Final Assessment Report for the 2022-2023 Cyclical Review of the Game Design and Development Program

INTRODUCTION

In accordance with Laurier's Institutional Quality Assurance Procedures (Policy 2.1), this Final Assessment Report provides a summary of the cyclical program review process for the Honours Bachelor of Arts in Game Design and Development, prepared by the Quality Assurance Office, along with an identification of strengths of the program(s) under review authored by the Dean of the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences. All recommendations made by the external review committee in their report are listed, followed by a summary of the programs' response, and the decanal response. Recommendations prioritized are listed in the Implementation Plan, with those not being prioritized for implementation noted as well.

The Final Assessment Report is reviewed and approved by the Provost and Vice-President: Academic. Following completion of the Final Assessment Report, it is approved by the Program Review Sub-Committee and Senate Academic Planning Committee. Approval dates are listed at the end of this report. Final Assessment Reports are submitted to Senate as part of an annual report on cyclical reviews, and to the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance for information. Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Reports are posted on the public-facing page of the Quality Assurance Office website.

The Implementation Plan for the recommendations prioritized in the Final Assessment Report can be found at the end of this report. Units will submit their first Implementation Report two years following approval of the Final Assessment Report at Senate. The Implementation Report will include comments from the unit on actions taken toward the completion of recommendations, comments from the relevant Dean(s) related to the progress made, and comments from the Program Review Sub-Committee, which is responsible for approving the Implementation Report and deciding if further reports are required. The Implementation Report is submitted to the Senate Academic Planning Committee for information.

SUMMARY OF REVIEW PROCESS

This was the first cyclical program review for the Game Design and Development program, which began in 2015.

The Self-Study was co-authored by Dr. Scott Nicholson and Dr. Steve Wilcox, along with assistance by Judy Jakusz (former Program Assistant). Full-time faculty in the program provided input on several sections of the document. In addition to the Self-Study (Volume I), the program also submitted a copy of faculty curricula vita (Volume II), a volume of course syllabi, and a list of proposed external reviewers (Volume III). A draft of the Self-Study was reviewed by the Quality Assurance Office and the Dean of the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences prior to submission of the final version.

Following Laurier's IQAP, the external review committee for the review consisted of two external reviewers from outside the university, and one internal reviewer from Laurier but outside of the unit. The review committee was selected by the Program Review Sub-Committee on November 4, 2022, and a virtual external review took place between Monday, February 27th and Thursday, March 2nd, 2023.

The review committee consisted of **Prof. Bruce Gillespie** from the User Experience Design Program at Wilfrid Laurier, **Dr. Jason Hawreliak** from the Department of Digital Humanities at Brock University, **Dr. Emma Westecott** from the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences at OCAD University, and **Dr. Paul Davarsi**, CEO and Co-Founder of Gold Bug Interactive, as an industry representative. During the external review, the committee had virtual meetings with the following individuals and groups:

- Dr. Heidi Northwood, Interim Provost and Vice-President: Academic, and Dr. Mary Wilson, Vice-Provost: Teaching and Learning

- Dr. Bruce McKay, Dean of the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences

- Dr. Scott Nicholson, Game Design and Development Program Coordinator

- Game Design and Development Program faculty

- Undergraduate students from the Game Design and Development Program

- Ms. Angela Jadric, Program Assistant

- Ms. Charlotte Innerd, Head of Collections and Acquisitions, and Ms. Michelle Goodridge, Liaison Librarian

- Ms. Nela Petkovic, Chief Information Officer

- Ms. Sally Heath, Manager: Academic Program Development and Review and Ms. Jessica Blondin, Executive Assistant

The review committee submitted their completed report on April 5, 2023. The executive summary from the report, and its recommendations, are provided below.

External Reviewers' Report Executive Summary

It is important to underscore that Laurier's Game Design and Development program is, in many ways, ahead of its time. First, the video games industry has emerged as the most lucrative and important entertainment category, with US revenues exceeding those of film and music combined. Additionally, the analog games industry is burgeoning, as there have never been more card games, board games, escape rooms, and role-playing games being created and played globally. Many scholars argue that the participatory, social, and engaging nature of games, whether digital or analog, capture our unique historical sensibilities and constitute a vital artistic expression of an interactive digital culture, much like the motion picture is an expression of the industrial ethos. In many ways, games both capture and inform our prevailing social and cultural paradigms.

Many industries and organizations that seek better alignment with the socio-cultural moment deliberately and inadvertently seek to adopt what amount to game-like systems, whether using gamification to incentivize

behaviours, simulations for training, or dynamic systems of engagement. Games also anticipate and embody our dominant technology paradigms: AI, immersive environments, "the metaverse," virtual reality, augmented reality, social media, and automation all converge in games. Games are innately multidisciplinary, manifesting in manifold material, digital, and embodied forms and with the ability to express any content in a dynamic and participatory fashion. Thus, understanding the design and operations of game systems is a skill that transfers to virtually every industry, including education, business, government, marketing, and health care to name a few. Despite these powerful sociocultural currents, games continue to be trivialized, vilified, and misunderstood. Much of the world has yet to connect the dots. Thus, games are not only vitally relevant, but pervasively transferable.

