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## From Silos to Networks: Re-envisioning Undergraduate and Graduate Programs in a Modern Languages Department

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In a 2013 *ADFL Bulletin* article, Violla Hartfield-Mendez and Karen Stolley write of the “imperative to reimagine our mission and our praxis . . . in the context of shrinking resources, seismic shifts in student populations, a changing faculty profile, and debates about how to organize and evaluate teaching, learning and scholarship for the twenty-first century” (49). Although the authors are describing the higher education climate in the United States, their observations are no less true in a Canadian setting. Our own department at the University of Alberta—Modern Languages and Cultural Studies (MLCS), a large, multisection unit of the

Faculty of Arts—has been buffeted by these trends in recent years.<sup>1</sup> Not only has funding from the province decreased or failed to keep up with costs, but the model in Alberta, in which the university receives about forty-five percent of its budget from the province, presents particular challenges. In Canada, when neither elections nor budgets come on set dates, universities find themselves in the position of guessing when the next election may be called, which party might win, and what that party's commitment to postsecondary education might be. All these elements make planning at the department, faculty, and university levels challenging. MLCS, like other departments, has been impacted by ongoing shifts in student populations, as domestic student enrollments in the Faculty of Arts continue to shrink and the ranks of international students who are exempt from the requirement to study a language other than English swell. The department's faculty complement is increasingly top-heavy, with little faculty renewal. While some programs—undergraduate majors in French, Spanish, and German, along with various minors and a certificate in translation studies—remain viable in this challenging climate, many others have been suspended because of persistently low enrollment. All these factors led MLCS in recent years to reorganize its graduate and undergraduate programs to attract students and meet their changing needs in the coming decades.

Here we address the challenges faced and opportunities seized by transforming our department's undergraduate and graduate degree programs.<sup>2</sup> These program transformations were undertaken in response to a set of challenging external circumstances; however, we also see them as pedagogical improvements. Students will have increased flexibility in customizing programs and more opportunities to apply language skills in settings relevant to their future professional and personal lives, by way of study abroad and community service-learning. We begin with a description of the transformation of MLCS's graduate programs, since the processes and conversations arising from that work helped to inspire and shape the development of the undergraduate major. Through collaborative governance, we were able to bring about change in a

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<sup>1</sup> The University of Alberta is one of the top 5 universities in Canada, with just under 40,000 students from about 150 countries. The Faculty of Arts is a large division of fine arts, humanities, and social sciences with more than 6,000 undergraduate and graduate students.

<sup>2</sup> Each of the five co-authors took a leadership role in the program changes described in this article. We wish to recognize, however, that many other members of MLCS—including both students and faculty members--were involved at various stages. Here we reflect on our own experiences with and perceptions of the reform process, without claiming to speak for all of our colleagues.

large department and discuss issues such as the difficulties of bringing faculty members together around a shared vision, dealing with administration (more specifically, one considering the elimination of language requirements), and the increasing scarcity of resources. The positive impact of uniting the varying disciplinary and cultural reference points of a diverse department resulted in several implications for departmental culture. The collaborative reshaping of MLCS's graduate and undergraduate programs also provided important opportunities for faculty members to take on visible leadership roles in the department and for faculty members and students alike to gain greater experience in and understanding of administrative work and academic governance.

### **Multilingual and Multidisciplinary Graduate Education**

In spring 2012, the provost's office held a university-wide competition to provide seed funding for innovative ideas in graduate education. This competition brought faculty members and graduate students together to consider long-needed improvements to our graduate programs. An external review of the department had already highlighted existing problems and challenges, particularly around morale and tension in the graduate programs. The review team noted concerns in four general areas: time to degree, supervision and mentoring, the program structure, and the role of the departmental graduate committee. Department members were motivated to confront the many challenges that our programs faced and inspired by the new opportunities before us. In the context of the public discussions across the North American academy on the future of graduate education in the humanities (see Cassuto; Patton; Jaschik) and local conversations about budgetary constraints, MLCS began collaboratively to assess its graduate programs in terms of compatibility with the diverse department, attractiveness to future students, and sustainability in the face of shifting student interests and budgetary measures. After a four-year-long discussion, in fall 2016 we launched a reinvigorated graduate program that better reflects the complex reality of our department within a changing academic and global climate. Structural changes make our graduate programs more attractive to potential students by decreasing time to completion, preparing students for postgraduation career goals (academic and nonacademic), and improving the overall quality of courses the students take.

