



TO: Digvir Jayas
President and Vice Chancellor

DATE: May 22, 2026

FROM: Lynn Kennedy
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

RE: Master of Music Program Academic Quality Assurance Review

In accordance with the U of L *Academic Quality Assurance Policy and Process*, the Academic Quality Assurance Committee approved the review of the Master of Music Program at its December 2, 2025, meeting.

The Self Study Committee for this review was comprised of: Georg Boenn (Program Review Coordinator), Bryn Hughes, Deanna Oye, Devon Smither, and Janet Youngdahl.

The review produced 5 documents:

1. Self Study Report. Written by the Self Study Committee. Received May 16, 2025.
2. External Review Report. Written by Dr. Adam Con (University of Victoria) and Dr. Kimberly Francis (University of Guelph) based on a site visit September 18 to 19, 2025. Received September 26, 2025.
3. Program Response. Written by the Self Study Committee. Received October 28, 2025.
4. Dean's Response. Written by Heather Davis-Fisch, Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts and Jackie Rice, Dean of the School of Graduate Studies. Received November 24, 2025.
5. Provost's Action plan. Written by Michelle Helstein, Provost and Vice President (Academic). Received December 24, 2025.

Self Study Report

The report highlighted a number of program strengths including:

- The Master of Music program benefits from dedicated faculty members with strong research profiles and teaching excellence. With a low student-to-faculty ratio, students have easy access to personalized mentorship through one-on-one supervisory relationships, allowing them to pursue specialized research interests and achieve professional milestones such as public performances and academic publications.
- The program's small size allows for customized coursework, flexible program design, and individualized study plans through cross-departmental collaborations and independent studies.
- State-of-the-art facilities—including performance spaces, recording studios, and the University library—support diverse musical practices.
- The program's integration with southern Alberta's music and arts community creates unique opportunities for community-engaged learning and professional networking.

The report also noted some challenges experienced by the program:

- Lack of dedicated graduate-level coursework. Students frequently rely on co-listed undergraduate courses and independent studies to meet degree requirements. The only regular graduate course offered is FA5020: Information Literacy, a required component of the Master of Music program and taught by one of the university librarians.
- The current Master of Music is heavily prescribed and does not provide much flexibility for students.
- Most Master of Music (Applied Performance) programs across North America prioritize performance as the primary mode of research. Yet, our Performance Capstone route lacks a dedicated performance stream with robust artistic opportunities. At the same time, students who choose either the Performance Capstone or the Thesis route are limited in their options for course selection. Ideally, our students should be able to customize their program to suit their needs.
- The website for graduate programs in Fine Arts lacks clarity on key program details and does not effectively highlight the unique aspects of the Master of Music or other Faculty of Fine Arts graduate programs. The poorly organized faculty directory, coupled with unclear information about courses, credits, and program structure, makes it difficult for prospective graduate students to find essential information.
- There is no strategic marketing or recruitment campaign for the Master of Music program.
- The current level of funding for graduate studies at the institutional level is insufficient, with Graduate Assistantships (GAs) and University of Lethbridge Graduate Research Awards (ULGRAs) remaining stagnant or, in some cases, declining. This reduction in funding compromises the program's ability to remain competitive with peer institutions, limiting opportunities for attracting and retaining top-tier graduate students.
- The Faculty of Fine Arts music library's limited holdings for advanced research and insufficient digital resources further hinder academic progress. Performance students face additional financial burdens due to inadequate stipends for essential expenses like instrument maintenance, the cost to hire a collaborative pianist for rehearsals, masterclasses, and performances. While the Faculty of Fine Arts dean's office offers a \$500 thesis completion award for graduate students, this does not always cover all the associated costs for a student to complete their program.
- While the current facilities for Master of Music students are of high-quality, there is a need for an additional recital and performance space on campus. The current recital hall in the University Centre for the Arts is almost always fully booked and students encounter problems booking rehearsals, performances, and recitals.
- Graduate supervision places significant, and often unsustainable, workload pressures on faculty, as they are required to oversee independent studies and perform more one-on-one work with students. This has contributed to burnout among active supervisors, further exacerbated by a decreasing pool of eligible faculty, driven by

retirements. Currently, faculty supervisors receive a course release for every two students who complete their program, though this policy remains informal, and no document exists for faculty to reference, this has only been verbally communicated by the Dean. The small size of our graduate cohorts often results in delays in receiving compensation, and the current compensation structure does not account for faculty who serve on committees without acting as primary supervisors.