Second, the program's focus on social impact is also timely. The Gen Z category, which accounts for the cohorts of incoming and current students, has been found to be significantly engaged and impassioned by social justice issues, climate change, identity politics, and unpacking ideologies. As we struggle to make sense and attempt to repair a deeply wounded world, games offer the potential to make a genuine difference. Unlike the spectatorship of reading and film, for example, games are interactive and demand action on behalf of the player. They persuade through doing, demonstrate consequences to actions, offer agency, and can recruit any number of geographically dislocated actors to work towards a common goal. However, the empirical research on whether games for change and serious games are genuinely making a difference is inconclusive and has a long way to go; it is, thus, a fertile and relevant field of study that must be approached through a critical lens. Regardless of whether games are currently achieving their potential for impact or not, it is inevitable that they will have an increasing role in this area due to their sociocultural centrality. Their study then, again, is relevant to the operations of the world in the foreseeable future.

In sum, the GDD program is timely, relevant, and offers paths to future employment that extend far beyond the horizon of the video games industry. We see an enormous opportunity to fine-tune the program in such a way to better emphasize and leverage the transferability and relevance of the skills and knowledges it teaches, with benefits to the university, the student body, and society at large. However, as was made clear in this review, the program has been suffocated by a series of external institutional and circumstantial factors that have impaired its ability to flourish. Some of these include the break with Conestoga College, the pandemic, the program's physical location, and institutional bureaucracy. While there are a number of elements that can be improved within the program itself, which we have identified and made corresponding recommendations, the largest obstacles to the program's success are factors outside of faculty members' control. Some of our findings don't only bear on the GDD program, but also point to aspects of Laurier's wider operations that may benefit from being reviewed and reconsidered.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES

The External Reviewers' Report included 23 recommendations to improve the quality of the Game Design and Development Program. All recommendations have been listed verbatim below, followed by a summary of the program's response, and the decanal response.

Recommendation #1: Require applicants to write and submit a short Statement of Interest for admission into the program.

Faculty Priority: Medium
Upfront Cost: Low *Ongoing Cost:* Medium *Timeframe:* Short to investigate, Long to implement (2+ years).

Unit Response: We have considered doing this in the past, but were warned at that point that it might reduce the number of students joining the program. Our concern is the additional administrative overhead to review these statements. We are willing to work with Recruitment and Admissions to put a statement requirement in for the next admissions cycle as a trial, and will balance the time required by the program director with the benefits.

Decanal Response: A statement of interest has both pros and cons. On the one hand, as the reviewers noted, it may result in a better informed incoming class, and can be used quite powerfully in the context of prior learning assessment and recognition, which is especially valuable for non-traditional applicants. On the other hand, there is a significant administrative burden to reviewing the statements, and it would have to be decided how to objectively combine some balance of high school grades and objectively identifiable characteristics, personal and career interests, etc., from the statement of interest, to determine the final Y/N admission decision.

Recommendation #2: Highlight the GDD program's transferrable skills in its external marketing and messaging.

Faculty Priority: Medium
Upfront Cost: High *Ongoing Cost:* Low *Timeframe:* Medium (3-9 months)

Unit Response: FHSS is already adopting a transferable skills communication strategy, contributed to by GDD faculty (Wilcox provided the shortlist and definition of skills that FHSS admin now uses to guide all FHSS programs/departments on transferrable skills). There are suggestions by the reviewers about transferable skills that are specific to Game Design, and our plan will be to work with the Career Development Centre to get advice on what these skills are and use this process to also help Career Development Centre to understand what our students can do. We also are going to develop a new Professional Skills for Game Designers class that will help students understand how to talk about the skills they have learned to potential employers.

Decanal Response: I support the inclusion of transferable skills acquired during the Game Design degree in marketing and messaging.

Recommendation #2A: A new recruitment video should be filmed to capture the ethos of the program better, as well as its transferable skills and cross-curricular/multidisciplinary opportunities.

Faculty Priority: High
Upfront Cost: High *Ongoing Cost:* Low *Timeframe:* Medium (3-9 months)

Unit Response: We agree that there needs to be a new video. This can focus on the new marketing messages we developed over the last year with Marketing as well as the transferable skills list that we develop with Career Development Centre.

Decanal Response: I support the creation of a new and updated marketing video. FHSS has recently invested in a staff member to provide Faculty-specific recruitment and marketing supports that can assist with such an effort.

