

Beyond combining two cultures: The Arts & Science Program at 40

Elizabeth Marquis and Jean Wilson, Arts & Science Program, McMaster University.

Contacts: beth.marquis@mcmaster.ca and wilsonj@mcmaster.ca

ABSTRACT

The Arts & Science Program, an interdisciplinary undergraduate program that emphasizes inquiry-based learning, social engagement, and the development of essential scholarly skills, celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2021–22. Following the example of *Combining Two Cultures* (Jenkins, Ferrier, & Ross, 2004), and informed by published reflections and our own experiences in the program, this chapter describes key developments in Arts & Science’s recent history and reflects critically on some of its successes as well as on tensions and challenges it continues to navigate. While the chapter focuses on the particular trajectory of this unique program, which has been an important part of McMaster’s teaching and learning community for four decades, its broader relevance emerges as we attend to significant questions of interdisciplinary education and imagine possibilities and priorities for the future.

KEYWORDS

Arts & Science Program, interdisciplinary education, inquiry-based learning, socially engaged education, intellectual community

In his 2011 letter to the McMaster community, *Forward with Integrity*, former McMaster President Dr. Patrick Deane describes the Arts & Science Program as one of the university’s “flagship programs,” “a determined attempt to escape the constraints of a discipline- or department-centred curriculum and to create a program that would effectively answer by example the concern that undergraduate education cannot thrive in a research-intensive university” (p. 6). Indeed, the Artsci program, which celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2021–22, has become well known for its unique approach to interdisciplinary education and for fostering a community of learning that resists instrumentality and emphasizes scholarly inquiry, critical and creative thinking, and social engagement. While previous publications—most notably the volume *Combining Two Cultures* (Jenkins, Ferrier, & Ross, 2004)—have detailed Arts & Science’s early history and reflected on some of its successes and challenges, the program’s 40th anniversary offers a valuable opportunity to take stock of more recent developments, priorities, and possibilities. As such, this chapter considers how the program has evolved, especially over the past decade, while maintaining its defining features, and engages critically with the example of interdisciplinary undergraduate education it currently offers. To support this investigation, we draw on published material, including faculty, student, and alumni

reflections, as well as on our experiences as instructors in the program and, in Jean Wilson's case, as director of Arts & Science (2011-22).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As detailed in *Combining Two Cultures*, the Arts & Science Program emerged in response to the 1979 "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on a General Studies Programme Leading to a New Baccalaureate," which received enthusiastic endorsement by Senate and fell under the purview of the vice-president academic. The Campbell Committee, as it came to be known, had been authorized by the University's 1977 strategic plan, which took seriously growing concerns since the late 1960s about the limitations of siloed disciplinary studies at the undergraduate level and recommended the creation of a program "that would assist students seriously to consider and come to know in some depth what the arts and sciences are and how they function, or can be made to function, in society" (King, 2004, p. 12). The Campbell Committee, in turn, envisioned a general studies program that would, among other things, "provide a moderate degree of specialization in a discipline," but also "develop the relations and connections among different fields of knowledge" by "using a mix of existing and new courses" (Jenkins, 2004, p. 18) and provide students with "the essential techniques for dealing with various kinds of information" (King, 2004, p. 12). Led by founding Director Herb Jenkins, who was charged with designing a specific program, a planning council with representation from four McMaster Faculties was formed. The council embarked on crafting a detailed proposal for a program aimed at offering students "a first-rate liberal education" (Jenkins, 1984, p. 5), wisely accepting that its initial task was "to agree on the philosophy" and objectives of the program (Jenkins, 2004, p. 20). Over the course of the 1979–80 academic year, as it determined the program's goals, curricular structure, and myriad particulars, the planning council consulted widely; engaged in frank, vigorous, critical debate in meetings of General Faculty, Undergraduate Council, and Senate; and remained focused and organized. Following Senate approval in 1980, further hard work was required to prepare to welcome the first cohort of students in September 1981.