The report made several recommendations and asked for External Reviewer feedback on several areas including:

- How can the Master of Music curriculum be revised to offer greater flexibility, specialization, and interdisciplinary opportunities for students?
- Is the Master of Music program being delivered effectively in terms of instruction, facilities (e.g., recital spaces, library resources), and overall student experience? How does it compare to peer institutions?
- How might faculty workload related to graduate supervision be better supported or restructured to ensure sustainability?
- What strategies could improve graduate student recruitment, enrollment, and the program's visibility—particularly through its online presence and public communications?
- How might the administration, governance, communication, and coordination of the Master of Music be improved between the various key players of the program?
- There is consistent recognition that Digital Audio Arts (DAA) is an underdeveloped area at the graduate level, despite being one of the two Bachelor of Music majors. The current Master of Music program does not adequately serve the needs of DAA students, and the Department of Music is actively exploring the development of a program pathway that would better support students working in music technology, digital composition, and audio engineering. This pathway would leverage existing institutional expertise, meet growing student demand, and help distinguish the program within an increasingly competitive graduate education landscape.
- Strategic marketing could position the Master of Music program—particularly with a new program pathway in Digital Audio Arts—as the primary destination for students in southern Alberta and the prairie region, particularly through targeted outreach to individuals interested in performance, composition, or music technology. Developing part-time enrollment options could further expand access for working professionals.
- The Faculty of Fine Arts is currently proposing a new course-based MA - Fine Arts Multidisciplinary program to the government of Alberta which includes the creation of six new graduate-level courses, many of which would benefit students in the Master of Music. A revision of the program requirements for the Master of Music should be undertaken once this new course-based MA is approved.
- The MA and PhD in Cultural, Social, and Political Thought in the Faculty of Arts and Science offers many graduate-level courses which students in the Master of Music would benefit from. A revision of the program requirements and electives for the Master of Music would help signal these offerings for students.
- In fall 2024 the Associate Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts and School of Graduate Studies offered a series of 4 workshops to encourage graduate students in fine arts, humanities, and social science disciplines to apply for Canadian Graduate Scholarship-Master's from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. These funding amounts have recently increased to \$27,000 and if Master of Music students are successful this would help with student's financial stability. Faculty of Fine Arts intends to make attending these SSHRC workshops and applying for SSHRC a best practice for graduate students in Faculty of Fine Arts.
- There is a thriving Indigenous arts community in Southern Alberta and the Master of Music program stands to benefit from a deeper engagement with the Blackfoot community in particular. This requires dedicated funding to bring in artists, knowledge keepers, and elders from the Blackfoot community to develop partnerships to inform curriculum enhancements while attracting new student demographics interested in Indigenous artistic, cultural and musical practices.

- Creating a bigger cohort of students would help support the program, however increasing enrollments must involve department-wide consultation and planning to ensure increasing graduate enrollments would not affect the undergraduate program or lead to further faculty burnout.

External Review Report

The External Review Report began with a caveat about the ongoing viability of the program, noting:

- To truly capitalize on the MMus program’s strengths, several critical questions must be addressed and significant gaps filled. Indeed, the MMus program is clearly at a crossroads. It remains unclear whether the faculty, as a cohesive unit, are committed to continuing the degree or whether there is sufficient buy-in to sustain the effort necessary for its long-term viability. Left as is, we do not recommend the program continue.

Immediate options include closing the program, allowing the University of Lethbridge Department of Music to focus resources on its successful undergraduate program, or suspending the program—halting new graduate admission—while undertaking a complete curriculum overhauling and establishing formal learning outcomes. If faculty and administrators can marshal the necessary vision, commitment, and institutional support, the MMus has the potential to become a distinctive and valuable component of the University’s educational landscape. The decision ultimately rests with the faculty, staff, and administrators.