Recommendation #3: Target secondary schools with game design and adjacent programs for recruitment.

Faculty Priority: Low
Upfront Cost: Low *Ongoing Cost:* Medium *Timeframe:* Long

Unit Response: This is already underway with assistance from the Dean's office. The program director is speaking to two high schools in May and has started discussions to speak with another school in September. Assuming these are successful, we will plan on doing these visits annually. The challenge is that each of these talks has taken 4 months to plan, as there are many layers of people that have to be engaged multiple times to get to the point of being able to speak to a class. If there was a staff member who had connections with each school in the area and would help with making the match between a teacher and a faculty member, then assist in setting up the talk, this would be a more reasonable request. But the time it has taken to schedule these few talks has been considerable for a faculty member to undertake for a one-time talk. If there is a desire to reach beyond Brantford, that will require additional staff assistance.

Decanal Response: I support increasing the outreach to local high schools, while being mindful of needing to do this in a sustainable way, most notably from a faculty member workload perspective. FHSS has recently invested in a staff member to provide Faculty-specific recruitment and marketing supports that can help with such an effort.

Recommendation #4: Diversify the program's outreach and recruitment strategies without taxing faculty.

Faculty Priority: Disagree without additional staff support
Upfront Cost: Medium *Ongoing Cost:* Medium *Timeframe:* Long

Unit Response: The examples that are provided will all tax faculty time. While we agree that more outreach is valuable, we need to have additional staff support if WLU wishes to run some of these types of recruitment activities. There used to be a course release for the Program Director to run the BGNlab and run these types of events; without that course release, the support is not there for someone to manage these events. In other departments, there is a staff member who is tasked with creating external relationships and coordinating these events. Having some time of a staff member who forms relationships with external organizations and game

companies and organizes and markets these events would be needed for this recommendation to occur without taxing faculty.

Decanal Response: FHSS has recently invested in a staff member to provide Faculty-specific recruitment and marketing supports that can help with outreach efforts. Perhaps outreach events such as this could also be built into a senior course and thus the faculty member would receive workload credit for doing it, and the students in the course would get the experiential benefit of planning for and working with the next generation of game designers.

Recommendation #5: Introduce a high-enrolment first-year online course in game studies, gamification, or a related general-interest topic generally available across Laurier beyond the GDD program.

Faculty Priority: Medium
Upfront Cost: High *Ongoing Cost:* Low *Timeframe:* Long

Unit Response: We are in the process of developing DD101: Critical Play as an online high-enrollment course that will be open to all Laurier students, which will satisfy the intent of this recommendation

Decanal Response: Fully supportive of developing high enrolment service courses for non-majors.

Recommendation #6: Implement a mandatory, skills-inclusive first-year course in game engines and game art to introduce critical making practices and computational literacy early in the student experience.

Faculty Priority: High
Upfront Cost: Medium *Ongoing Cost:* Low *Timeframe:* Long

Unit Response: It is our plan to develop several foundational courses to replace Brantford Foundations. Two of these courses would be 2D/3D Design, which was taught in the past and is already in the Calendar, and a new class on Playful Programming through Game Engines.

Decanal Response: There is value in providing students a more robust introduction to the technical / digital aspects of game design as early as possible in the program. The number of net new courses (and sections) offered needs to, however, scale with enrolment growth in the program, as part of an effort to achieve financial sustainability – it thus, financially, would not make sense to replace all four Foundations courses at the same time with new game design courses.

Recommendation #7: Opt out of the four Brantford Foundations courses to allow the development of new program specific foundational courses.

Faculty Priority: Medium
Upfront Cost: Low   *Ongoing Cost:* Low   *Timeframe:* Medium (3-9 months)

Unit Response: It is our plan to replace the four Foundations classes with four classes that have been identified as needs in this review. Below are our tentative ideas, but we plan to undergo a more systemic curriculum review in the fall.
 - 2D/3D Design
 - Playful Programming through Game Engines
 - Professional Skills for Game Design
 - Narrative Design and Writing for Critically-Designed Games

Decanal Response: If new courses are added to the program they must be added in sync with the growth of majors and/or non-major service teaching course registrations. This could be accomplished more quickly by partnering with other programs to co-develop courses that would have broad appeal to (and be required for) students in multiple programs.

Recommendation #8: Begin to focus on student portfolios early in the program.

Faculty Priority: Medium
Upfront Cost: Medium   *Ongoing Cost:* High   *Timeframe:* Long

Unit Response: In the first years of the program, the Program Director worked with Teaching and Learning to explore an ePortfolio system through myLS. He developed a system for students to use based on the program outcomes that would allow students to connect assignments to their portfolio. After a few years, this system was discontinued, and he was told there was a committee examining portfolio solutions, but he never heard anything again. He will see if there is any movement on a university-provided portfolio system.

