## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to the BA Curriculum Renewal Proposal</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Context of the BA Curriculum Renewal Process</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current and Proposed BA Basic Requirements</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance Pathway for the Proposed Changes to BA Basic Requirements</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next Steps of the BA Curriculum Renewal Process</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. History of the BA Curriculum Review Process</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Ongoing BA Curriculum Renewal Consultation Process</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Stats Canada Edmonton Population by Census</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Arts Undergraduate Headcount 2005 - 2016</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Arts Undergraduate Headcount International – Domestic Ratio 2005 - 2016</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Comparable Canadian BA Basic Requirements</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Draft Table for New BA Attributes and Requirements</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Dr. Jennifer Summit and Dr. John Galaty lectures notes</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Undergraduate Student Surveys 2011 - 2012</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. BA Core Review – The Proposed Attributes BA</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction to the BA Curriculum Renewal Proposal

The current structure of the University of Alberta Bachelor of Arts (BA) Basic Requirements has been in place since the 2006 – 2007 academic year.¹ In November 2011, Arts Faculty Council approved a five year Academic Plan² that included a systematic review of the BA general requirements. Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) Mickey Adolphson was initially assigned to chair the BA Curriculum Review; and, in July 2015, Dean of Arts Lesley Cormack asked Associate Dean (Student Programs: Teaching and Learning) Allen Ball to continue this process as the BA Curriculum Renewal.

The ensuing consultation process has led to this final version of the BA Renewal Proposal. To bring clarity to this document, two sections from the original draft proposal have been moved to the appendices: History of the BA Curriculum Review Process is now located in Appendix A; and, Ongoing BA Curriculum Renewal Consultation Process is now located in Appendix B.

The goal of the BA Curriculum Renewal is to develop a simpler, more appealing, and financially sustainable BA program that provides Arts students with an exemplary undergraduate degree, while maintaining, at its heart, a liberal arts philosophy that is contextualized within our large-scale research intensive university. A renewed BA at the University of Alberta must be flexible enough to accommodate the exceptional breadth and depth in programming offered in the Faculty of Arts. This renewed BA must also continue to enable a broad range of pedagogical methods, from traditional instructional strategies to community-engaged experiential learning, while retaining our rigorous academic standards.

Current Context for the BA Curriculum Renewal Process

A number of factors inform the current institutional, provincial, and national contexts in which the BA Curriculum Renewal occurs. First, in June 2015, the Government of Alberta introduced Bill 3, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act. Bill 3 reversed cuts made by the previous provincial administration (including a 1.4 percent reduction to post-secondary funding), increased base funding for post-secondary institutions by two percent, cancelled market modifiers that had previously been approved for 25 programs in Alberta, and restored apprenticeship and targeted enrolment funding. As well, the Bill implemented a two-year freeze

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on tuition and mandatory non-instructional fees for post-secondary students in both the 2015-16 and 2016-17 academic years.³ In Fall 2015, the Government also began a review of the overall funding model for Campus Alberta.⁴ Given the uncertain financial future, the current period of relative stability gives the Faculty of Arts the opportunity to re-envision its BA program to better meet the goal of offering a competitive program that attracts excellent students. If the Arts BA program is re-worked now to meet our goals, the Faculty will be better positioned to face future challenges and to take advantage of emergent opportunities.

Within our institution, central administrative units are also planning for substantive change. On May 30, 2016, General Faculties Council recommended approval of the University of Alberta’s new institutional strategic plan (ISP) “For the Public Good” (Au Service de l'intérêt public), which was ratified by the Board of Governors on June 17, 2016.⁵ The strategic goals of the ISP are as follows:

In *For the Public Good*—our institutional strategic plan for the coming decade—we embrace and affirm our vision to inspire the human spirit through outstanding achievements in learning, discovery, and citizenship in a creative community, building one of the world’s great universities for the public good.

We forge ahead, motivated and supported by the University of Alberta’s 108-year history of leadership, achievement, and public service. Inspired by this plan, we will strive to achieve the following strategic goals:

**BUILD** a diverse, inclusive community of exceptional students, faculty, and staff from Alberta, Canada, and the world.

**EXPERIENCE** diverse and rewarding learning opportunities that inspire us, nurture our talents, expand our knowledge and skills, and enable our success.

**EXCEL** as individuals, and together, sustain a culture that fosters and champions distinction and distinctiveness in teaching, learning, research, and service.

**ENGAGE** communities across campuses, city and region, province, nation, and the world to create reciprocal, mutually beneficial learning experiences, research projects, partnerships, and collaborations.