Should the decision be made to overhaul the Master of Music, the External Review Report made eleven (11) recommendations for improving the program.

- Develop program Learning Outcomes (LOs) – Clear, program-level LOs are essential. They provide the foundation for all admission requirements, resource allocation, curriculum design, alignment with institutional priorities, and evaluation processes. Any decision to continue the program rests on these outcomes being developed.
- Reduce Total Program Credits – Current program requirements are overly cumbersome and lack a clear rationale. Streamlining credits will help to reduce faculty workload, improve student experience, and sharpen the program’s identity and brand.
- Create Dedicated Graduate Courses – The graduate program must offer graduate-level courses to support student Learning Outcomes and foster a sense of cohort. Faculty should consider whether these courses should be standalone music courses or shared across the Faculty of Fine Arts. Pooling the MA, MMus, and MFA courses would strengthen peer-to-peer learning while minimizing additional resource demands. Given resource pressures on the unit, we would highly recommend some thought be given to multidisciplinary sharing where curricular alignment exists.
- Establish a Culture of Collective Graduate Supervision – Graduate supervision must shift from an individual-advisor model to a program-wide responsibility. This change will reduce risks of isolation and conflict, while ensuring consistent student support. We recommend the creation of a graduate student committee to oversee admissions, monitor student progress, assign teaching/research positions, and provide feedback on professional development.
- Implement Student and Alumni Tracking – Tracking systems are vital for monitoring student progress, informing advisors, and supporting program-wide planning. Alumni tracking would also allow the program to celebrate graduate successes and demonstrate impact. Appropriate staffing or recourse allocation will be necessary.
- Clear Admission Criteria – Admissions should be based on transparent program-level standards rather than pre-arranged advisor commitments. This shift requires more faculty be willing and prepared to supervise graduate students.
- Potential pathways for growth and differentiation include:
 - One-year Master’s Option. Consider developing a 4+1 scenario for students entering the program at the undergraduate level or as a standalone 1-year option. A 4+1 model reduces funding barriers for

the fifth year of studies, as students would be taking the fifth year as a continuation of their undergraduate experience thus leveraging the undergraduate pipeline.

- Clear Undergraduate-to-Graduate Pathways. We heard from a number of stakeholders that the graduate program draws heavily upon its own outstanding undergraduates—a built-in recruitment pool. As such, transparent admissions processes should formalize this recruitment channel while avoiding perceptions of favoritism.
- Master’s in Digital Audio Arts. The DAA program is a clear strength of the undergraduate program, and it could anchor a distinct MMus stream. Faculty must define how Lethbridge’s offerings would differ from competitors and design courses that both serve the entire MMus cohort and provide clear specialization for DAA students. With clear branding, the DAA could provide a pipeline to invigorate and expand the MMus.
- Industry Connections. There appears to be existing and potential ties to the music industry in Lethbridge, Banff, and Calgary as part of the program’s rebranding and student experience. We highly recommend that faculty consider how to celebrate these existing connections as a part of the program’s re-brand and develop other untapped community ties.
- Address Faculty and Staff Workload. This program cannot expand without some acknowledgement of workload concerns for both faculty and staff. Graduate supervision should be formally recognized and supported. We would recommend that those faculty members who supervise graduate students should receive a reduction in their service load or some other, non-resource dependent acknowledgement of labour. For example, some mechanism tied to tenure & promotion review that could celebrate the work being done and allow advisors to feel recognized and valued. Building a culture where graduate supervision is an expected and valued responsibility is essential for long-term success.