While we continue to mention portfolios from year one onward and suggest students add assignments to their portfolio, most students currently ignore these suggestions and do not create a portfolio until their 4th year. The new class on 'Professional Skills for Game Designers' will contain a significant portfolio component, and if we know our students have created a portfolio, we can then continue to request students add to the portfolio each year.

Decanal Response: The unit may consider engaging in conversations with the Career Centre about outsourcing this recommendation – perhaps the Career Centre can deliver an annual workshop on the importance of maintaining a portfolio, and the mechanisms available to do so.

Recommendation #9: Increase the size of project teams in the capstone course to improve the student experience and game quality.

Faculty Priority: Disagree
Upfront Cost: Low   *Ongoing Cost:* Low   *Timeframe:* Medium (3-9 months)

Unit Response: We have explored large, small, and individual group projects in the past with varying degrees of success. This suggestion would be appropriate if our focus was on the AAA industry where large teams are the norm, but not all of our students are interested in that career direction. Students who are planning to go into indie game development would be expected to have developed a variety of skills, which happens on a small team. Therefore, we plan to continue to allow a variety of team sizes to accommodate the different career goals that students have.

Decanal Response: The reviewers and the unit make excellent points here about the reasons motivating different sizes of groups in Game Design courses and projects. The approach of the unit here is preferred – a flexible approach to group size that centres the current and future needs of the students. This recommendation has not been prioritized in the Implementation Plan.

Recommendation #10: Offer more relevant electives inside and outside of the GDD program and provide clearer context about their usefulness.

Faculty Priority: Medium
Upfront Cost: High   *Ongoing Cost:* Medium   *Timeframe:* Long

Unit Response: It is difficult to continue to add electives in a financial situation that discourages teaching classes that are not required by students. Up to now, our strategy was to identify electives from other programs that might be of interest to some game design students, but these classes are not, on the surface, directly related to game design. The result is that students don't understand why these classes are helping with their game design degree. Therefore, we need to develop a new strategy to offer classes that are directly related to game design.

Our plan for this is to look for opportunities to partner with other programs to offer game design electives that are of interst to another program. For example, Scott Nicholson is currently talking with faculty from Education to create a Game-Based Learning class that would be of interest in Education students and would serve as an elective for Game Design students. This may require us to explore different ways of teaching, such as virtual sychronous classes that could be taken by both Waterloo and Brantford students.

Decanal Response: I support partnering with other programs to explore the development of mutually beneficial courses – those courses that are required perhaps in two or more programs, or required in one and are a highly sought out as electives in other programs. Such partnerships may now be facilitated by the redesignation of Game Design as a BA program, with the development of courses that meet the needs of students in many other BA degree programs. Creating high enrolment courses whose value can be clearly articulated and marketed to non Game Design students would prove fruitful. I am also supportive of making it clearer to Game Design

students that existing courses taught in other programs, such as Leadership, BTM, etc., can be highly valuable in the context of their career ambitions.

Recommendation #11: Create more opportunities for students to connect with industry and community partners.

Faculty Priority: Low
Upfront Cost: High *Ongoing Cost:* High *Timeframe:* Long

Unit Response: In the past, we have run events, both by ourselves and in partnership with the Liaison Librarian, where we brought speakers from industry to the school. The attendance at these sessions has always been low – at best, it was 10% of the students of the program, and some of these events drew fewer than 5 students. It is demoralizing to both speakers and the organizers to try to run events where few students attend.

We are trying a different approach, and would look to financial support from the Dean's office for this. To ensure there is an audience for a talk, we would like to set up a program for instructors to apply for funds to support a speaker visiting a class either in-person or virtually. In exchange for the support, the instructor would open up their class to other game design students and would market the talk through our mailing list.

Decanal Response: The FHSS dean's office, as well as the Laurier Brantford SEO's office, do support events that host guest speakers. I am open to a conversation about how such support could benefit the Game Design program.

Recommendation #12: Build mission-aligned research, writing, and multimedia assessments into the GDD program's curriculum.

Faculty Priority: Low
Upfront Cost: Medium *Ongoing Cost:* Medium *Timeframe:* Medium (3-9 months)

Unit Response: The faculty recognize that as our program changes to a BA degree that we need to ensure our students have stronger traditional research skills. We will be inviting the Liaison Librarian to provide sessions with our students in the first year in DD101, and then will look for opportunities to add research-based elements to game design projects in classes such as DD102, DD363, and the Capstone. The new class on Narrative Design and Writing for Serious Games will also contain research and writing assessments. We will also look at ways to add multimedia assessments to some of our game design projects, such as a game teaching or promotional video.

Decanal Response: I support the regular review of curriculum and consultation with subject matter experts to ensure that courses are up-to-date and include elements aligned to the learning outcomes of the degree.