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SUSTAIN our people, our work, and the environment by attracting and stewarding the resources we need to deliver excellence to the benefit of all.

In pursuit of these shared goals, the University of Alberta will deepen our dedication to excellence and extend our record of public leadership, playing a lead role in building a better province, a better Canada, and a better world.6

Also, the “Undergraduate Out-of-Province National Recruitment Strategy Discussion Paper,” recently released internally by the University of Alberta Office of the Registrar, lays the groundwork for a coordinated approach to the recruitment challenges facing the University of Alberta. As outlined in the introduction to the “Discussion Paper”:

the environment within which we recruit students has been changing as a result of provincial and national trends. Post-secondary participation rates within the province are comparatively low [Alberta Innovation and Advanced Education], the number of degree-granting institutions in Alberta has increased [Canadian Association of University Teachers Bulletin], and national demographics have shifted [Statistics Canada]. These factors have combined to result in a smaller pool of potential undergraduate students nationally, prompting increasing and aggressive recruitment of Alberta students by other out-of-province institutions.7

As a backdrop to the BA Curriculum Renewal, a number of significant demographic shifts have emerged since the introduction of the current BA structure in the 2006-2007 academic year. From 2006 to 2016, the population of the Edmonton Metropolitan area increased by 26.9% (see Appendix C), while Faculty of Arts undergraduate enrollment declined by 5.5% (see Appendix D). Although the general population (and local pool of potential applicants) has increased significantly, the Faculty of Arts has seen a decrease in enrolled students. This negative trend is further complicated by the fact that, in the 2006-2007 academic year, international students accounted for 5.4% of Arts undergraduates whereas they comprise over 21.5% of Arts undergraduates in 2016-2017 (see Appendix E). In 2016-17, there are 850 fewer domestic undergraduate students enrolled annually in the Faculty of Arts than there were in 2006-2007.

Although it is impossible to know or weigh all the potential factors causing enrollments to fall or to account for the significant decrease in domestic students, the number of peer institutions offering liberal arts education in the Edmonton region suggest a strong demand locally for arts education. For instance, MacEwan University and King’s University became BA degree granting institutions in 2004.

While it is clear from the BA Curriculum Renewal consultation process that the Faculty of Arts believes strongly in sustaining a liberal arts model, we must respond to the growing pressure to

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articulate the value of our BA degree effectively in this new educational environment, as well as to communicate its benefits and outcomes clearly to students, parents, employers, and government. In light of these demographic shifts and the increasingly competitive environment for post-secondary students, it is critical that the Faculty of Arts craft a distinct, well-designed BA with desirable programs if expanded recruitment efforts are to be successful.

Current & Proposed BA Basic Requirements

The current Faculty of Arts Bachelor of Arts (BA) Basic Requirements are as follows8:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arts Requirements (*36)</th>
<th>Courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENGL/WRS *6</td>
<td>*6 100-level ENGL or *3 ENGL and *3 WRS at the 100-level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOE *6</td>
<td>*6 in one language other than English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science *6</td>
<td>Courses offered by the Faculty of Science</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Breadth and Diversity *18| a) *6 Group 1 - creative arts (ART, ART H, DES, DRAMA, T. DES, MUSIC, WRITE)  
b) *6 Group 2 – study of cultures (CHINA, CHRTC, CHRTP, CLASS, C LIT, EASIA, ENGL, FREN, FS, GERM, GREEK, HIST, ITAL, JAPAN, KOREA, LA ST, MLCS, PHIL, POLISH, PORT, RELIG, RUSS, SCAND, SLAV, SPAN)  
c) *6 Group 3 – social systems (ANTHR, CSL, EAS (Arts courses only), ECON, HGP, INT D, LING, MEAS, POL S, PSYCO (Arts courses only), STS, SOC, WGS) |

The current BA Basic Requirements are based on a distribution model that grounds a traditional liberal arts education in a breadth of disciplines and methodologies. On the one hand, in principle, the distribution model enforces breadth of study in students’ degree programs. On the other hand, it is not clear how these requirements relate to the many and diverse types of Arts majors, or how they benefit students during and after their degrees. The weakest aspect to this model is that the basic requirements rarely align with courses taken as part of a student’s declared major nor do they connect with one another. Furthermore, the pedagogical value of these particular basic requirements has not been clearly linked to our research-intensive institutional focus.

A variety of approaches to the structuring of BA programs are employed in Canadian universities, along with a broad threshold of basic credit requirements among the top 20-ranked

Canadian universities (see Appendix F). The lowest number of BA program basic requirement credits is in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Calgary, which since 2010, requires only *6 credits from the Faculty of Science, with all other requirements determined by departments or programs offering majors. By contrast, students in BA programs within the University of Alberta Faculty of Arts face the highest number of basic requirements among the top 20 comparable Canadian programs, with *36 basic course credits needed to graduate.