## **Challenges and Opportunities, Challenges as Opportunities**

Like many modern languages departments in large, public research universities, the graduate programs in MLCS were organized in a manner that maintained historical ties to language-based departments long since amalgamated. Their structures reflected transformations that had been occurring for over twenty years at the faculty and university levels, transformations that are mirrored across North America and that have been central to conversations about the utility of the humanities as well as the future of graduate education in an ever-tightening academic job market (see Berrett; Cassuto; Jaschik; Patton; Supiano). Indeed, the *Report on the MLA Job Information List, 2016–17* continues to show decreases in the number of advertised jobs in English, foreign languages, and related fields (MLA Office of Research). This is not to suggest that graduate programs organized by language or cultural and national region are no longer viable; however, in the face of dwindling jobs, departments must turn inward to reassess their ability to offer students the type of education and training necessary for success in a changing academic and professional world, one that has been under discussion in higher education journals and academic publications for some time.

In the case of MLCS, the MA and PhD programs were organized into specializations along linguistic, cultural, or national or regional lines reflective of former units but not entirely consonant with a unified modern languages department. Changes within the course offerings or faculty research expertise of the individual departmental areas led to a division of these into further specializations that were not consistent across the department and resulted in duplications. For instance, MLCS offered a Slavic languages and literatures specialization as well as one in Slavic linguistics but a single specialization in German language, literature, and linguistics. At the same time, the department offered an applied linguistics specialization at the MA level. Having nine specializations made it difficult to create sustainable class sizes in all the languages and disciplines that our department housed and did not allow us to develop courses of study that offered students breadth and depth in their chosen field.<sup>3</sup> The multiple specializations,

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<sup>3</sup> When we began this process of change MLCS had nine specializations. In 2013–14 Comparative Literature joined MLCS, adding one more specialization to the department. In many ways, Comparative Literature had begun the same work underway in MLCS. The graduate-only courses in Comparative Literature were similar to the ones MLCS would adopt and Comparative Literature added a richer dimension to one of the new streams: Comparative and Transnational Literatures.

along with very few specific department-wide requirements, meant that students were individually cobbling together their degrees with shared upper-level undergraduate courses and graduate courses taken in the department, classes from outside the department, and independent studies with faculty members. This configuration made it difficult to have consistency across specializations. Further, it placed our students at a significant disadvantage to those graduating MAs and PhDs from institutions with large and robust area studies programs able to offer comprehensive coursework in specific languages and cultural regions.

Thus, when the conversations around restructuring our graduate programs began in 2012, MLCS offered MA and PhD specializations that were too numerous, making courses unwieldy and yielding tiny or nonexistent cohorts that led to a feeling of isolation among students; overlapping in terms of language or regional area and discipline while diverging radically in terms of expectations around exams and supervision, leading to confusion among students and long time to degree; and no longer reflective of the department, neither in terms of research and teaching expertise nor in terms of the career realities for students upon completion. The conversation around graduate reform went beyond merely reconceptualizing our graduate programs; it went straight to the heart of our collective identity as a department, our individual conceptions of the health and future of our own disciplines, and our training as faculty members.