Recommendation #13: Increase funding for critical resource needs, including a lab manager-technician and essential software.

Faculty Priority: High
Upfront Cost: Medium *Ongoing Cost:* High *Timeframe:* Short (3 month)

Unit Response: This addresses a long-standing request from the program. We currently have access to a lab manager on the hourly basis, but he is not been given access to the computers in the GRH lab to be able to address problems. With the addition of two more technology-based classes (2D/3D Art and Playful Programming through Game Engines), the needs for this role will increase, as there will need to be new software tools installed on the computers.

There is a small computer lab in GRH 205 that, pre-COVID, was opened up to students using the outdoor lounge. This lab was staffed by student volunteers; the task of recruiting, training, scheduling, and managing 10 student volunteers was undertaken through the course release provided to the program director to run the BGNlab. In order to re-open this computer lab, the lab manager will be tasked with this role. These computers have had the same software as is on the GRH computer lab so that students have a place to work on assignments when the lab is busy, but 4 computers only goes so far to support a program that is now adding on additional students through minors, options, and combo degrees that will need access to these tools.

In the past, when there was a research project that could fund the Adobe suite for these computers, then the students would have access to the programs. When there was no funded research that required Adobe, then the students would not have access to the programs. The result is that many of our students have a personal subscription to Adobe, especially if they want to access files that they made one year when Adobe was available. This has created a have/have-not divide in the program between students can personally afford an Adobe subscriptions and those who do not.

This is the program's single greatest problem, and is highlighted throughout this review document – the expectations for us to provide a stronger digital education needs to be matched with the University's support to provide that education.

Decanal Response: The enrolment numbers in the Game Design program do not at this time justify a full-time lab support position. The computer lab hosting digital Game Design courses is, by way of example, only used on average a few hours each week. The lack of sufficient need to merit a staff position is a decision reached in consultation with ICT. One of the (many) motivations to work with Faculty of Science to bring Computer Science programming to the Laurier Brantford campus is the shared technical support needs for Computer Science and Game Design, and together, a stronger business case for a staff position. We will continue to support the Game Design program with hourly technical support until the needs of the program scale up to necessitating some fraction of a FTE staff member. We will need to work with ICT to find cost-effective ways to procure the software that is essential to running a Game Design program. This recommendation has not been included in the Implementation Plan as it is not financially feasible to implement at this time.

Recommendation #14: Work with ICT to establish clear protocols for program-specific lab needs.

Faculty Priority: Medium
Upfront Cost: High *Ongoing Cost:* Low *Timeframe:* Medium (3-9 months)

Unit Response: This will be easier with a paid lab manager position to lead these discussions. As all of these lab-based classes are taught by CTF, there is no faculty member who would be appropriate for leading this time-consuming process. Given that the labs have to be set up well in advance of the classes, it is both inappropriate to ask a CTF to engage in this unpaid process, and may not even be possible given the timing of hiring a CTF. This is additional evidence for the need for a paid technical manager position, as was in the original plans for the program.

Decanal Response: See response to recommendation #13.

Recommendation #15: Integrate the Liaison Librarian in course delivery and in developing external partnerships.

Faculty Priority: Low / Disagree
Upfront Cost: Medium *Ongoing Cost:* Medium *Timeframe:* Long

Unit Response: We will look for tapping the Liaison Librarian for classes where we will be emphasizing a greater research component. We do not feel it is appropriate to rely upon this person to develop external partnerships for the program; that, instead, should be a staff member who is paid to develop these relationships that will address a number of the concerns in this report. The staff member can consult with the librarian, but it is outside the scope of the position of the librarian to develop external partnerships to support the game design curriculum.

We also would like to note caution in relying too heavily upon the Library for the program, as we have struggled with a lack of Library support for the Brantford campus since returning from COVID. While the liaison librarian is enthusiastic, she is also tasked with many other duties and is not provided always provided with enough support from the Library. This has resulted in gaps in service. As an example, there are hundreds of games ready to be circulated in the Information Commons one floor below the Game Design space. We had planned upon returning in Fall 2022 to direct students to use this collection and space instead of relying upon Dr. Nicholson's personal game collection. This collection was not made available until well into the Spring semester of 2023, and according to the library's web site right now, "Access to the Gaming Library is suspended at this time." This then caused frustration for students who found both Dr. Nicholson's personal collection unavailable and the collection funded by the Student Life Levy unavailable.

To provide some additional context for our concerns, we have had similar problems with the Laurier Launchpad / Entrepreneurship support on the Brantford campus. When this program was started, it was planned that the Launchpad would teach the fourth-year entrepreneurship class and create a pipeline for our students to engage with the Launchpad during capstone. When we reached that time with the program, the support for the Launchpad did not exist. There has been an instructor during some of the years for the Entrepreneurship course, but for most of the years, it has been taught by our own faculty members. This unreliable support for this

requirement does not match well with a curricular commitment that was made to students. Because of this, we are hesitant to rely upon a Waterloo-based unit for the support of our program.