Program Response

In their Program Response, the Self Study Committee addressed the recommendations from the External Review Report:

1.	<i>Develop program Learning Outcomes</i>	We agree with this recommendation and will charge the MMus redevelopment committee with creating program learning outcomes.
2.	<i>Reduce Total Program Credits</i>	We agree with this recommendation and will charge the MMus redevelopment committee to reduce the number of program credits.
3.	<i>Create Dedicated Graduate Courses</i>	We agree with this recommendation and will charge the MMus redevelopment committee to develop graduate-level courses. The committee will also examine whether new FA 5000-level courses could satisfy MMus requirements before proposing new ones.
4.	<i>Establish a Culture of Collective Graduate Supervision</i>	We agree with this recommendation and would like to examine the scope of the existing Department Graduate Education Committee (DGEC) to include not only overseeing admission of students, which is what it currently does, but also to monitor student progress, assign teaching and/or research positions, and provide feedback on professional development. This should be addressed as part of a broader faculty-wide discussion about graduate supervision models to ensure consistency across Fine Arts programs.
5.	<i>Implement Student and Alumni Tracking</i>	We support this recommendation and will continue to work with Alumni Relations and our Recruitment & Retention Specialist to track students post-graduation. Alumni tracking efforts are coordinated at the faculty level to ensure consistent data collection

		and reporting across all Fine Arts graduate programs. As part of this effort, we continue publishing a Faculty newsletter that highlights student and alumni success.
6.	<i>Clear Admission Criteria</i>	We agree with this recommendation and will charge the MMus redevelopment committee to clarify admission criteria in alignment with the redesign of the program structure.
7.	<i>One-year Master's Option</i>	We welcome the opportunity to bring this forward to the agenda of the MMus redevelopment committee. It will decide early in the process about which program structure to implement. The proposed 4+1 option will require further research into comparable models at other institutions, as well as analysis of advantages, limitations, and potential resource implications before moving forward.
8.	<i>Clear Undergraduate-to-Graduate Pathways</i>	The MMus redevelopment committee will formalize a transparent admission process.
9.	<i>Master's in Digital Audio Arts</i>	The MMus redevelopment committee and the Faculty will discuss possible pathways for BMus DAA students that can be offered to strengthen the program.
10.	<i>Use Industry Connections</i>	The Music Department will engage in discussions around re-branding and aim at expanding and strengthening our existing industry connections and our ties with the local community.
11.	<i>Address Faculty and Staff Workload</i>	The study group agrees that existing issues around workload for faculty and staff need to be addressed.

Deans' Response

The Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts responded to the recommendations from the External Review Report:

1.	<i>Develop program Learning Outcomes</i>	The Dean's Office agrees and notes that this is not only the most critical recommendation from the External Reviewers but should also be the first recommendation undertaken. Program learning outcomes should be appropriate to the graduate level and follow best practices for articulating learning outcomes.
2.	<i>Reduce Total Program Credits</i>	The Dean's Office agrees with this recommendation. In order to address this, the Department should identify comparable programs (i.e. other Master's programs at the University of Lethbridge and other MMus programs nationally) and review the number of credits required in those programs in establishing an appropriate number of credits for its revised program.
3.	<i>Create Dedicated Graduate Courses</i>	The Department should consider whether to create dedicated graduate courses after it has created program learning outcomes and revised its program structure. Additionally, the Department should carefully consider whether existing interdisciplinary graduate courses (FA 5000-level courses) might be used to satisfy degree requirements. If the Department chooses to develop dedicated graduate courses in Music, it would need to deliver those courses using its existing complement of academic staff; consultative discussions at the Department level and with the Dean's Office about how to balance graduate and undergraduate course delivery and program needs would be necessary.

