

Interdisciplinary Program
Letter of Intent (LOI) to Create Interdisciplinary Graduate Research Concentration

Thematic Area: Co-operative Studies

The purpose of an Interdisciplinary Graduate Research Concentration is to allow students to undertake graduate studies and research with an interdisciplinary cohort of faculty who share a common research interest.

This document outlines the elements of a concentration and details the procedures that will be followed by the Interdisciplinary Committee and the concentration in administering it.

Background

Research about co-operatives is an area in which the University of Saskatchewan has established a “commanding presence,” according to President Peter MacKinnon (*Renewing the Dream*, 2002). Since 1984 the university has been home to the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, the largest institute of its type in anglophone Canada and increasingly recognized internationally as a leader in innovative interdisciplinary research related to co-operatives. On behalf of the co-operative sector, a number of large co-operative organizations co-sponsor the centre and provide it with linkages and contacts. The centre has a core faculty of 5 Fellows together with a wider network of Scholars at the U of S and elsewhere. The centre and its network of faculty, Fellows as well as Scholars, form the underpinning for the Concentration in Co-operative Studies. Co-op Studies is a field under development in Canada, notably through the efforts of Professor Ian MacPherson of the British Columbia Institute of Co-operative Studies at the University of Victoria. MacPherson, like most other tenured co-operative specialists in anglophone Canada, is a Scholar of our centre. The concentration in the thematic area of Co-operative Studies will help link students, through the centre and its nucleus of U of S – based researchers, to this wider interdisciplinary community.

The centre is not an academic unit: it is not a discipline, it does not offer degrees, and there is no tenure in it. Its faculty all have appointments in other units and work within as well as between disciplines. Because of this structure, graduate students working with the faculty on topics related to co-operatives have either done their work within disciplines where this was possible, or through Individual Interdisciplinary programs. The Concentration in Co-operative Studies regularizes and streamlines the arrangements for interdisciplinary students. It will also assist in marketing the opportunity of Co-operative Studies to students who would not otherwise hear of it. This is important for the centre, which in its 2003 strategic plan identified expansion of graduate studies (alongside continued research intensity) as one of its two priorities to 2008.

More information about the centre is given in our annual reports, newsletters, and especially on our website: <http://www.usaskstudies.coop>

Research Statement

Co-operatives are associations of people who own and control enterprises for their own use.¹ Common examples include retail stores owned by consumers, housing complexes owned by tenants, financial institutions owned by depositors and borrowers, value-added enterprises owned by farmers, firms owned by employees, and so on. By definition, all co-operatives have a dual character as both democratic associations of people and as business enterprises. Discipline-based studies often concentrate on one part of the character of a co-operative: for example, studies of co-operative business through Economics, Agricultural Economics, or Commerce; or studies of participation and leadership through Sociology, Political Studies, and the like. The interdisciplinary thematic Concentration in Co-operative Studies provides a framework for students to combine different perspectives and disciplines for a more holistic understanding of co-operatives as both enterprises and associations. This holistic perspective is even more critical in those cases where a third element is added in: community. Co-operatives are connected to their communities both through their business and through their membership/governance structure. In both aspects, they are affected by complex phenomena such as globalization. Co-operative studies grounded in community settings, and looking at interactions of social, economic, cultural, and political change, are of particular interest in this concentration and pose special challenges of integration and interdisciplinarity.

Both M.A. and Ph.D. programs are parts of the Concentration in Co-operative Studies.

Interdisciplinary studies of co-operatives overlap with and mutually enrich parallel disciplinary studies. Students who are studying co-operatives within disciplinary programs are also welcome to participate in the courses and colloquia offered in Co-operative Studies. Besides the disciplines mentioned as examples above, other disciplines that could be involved in this concentration include Health Sciences (which may look at co-operatives in the health sector), Social Psychology, Adult Education, Women's and Gender Studies, Native Studies, Philosophy, and Environmental Sciences (which may consider co-operatives in relation to environmental management).

Typical Program in Concentration

Graduate programs in Co-operative Studies consist of fundamental academic elements, as follows:

- graduate-level courses, normally 6 credit units for Ph.D. programs (equivalent to 2 single-term courses) or 12 credit units for M.A. programs (4 courses) (some students' programs may require additional courses because of the nature of their topics);
- a thesis conducted under the guidance of a supervisor;
- ethics approval applications for research involving human subjects; and
- attendance at as well as at least one presentation in a graduate colloquium.

In addition to the above, Ph.D. programs in Co-operative Studies require a qualifying examination in the first term, and comprehensive examinations, normally taken in the second year of the program.

¹ International Co-operative Alliance Statement on the Co-operative Identity, 1995, in: Ian MacPherson, *Co-operative Principles for the 21st Century* (Geneva: ICA, 1996), p. 1.

The remainder of this document outlines what these different program elements look like, as well as the resources (human, financial, physical, and informational) available to support them. While each interdisciplinary program for each student is individually designed and must be approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee of the College of Graduate Studies and Research (CGSR), approval can be expected for those programs conforming to what is outlined here.