If we were on the Waterloo campus where we knew there would be library staff available to help our students in the library, we would feel differently. As it stands, we do not have confidence that library services will always be available to our students and instructors when needed.

Decanal Response: I recommend re-engaging in conversations with the Library, and the Laurier Launchpad, about the needs stated above.

Recommendation #16: Create a shared department to house the GDD and User Experience Design Programs.

Faculty Priority: Low / Disagree without proper support
Upfront Cost: High *Ongoing Cost:* Low *Timeframe:* Long

Unit Response: While we have worked with UX to develop a proposal for a shared department, we have great concerns about how the joint programs would function with only a single department chair who would come from one of the programs. Given the differences in the programs and that they live in different faculties, there would need to be someone who is not the Chair tasked with many of the roles currently taken on by the Program Coordinator, such as attending the DACs for the other Faculty, leading curriculum development and marketing the program. The current recommendation by the deans is that this be the role of the Undergraduate Officer, but that person is expected to do a number of other tasks that are unrelated to running a degree program. Item 21.4.3.2 in the collective agreement establishes the role of an Associate Chair, which would be the appropriate role to fund for what this person will be asked to do.

Therefore, we would only want to proceed in bringing these programs together if there was a Department Chair and an Associate Chair role established, so that the service asks of faculty members were appropriately defined and compensated. Otherwise, it will be too great of an ask to request someone to take on both the role of an Undergraduate Officer while still doing most of the job of the Program Coordinator.

Decanal Response: The Collective Agreement stipulates that a program needs to have a minimum 34 FTE to merit an Associate Chair. The Game Design and UXD programs, combined, would be closer to 10+ FTE. It would be unfair to other programs and departments if a merged GDD / UXD department were given such additional resources, which is not justified by the number of full-time equivalent faculty.

Recommendation #17: Internally administer surveys of students before the end of first year.

Faculty Priority: Unknown
Upfront Cost: Medium *Ongoing Cost:* Low *Timeframe:* Medium (3-9 months)

Decanal Response: I am supportive of quality assurance surveys being administered by the Game Design program to its students (and as approved by our internal ethics committee for such surveys).

Recommendation #18: Launch an annual student survey of all GDD students to gauge their satisfaction and identify perceived gaps, strengths, and weaknesses in the program.

Faculty Priority: Unknown
Upfront Cost: Medium   *Ongoing Cost:* Low   *Timeframe:* Medium (3-9 months)

Unit Response: We will take both of these recommendations together and start the process of designing a survey for our existing students and getting those surveys internally approved for use.

We attempt a survey of our graduating seniors each year; however, we have learned from this year that if we do not make class time for this survey, the students don't do it. For this current year, even after multiple requests, we have had only 1 student fill out 1 question from the graduating student survey.

Therefore, it is clear that if we want a survey to be successful, we will have to make the time in class for students to fill them out. We will be identifying specific classes in each year where we can ask students to fill out these surveys.

Decanal Response: See response above to recommendation #17.

Recommendation #19: Work with Laurier's Career Centre to help students across all years identify and promote their transferable skills to potential employers.

Faculty Priority: Unknown
Upfront Cost: High   *Ongoing Cost:* Low   *Timeframe:* Long

Unit Response: Meeting with the Career Development Centre and discussing how to advise students with game design degrees would be useful for both parties. The Program Director did meet with them when starting the program, but there wasn't much traction in encouraging them to look deeply to help our students find employment as they didn't understand the breadth of positions our students could explore. Now that we have more years of the program and have examples of positions our students have found, this discussion should be more fruitful.

Just as we met with Marketing last year to help us redevelop our marketing messages, we will meet with the Career Development Centre this year to help us identify what skills students are learning in the game design program that would be valuable in other professions (Recommendation 2). Working on both of these recommendations will help the Career Development Centre to better understand our program and help us identify potential careers our students might be successful in with their skills.

Decanal Response: I support working closely with the Career Centre to help them better understand our students, and thus in turn, work with our students as they progress into their careers.

Recommendation #20: Engage in community-building for GDD students.

Faculty Priority: Disagree
Upfront Cost: Low   *Ongoing Cost:* Medium   *Timeframe:* Medium (3-9 months)

Unit Response: This is a timely recommendation, but one that will need to be balanced against faculty workloads and student expectations. We ran several events this year, and nothing resulted in more than 5 student attendees. There used to be a course release for the program director to run the BGNlab; part of that role was to find partners, plan, market, find funding, and run game jams. These events were more successful because they were tied into funded work-for-hire projects.

