

**External Reviewer's Report—Print Futures Program—
Douglas College—July 19, 2012**

**Reviewer: Dr. David Black, School of Communication and Culture,
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How to build enrolment in Print Futures: Two approaches

The working premise here is that the Print Futures curriculum is substantially fine—that the enrolment problem has little to do with the courses offered or the “generalist” whom the program aims to educate. The obstacle, this reviewer believes, is that the current diploma is not defined as an academic credential nor located in the College's organizational environment in ways suited to Print Futures' success. This is made worse by the fact, as compared to the conditions in which the program was founded in 1991,

The difficult question that surfaces here is: is someone with a Grade 12 “C” and perhaps little life or work experience ready for a program as demanding in rigour and literacy as Print Futures? Likewise, are they prepared to share a classroom for two years with students with BAs and even (though the percentage is small at 3%) graduate degrees? To be sure, there are other elements to the program’s deliberate admissions process: writing samples, reference letters, a group or individual interview. But it remains that a given Print Futures cohort is likely to have students possessing a greater range of ability and experience than a typical college diploma. Writing and editing ability and the cultural capital that supports it more sharply differentiate students—separating the less from the well-prepared—than general knowledge of subject matter in arts and social sciences subjects. So students entering Print Futures from high school, as contrasted with those entering with BA degrees are (with obvious precocious or experienced exceptions) not operating on a similar plane.

Moreover, if marketed specifically as a post-baccalaureate diploma, Print Futures may appear a more attractive choice to the legions of students looking for options after completing BAs. If offered as a post-BA program, Print Futures could even repackage itself as a more streamlined diploma completed over 12 or 18 months; two years of full-time study that lead to a diploma (rather than an MA) for a student with a BA or even an MA is a significant commitment. Since students in recent years are arguably more cost-conscious about education than was true historically, the two years of full-time study may even be now dampening enrolment.

As stated above, a post-graduate version of Print Futures could offer itself as a more advanced experience. It could provide BA or MA graduates with a program with a 12- or 18-month curriculum. For example, in an 18-month structure, students could be exposed to an intensive series of courses in professional writing, editing and document design over a year. Then, with that advanced but comprehensive training done, they could spend the remaining six months in a structure that combines a more specialized course(s) in a subfield of writing, editing and design interest—perhaps built around a major writing, editing and design project—with a co-op term in that same area of specialization. These areas of specialization could be varied as market conditions change and new and emergent skills are asked of professional writers and editors.

The capacity to develop specialized areas of curriculum and to offer students a deliverable major project—a book, a major technical document—to work on was echoed in this reviewer’s interview with Maureen Nicholson. The post-graduate diploma could also be an incubator for enrichment of the BA, and vice versa; the value of incubator courses of some kind was underlined in the Print Futures self-report. It should be noted that the program’s self-report already identifies courses that might be relocated in a “sample post-degree diploma” on page 23.

So to summarize, a post-graduate diploma in professional writing, editing, and document design would have these benefits:

- Offer a 12 or 18 month structure (to better compete with other competitor programs)

Modern Languages

Arts of the Modern World (PEFA1102)
Students could pursue study of a language as part of their degree, e.g., French, Mandarin, Spanish, German

5. Develop capacity within whatever structure emerges for Print Futures for incubation of new course content.

The professional communications workplace needs great writers, editors and document designers. While this reviewer is not expert in professional writing, it's evident that the places in which graduates of Print Futures and its future incarnations are hired into are changeful ones. Capacity, for example, in working within media-rich audio-visual environments—which would benefit by knowledge of script-writing, storyboarding, digital storytelling, directing photo shoots, and the basics of videography—is recommended. Another suggestion for capacity-building is writing for transmedia. Transmedia practice is the work of creating content and coordinating the deployment of that content among multiple media platforms. This allows communicators to offer a comprehensive narrative, or to otherwise represent complex issues, optimized for the many media forms now available to professionals.

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