Administratively, programs operate under the following structures, roles, and responsibilities:

Role of Interdisciplinary Committee

The Interdisciplinary Committee of the CGSR makes all final decisions concerning admissions and programs.

Role of Area Leader

The area leader serves as co-ordinator and the contact person between the Concentration in Co-operative Studies and the CGSR. The leader reviews all applications, informs the associated faculty about applicants and their proposed topics, consults with faculty members who have relevant expertise, and then makes recommendations to the Interdisciplinary Committee of the CGSR concerning admission, programs, appointment of supervisors, and membership of advisory committees. The area leader is *ex officio* member and chair of all student advisory committees in the concentration, and reviews all minutes and progress reports from the committees before they are passed on to the CGSR.

Role of Student Advisory Committees

Student advisory committees meet with students, at least twice during the first year of study and at least annually thereafter, to review student progress generally and the development of thesis proposals and theses specifically. The area leader is *ex officio* member and chair of all advisory committees, and is joined by the supervisor and, normally, two other faculty members. When the supervisor or student believes a thesis is complete and ready for examination, the advisory committee reviews it and makes a recommendation.

Role of Supervisors

Supervisors meet regularly with students, help them develop their thesis proposals, work with them on drafts of their theses, and convene meetings of the advisory committee as needed. Although the area leader is *ex officio* chair of the advisory committee, the co-ordination of advisory committee meetings is often delegated to the supervisor.

Role of Instructors

Course instructors will often be faculty associated with the concentration, but students may also, as part of their programs, take classes from disciplinary programs or from outside instructors, as determined in their program application and subsequent official revisions. Instructors are responsible for teaching and grading within courses.

Role of Students

Students are responsible for maintaining continuous and satisfactory progress with all academic elements of their approved program, and informing their supervisor (in the first instance) or the area leader of any difficulties they encounter. Students who cease to make progress may be

deemed to have withdrawn from the program. Those who do not make satisfactory progress (for example, who have grade averages less than 75) may be required to discontinue. Such decisions are made upon recommendation from the area leader by the Interdisciplinary Committee of the CGSR. The area leader will consult with the supervisor and advisory committee and give the student an opportunity to comment before making such a recommendation.

Faculty

Concentration Area Leader

The area leader will be the director of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives. As described above, the director will serve as the contact person between Co-operative Studies and the Interdisciplinary Committee of the CGSR. The leader is *ex officio* member and chair of all Co-operative Studies student advisory committees and reviews all progress reports and committee minutes before they are passed on to the CGSR.

Associated Faculty

The following faculty are likely to be involved in teaching, supervision, and advisory committees in the area of the thematic Concentration in Co-operative Studies. While faculty could be grouped in various ways, the grouping used here (co-operative structures, processes, and systems) represents one interdisciplinary categorization of areas of expertise that may make sense for many students' programs. Students might work with several faculty members from one of these areas where their programs require this depth, or might pull in a faculty member from another area where it is desirable to add an additional dimension.

Associated Faculty: Co-operative Structures

- Cristine de Clercy (Political Studies): CSC Fellow in Co-operative Governance — models of governance and decision making; co-operative–government relations; leadership, diversity, and minority representation; financial services; regulatory change; methodology and statistics
- Michael Gertler (Sociology): CSC Fellow in Community and Co-operative Development — sociology of agriculture and food; rural sociology; environmental sociology; production co-operatives
- Louise Clarke (Industrial Relations and Organizational Behaviour, CSC Scholar): modern/postmodern organization theory; labour-management relations in co-ops; co-ops and community economic development; worker co-operatives
- Dan Ish (Law, CSC Scholar): co-op law; co-op legislation; government policy; governance (co-operatives and other organizations)
- Gordon Barnhart (History/Political Studies, CSC Scholar): effective governance; contributions of voluntary associations to democratic society; co-operatives and early Saskatchewan politics

Associated Faculty: Co-operative Cultures and Processes

- Lou Hammond Ketilson (Management and Marketing): CSC Fellow in Co-operative Leadership and Management — gender and diversity in organizations; women and management; community economic development
- Isobel Findlay (Management and Marketing, CSC Scholar): business communications in co-operatives; postmodern and postcolonial methodologies; historical social movements;

diversity and identity; co-ops and community economic development; Aboriginal organization and co-operatives

- Len Findlay (English, CSC Scholar): the Indigenous Humanities; postcolonial studies; discourse about globalization as it relates to co-operatives and communities; university and community collaboration
- Morris Altman (Economics, CSC Scholar): labour; employee participation; economic justice; democratic organization; growth and development
- Marj Benson (Law, CSC Scholar): legal and cultural history of communitarian institutions in Saskatchewan; role of personal transformation in institutional change; co-operation and conflict resolution; multiparty negotiation; interdisciplinary systems theory