### **Constructing Departmental Identity**

The process began by dissecting the existing programs to seek unity in such a diverse department. By identifying both the languages and disciplines taught, department members were able to see how narrowly divided our programs were. To visualize the way our department was organized, the reform team—made up of members of the graduate committee as well as a small representative group of faculty members and led by the associate chair for graduate studies—created a table containing the numbers of students in each of the programs. The table featured the languages as rows and the disciplines as columns, which showed that while the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of faculty members and graduate students were many, varied, and constantly changing in configuration based on applicant profiles in any given year, they all intersected and found common ground in a few key disciplines. When it came to understanding how this might impact the structure of MLCS's graduate programs, the team was able to show that while a given admission year may include one student in German, two in Ukrainian folklore,

one in Spanish, and one in Russian—thus suggesting multiple dwindling programs—when all five of these students were working on topics related to film and were therefore considered under the discipline of media and cultural studies, suddenly a cohort was formed. This visualization allowed the team to explain to the department the disadvantages of defining ourselves through the languages and the clear advantages of identifying ourselves through the overlap in our broader disciplines and combining more students into stronger cohorts. Multiple conversations in department council and in smaller groups allowed people to understand the possibilities that this reclassification could offer to the department.

The work of restructuring took place in a series of steps following principles of collegiality and collaborative governance. The initial conceptualization began in the graduate committee, a service body appointed by the chair, before being brought to the entire department in the form of discussions and proposals in department council, made up of faculty members, graduate students, members of the teaching and administrative staff, and undergraduate representatives. In a yearlong series of brainstorming sessions and discussions, the department agreed to reorganize its specializations into four disciplinary streams: applied linguistics, transnational and comparative literatures, media and cultural studies, and translation studies. By reducing graduate specializations to these four, the MA and PhD programs took on a more theoretically robust structure, with shared courses in English in both theory and methodology, and also afforded students flexibility to practice in a specific language or international cultural region supported by the department. This redistribution of our resources provided opportunities for students to work with different mentors across languages in a variety of capacities.

Once the general concept of restructuring the graduate program in this manner was approved by the majority of the members of the department, the leadership began a long process of consultation along our four new streams to begin conceiving of their content. Faculty members participated in group sessions to work out the structure of the new graduate streams, including core and optional courses, comprehensive exams and candidacy procedures, and the portfolio, meant to give students more clearly defined professional skills. Further, the student representatives to the graduate committee led graduate students in the department in a discussion group separate from faculty members. These various group sessions proved successful, allowing everyone to participate in shaping each stream and leading to final departmental buy-in. Since some faculty members identified with more than one stream and because the graduate student

discussions were separate from those of the streams, the documents developed in each group were shared in a cloud-based file so everyone could comment on the discussions. These collaborative notes and documents formed the backbone of the proposal for the restructuring of the graduate programs, which received final approval in late 2015.

## **Structure, Flexibility, and Diverse Professionalization: Toward Sustainable Graduate Education in Languages and Cultures**

The result of this four-year effort is an innovative new program structure that answers the key challenge areas identified at the outset of the process and mentioned in our 2010 external review. The program includes a robust mentorship structure with streamlined requirements and strong, transnationally focused cohorts, all of which will lead to reduced completion times. Merging the multiple languages into four discipline-based streams brings students researching a broad range of languages and cultural regions into conversation in thesis courses and colloquia, thereby reducing the sense of isolation that is typical of graduate education while also offering points of theoretical and methodological intersection.

Further, the innovative program structure builds in professional development units in the form of an individually tailored portfolio that reflects future career plans. The new iteration of the degree includes hands-on experience, giving students the opportunity to identify and acquire important and needed skills that they can use postdegree, filling a gap in postsecondary education identified in the higher education literature as needing attention (see Patton; Supiano; Jaschik). The portfolio is made up of mandatory elements, micro courses in grant-writing and library information literacy, but also includes other elements that the students can choose from to develop skills related to their degrees and their career goals, such as conference presentations, Web development, exhibitions, or performance. Through these one-credit modules (a standard course at the University of Alberta is three credits), students gain a variety of skills that they can present to future employers or academic programs. Importantly, a lengthier portfolio is required of the course-based master's, replacing what used to be a capping project. In this way, we have devised a professionalized master's degree, one that offers a counterpoint to the more traditional academic tracks. The revised program launched in fall 2016 with its first cohort of students; we will track these students as they complete their degrees, as we did under the old program, which should allow us to assess over time the impact our program changes have on individual students

and their career paths.

