

## **FASS ACADEMIC PLAN [HURON]**

**Passed at FASS Faculty Council 10 May 2024**

### **Called to Action: The FASS Academic Plan, 2024-2029**

A call to action:

In recent years, humanity has experienced many challenges that are unique to this particular historical juncture- a globalization-era pandemic that to-date is estimated to have killed nearly 7,000,000 people and sparked economic and social turmoil; the rise of various transnational extremist movements facilitated by social media and internet networks; heightened partisanship and hyper-polarized discourses; the weakening of commitments to multilateralism and international law in the face of renewed conflicts involving unchecked military aggression and mass atrocity; the accelerating pace of climate change with its increasingly devastating effects; and the rapid spread of disinformation and misinformation, enabled by our adoption of technologies that are moving far faster than our understanding of them.

This might seem like a strange way to begin an academic plan. But as a Liberal Arts institution, the urgency of these particular challenges represents a call to action. Accompanying these problems has been a decline in enrolments in Arts and Social Science programs. Since the 1980s, interest in these disciplines, and in a “liberal arts” education, has declined by about 50% in North America. The Huron Faculty of Arts and Social Science (FASS) believes, first, that liberal arts graduates will be critical to helping the world grapple with the problems it faces, and second, that FASS is and must continue to be one of the best places in the world to obtain a liberal arts education. Our ongoing contributions as a liberal arts teaching and research institution include cutting edge research and expertise that stand in opposition to disinformation and ‘post-truth’ discourse and help our students to play a part in the mitigation, and hopefully resolution, of these problems. It is our responsibility to assist our students in becoming well-informed and ethically-minded individuals; as well as to contribute meaningfully to society - both locally and globally.

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Our priorities:

This Academic Plan includes commitments by the Huron Faculty of Arts and Social Science to equip our students and communities with the knowledge and tools to empower them to succeed in their own lives and to contribute positively to the betterment of society. We therefore identify key priorities in our teaching and in our research. Further, we want our students to behave ethically and be community-minded and socially responsible.

## PART A: TEACHING AND RESEARCH FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

### **1. Building Information Literacy Skills**

The ability to reliably assess and interpret information, and to understand the nuances around how facts, evidence, and data can be harnessed in different ways for different purposes, has never been more important. At the same time, in this hyper-saturated media environment, it has never been more difficult to discern the veracity of knowledge or the quality of information we are exposed to. Disinformation and misinformation are fueling the rise of political polarization; radical and violent extremism; hatred and bigotry; anti-science beliefs; and the agendas of authoritarian regimes and bad-faith actors.

To ensure that our students are information literate, we will equip them with critical thinking skills and analytical skills, which they will acquire through research-based and experiential learning, constructive discussion of different perspectives and ideas in the classroom, and conscientious training in reading, writing, and information analysis. This package of skills will ensure that FASS students graduate ready to navigate the increasingly complex constellation of information, disinformation, news, spin, advertisements, and propaganda in the contemporary world. FASS graduates will be able to distinguish between good and bad information and will have the skills to analyze and synthesize facts and evidence. Information literacy will also prepare students for a workplace where the nature of work will evolve rapidly. We are teaching students to be adaptable and preparing students for a dynamic future.

### **2. Supporting and Promoting Research**

We have seen a gradual devaluing of expertise, hastened by a steady erosion of funding and support for educational institutions and knowledge-building research agendas. The concept of expertise has been further challenged by the growing information-literacy deficits described above.

It is therefore critical that FASS demonstrate the value of research and hold steadfast to the veracity of robust research-based knowledge and expertise. We will do this through: training our students in various research methods and evidence-evaluation skills across our programs; offering research-based learning in our courses; supporting and celebrating original student research through initiatives like the Centre for Undergraduate Learning (CURL); encouraging research collaborations between faculty and students; providing faculty with professional development opportunities to improve their own research skills; supporting faculty research through a variety of means; and celebrating and promoting faculty research. At every turn, we will seek the opportunity to teach our students the value of robust research in generating legitimate findings, and to teach our students that literal facts cannot be disproved by disinformation. Moreover, we will continue to expand the frontiers of research, valuing non-traditional forms of creative and public-facing research output, which are grounded on a foundation of sound scholarship.