The GDDSA has reported minimal turnout this past year as well, and could not find a student to volunteer as the treasurer, so had no budget for events. We worked to start the Themed Entertainment Association student group this year, and ran an event where 20 students from different student groups all ran games... but fewer than 5 students showed up to particiapte. This has resulted in low morale for the groups, and no student has volunteered to be president of the TEA for next year. Without students volunteering to run student organizations, there are no student-run events.

So, this the situation: The students aren't attending the events we have organized as a faculty, and the students aren't willing to run their own events, even though there is already a student group infrastructure and funding to do so.

On the recommendation to re-open the small R&D space in GRH 201 as a social space:
As background, the students who met with the committee were 4th year students. In their first year when they lived in GRH, the R&D space was a social space and students did hang out there, playing recreational games and eating as it was a social lounge. The students enjoyed it, but were unaware of the problems it caused.

We had complaints about the noise from other departments in the building, had to address what content students showed on the large TVs that can be seen from outside the building, had to deal with behavioral issues (bringing in campus security), smoking, theft, and damage, had ants from the food waste, lingering body odor, and the grease left on the tables from the food damaged some of Dr. Nicholson's personal game collection. If we brought visitors to the lab, the only way to enter the lab was through this space, and there were multiple occurences that visitors commented that, "it smells like a gym in here". It was an ongoing problem to manage, and the reality is that it's not the faculty's job to host a social space for students. We do need a space for students to work on games for classes and to play games assigned for class, but we found that the social lounge didn't allow students that space for class-related work.

Since that time, the University has built a large and quite nice gaming lounge in One Market where food is welcome. The Information Commons has hundreds of games for students to check out and play (when the collection is available). Therefore, we decided to rebrand the small space as "R&D", and make it clear that it's a

place for students to work on games for class, to find playtesters, and to play games they haven't played before, but it's not a place for purely social game play, as they have other areas funded by the University for that.

Decanal Response: The new game lounge on the lower level of One Market is an ideal space for students to socialize. It would be ideal to have vibrant student associations in each program organizing events for their members, however, this is beyond the scope of responsibilities of the faculty and the dean's office. Perhaps the Game Design students can partner with the Game Lounge to organize campus wide events appealing to students in a multitude of programs, thinking of their student club as a service to others in the gaming space.

Recommendation #21: Engage in more community outreach.

Faculty Priority: Medium with staff support / Disagree without that support.
Upfront Cost: High *Ongoing Cost:* High *Timeframe:* Long

Unit Response: In the past we have hosted the Brant Business Council, various community organizations, and city-related events. Paid students projects have also unfolded in partnership with the City of Brantford. Some faculty research projects are designed around working with the community, and has resulted in running game jams with different members of the Brantford community in the lab. There used to be a course release for the program director to run the BGNlab and run these types of events; without that course release, the support is not there for someone to find partners, plan, market, find funding, and manage these events. If the project is tied into a faculty research project, then it makes sense for the faculty member to spend the effort to plan, market, fund, and run a community outreach program.

As with several recommendation here, this calls for the need for a staff member to get more engaged connecting the community to the program. If there was someone tasked with developing these relationships and leading the planning, marketing, and running of these events, then faculty members could be involved as a participant and subject expert, but asking the faculty members to run these types of events when they aren't related to their research or teaching is too much.

Decanal Response: FHSS has recently invested in a staff member to support recruitment and marketing initiatives for programs in our Faculty. This staff member may be able to provide some supports in implementing this recommendation.

Recommendation #22: Provide transportation to Waterloo.

Faculty Priority: High
Upfront Cost: High *Ongoing Cost:* High *Timeframe:* Long

Unit Response: Students, faculty, and the program as a whole would benefit immensely from regular, affordable, and accessible transportation between the campuses. This is especially true given the interdisciplinary nature of game design (e.g. students would benefit from arts, computing, mathematics, and many other courses offered

only in Waterloo). The founding of the GDD minor on Waterloo campus creates transportation needs for faculty who are primarily based in Brantford. While the GDD program agrees with this recommendation, implementing it is outside of our control.

Decanal Response: Transit connecting the two campuses is beyond the scope of the dean's office. This recommendation has not been prioritized in the Implementation Plan.

Recommendation #23: Build new courses to contain external partnerships to allow faculty to secure credit for running these important opportunities.

Faculty Priority: Low
Upfront Cost: Medium   *Ongoing Cost:* Low   *Timeframe:* Long

Unit Response: Early in the program, we experimented with using real-world partners for the capstone. We found there were several significant problems with this model. The first is that the partner needs to stay engaged for the duration of the semester. We had significant problems where a class-long project was based around working with a partner, and midway through the project, the partner organization stopped responding to requests to engage with the students. We also faced a problem with expectations and scope – some partners expected a fully developed game, ready to use, from a six-month design process with a student team who was learning.