The team central to the restructuring process believed strongly in proactively addressing the changing nature of foreign language research and careers, thereby anticipating conversations at the graduate level not only in the university proper<sup>4</sup> but also across North America. The examples that were cited in some of the early literature on such efforts began to identify a shift that was taking place in graduate programming in general: for instance, funding incentives for units at Stanford University to decrease time to degree (Jaschik); structural efforts by the University of Washington Hispanic Studies Department to address and streamline the PhD (Patton); and City University of New York, Michigan State University, University of Virginia all supporting students who want to work on nontraditional dissertations through well-funded digital humanities research centers and new media and collaborative research programs (Patton). The shift that has been occurring for many years in individual programs, MLCS included, particularly at the PhD level, has become more widely accepted with the current reevaluation and focus on the master's degree; at the annual meeting of the Council of Graduate Schools in 2016, a group of eighteen graduate school deans from different institution types agreed to study the master's degree in all its forms and develop a guide for their peers. This guide, meant to encourage change in a "deliberate and thoughtful way," developed a working model of the framework based on alignment "since deans need to align key features in order to develop strong degree programs. Alignment ideally will drive responsiveness, harness innovation and motivate distinctiveness" (Flaherty). The framework (specialized knowledge, broad and integrative knowledge, intellectual skills, applied and collaborative learning, and civic and global learning) recalls the criteria that drove our discussions at the graduate level in MLCS and led to parallel discussions at the undergraduate level. While the new MLCS undergraduate and graduate programs differ, the process of developing them allowed us to think about our departmental identity and collaboratively develop creative programs for our students.

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<sup>4</sup> The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) recently instituted a formalized professional development program requirement for all graduate students across the university. As part of this commitment to diversifying the training of graduate students, three departments within the Faculty of Arts—MLCS, History and Classics, and English and Film Studies, supported by FGSR—participated in the pilot year of TRaCE Project (Track Report Connect Exchange), a project seeking to monitor Canadian alumni and report on their career paths after graduate study (<http://iplaitrace.com/>).



## **Experiential and Cross-Cultural Undergraduate Education**

The same factors that led to the reconception of MLCS's graduate program as a network connecting colleagues and fields that previously had little contact with one another also prompted an effort, now in its concluding stages, to reenvision the department's numerous, mostly language-based undergraduate majors as a single program. Current enrollment management and budgetary pressures—like those experienced by language departments across North America—make it clear that the traditional model, in which most of the languages taught in our department have their own major, is no longer sustainable. In August 2013, the dean of the Faculty of Arts announced the suspension of ten MLCS majors because of persistently low enrollment: combined French and Italian, combined German and Scandinavian, combined Italian and Spanish, Italian, Latin American studies, Russian, combined Russian and Ukrainian, Scandinavian, Ukrainian folklore, and Ukrainian culture, language, and literature. Although Scandinavian and Latin American studies were given a reprieve, they remained vulnerable according to the dean's stated criterion for judging the viability of programs—at least ten students majoring in the program, sustained over the course of several years—and were reslated for possible suspension in 2017. These suspensions would leave MLCS with majors only in comparative literature, French, German, and Spanish, and comparative literature is now endangered as well. A significant number of the department's faculty members are not associated with any of the remaining programs, a situation that deprives students and faculty members alike of valuable educational opportunities and creates inequities. Although the suspension of more than half of the department's major programs clearly reduced options for our students, it also presented an opportunity to devise a new major that would at least partially restore those options—and create new ones—and to which all faculty members could contribute.

Also contributing to deliberations about MLCS's major programs was a campus climate that seemed ripe for innovative thinking about undergraduate education. Beginning in November 2011, the Faculty of Arts undertook a systematic, multiyear review of the core requirements of the BA. Although that work eventually culminated in a simple reduction in requirements, its initial phases, which coincided with the beginnings of MLCS's reform efforts, included proposals that seemed to fit hand in glove with the desire to free the individual areas of our department from their traditional silos and encourage the development of fruitful new networks. Proposed reforms to the BA core included better integration of study abroad opportunities and