Like others (Jenkins, 2004; King, 2004), we perceive several key factors in the establishment of what former McMaster President Alvin A. Lee calls "one of this University's finest achievements in undergraduate education" (Wilson & Wells, 2020, p. 44), including the creative support and intellectual engagement of senior leadership, university-wide critical deliberations and respect for process, and the judiciousness and dedication of those responsible for implementing the program (on the "commitment and genius" of the founding director, see King, 2004, p. 13). Leslie J. King, who became vice-president academic in 1979, recalls that he, Arthur Bourns (McMaster president, 1972–80), and Alvin Lee (vice-president academic, 1974–79 and McMaster president, 1980–90), invited Herb Jenkins to "give shape and content" (Wilson & Wells, 2020, p. 19) to the proposal for a new baccalaureate degree. Thus, Herb Jenkins was approached by a high-level trio indeed, but we note that it was a trio of colleagues, not managers. He acknowledges that he "had not seen the invitation coming," but had felt "the absence of a lively, social, intellectual community arguing about a wide spectrum of issues" and "could not pass up on this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" to "foster such a

community” and to “shape a curriculum for liberal education within a research-intensive university” (Jenkins, 2004, p. 18).

From the outset, this curriculum was guided by a conviction in the importance of socially engaged, inquiry-based learning—a conviction which Jenkins (2004) notes was informed by existing literature (including work by Bell and Schwab) and which has received further support from more recent scholarship detailing the benefits and limitations of various approaches to inquiry-based learning (e.g., Archer-Kuhn et al., 2020; Levy, 2012; Justice et al., 2009; Spronken-Smith & Walker, 2010). As such, one of the defining objectives set by the planning council was that program students would become “accomplished in the ways of scholarly investigation into current issues of public concern” (Jenkins, 2004, p. 22). The council also agreed that the program should “aim to provide a balanced and substantial introduction to arts and sciences, and to develop skills in writing, speaking, and . . . critical and quantitative reasoning” (pp. 22–23). In fierce resistance to the “equation of breadth with superficiality,” the council insisted that the program be academically rigorous, placed at the honours level, and designed to attract highly motivated students “willing to undertake studies in a wide spectrum of disciplines” (Jenkins, 2004, p. 23). These program goals remain largely unchanged to this day. To enable the achievement of the objectives of the innovative, broad-based program that they were shaping, the planners developed a curriculum that included a series of core Arts & Science courses specifically designed for the program, which were combined with a small number of courses available from other departments as well as with ample opportunities for students to pursue electives or a specialization. Specifics of this curriculum and its development up to the mid-2000s are detailed in Jenkins, Ferrier, and Ross (2004), as are other features of the program, such as its deliberately small size and the ways in which the latter supports “a vibrant community of sharing and learning” (Warner, 2004, p. 270).

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT (2011-2022)

The program continued in a steady state for many years, but by 2010 key retirements had exposed the need for substantial faculty, curricular, and administrative renewal. Over the past decade, Artsci faculty, staff, students, and alumni, in conversation with many others at and beyond McMaster, have worked energetically to expand the vision and clarify the potential of what has been recognized as a unique interdisciplinary program of more than local significance (see, e.g., Bradshaw, 2012; Evans & Risdon, 2014), despite its size. Indeed, as throughout its history, Arts & Science remains intentionally small. While the target enrolment has grown to its current level of 70 first-year students, this still limited size remains an important program feature that “facilitates close relationships between students both academically and personally” and allows for “small class and tutorial sizes [that] promote lively interaction between professors and students” (McMaster University, n.d.-c).

The current curricular structure of the [B.Arts Sc. \(Honours\)](#) degree maintains students’ historical options of using their considerable elective room to explore a variety of individual interests, to pursue a disciplinary or interdisciplinary minor, or to earn a full honours specialization by enrolling in a [combined honours program](#) in Arts & Science and a particular discipline. At the same time, over the past 10 years, not only have the latter two options been

enhanced by the development of new interdisciplinary minors—collaborative ventures in which Arts & Science played a major role—and by the increase in the number of combined honours programs to over 30 subject areas, but there have been significant modifications to the core curriculum as well.