Having the highest number of BA basic requirements among these top Canadian institutions produces a number of challenges for our Faculty. First, the high number of requirements is dissuading high school students from choosing our program for their post-secondary education; they now have other more attractive and less complex options locally, provincially, and nationally. The current requirements also make transferring into the Faculty of Arts difficult and potentially unattractive to prospective students from colleges, other University of Alberta programs, and other universities. As well, the Faculty of Arts encompasses a wide variety of disciplines; but, the high number of basic requirements neutralizes this diversity in programming by imposing similarity across majors and ignoring distinct disciplinary differences. In short, other institutions provide more flexibility to students; and, students increasingly opt for the program flexibility accessible at other institutions. Our current program does not represent or maximize the value of our diverse offerings. We are losing students to more attractive and easier-to-navigate programs offered elsewhere, even though we provide comparable or superior course offerings.

The Faculty of Arts Dean’s Office has engaged and consulted widely over the course of the BA Curriculum Renewal process, hearing from key campus partners and stakeholders, including students, faculty, contract instructors, staff, and alumni. Our BA Renewal Surveys generated over 800 hundred student responses and nearly 150 faculty responses. In addition, we collected over 370 written responses to the original discussion paper from a variety of different forums. The revised recommendations detailed below are drawn directly from the input received during this comprehensive consultation process.

To enhance our competitiveness among peer institutions and strengthen the quality and flexibility of our BA degree, the Faculty of Arts proposes these basic requirements for the University of Alberta Bachelor of Arts:

- *120
  The 120 credit minimum remains unchanged.

- one major (*30-*48 maximum at the senior level)
  The major credit threshold remains unchanged.

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• *3 ENGL or WRS at the 100-level
  3 credits in English or Writing Studies aligns with or exceeds the minimum basic requirements of the other top four-ranked universities in Canada.\(^{11}\)

• *6 in one language other than English
  6 credits in one language other than English, including exemptions, aligns with or exceeds the minimum basic requirements of the other four top-ranked universities in Canada.

The chart below, titled “Proposed Changes to the Common Structure of the BA,” provides a comparison of the proposed and current requirements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credit Requirement</th>
<th>Current</th>
<th>Proposed</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>*120</td>
<td>*120</td>
<td>No change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>*30 - *48 at the senior level</td>
<td>*30 - *48 at the senior level</td>
<td>No change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Subject(s)</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Maximum of *48 senior courses in any discipline</td>
<td>To allow students who wish to do so to complete a double major, but also to ensure that students diversify their studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts Courses</td>
<td>Minimum *63</td>
<td>Minimum *63</td>
<td>No change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English/ Writing Studies</td>
<td>*6 100-level ENGL or *3 ENGL and *3 WRS at the 100-level</td>
<td>*3 ENGL at the 100 level or *3 WRS at the 100 level or other approved courses</td>
<td>A reduction of *3 in the ENGL/WRS requirement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language other than English (LOE)</th>
<th>LOE *6</th>
<th>LOE *6</th>
<th>Exemptions from the *6 LOE requirement. See Note 2.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Arts Discipline Courses</td>
<td>*6 from Faculty of Science</td>
<td>*6 from a non-Arts discipline</td>
<td>Encourages experimentation outside Arts disciplines and expands breadth. See Note 1 for exceptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior (100-) level</td>
<td>*48 maximum</td>
<td>*48 maximum</td>
<td>No change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor</td>
<td>*12 - *42 senior</td>
<td>*12 - *42 in a minor if the option of a minor is chosen</td>
<td>Students are not required to choose a minor, but may choose one or more minor subjects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Arts/Science</td>
<td>Maximum *18</td>
<td>Maximum *18</td>
<td>Change opens this option to After Degree program students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses Completed at the U of A</td>
<td>Minimum *60</td>
<td>Minimum *60</td>
<td>No change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

1. Some Courses offered by other Faculties are recognized as “Arts courses”:
   i) Native Studies (NS)
   ii) Arts disciplines from Campus St Jean and Augustana (e.g. HISTE, SC PO, AUFRE, AUSOC)
   iii) Approved Cross-listed ALES courses (in Sociology (R SOC) and Economics (AREC))

2. Exemptions from the *6 LOE requirement include:
   i) Students that present the 30-level (matriculation) equivalent of a Language Other than English, or
   ii) Students that are required by the Registrar’s office to take any English proficiency test to qualify for admission
   iii) The Calendar currently states: students who have completed their secondary education in a LOE will be permitted to take *6 option in lieu of the LOE core.
Students with prior LOE background who wish further study in that LOE must be placed at the appropriate level or credit will be withheld. Records for these applicants will be reviewed and assessed by the Undergraduate Student Services Office. Students who have facility in a LOE but who cannot provide official transcripts should contact the relevant LOE department for advice about obtaining a waiver for the LOE requirement.