experiential learning, engagement in local communities and across cultures, and encouragement of interdisciplinarity. Although work to reform MLCS's majors was distinct from these discussions in the Faculty of Arts, it was clear that the department had potential to lead the way in initiatives to engage students in high-impact learning opportunities outside the classroom and across traditional disciplinary and linguistic boundaries. Indeed, many MLCS students already study abroad, and many of the department's faculty members incorporate community service-learning in their courses, providing a solid foundation on which to build. The most recent annual report prepared by the university's office of community service-learning, for 2015–16, listed all courses that were partly or entirely service-learning based and taught during the past academic year at the University of Alberta. The majority of these courses were taught in the Faculty of Arts, and a third of those were taught in MLCS, demonstrating a strong commitment to pairing our course offerings with community-engaged learning opportunities. The favorable light cast on such efforts in the faculty-wide discussions about the future of the BA encouraged departmental leaders to begin a process to reconceive MLCS's undergraduate programs to take advantage of existing strengths while also building cross-departmental networks that could engage all faculty members and students in an educational endeavor that would be more engaging, relevant, and rigorous than the present assortment of independent major programs.

### **One Major, Two Routes**

Prompted by the factors discussed above, the MLCS curriculum committee prepared a proposal for a new major. The proposal called for the replacement of all existing undergraduate majors in the department with a single major consisting of three courses in general requirements and of two eight-course routes,<sup>5</sup> each of which represents a different path to the major. Required courses include a gateway course to be taken at the beginning of a student's program and a capstone course to be taken at the end. Emphasizing breadth, the gateway will provide students with a broad theoretical understanding of the various disciplines they might choose to study under the umbrella of a major in modern languages and cultural studies. The capstone, in contrast, will emphasize depth, providing students in their final year with the opportunity to synthesize knowledge and skills accrued over the course of the program and to present those in a capping

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<sup>5</sup> The original proposal, passed at departmental council, had three routes, but the Faculty of Arts suggested a further simplification into the two routes described here.

project under the supervision of a faculty mentor. During the course, students will accomplish a series of individual as well as group projects that will culminate in their capstone project. The final project may take the form of creative work, scholarly research, translation, or exhibition and will be presented publicly to our department. An additional course of general requirements will be filled by any of the interdisciplinary courses taught under the MLCS prefix, a requirement intended to encourage students to explore and discover how their interests can intersect with those of faculty members and students in areas of the department with which they otherwise might not come in contact.

Aside from these general requirements, all students will choose one of two routes to the new major: language studies or cross-cultural studies. The language studies route calls for a minimum of eight upper-level courses (second year or above) in a single language or split between two, with the requirement that at least two courses be taken in each—the minimum that the curriculum committee felt would have pedagogical value. The option of incorporating more than one language into the major is intended to encourage the kind of interdisciplinary collaboration that is now rare in the department’s major programs. A student who is currently a French major interested in nineteenth-century Russian Francophilia, for example, might opt under the new major to take two or more courses in Russian and thereby forge relationships in—and potentially build bridges between—two parts of the department that have typically had little to do with each other. Such an arrangement would have the additional benefit of helping smaller language programs—those that have lost their major programs or that struggle to meet enrollment quotas—attract students and potentially grow. This new flexibility, however, comes with potential drawbacks that some members of the department were quick to point out. Whereas the current, language-based majors generally call for ten courses in a target language, the new major calls for a minimum of eight—potentially less if a student opts to study more than one language. Might the new major sacrifice students’ attainment of linguistic proficiency for the sake of breaking down walls between departmental areas? This possibility may be mitigated by another requirement of the language studies route: students must take two courses at the fourth-year level in a single language. Coupled with the power that individual language areas retain to make decisions about prerequisites, this requirement will ensure that every student in the language studies route will achieve the same level of proficiency in at least one language as students in the existing major programs.

The majority of language learning in our department will continue in the language studies route. Those who currently major in Spanish, French, or German will continue to do so in this route, taking a series of courses at the 100, 200, 300 and 400 levels to create their majors, and now all, rather than many, students majoring in these languages will have either community service learning or study abroad as part of their degree.