FASS students will thus complete their degrees with highly developed research skills, which will include the ability to think critically and constructively about the value of knowledge and the importance of its origins. These vital skills will prepare them well for their post-Huron lives and careers.

### **3. Prioritizing Academic Integrity**

FASS graduates must understand the value of intellectual integrity and which skills and tools they are expected to use and become proficient in as part of their education. With the erosion of the public's faith in universities, expertise, and research, it is especially important that the integrity of a Huron FASS degree be beyond reproach, and that our graduates leave Huron equipped with the facilities promised by a liberal arts education. In the context of new technologies like Large Language Model (LLM) artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms and programs, which are rapidly changing the communication and information terrain that our faculty and students are operating in, we know that AI technologies and LLMs will continue to develop quickly. Importantly, there are many ways that the liberal arts are uniquely positioned to be a key part of the conversation around the development of these new technologies and their many possible applications.

FASS will strike the right balance, both embracing the power and utility of AI and LLMs, while also insisting that students continue to challenge themselves to think critically, analytically, creatively, and constructively. In our classes, we will continually remind our students about the importance of academic integrity, particularly with regard to research, analysis, and writing; we will make clear in all of our classes, what uses of AI or LLM programs are permissible depending on the pedagogies being used, and provide guidance about how to use them productively; we will be transparent about our uses of AI and will demand the same transparency from our students; we will offer our students supports and services to help them learn the ins and outs of academic research and writing, avoiding plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty, and using technology with integrity; we will prepare our students to use AI and LLMs effectively and ethically; and we commit to staying current with ongoing developments in technological change as they pertain to questions of Academic Integrity, and will adjust our approaches and policies as needed. In these ways we will protect the integrity of our students' education, the reputation of the Huron FASS degree, all while helping our students develop their competencies with Artificial Intelligence and their facility with its uses.

### **4. Thinking Critically, Constructively, and Creatively Across Disciplines**

Addressing the world's problems requires critical thinking in order to understand what is causing, perpetuating, or exacerbating them. But critique alone is insufficient. FASS graduates must be able to approach problems with a constructive and creative disposition that seeks to effect change where it is needed.

Interdisciplinarity fosters a critical approach with constructive and creative engagement in various contexts. Different academic disciplines offer distinct modes of analysis and insights, which in combination, can allow us to arrive at better solutions to problems than any one disciplinary perspective can provide.

Accordingly, FASS will promote interdisciplinarity in the following ways: we will support our interdisciplinary programs and remain open to developing new interdisciplinary opportunities for our students; within our disciplinary programs, we will encourage the incorporation of interdisciplinary perspectives when addressing complex problems; similarly, we will encourage our students to consult scholarship from disciplines other than our own when conducting their own research; we will continue conversations about building an interdisciplinary foundation for our students in the first year and beyond; we will prioritize support for interdisciplinary student and faculty research; we will provide opportunities for interdisciplinary events, workshops, and conversations among both faculty and students; and we will be champions for the benefits of a broad-based liberal arts education.

Alongside this commitment to interdisciplinarity, as a faculty we will push ourselves and our students to make constructive, and when appropriate, creative commitments. When analyzing a problem, we will move to a consideration and/or discussion of solutions. When critiquing the research, work, or policies of others, we will consider and propose alternatives. Our students, therefore, will graduate prepared to think critically about, but also to improving, the world around them. Constructive and creative engagement will allow students and faculty space to challenge accepted theories and approaches.

## **PART B: COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

### **5. Building and Valuing Community**

Huron and its students value community. This provides FASS with an excellent foundation from which to instill in our students a strong sense of social responsibility and civic-mindedness. In an atomized and polarized world, we must illuminate the bonds that tie community members together, across cultural, social, ethnic, religious, and political lines. Our world needs leaders and citizens who care for others; we will teach our students to lead with heart.

In our classrooms, we will emphasize the importance of collaborative learning and respectful discourse; our students will understand that everyone benefits from their ideas being respectfully challenged and tested and that we often can and do share common ground with those with whom we disagree. Likewise, we will develop in our students a complex understanding of the world, which accounts for both structural systems of power as well as individual initiative and agency; this understanding will inform our students' capacity for thoughtful empathy.