The proposed changes have multiple advantages:

1. The proposed requirements will continue to promote breadth and diversity but in a manner that is less prescriptive.
2. The maximum of *48 in any single Arts discipline and the *6 required in non-Arts disciplines mean that students must experiment by taking courses in several disciplines, regardless of their chosen major in order to complete the *120 credit minimum.
3. The added flexibility will create significantly more opportunities for students to take double majors and/or multiple minors. For example, a student could graduate with a single major, two majors, or the option of a major and one or more minors.
4. If students no longer require minors (which, by their very nature, are limited to single departments), they would be free to undertake more of the certificates that are developed and offered across disciplines and departments.
5. Students will also take on greater responsibility for designing their programs, an important facet of the educational experience.
6. The proposed requirements enable a straightforward transition for students transferring to Arts from other programs at the University of Alberta and other post-secondary institutions.
7. The requirement for *6 of non-Arts credits guarantees that students will be exposed to the disciplinary perspectives and pedagogical environments of other Faculties and programs, which will ensure and enrich students’ experiences of the full breadth of university learning.
8. A flexible Arts degree means that our students will easily be able to accommodate any mandated University-wide Indigenous studies requirement in their degrees, should this requirement be embraced institutionally.

The new common requirements introduce significant flexibility to students, while sustaining the academic excellence and rigour of Faculty of Arts programs. This structural shift creates a continuum of options that can adapt to both specific departmental programmatic outcomes and disciplinary specificity, while simultaneously facilitating breadth in pedagogical scope and curricular demands.

**Governance Pathway for the Proposed Changes to BA Basic Requirements**

The proposed changes to the BA Basic Requirements will follow the standard governance pathway. Within the Faculty of Arts, changes must be reviewed and approved first by Academic Affairs Committee (AAC), then by Arts Executive Committee (AEC), and, finally, by Arts Faculty Council (AFC). Since there are no changes to academic standing, admissions (including high school subjects to be used for admission), or graduation requirements, the proposed changes
will not need to be approved by Academic Standards Committee (ASC) of GFC. Approval of GFC is required through routine circulation in Winter 2017 for implementation in Fall 2018.

The BA Curriculum Renewal proposal will be presented for consideration at the following meetings:

- Academic Affairs Committee (AAC): October 26, 2016
- Arts Executive Committee (AEC): November 3, 2016
- Arts Faculty Council (AFC): November 24, 2016

The BA Curriculum Renewal proposal, as it stands, would require a number of University of Alberta Calendar changes. These changes will affect calendar section entries for the Bachelor of Arts (BA), BA Honors Program Requirements, and the After Degree Programs

Next Steps in the BA Curriculum Renewal Process

The BA Curriculum Renewal is an opportunity for us as a Faculty to shape our future together. This proposal promotes a new BA structure that will replace our current BA Basic Curriculum. The new common requirements will increase flexibility for students, departments, and the Faculty, and ensure our requirements are competitive with other post-secondary institutions.

The proposed changes will affect the way we advise our students and offer guidance in building their programs through appropriate course selection. In consultation with Departments, specifically through the Arts Teaching and Learning Engagement Committee (ATLEC), which consists of every departmental undergraduate Associate Chair, student representatives, and Senior Advisors in Undergraduate Student Services, the Faculty of Arts will create a series of thematic pathways as optional guides for students. The pathways will act as roadmaps for our Undergraduate Student Services advisors to guide students in their first year.

Associate Dean Allen Ball will lead the consultation process in developing the thematic pathways, which will ensure that our diverse programs can be promoted equally, thus exposing students to the full range of departments and disciplines. It is envisaged that the optional thematic pathways will echo and build upon the extensive work developed over the last five years in defining BA attributes (see Appendix G), while also providing opportunities to inform students of the multiple ways of achieving breadth and diversity in their Arts education.

It is imperative that the Faculty of Arts and its departments design this renewed BA and its thematic pathways together, such that we construct a degree program that is flexible enough to meet future challenges and well positioned to take advantage of emergent opportunities. Together, these recommendations form a critical part of a broader effort by the Faculty of Arts to offer a truly outstanding BA program that will attract and retain the very best and brightest students from Alberta, Canada, and the world.