4.	<i>Establish a Culture of Collective Graduate Supervision</i>	The Dean's Office recommends that the Department works with the other departments in the Faculty to address the substance of this recommendation, which largely concerns streamlining and simplifying processes related to admissions, monitoring student progress, assigning GA positions.
5.	<i>Implement Student and Alumni Tracking</i>	The Dean's Office agrees with this recommendation. The Associate Dean and other members of the Dean's Office team will work with the Department and Alumni Relations to coordinate alumni tracking and alumni engagement post-graduation. Work is already underway in this area, for example with the Faculty "Spotlight" newsletter.
6.	<i>Clear Admission Criteria</i>	The Dean's Office agrees with this recommendation.
7.	<i>One-year Master's Option</i>	The Dean's Office recommends that the Department research comparable one year and 4+1 options; that it does this early in its curriculum revision process. If it determines this is a viable pathway, it should consider whether a one year/4+1 program becomes the primary offering or whether it will develop this as one option for students to select. As part of this early research, the Department should identify whether creation of this pathway would constitute a new program in the view of the Ministry and whether the workload associated with that is feasible. If the Department determines that it will create a one year/4+1 offering alongside a two-year MMus, it should revise the two-year MMus requirements to ensure it is not offering two completely distinct programs (e.g. one-year might include only course work and a major research project, whereas the two-year might be include a thesis-style capstone).
8.	<i>Clear Undergraduate-to-Graduate Pathways</i>	This will be addressed as part of Recommendation 6. Once program revisions are complete, the Department may also consider how to recruit internally from its own undergraduate programs.
9.	<i>Master's in Digital Audio Arts</i>	The Dean's Office is strongly in favour of developing a pathway for graduate programming in DAA. Given that the Department will likely significantly revise the existing MMus and given the workload and timelines associated with developing a new program (particularly in terms of Ministry requirements and approval timelines), the Dean's Office strongly recommends that the Department consider how to build a DAA option into the revised MMus and that it exhausts all possibility of this before developing a new and separate credential.
10.	<i>Use Industry Connections</i>	The Dean's Office agrees with this recommendation.
11.	<i>Address Faculty and Staff Workload</i>	The Dean's Office agrees with this recommendation. The workload associated with graduate program delivery needs to be addressed as part of broader workload conversations occurring within the Faculty (including within conversations about PAR and STP). The Dean's Office strongly believes that not only graduate supervision but also other labour involved in successful graduate program delivery, such as supervisory committee membership and program administration tasks, needs to be recognized and considered as part of overall assignment of teaching (in the case of supervision and supervisory committee membership) and service (in the case of administrative tasks) duties.

Provost's Action Plan

Consulting the External Reviewer Recommendations, the Program Response, and Deans Davis-Fisch and Rice, the Academic Quality Assurance Committee made the following six (6) recommendations for action which the Program must report on in 1 and 3 years:

1. The Master of Music Program will develop program-level learning outcomes. The Master of Music program will then undertake a process of mapping of individual courses to program outcomes to identify any gaps.
2. The Master of Music Program will do an environmental scan of comparable programs (both at the University of Lethbridge and at other institutions) before undertaking a review of the curriculum. This curriculum review should consider:
 - a. Whether to reduce total program credits.
 - b. The viability of a 1-year/ 4+1 pathway.
 - c. Whether existing interdisciplinary courses can meet the needs of students or whether a music-specific common course is viable given current resource constraints.
 - d. Whether graduate programming in Digital Audio Arts might be undertaken under the existing MMus.
 - e. Clarifying processes for admission and appropriate curriculum for internal undergraduates entering the MMus program.
 - f. Restricting admissions of graduate students to areas of continuing faculty expertise.
 - g. Program requirements aligned with the resource realities of the University, Faculty, and Department.
3. The Master of Music will participate in the Faculty of Fine Arts ad hoc committee to address elements of concern around graduate supervision workload and clarification around assignment of duties for all categories of academic staff.
4. The Master of Music Program will work with the Faculty of Fine Arts Deans Office and the School of Graduate Studies to clarify processes related to admissions, student progress, baseline expectations of supervision, and assigning GA-ships.
5. The Master of Music Program will participate in the Dean's Office's efforts to establish a means of tracking and engaging alumni.
6. The Master of Music Program will consider ways to develop industry connections and community engagement.

The Academic Quality Assurance Committee is satisfied that the Master of Music academic quality assurance review has followed the U of L's academic quality assurance process appropriately, and acknowledges the successful completion of the review.

Sincerely,



Dr. Lynn Kennedy
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee
Associate Professor, Department of History and Religion

cc Michelle Helstein, PhD.
Provost & Vice-President (Academic)