Curricular developments

In their first year, all Arts & Science students are required to take a series of courses designed specifically for the program, as well as two half-year science courses offered by other departments and, as of 2017–18, a half-year course cross-listed with the Indigenous Studies Program (ISP). The introduction of the Indigenous studies course reflects the importance of foregrounding Indigenous knowledges and practices within university curricula and contexts, and of further engaging students in learning about the history and ongoing realities of settler colonialism (Pete, 2016; Truth & Reconciliation Commission, 2015). This significant curricular change resulted from a series of thoughtful and creative discussions with colleagues in the Faculty of Social Sciences, in which the Indigenous Studies Program is housed, including outgoing and incoming ISP Directors Rick Monture and Vanessa Watts, Bonnie Freeman (ISP, School of Social Work), School of Social Work Director Christina Sinding, and outgoing and incoming Associate Deans of Social Sciences James Gillett and Lori Campbell. Sparked by conversations in 2016 between Jean Wilson and James Gillett, the process was fully supported by Dean of Social Sciences Jeremiah Hurley, who along with the others exemplified the creative leadership noted in our discussion of the genesis of the Arts & Science Program above. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 2015 *Calls to Action* provided the impetus to respond to a clear, if largely only casually articulated, desire on the part of Arts & Science students and faculty to engage in what has been described as “reconciliation indigenization” (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018, pp. 221–223). A new, required course in Indigenous studies as part of the integrated Arts & Science curriculum would facilitate consideration of, among other things, “what counts as knowledge” and how “Indigenous knowledges and European-derived knowledges [should] be reconciled” (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018, p. 219). When resource issues (ISP was still building its faculty complement) presented an impediment to the original idea of a specially designed course in Indigenous studies for first-year Arts & Science students, Jean Wilson and Vanessa Watts, along with Dean Hurley and Associate Dean Campbell, worked out a proposal for a cross-listed course, completion of which would also allow Arts & Science students to enter the new Combined Honours in Arts & Science and Indigenous Studies Program, co-designed by the two respective directors and approved in that same year’s Undergraduate Council and Senate curricular cycle.

In order to make space for the new Indigenous studies course in the tight Level I curriculum, it was necessary to reduce one of the full-year courses to a single semester offering. In 2014–15, the required full-year course in writing and argumentation had already been divided into two half-year courses to ensure that adequate time was devoted to each of these skills. At the same time, the signature Level I Inquiry course, which had previously engaged students in exploring issues of injustice and inequity in the Global South, was reconceptualized to focus on “global challenges.” This change was made to acknowledge critiques of

“development” discourse (see Ziai, 2017) more explicitly and extensively, and to encourage consideration of both the global nature of injustice and a wider range of its specific manifestations. While in 2017–18, it was the Global Challenges Inquiry class that was reduced to a half-year offering to make room for the Indigenous studies course, it has now been restored to a full-year course, which will continue to prioritize inquiry skills development. Instead, the Level I Practices of Knowledge course—one that in 2013 had been introduced as a substantial reworking of the existing Western Civilization course—has become a half-year offering, in what stands to be a generative pairing with the cross-listed course that introduces students to Indigenous ways of knowing. The final required Level I Artsci course, a full-year calculus offering designed specifically for the program, has not been substantially altered, though it, like all courses, is reviewed and updated as necessary by the instructors teaching it.

In the second-year curriculum, the long-standing required course Modern Western Thought has been redesigned as Social and Political Thought. Although the revised offering still focuses on writers from the “West,” it challenges students more explicitly to think through how particular texts might help us conceive, understand, and work toward ethical, just, and equitable societies in the contemporary moment. Alongside this course, students continue to take specially designed Artsci courses in physics, economics, and statistics, as well as electives of their choosing. In Levels III and IV, in addition to the specially designed Artsci courses in literature (see Wilson, 2012) and technology and society, cross-listed and independent study options, electives of their choosing, and, in their graduating year, the honours undergraduate thesis, students select from a large list at least three upper-level Artsci inquiry courses, some offered annually, some in alternate years, almost all of which have been developed in the last decade. The latter process of curricular renewal has included the active participation of not only faculty and staff, but also students and alumni. As a glance at their titles suggests, these courses,¹ ranging from Diversity and Human Rights Inquiry, Research and Creative Writing, and Engaging Hamilton Inquiry to How Science Speaks to Power, Medical Humanities Inquiry, and Alumni Experience Inquiry, open up opportunities for cutting-edge disciplinary and interdisciplinary inquiry as well as, in some cases, experiential and community-engaged learning.