Requiring that at least two courses in a target language be earned abroad or in courses with a language-immersive community-service-learning component allows students to use their language skills outside the classroom. By taking at least a portion of the language-learning experience out of the traditional classroom, the new major will foster in students an awareness of the ways in which knowing a second language can be useful and applicable to the world outside the university classroom and can enrich their personal and professional lives. The pedagogical value of community service-learning and study abroad is well established (Astin et al.; Gallini and Moely; Lee et al.), and the experiential learning component of the language studies route makes this path to the major more engaging, rigorous, and relevant to students' lives and goals.

The second route to the new major, cross-cultural studies, is intended to replace and strengthen programs that incorporate instruction in English, while also increasing the options open to students. The cross-cultural studies route consists of eight courses in addition to the three courses of general requirements outlined above: four courses at the second year or higher taught in one language (or two in each of two languages) and four courses in a single area of MLCS taught in English and related to the language(s) studied. A student who is interested in Ukrainian language and culture, for example—an option that is not currently available as a major—could earn a major aligned with his or her interests by pairing four language courses with four Slavic studies courses taught in English. Any language taught in the department could be combined with courses in comparative literature for the major. This flexibility could be extended in the future to extradepartmental language programs like Latin, Japanese, or Cree, strengthening the connections with, for example, the Department of East Asian Studies and the Department of English and Film Studies, where comparative literature faculty members also teach. We hope that this increased flexibility will increase enrollments in comparative literature and in other currently underenrolled areas. The experience of the Department of East Asian Studies, which similarly consolidated its various languages into a single major, has already shown an increase in overall majors.

Just as the language studies route calls for work outside the classroom, the cross-cultural studies option requires two courses with an experiential learning component appropriate to the area of study. Experiential learning can be described as learning by doing and may take different forms inside and outside the classroom (Kolb; Martinsen et al.). Outside the classroom, community service-learning, field trips during study abroad, and fieldwork connected to course assignments are good examples that have already been used in MLCS courses. Inside the classroom, project-based learning and simulations enhance students' learning experiences by allowing them to apply their knowledge to real-life situations. Drawn from work already underway by members of the department, examples include projects such as annotating Latin American songs on the public online annotation platform *Genius* to elucidate pieces of popular music, studying community groups using ethnographic research methodology to create promotional materials for a choir, producing and administering surveys of language ideologies among Hispanics in Canada, and simulating the creation of media companies focused on various social issues. Other opportunities for experiential learning will no doubt emerge in the future, possibly in partnership with University of Alberta International or the program in community service-learning.

After a yearlong process to develop and refine the proposal, the curriculum committee presented it to departmental colleagues, both in small groups corresponding to existing major programs and at regular departmental meetings. This work continued in fall 2014, resulting in several changes to the proposed major, which the department voted to adopt in October and November 2014.

### **Feedback and Further Collaboration**

Students have responded with enthusiasm to the proposed changes. Throughout 2016, members of the curriculum committee presented the new MLCS major to students in different classes to gather their feedback, taking care to include large classes as well as classes from a wide variety of departmental areas. The committee also held a town hall meeting for students majoring in MLCS areas to present and discuss the proposed changes. Student responses to two separate surveys have also been quite positive. In their comments, students not only mentioned the benefits of integrating experiential learning, study abroad, and the option of studying multiple languages, but they also perceived the new capstone course as a valuable asset when applying for

graduate studies. Moreover, they applauded the new major for buoying the smaller language areas, encouraging increased interconnectedness in MLCS, and creating a community within the department rather than just within certain disciplines.

In fall 2016, the department collaboratively designed the new capstone course, a graduation requirement in the new major. The curriculum committee organized two workshops for faculty members to share their ideas about the new course. Attendees discussed the overall structure of the course as well as the required projects. It is designed to be taught workshop-style, in a student-centered and project-based manner, and students majoring in a variety of languages and disciplines take the course together. The course objectives state that students should be able to demonstrate depth of knowledge in their field of specialization (including key concepts, research methodologies, and theoretical approaches), synthesize knowledge and skills accrued over the course of their major, and present their knowledge and skills through a series of individual and group projects, resulting in a capping project under the supervision of a faculty mentor of the students' choice. To ensure the capstone project's quality in terms of disciplinary content as well as its ability to be comprehended by a wider, less-discipline-specific audience, both the course instructor and the faculty mentor will assess it.