We could develop a course on how to write grants and work with external partners as a game design consultant. Dr. Nicholson explored a model this year working with a WLU-offered Non-Profit Certificate where the students had to work for 15 hours with an organization. Dr. Nicholson took on a group of 4 students and led them through this process with a non-profit, and this has resulted in a successful grant to fund continued work on the project. This appears to be a better model to explore, as the time of connection is limited so the partner will be more likely to be involved, the short number of hours allows for a reasonable project scope, and it can open the door to future partnerships.

Decanal Response: I am in favour of efforts that connect external partners to Laurier researchers and their courses. The Laurier Hub for Community Solutions has a mandate to help foster such connections.

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

Dean of the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences: The Game Design and Development program is strongly differentiated from other game design programs in the province and beyond, given its focus on building "games that matter". In contrast to a myriad of commercially available games that are rife with misogyny, homophobia, racism, colonialism, and other expressions of hate. Laurier's Game Design program teaches students to critically address such issues, build inclusive communities, and create meaningful, prosocial games that can change the world.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT

Dean of the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences: The Game Design program admits only approximately 25-30 new students per year, with a relatively low retention into second year. The number of majors in the program is this quite small, and not financially sustainable. The program will need to markedly increase the number of student majors, the amount of service teaching it does to non-majors, and improve retention in the program across years.

SIGNATURES

Dr. Heidi Northwood   October 16, 2023

APPROVAL DATES

Approved by Program Review Sub-Committee: December 7, 2023

Approved by Senate Academic Planning Committee: January 11, 2024

Submitted to Senate (for information): April 10, 2024

Implementation Report Due Date: April 10, 2026

RECOMMENDATIONS PRIORITIZED FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND ACTION PLAN

The following Implementation Plan was created by the Dean of the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences as part of the Decanal Response.

Recommendation to be Implemented	Responsibility for Implementation	Anticipated Completion Date
Recommendation #1: Require applicants to write and submit a short Statement of Interest for admission into the program.	GDD Program in consultation with Recruitment and Admissions	Explore feasibility in 2023, recognizing implementation may take several years.
Recommendation #2: Highlight the GDD program's transferrable skills in its external marketing and messaging.	GDD Program in consultation with Career Development Centre	July 2024
Recommendation #3: Target secondary schools with game design and adjacent programs for recruitment.	GDD Program in collaboration with FHSS recruitment and marketing staff	Ongoing
Recommendation #4: Diversity the program's outreach and recruitment strategies without taxing faculty.	GDD Program in collaboration with FHSS recruitment and marketing staff	Ongoing
Recommendation #5: Introduce a high-enrolment first-year online course in game studies, gamification, or a related general-interest topic generally available across Laurier beyond the GDD program.	GDD Program	September 2025
Recommendation #6: Implement a mandatory, skills-inclusive first-year course in game engines and game art to introduce critical making practices and computational literacy early in the student experience.	GDD Program in consultation with Dean of the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences	September 2025

Recommendation #7: Opt out of the four Brantford Foundations courses to allow the development of new program-specific foundational courses.	GDD Program in consultation with Dean of the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences	September 2025
Recommendation #8: Begin to focus on student portfolios early in the program.	GDD Program in consultation with the Career Development Centre	September 2025
Recommendation #10: Offer more relevant electives inside and outside of the GDD program and provide clearer context about their usefulness.	GDD Program	September 2025
Recommendation #11: Create more opportunities for students to connect with industry and community partners.	GDD Program	Ongoing
Recommendation #12: Build mission-aligned research, writing, and multimedia assessments into the GDD program's curriculum.	GDD Program	September 2025
Recommendation #14: Work with ICT to establish clear protocols for program-specific lab needs.	GDD Program	Ongoing
Recommendation #15: Integrate the Liaison Librarian in course delivery and in developing external partnerships.	GDD Program in consultation with Liaison Librarian	September 2025
Recommendation #16: Create a shared department to house the GDD and User Experience Design Programs.	GDD Program in collaboration with UXD Program	Discussions underway; completion date TBD
Recommendation #17: Internally administer surveys of students before the end of first year.	GDD Program	September 2025

Recommendation #18: Launch an annual student survey of all GDD students to gauge their satisfaction and identify perceived gaps, strengths, and weaknesses in the program.	GDD Program	September 2025
Recommendation #19: Work with Laurier's Career Centre to help students identify their transferable skills to potential employers across all year levels.	GDD Program	September 2025
Recommendation #20: Engage in community-building for GDD students.	GDD Program	Ongoing
Recommendation #21: Engage in more community outreach.	GDD Program in collaboration with FHSS recruitment and marketing staff	Ongoing
Recommendation #23: Build new courses to contain external partnerships to allow faculty to secure credit for running these important opportunities.	GDD Program	September 2025