Along with the many new upper-level inquiry courses, the most striking development since 2011 has been the launch of new experiential learning initiatives in collaboration with departments and Faculties across campus. One-unit offerings, such as Urban Placemaking, Decision-Making and Judgement, Winter as Place, and Deep Skills Development, as well as the two-unit Movement and Integration course, developed in response to a research paper authored by Arts & Science students and a faculty member (Wilson et al., 2016) and open to students embarking on or returning from academic exchange and international students at McMaster on exchange, grew out of the Arts & Science and Integrated Science Programs’ collaboration on a series of cross-listed Interdisciplinary Experiences courses introduced in 2013–14, which set a precedent for subsequent university-wide experiential offerings. At a broader level, the Arts & Science Program’s collaborative work on interdisciplinary minors in sustainability, community engagement, and Latin American and Latinx studies constitutes a major contribution to the fostering of interdisciplinary studies at McMaster and exemplifies its

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role as a catalyst and innovator in undergraduate education.

Other program initiatives

The past 10 years have also seen the development of initiatives that complement the program's curriculum and enhance the community of learning it fosters. In 2013, for instance, a Global Justice Hub, housed in the Arts & Science Program, was formed to support and engage students, faculty, and alumni interested and/or involved in global justice efforts. The hub hosted events such as a lecture by Dr. Richard Heinzl, founder of the Canadian Chapter of Médecins Sans Frontières, and two full-day workshops, which featured keynote addresses by McMaster faculty (Dr. Eugène Nshimiyimana and Dr. Bonny Ibhawoh) and opportunities for group discussion. It also fostered the development of a new upper-level Artsci inquiry offering, Global Justice Inquiry, a course open to students from across campus (see Marquis & Tam, 2015). In addition to offering an opportunity for Arts & Science students and their McMaster peers to engage in scholarly inquiry into issues of public concern, this course has been a site for pedagogical scholarship co-developed and conducted by program instructors and students (Marquis et al., 2018; Ijaz & Sergeant, 2022).

In 2013–14, Arts & Science Program faculty, staff, and students collaborated with the MacPherson Institute (then the McMaster Institute for Innovation and Excellence in Teaching and Learning) to develop and pilot the Student Partners Program (SPP). The SPP, which sees faculty/staff and students work together as partners on teaching and learning initiatives, first involved 13 Arts & Science students who partnered primarily with faculty and staff from the MacPherson Institute in paid, extracurricular positions. A concurrently developed Artsci course, Experiential Project in Teaching and Learning, also gave students an opportunity to pursue a teaching and learning project in partnership with faculty/staff for course credit. Given the success of the SPP's first year and the findings of collaboratively developed research involving program participants (Marquis et al., 2016), the program was subsequently refined and expanded, and now involves faculty, staff, and students from across campus (see McKenny & Anderson, 2019; Chukwu & Jones, 2020; Foran et al., 2020; Marquis, Black, et al., 2020; Marquis et al., 2017; Pearlston et al., 2020). Arts & Science students have continued to be active participants, contributing significantly to a range of pedagogical projects, serving as student co-editors of the *International Journal for Students as Partners*, and co-authoring presentations and articles connected to their work (e.g., Acai et al., 2017; Brown et al., 2020; Johnstone et al., 2018; Marquis, Power, & Yin, 2019; Marquis, Jayaratnam, et al., 2019; Marquis, Wojcik, et al., 2020; Marquis, Guitman, et al., 2021; Marquis, de Bie, et al., 2021; Ntem et al., 2020).

