

External Review of the Cultural, Social and Political Thought (CSPT) Program

June 28-30, 2021

Review Committee:

- Dr. Allan Pero (Chair), Associate Professor, Dept of English and Writing Studies and Director, Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism, University of Western Ontario
- Dr. Gamal Abdel-Shehid, Graduate Program Director, Graduate Program in Social and Political Thought; Associate Professor School of Kinesiology & Health Science, York University
- Dr. Susan Breau, Dean of Law, Professor, University of Victoria

Executive Summary

The CSPT, with its MA and PhD concentration programs, is rightly viewed by faculty and administrators alike as possessing a remarkable academic profile. The presence of CSPT is, as we were told by a senior administrator, a “jewel in the crown” of the University of Victoria. We concur. Its sterling reputation, forged over 33 years, is reflected in its ability to continue to attract excellent students across Canada and beyond. Its commitment to interdisciplinarity is one of the ways CSPT functions as a leader in the university of the future. Drawing as it does from eight different programs, CSPT is the axis of a rich and diverse intellectual conversation not only at the University of Victoria, but also is a rarity in Canada; there are perhaps only two or three graduate programs like it elsewhere in the country. The depth and breadth of its courses, the liveliness of its Colloquium, and of its annual student conference are indices of the kinds of excitement and interest the programs continue to generate. In this respect, CSPT should be considered very much part of the University of Victoria’s “brand” precisely because of its exceptional and international contribution to the academy. University administrators, students, and faculty alike were univocal in their recognition of the value that CSPT brings in qualitative and quantitative terms to the University of Victoria. The reviewers contend that CSPT is not additive in its pedagogy; rather, it is transformative. The rigour of its foundation courses and the variety of its seminars point to a curriculum that is both dynamic and responsive to the changing field of theoretical and philosophical research; the Candidacy Examinations and the Problématique Examinations are the pledge and seal of the program’s commitment to forms of historical and contemporary thought and inquiry.

The reviewers contend that the MA and PhD programs of the CSPT fulfill all the expectations relevant to being an excellent and valuable graduate concentration program. We have also commented above on aspects of the program, including how it functions within the University of Victoria, with a view to which improvements or enhancements could be considered by CSPT, in collaboration with its budgetary faculty (Faculty of Social Sciences) and FGS. We have indicated issues about which the CSPT, Social Sciences, and FGS should consider in order to ensure that the program can continue to grow and flourish.

We have provided some recommendations, which we have summarized below:

- 1) Consider modifying the structure and organization of PhD Candidacy and Problématique Examinations;
- 2) Consider making CSPT more visible: it should have a presence at Convocation;
- 3) Consider modifying the program’s website; include celebrations of published research of students and faculty alike; create a page listing students’ theses and their supervisors; for the purposes of recruitment, dedicate a page to CSPT alumni with “Where Are They Now?” information (graduate placement/ non-academic employment);

- 4) Consider restoring funding for two-year MAs. Currently, CSPT Conc MA students receive one year of funding. It is becoming rare for current MA students to remain at University of Victoria, choosing to pursue PhDs elsewhere. CSPT has been put in the position of streamlining their 2-year MA requirements to one year, but Sociology, for example, has retained its two-year MA. Meanwhile, English has chosen to pursue the one-year MA, and History has also embraced the non-thesis option. These discrepancies should be addressed.
- 5) CSPT has responded to this difficulty nimbly by creating a “summer theory school” and a capstone paper, but the reviewers feel that a second year of MA funding must be restored in order to protect the rigour and value of the program. The reviewers recognize that the revision of the MA could be retained, but that the two-year MA with thesis should remain part of its roster of offerings.
- 6) Consider providing stable, base funding to CSPT; currently, we understand that CSPT relies exclusively on discretionary funding;
- 7) Consider increasing CSPT’s funding; \$30,000/annum is regrettably insufficient, given a) how much the program contributes to the university and b) that its faculty complement has virtually doubled over the past nine years;
- 8) Create a specifically-designated space for CSPT and its students