



MEMO

Date: September 8, 2017
To: Rick Muma, Senior Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and Strategic Enrollment Management
CC: Ron Matson, Dean of the Fairmount College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
From: Dennis Livesay, Dean of the Graduate School and Associate Vice President of Research and Technology Transfer
Re: Master of Arts in Liberal Studies 3-Year Program Review

This review is part of the 3-year review process of the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies (MALS) program at Wichita State University. The biggest strength of the MALS program is also its biggest weakness—that being flexibility. MALS is an individualized and interdisciplinary degree program that allows students to identify three focus areas, that results in an original thesis (or terminal project) that spans the focus areas. As a consequence, there is no curricula core that can be used to define learning outcomes in the traditional way. The only common experience that students have is a capstone, and thus assessment is tied to it. This makes perfect sense, but I share the LAS dean's concern that more concreteness is needed in how the assessment is performed. Further, I would like to see assessment occurring earlier in the student's time here as well—perhaps a capstone proposal could be initiated, similar to what is done in PhD programs, so that faculty would have the ability to make sure that the student's coursework has prepared him/her for success in the thesis/project.

I understand the timeframe for carrying out this review was compressed due to personnel changes, but a more thorough and thoughtful assessment of exit survey data is needed next time around. In fact, what a student thinks as he/she graduates can be quite different than after having been employed for 5-10 years. I would encourage the program to go further and develop an alumni survey tool to collect that feedback, and then—of course—use that info to inform curricula revisions (where appropriate). Further, focus groups and surveys of employers are another great way of determining how well your graduates are being prepared for professional success. The above points become even more critical based on the difficulty in defining learning outcomes due to the flexibility of the MALS program.

There are other areas of the review that will similarly need more attention next time, but I won't dwell on them given the circumstance of the compressed review. Having said that, I am very bullish on the MALS program. I believe it has the potential to become a healthy, well-enrolled, and high-visibility program at WSU. Traditional generalist master's programs are starting to lose out to more tailored and specific

programs, and all indications suggest this gap will increase. The MALS programs fits into the national trends perfectly and I hope that the 3-year program review and graduate enrollment management processes will be used effectively to allow us to capitalize on the opportunity.