Other significant developments include the McMaster Discovery Program, an initiative piloted in 2011 in collaboration with partners at McMaster and in the wider Hamilton community, which offers a free, non-credit university course for Hamiltonians “who want to experience university in a supportive and welcoming learning community” (McMaster University, n.d.-a). Arts & Science faculty, staff, students, and alumni, involved in myriad ways to deliver the program, continue to be enlivened by their participation in this unique teaching and learning environment. The Arts & Science Common Reading Program is an initiative that has increasingly exceeded initial expectations of providing an opportunity for incoming Arts &

Science students to come together in a shared reading experience and in the past decade has grown to provide remarkably generative interactions between visiting authors and students in all levels of the program. Writers such as Lawrence Hill, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Richard Wagamese, Arun Lakra, Samantha Nutt, Jeff Ho, and Shyam Selvadurai have engaged with students in lively Q & As, drama workshops, play readings, critical discussions, and even career talks that resonate with students in all stages of their undergraduate studies. Two further program developments include the launch of *Aletheia*, a student-led, peer-reviewed Arts & Science journal, and the New World of Work Forum, which is “designed to provide hands-on project management experience” to students selected to serve on the management team as well as to bring in speakers (most commonly Arts & Science alumni) to interact with current students and “reflect on the world of work in the 21st century” (McMaster University, n.d.-b).

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

In *Combining Two Cultures*, Jenkins, Ferrier, and Ross (2004) collect a range of comments and reflections from Arts & Science students, alumni, and faculty, which speak to their experiences in the program, and, in the case of many alumni, their lives since graduating. While Ferrier (2004b) notes the editors were careful not to ask contributors for testimonials, and while some concerns and tensions are raised, many of the comments provided illustrate the perceived successes of the program and the important place it holds in the lives of members of its community. A similar pattern can be found in the reflections offered by more recent alumni, included on the program’s website.² Zsuzsi Fodor, for instance, writes:

Being in the Arts & Science Program was about learning how to approach the questions to which there are no easy answers; being part of a learning community that challenged and cherished me; and figuring out my passions and the ways in which I would contribute to life on this planet. It is a program that nurtured me as a thinker and global citizen, while incubating a community that continues to have a meaningful presence in my life years after graduation.

This comment, like many other alumni reflections, points to the ongoing realization of some of the program’s key features, including its cultivation of a vibrant community of learning—one that Aaron Jacobs refers to as “unusually welcoming and intellectually-oriented”—and its emphasis on developing students’ capacities to ask and explore complex questions of social importance. Mary Koziol acknowledges that “the Artsci community continues to be a source of inspiration to challenge the status quo and ask, what if?,” and Gali Katznelson appreciates the opportunities the program provides “to explore, to question, to learn to embrace uncertainty, and to laugh along with our exceptionally talented and caring community.”

Alumni reflections also commonly point to the realization of other core program objectives, such as developing students’ capacity to work within diverse disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts and supporting the growth of their communication and critical reasoning skills:

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Arts & Science gave me the opportunity to explore diverse interests. In the process, I discovered a particular field of study that drew me most, and which was continually supported and questioned by the different ways of thinking and knowing that I learned along the way. (Arakel Minassian)

I was able to gain extensive knowledge and tailor my undergraduate experience to explore my interests. By providing this exposure, and coupling it with a focus on communication and critical thinking skills, the program has established a strong foundation for my postgraduate education as an MD/PhD. (Saad Syed)

The community in the Arts & Science Program is unlike any other. The support of the professors, staff, and students make it the ideal atmosphere in which to explore new and different academic disciplines, to develop critical thinking skills, and to embark on the journey of becoming a lifelong learner. (Pawan Aulakh)

While we of course do not wish to suggest that such reflections offer a full assessment of Arts & Science and its progress, they do provide heartening indications that the program continues, in many respects and cases, to meet its defining goals and to offer a meaningful educational experience for its students. At the same time, following the lead of *Combining Two Cultures*, we want to highlight ongoing challenges facing the program alongside the above-mentioned indicators of success. These issues for continued consideration, which resonate with questions that might be of relevance to those working in other educational contexts, are themselves informed by published alumni and faculty reflections, as well as our own experiences in the program and consideration of the recent history described above.