Our second strategy to encourage a sense of community responsibility in our students will be extra-curricular: FASS will expand on its efforts to foster a sense of connection outside the classroom through events that promote collegial and community engagement. As in the classroom, we will look for opportunities to help our students understand our interconnectedness, the complexity of social relations, and the urgent necessity of building communities of care. Such opportunities will be deliberately "community-building" and designed to deepen our appreciation of the communal bonds we share with others beyond the university. Through these combined curricular and extra-curricular efforts, FASS graduates will leave Huron with a sense of social responsibility.

### **6. Working Continually Towards Indigenization, Reconciliation, and Decolonization**

In 2015, the federal government of Canada accepted the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which includes 94 "calls to action." This report, at least in part, inspired a sea-change at Canadian universities, leading many to embark on projects to integrate Indigenous perspectives and knowledge into curricula, to become more welcoming spaces for Indigenous students, staff, and faculty, and to grapple with their own embeddedness in Canadian colonialism.

This work has fallen along three axes: Indigenization, Reconciliation, and Decolonization. For our students to realize our collective responsibilities to these commitments, Huron FASS must play its part in furthering work in all three areas.

We will continue our ongoing efforts to Indigenize our work in all areas. By this, we mean that we will strive to include Indigenous voices, perspectives, and knowledge in how we develop our teaching and research programs. We commit to developing our understanding, and acknowledge that this is an ongoing project for our institution and community. A Huron without acknowledgement and integration of Indigenous perspectives is impoverished as a result; a FASS graduate without an understanding of Indigenous perspectives is simply not fully prepared to contribute to Canadian society and beyond.

We will seek to decolonize our practices. In governance, ceremony, rhetoric, and teaching, we will seek out learning opportunities with humility and be open to critique and new approaches. Our students will benefit, for example, from our rethinking courses built on colonial frameworks and from moving away from Eurocentric conceptions of the world and history. We are open to where this commitment takes us, including in ways that could mean a rethinking of how we teach and do research as faculty in a settler-colonial context. We are deeply committed to ethical practices in conducting research with and teaching about Indigenous peoples.

Finally, we will contribute to understanding our own position as a faculty in the Canadian colonial project, and in colonial projects more broadly. Through our research and our teaching, we will explore and reflect on our connections to systems of oppression towards Indigenous peoples in Canada and seek to serve the needs of Indigenous communities. We will also seek to understand our connections to systems of oppression and structures beyond Canada, as part of the decolonization project is acknowledging all systems of colonial violences that we may be complicit in or beneficiaries of.

FASS will model responsibility to its students through its efforts at transparency and reconciliation.

### **7. Committing to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility**

FASS remains steadfast in its commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). We will provide ongoing learning opportunities for our faculty to help ensure our pedagogy is consistent with EDI principles; we will support our classes that teach EDI principles and practices to our students and will look for opportunities to expand such teaching; we will speak to our students about the intrinsic value of EDI; we will support institutional initiatives to deepen EDI at the university, and we will place EDI at the heart of our decision-making processes around collegial governance, recruitment, and hiring.

We want our students to learn in an environment that provides equal opportunity for everyone and where everyone feels included; we want our staff and faculty to work in such an environment; and we want our students to become supporters of EDI in their future lives and careers. We acknowledge, and want our students to understand, that EDI is an ongoing project and requires long-term commitments to learning and structural change.

Further, we acknowledge that there are and have been barriers to access for many people. We pledge to work to remove barriers to access, including those that may be present in our own pedagogies and practices. It is our goal that every person of ability has an equal opportunity to succeed in FASS.

### **8. Thinking Globally**

Perspectives and approaches long presumed to be ‘neutral’ are in fact often Euro-centric and particular to western understandings of the world. We are committed to ensuring that our syllabi and teaching materials reflect a global approach to teaching and research. Our efforts to internationalize our own materials and perspectives will serve our students well as they graduate with a well-rounded understanding of their subject matter. Additionally, we will seek to leverage and celebrate our programs that are already succeeding at offering students a global perspective.

