies programs, which (as the University of Saskatchewan's department notes) are generally interdisciplinary and invested in considering Indigenous societies "from within" and wish to move beyond "simple binaries like juxtaposing Indigenous knowledge in opposition to Western scholarship." In particular, it examines trends that emerge from recently approved programs.

Focusing on Indigenous studies also illustrates some themes in other sections, such as the value of service learning and the potential of drawing on multiple disciplines to provide students with new insights and research directions.

TRENDS IN NEW PROGRAMS

A scan of four provinces identified new programs that have emerged at institutions such as Carleton, McMaster, Trent, the University of New Brunswick, the University of Fraser Valley, the University of Victoria, and at Wilfred Laurier. These programs all feature several commonalities:

- *Importance placed on language preservation and education:* Given the deep damage that colonisation caused to the knowledge and use of Indigenous languages, instruction in those languages is of vital importance. Preserving and promoting the use of Indigenous languages through a range of means, including digital preservation and education, has received increasing attention. For example, McMaster's program has courses in surviving Iroquoian languages and Victoria is offering an Indigenous language revitalisation program as a Bachelor of Education. This particular program takes in students from Indigenous communities, where two years of study may be conducted with a "language community." The aim is to keep students connected to their communities while also providing the necessary certification to provide the students with teaching accreditation.

- *Engaging with global issues.* While many programs in this area place focus on nearby nations, programs are also placing emphasis on situating Indigenous experiences and knowledges within a global context. For example, Carleton’s Combined Honours in Indigenous Studies has students take courses on the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples, but also includes several courses that explore Indigenous issues broadly and in a wide range of contexts. Similarly, Wilfrid Laurier’s program has courses such as Indigenous Perspectives on Globalisation and Indigenous Issues and Anthropology.
- *Flexible learning.* Both the University of Victoria and the University of Fraser Valley offer laddered programming, whereby students can either enter the program after completing a variety of certificates, or they can earn a certificate and then resume their studies later. For instance, Fraser Valley offers certificates in Stó:lō Studies, Indigenous Maps, Films, Rights and Land Claims, and in Halq’eméylem, which can all be applied towards a BA degree at a later stage. Given the need to accommodate different requirements and learning approaches, these more flexible and laddered approaches should be considered widely.

COMMUNITY LEARNING

An important element of most Indigenous studies programs considered is their commitment to maintaining ties to nearby communities and nations. This important dimension should be considered not only as an important feature of Indigenous studies programming, but as an approach that might be considered, in modified forms, in other programs.

Given the growing importance of service-based learning, many Indigenous

studies faculty provide precedents and examples that might profitably be considered by other service-driven programs.

A very common feature of these programs is an experiential learning course that has students go into the surrounding communities or nations and directly apply their research. For example, the University of Toronto’s Centre for Indigenous Studies highlights the importance they place on community engaged learning, where faculty work with community partners to identify placement activities that fulfill a current need. Students complete this course in their fourth year. Carleton’s course “Indigeniety in the City” has students undertake research projects and make connections with communities in Ottawa. Students at the University of Manitoba have several courses with field components, such as “Aboriginal Organisations” and “Environment, Economy and Aboriginal Peoples.”

Forming connections is especially important in education programs where students directly learn within their nations. First Nations University of Canada is a leader in this regard, doing things like offering a four-year Indigenous Education (Elementary) program directly to members of the Clearwater River Dene Nation within that nation. The aforementioned program at Victoria also allows for part of their degree to be taken within a student’s community.

There have been long-standing efforts to provide some degree of connection to nearby nations through connections with Indigenous elders and educators. However, to further attract and retain Indigenous students, more needs to be done in actually integrating different knowledges into academia. Trent’s First Peoples House of Learning invites visiting elders for four-day periods to provide one-on-one appointments or offer traditional teachings to

An important element of most Indigenous studies programs [...] is their commitment to maintaining ties to nearby communities and nations

interested students and the university has been noted as a leader in recognising Indigenous knowledge as part of its appointment and tenure decisions, a practice stretching back to 2001.

Both of UBC’s campuses have created formal affiliations with Indigenous nations—UBC Vancouver with the Musqueam peoples and UBC-Okanagan with the Okanagan Nation Alliance. This includes the creation of committees to ensure that the Musqueam and Okanagan peoples are represented and present in the institutional curriculum, student body, and research. In 2018-19, UBC-Okanagan had 563 Indigenous students (5.7 percent of all students and an increase of 48 percent since 2012) and UBC Vancouver had 1,168 Indigenous students (2.9 percent of all students and an increase of 16.5 percent since 2012).

These sites and agreements for knowledge sharing that go beyond traditional curriculum and expand the definition of service learning in a way that is not simply from institution to community but from community to institution. This openness to different forms of knowledge might be considered as a model for other faculties and departments who are looking to further their engagement with the surrounding community and nations.

HESA Presents

IN CONCLUSION

Monitoring Trends in Academic Programs

Years of examining academic websites have given us some general insights into program presentation that can be applied across disciplines. This includes:

- **Publish learning outcomes:** Many universities still provide only a few sentences to describe entire programs to the public. In the face of growing competition for students and public demand that universities demonstrate value and engagement, this is not adequate.
- **Move beyond links to calendars:** Students who are browsing are not particularly attracted by a dense list of courses after clicking a link for more information—especially when those courses do not have readily available descriptions (or even names).
- **Provide examples of success:** This is increasingly common, but some programs still rely on general discussion of what students can do with a degree without citing any specific examples. Draw on alumni, list specific jobs or degrees students have landed after graduation—make the pathways clear.

*As for the key trends examined over the course of writing this report, our findings can be summarised by three key words: **ENGAGE, GUIDE, and OPENNESS***

1. **ENGAGE:** Strong programs demonstrate how they connect with the community and demonstrate links beyond academia. Knowledge for knowledge's sake is fine; showing how that knowledge helps others is better.
2. **GUIDE:** Many students simultaneously crave independence and the flexibility to pursue a wide range of interests while having some degree of guidance in their programs. Programs that draw on several disciplines often make the mistake of assuming that students will be able to make connections themselves; developing programs that provide a few multidisciplinary bridges helps balance these urges.
3. **OPENNESS:** There is growing awareness of the need to change how higher education is provided in order to facilitate different learning styles and cultures. Indigenous Studies programs and services are offering a model for how to do this that is often not seen by other programs as a model. Learning what can be applied *from* how Indigenous programs are open to other forms of teaching and learning rather than just thinking about what can be done *for* Indigenous education may help to revalitise other programs.

This document is just an example of some of the work that Higher Education Strategy Associates provides for program analysis and review.

At HESA, we keep a close eye on academic trends to understand what programs are attracting students and the sort of studies that attract and excite students.

Our company has produced reviews for disciplines ranging from drama to sociology.

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