The new MLCS major received positive endorsements from intra-university groups such as the Faculty of Arts Student Association, Campus Augustana, the community-service learning office, and the University of Alberta international office, as well as from comparable programs at other universities and from potential employers of our future majors. All materials, including the new capstone course and the detailed program description, were passed at the university governance level by January 2018 and were then sent on to the provincial government level. The new major is anticipated to launch in fall 2019.

### **Lessons Learned and Future Outlooks**

These efforts to rethink MLCS's undergraduate and graduate programs brought together department members to envision a shared future. The process responded to many of the problems lingering from leftover structures that continued to be impediments to creating a truly unified and collaborative department, and from allowing for more meaningful interaction among faculty members and students. It also provided an opportunity to define a collective identity, and, just as important, it allowed proactive confrontation of external pressures that could have led to the

department's elimination. While the changes implemented were substantial and at times hard-won, it also must be acknowledged that change is an ever-present condition, one that the faculty members and students of MLCS will need to continue to embrace as the new structures are refined and put into practice. Reflecting on our own roles as leaders of these efforts, below we take into account some of the overall challenges and opportunities that this process has presented.

Such a comprehensive restructuring of our graduate and undergraduate programs proved to be simultaneously tumultuous and enlightening. Many colleagues engaged enthusiastically in the process of reimagining our offerings in ways that promised to foster new connections across the department and create new opportunities for our students. Others, including some whose undergraduate majors had been closed, reacted with concern and resisted the proposals. Some ignored the process until the end and then opposed it vigorously. These reactions remind us that resistance to change is often motivated by fear of loss, requiring us all to do our best to move through the process gently and generously.

Another problem was faculty apathy and a feeling of exclusion from the process. Despite the consistent commitment of the department's leadership to encouraging collaborative work and to shared governance, the long road to change left some faculty members disengaged, even feeling isolated from the process. Perhaps some of these feelings may be explained by a December 2016 article in *Inside Higher Ed*, which uses the relationship between commuters from the suburbs and cities as a metaphor to illuminate the "general mistrust between faculty members and administrators as well as the concerns over the corporatization of the university" (Pfaff and Sullivan). When communication between administrators and faculty members is stymied, distrust festers. In this spirit, since the proposal's arrival at the final phase of government approval in early 2018, faculty members have been brought together in meetings focusing on course design and departmental structure under the new major with an eye toward its interconnection with the graduate program, and the departmental leadership has initiated smaller working groups to make sure those concerns voiced throughout the process are thoughtfully addressed in the proposal's realization on the ground. The process of making changes in MLCS created spaces for more conversations, but transforming a department climate to embrace those conversations is a long and ongoing project. For profound changes to take place, the conversations need to continue.

Critical to the success of our efforts is that they have been from the beginning led collaboratively by faculty members, students, and staff members instead of imposed by the department chair. This collaborative process provided important professional development for faculty members and students alike. Undergraduate and graduate students serving on the committees attained considerable experience in program development, department and university policies, departmental politics, and university governance. Individual faculty members had the opportunity to take on visible leadership roles (chair of the curriculum committee; associate chair for graduate studies; associate chair for undergraduate studies) and gain important professional development throughout the program revision process. Because of the complex governance structures at the university and the need to consult widely on all changes, leadership in the process has required meetings with many individuals and groups outside the department, allowing the faculty members leading the change to increase their own professional networks on campus.

The department's work is not finished. Keeping abreast of disciplinary, budgetary, and pedagogical trends at the university and throughout academia will position MLCS at the forefront of graduate and undergraduate education. Sharing information consistently and keeping communication channels open among administration, faculty members, staff members, and students will allow all to play an active role in the way programming develops at the University of Alberta, as MLCS moves from isolated silos to the building of ever more meaningful and engaged networks. <sup>i</sup>

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