Our classrooms benefit, similarly, from a diversity of perspectives among the student body; FASS will accordingly continue to support initiatives to bring students from various backgrounds and perspectives to our campus; FASS will likewise explore opportunities for student and faculty international mobility. This will include continuing to work thoughtfully on student and faculty exchanges. FASS will continue to work on encouraging its students to take advantage of the many opportunities in place for

them to study outside of Canada. Similarly, FASS will promote faculty exchange programs and seek to establish more such partnerships. Additionally, FASS will support other projects, including experiential learning initiatives in international contexts, to diversify our campus and to see Huron staff, faculty, and students engage thoughtfully with the world. To ensure that all students can benefit from the opportunities FASS provides, we are committed to a “needs-blind” model of funding our international experiential learning opportunities.

FASS will also seek out and support research and teaching collaborations with international partners. Working with faculty and students from around the world enriches all involved and experiencing that kind of collaboration prepares our students for life beyond Huron.

FASS graduates will, therefore, situate problems in a global context, with the benefit of diverse perspectives and an understanding of global patterns and systems of power.

## **9. Working Towards a Sustainable Future**

The world is experiencing a climate emergency. As we experience the escalating costs of climate change, FASS must empower its students to be agents for a paradigmatic change in attitudes and policies dealing with climate change and the environment more broadly.

FASS will do this by: endeavoring to model environmental sustainability in its own practices whenever and wherever possible; seeking out opportunities to incorporate materials and themes relevant to environmental sustainability within our programs and classes; teaching our students the fundamentals of critical thinking, research, constructive thinking, and interdisciplinarity, as well as the insights provided by Indigenous Ways of Knowing about environmental stewardship; encouraging in our students a sense of social responsibility; and bringing climate researchers, policymakers, Indigenous elders and knowledge-keepers, and advocates to our campus to address and inform the community whenever possible.

In sum, our goal is for our students to become socially responsible citizens, aware of the urgency of the climate emergency and prepared to take positive action.

## **PART C: SUMMARY**

The world needs graduates with a liberal arts education more than ever. Huron’s Faculty of Arts and Social Science is uniquely positioned to be a leader in producing the well-balanced, sophisticated innovators and thinkers who will help humanity to meet the challenges of the present and future. We will build the information literacy skills our students require to navigate disinformation and misinformation; we will support and promote research so that our students have the ability to ask meaningful questions, produce verifiable answers, and work towards constructive and creative solutions; we will value academic integrity so that Huron graduates act with integrity in all that they do; we will build community so that students develop a sense of social responsibility and act with empathy and care towards others; we will work continually towards Indigenization, Reconciliation, and Decolonization and will teach our students to appreciate the benefits and insights of Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing; they will likewise understand the imperative to work towards truth and reconciliation; we will remain committed to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility in order to ensure that a Huron education is available to everyone of ability and that our students value these principles; we will think globally so that our students understand the merit of a diversity of global perspectives and recognize their embeddedness in the world; and we will work towards a sustainable future so that our students will do the same.

FASS students, in short, will be exemplars of the value of a liberal arts education. The world faces many challenges; yet, our students will move forward from Huron with confidence, equipped with the tools, skills, nimble minds, and spirit of inquiry needed to succeed in the present and future. They will be difference-makers in the world and in their chosen endeavors.

## **PART D: ADDENDA**

### **Next Steps**

FASS will create the Academic Planning Committee (APC), which will be charged with helping the faculty meet the goals and work towards the aspirations of the Academic Plan. Where appropriate, the committee will develop benchmarks to measure FASS's progress towards full realization of the Academic Plan and will report on such to the FASS Committee. Where needed, the APC will also recommend strategies for the success of the Academic Plan both to FASS and the Dean.

### **Codicil**

1. All of the plans and commitments above are conditional upon their financial feasibility; all recommendations generated by the processes outlined in this plan are recommendations only and are not binding upon the institution.
2. The Academic Plan is meant to be a living and aspirational document; plans necessarily change with time; new initiatives not contained in this document may emerge and be prioritized. FASS and Huron University require flexibility to respond nimbly to new developments and have an interest in encouraging the ongoing creativity of the Huron community, including faculty, staff, and students; the commitments outlined above do not preclude new initiatives.
3. While there are many specific commitments contained in this plan, the priorities it identifies are also intended to guide decisions around future FASS commitments and initiatives within the 2024-2029 period.