Curriculum pressures/possibilities

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges for an interdisciplinary program like Arts & Science is the need to provide students with meaningful opportunities to work in and across a range of disciplines, while still acknowledging the finite space available in the curriculum, the importance of enabling students to discover and explore their unique interests, and the potential demands of a complex, wide-ranging course of study on students, faculty, and staff. Jenkins (2004) notes that the program from the outset was concerned with “breaking the association of ‘liberal’ with ‘superficial’” (p. 23). Arguably, it has continued in this effort throughout its history by emphasizing depth and challenge within a wide range of courses, and by questioning, as Jenkins, Ferrier, et al. (2004) put it, the notion that “specialization offers a royal road to mental discipline” (p. 286), while nonetheless providing opportunities for students with particular disciplinary interests to explore those further. This attention to creating rich, meaningfully challenging courses that span a variety of subject areas does, however, make for a dense curriculum that can feel stressful to students. While we continue to believe in the pedagogical value of appropriate challenge, it is also important to reflect on this issue continually and ensure that expectations and workloads remain reasonable.

A related area for ongoing reflection is the question of which areas of disciplinary/interdisciplinary study should be foregrounded and/or required in the curriculum. Although the basic curricular structure has proven solid over time, Ferrier (2004a) notes some changes that were implemented in the program's first 20 or more years, and we have detailed further developments above, including the addition of a required Indigenous studies course in Level I and the introduction of new upper-level inquiry courses. While these are necessary updates that enrich the curriculum and begin to fill some of its potential gaps, it remains true that there are several other significant areas of study that might be (and, in some cases, have been) suggested as important to include in a liberal arts education in the 21st century. One particular topic for ongoing consideration is the extent to which program developments successfully and meaningfully respond to the feedback, noted by Warner (2004) and Evans and Risdon (2014), that the program could further engage with issues, thinkers, and epistemologies from outside the "West." While several changes have been made in response to this observation, some of which are detailed above, it will also be important for Arts & Science, like all academic programs, to continue to assess how effectively it responds to calls to counter Eurocentrism, white supremacy, and other forms of injustice within the academy, recognizing that this can require more than simply diversifying reading lists and/or implementing required courses (Brookfield, 2007; Gaudry, 2016; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2019; Louie et al., 2017; Kuokkanen, 2016; Pete, 2016; Shain et al., 2021).

Pedagogy and program goals

Jenkins, Ferrier, et al. (2004) argue that the "approach to pedagogy [in the Arts & Science Program] rests on the broad conviction that teaching and learning in the university should be a shared enterprise among students and between students and teachers" (p. 283). In our experience, this description continues to hold, and likewise continues to serve the program's overarching objectives. Nevertheless, program instructors, not only individually, but also collectively, are dedicating time and attention to a thoughtful consideration of ways in which we might refine our specific pedagogical choices such that they best support curricular goals and broader social imperatives. For instance, given the program's emphasis on critical thinking and scholarly investigation of issues of social concern, instructors of the first-year Inquiry course have grappled with how best to encourage students to explore social challenges in a nuanced and just manner while nevertheless avoiding relativism, and with supporting students to embrace complexity without becoming defeated or overwhelmed. Similar issues have been discussed in relation to other program courses (e.g., Ijaz & Sergeant, 2022; Marquis et al., 2018) and continue to remain important sites of pedagogical consideration for the program as a whole. Of course, this is just one set of relevant concerns. Reflection about the ways in which specific pedagogical choices support other program goals (e.g., the development of writing, argumentation, and/or quantitative reasoning skills) is also ongoing, and over the last 3 years has become increasingly intentional in a series of faculty workshops and student focus groups facilitated by educational developers from the MacPherson Institute. This work has been enhanced by consultations with colleagues from other universities interested in interdisciplinary programs and initiatives in their own contexts, as, for instance, have taken

place in 2-day visits in 2019 and 2022 by Université de Montréal instructors and administrators.

