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RE: The proposed merger of the School of Library, Archives and Information Studies with the School of Journalism and the Bachelor of Media Studies to create the School of Media and Information

Dear Ms. Nightingale,

The Archives Society of Alberta (ASA) represents individual and institutional members from across Alberta: students, archivists, and employers. The ASA Board wrote this response with all these diverse perspectives in mind. Before getting to the specific questions your call for feedback suggested, we offer the following comments.

The proposal is given a very short timeline (from Submission to the Senate in February of 2017 to Establishment in July of 2017 (p.10). This timeline seems overly optimistic which is particularly worrying given how vague the proposal is – it is long on perceived benefits and short on detailed, considered and/or concrete plans.

There is little of substance behind this proposal, for example even the stakeholders are not well defined. The proposal states that the new School will be “for students and researchers who seek to intervene in the knowledge economy” (p.2). Who are researchers in this context and what is meant by using the term “intervene”?

There is an insistence in the proposal on the complementary nature of “these areas of research and education” (p.2) that is repeatedly asserted but never explained or argued cogently. How do these areas complement each other? How does working together strengthen them? Who benefits?

The proposal states that the new school will meet market demand in three ways (p.4), one of which is “by designing and delivering programs in close consultation with businesses and employers.” First of all, the market need is poorly defined, second there has been little evidence of this consultation (close or otherwise) to date. How will you reassure graduates and potential entrants that a) their degree will be recognized by employers and b) that upon completion of the degree they will have the necessary skills? How will employers understand the degree conveys the skill sets they need, especially given the nebulousness of the program name? The Master of Archival Studies (MAS) skill set is already well defined and understood – what value does this merger actually add?

Finally, a footnote on page 6 notes that the Faculty of Media Studies at Western University is the closest comparison of a merger of this type. Why was an analysis of this merger not done prior to this proposal or, if it was, why is there no data from it informing this proposal?

1. What, if any, benefits do you envision from the establishment of a School of Media and Information at UBC.

The proposal notes that solely graduate degree programs are an exception at UBC (p.7) and having an undergraduate program attached to the School will allow access to additional initiatives and funding opportunities. In addition, there is the potential to increase enrollment drawn from the undergraduate stream. Increasing the size of the faculty should give the programs more weight and consideration from the University administration than they have separately.

There may be some long term easing of the administrative duties of faculty (one of the benefits outlined by faculty at the January 14, 2017 Town Hall), allowing them to give more attention to research and students. However, this will not be evident in the short term as they will be working on integrating the different programs. How will integration be managed to allow faculty to continue to meet the needs of current students?

2. What, if any, concerns do you have regarding the proposal? How could we strengthen the proposal to address these concerns?

The aforementioned vagueness of the proposal is of concern. How will the needs of the MAS program be expressed? The proposal states there will be an Advisory Board (p. 8), who will be on this Board and how will the MAS program be represented? What will the Board's terms of reference be?

How will the unique courses, specific to each discipline, be protected? Page 4 of the proposal states that "[i]ntegration will allow for courses to be shared, while maintaining the distinct identity of specialized, professionally-oriented programs." How will this be achieved with course content remaining meaningful for the different streams? In the Town Hall it was stated that the Core MAS courses will remain, but what about the upper level courses? As an example, how will a FOIPPA course be integrated with journalism for cross-disciplinary learning and still remain vigorous enough for the specific needs of an MAS student?

Table 1 (p. 5) gives a list of ongoing and potential positions to be filled by graduates of the new School. How exactly will the integrated program, designed to encourage increased enrolment, prepare these graduates to fill such a diverse set of roles, while ensuring that archival graduates are prepared for their very specific roles in the workforce?

The potential decrease of administrative staff (p. 9) is also of concern. These staff members will be key to the success of any future program and every effort should be made to retain them.

3. What suggestions do you have for ensuring that this integration would be successful? What do you see as important values, features or guiding principles for the UBC School of Media and Information?

A more measured approach and timeline.

Assurance that the unique nature of archival studies will be respected and that current and future MAS students will receive the education they need to get and keep archival, records management, and Freedom of Information jobs. In addition, a commitment to existing students that the value of their degree will not be lessened by these changes should be expressed.

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Assurance that faculty will not be negatively affected. It may be difficult for existing faculty to teach joint courses if they do not already have expertise in both information studies and journalism.

Assurance that the goal of interdisciplinarity does not detract from the needs of the different disciplines.

Significantly more detail in which courses will be taught and how the new school will benefit its students.

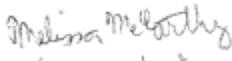
Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to this proposal.

Regards,



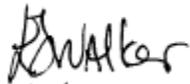
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