Program size

The relatively small size of the Arts & Science Program is repeatedly mentioned in *Combining Two Cultures* as a key contributor to the community of learning the program fosters. In our experience, this program size continues to support the formation of a stimulating, supportive, and respectfully challenging community, and enables meaningful enactment of the collaborative, student-centred pedagogy described above. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine realizing some of the key features and successes of the program with groups much larger than our current target intake. Nonetheless, this small size is not without its drawbacks. For example, the limited number of program staff, faculty, and students strains our capacity to support and sustain the number of exciting initiatives that are proposed and, in many cases, initiated, such as the development of a robust communications plan to help the program further diversify its pool of applicants. For, indeed, there are vital questions about the accessibility of this limited-enrolment program. Warner (2004) and Jenkins, Ferrier, et al. (2004) point to the need for continued attention to such matters, noting several groups that appear to be underrepresented in the program community despite its diversity. While some steps have been taken to respond to this concern (e.g., review of supplementary application procedures), it remains an essential area for further review and potential action going forward.

CONCLUSION

As we write this chapter, the world continues to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, and universities grapple with what a “post-COVID” educational experience could entail. While we, like so many others, have certainly experienced the difficulties and losses attached to teaching and learning during the pandemic, we have also been uplifted and inspired by the spirit of collaboration, support, and critical engagement that continues to characterize the Arts & Science community. We look forward in coming years to maintaining such strengths, while continuing to work with program faculty, staff, students, and alumni to respond to tensions and challenges such as those we discuss in this chapter. Doing so is itself in the spirit of the program and its goals, as the following reflection from Artsci grad Sam Colbert reminds us:

The program encouraged me to be a curious learner, an engaged citizen, and an open-minded person. The most enduring lesson came at the start of a first-year inquiry course: if you think you know the answer, you haven’t asked enough questions. The courses prepared me to challenge the things I thought I knew, even when it was uncomfortable. All that is (or should be) a prerequisite to a responsible and satisfying life and career.

In addition to supporting such curious and critical thinking in program students, it behooves us to continue to take an open-minded, socially conscious, scholarly approach to our work in and on the program itself.

NOTES

1. Upper-level inquiry courses offered over the last decade include: Education Inquiry; How Science Speaks to Power; Alumni Experience Inquiry; Theatre, Self, and Social Development; Exploring Hamilton Inquiry; Global Justice Inquiry; Trees and Their Histories; Environmental Education Inquiry; Legal Inquiry; Scientific Research Inquiry; Research and Creative Writing; Climate Change Inquiry; Infinity; Diversity and Human Rights Inquiry; Media Inquiry; Medical Humanities Inquiry; Contemporary Intellectual History Inquiry; Environmental Policy Inquiry; History of Science Inquiry; Visual Culture Inquiry; Digital Society and Public Policy; Selected Topics in Inquiry (e.g., Interfaces: Our Technology, Ourselves; Speculative Fictions and Who We Are).
2. This quotation, like other comments from Arts & Science graduates, is drawn from the program website, where many additional reflections from alumni, faculty, students, and others can also be found. See the "[Alumni Corner](#)," "[News](#)," and "[Why Arts & Science?](#)" pages, as well as the "Commemorative Booklet" (located on the "[Faculty](#)" page) in honour of founding Director, Dr. Herb Jenkins, compiled following his death on 5 Sept. 2020 and containing contributions from a variety of people involved in Arts & Science in each of the 4 decades of the program.

NOTE ON CONTRIBUTORS

Elizabeth Marquis is an associate professor in the Arts & Science Program and the School of the Arts at McMaster. In recent years, her research has focused primarily on teaching and learning in postsecondary education and includes several projects conducted in partnership with Arts & Science students.

Jean Wilson has taught in the Arts & Science Program throughout her 30-year career at McMaster and served as Arts & Science director (2011-22). The recipient of several teaching awards, she has extensive teaching, research, and academic administrative experience in comparative literature and interdisciplinary studies.

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