Associated Faculty: Co-operative Systems

- Brett Fairbairn (History): CSC Fellow in Co-operative Thought and Institutions — origins of co-operatives and their development, particularly in Europe and North America; co-operatives, social movements, and democracy; history and dynamics of federations and systems of co-operatives
- Murray Fulton (Agricultural Economics): CSC Fellow in Agricultural Co-operation — agricultural co-operatives and other forms of producer associations; the role that these organizations play in an industry; the manner in which they adapt and evolve over time; and the manner in which they are governed and managed
- Jill Hobbs (Agricultural Economics, CSC Scholar): agri-food marketing; supply chains; contracting and strategic alliances in the agri-food sector; consumer attitudes towards new food products and/or production methods
- cross-listed: Cristine de Clercy (Political Studies)

The preceding reflects the current network of CSC Fellows and Scholars. The network of scholars is flexible and we see it changing and growing to follow the research interests of individual academics at the U of S who may become interested in Co-operative Studies. In the future we see possible growth into any or all of the departments and disciplines mentioned in our research statement above.

Faculty at Other Universities

As noted above, the centre has affiliated faculty (Centre Scholars) from other universities, primarily in western Canada. These individuals, too, may be involved in some graduate programs, notably to serve on Ph.D. committees in their areas. Individual applications to appoint them as members of the CGSR will be required in each case. Currently these scholars include Professor Ian MacPherson, University of Victoria (History, CSC Scholar) — an eminent figure in co-operative studies, especially concerning co-operative principles and international co-operative development — as well as two professors of Agricultural Economics, Professor Ellen Goddard, University of Alberta (Rural Economy, CSC Scholar), and Professor Brian Oleson, University of Manitoba (Agriculture, CSC Scholar appointment in finalization).

Graduate Student Admission Policy

To be admitted to the Concentration in Co-operative Studies, applicants must have:

- a degree, or equivalent, in an area relevant to the proposed research; for admission to a Masters program, this degree must be an Honours B.A. or equivalent; for admission to a Ph.D. program, a Masters degree or equivalent is required;
- an academic average of 80 or better (A) in their most recent two years (full-time equivalent) of relevant university-level courses; and
- a capacity for independent and self-directed work within a collaborative environment, as evidenced by letters of reference and preparation of an initial statement of interest. (Although the leader and faculty in the area will provide a supportive environment and supervision, the nature of interdisciplinary work requires initiative on the part of students to seek out knowledge and advice when needed.)

Students may make a case for exceptions to the above requirements based on special circumstances or equivalent experiences and performance. In general, issues of academic preparation will be resolved by asking students to take specified courses prior to full admission into the concentration. Other exceptions will be considered on a case-by-case basis and require the approval of the Interdisciplinary Committee of the College of Graduate Studies and Research.

Ethics Statement

Research involving human subjects will follow normal university procedures. Students will be responsible for drafting behavioural ethics review applications prior to collecting data about or from human subjects. Their supervisors will review these applications and make comments or suggestions before the applications are submitted to the relevant university committee.

Concentration Area Course Statement

Typical graduate courses available to students in the concentration include the following. This list consists of courses taken in recent years by graduate students who were studying co-operatives, and which they found useful, as well as others suggested by our associated faculty. Some courses will require a particular background or special permission and will be relevant only to students working on specific kinds of co-operatives:

AG EC 840.3 Methods of Marketing Agricultural Products

AG EC 842.3 Agricultural Market Organization

AG EC 898.3 Special Topics in the Economics of Co-operatives (by arrangement)**

CH&EP 804.3 Community Health Issues

ECON 823.3 Labour Economics

EDCNT 810.3 Learning for Life: Practice and Theory in Adult Education

EDCNT 880.3 The Community Development Process

EDIND 855.3 Cross-Cultural Research Methodology

EDRES 800.3 Research Methods: Introductory Level

ENG 816.6 Studies in Literary and Cultural Theory

i. Canadian Cultural Studies: History, Theory, Practice

ii. Studies in Marxist Literary and Cultural Theory

HIST 882.6 Rural Social History
 HIST 898.3 History of Co-operatives in Canada (by arrangement)**
 HIST 898.3 History of Participatory Organizations and Their Leadership (by arrangement)**

MBA* 849.3 Readings in International Business
 MBA* 898.3 Special Readings on Organizational Theory (by arrangement)**
 MBA* 898.3 Women in Management (by arrangement)**
 MKT 898.3 Business and Community (by arrangement)**
 MKT 898.3 Social Marketing (by arrangement)**

POLST 809.3 Canada's Constitution and Politics
 POLST 802.3 Canadian Government and Politics
 POLST 898.3 Methodological Issues in Co-operative Study (by arrangement)**

SOC 898.3 Rural Sociology and Rural Development (by arrangement)**
 SOC 898.3 Co-operatives, Co-operation, and Rural Development (by arrangement)**

*Note regarding MBA courses: While these courses have been offered in the past, changes in the MBA program mean they may not be offered within that program in the future. They are listed here as samples of courses that may be created in another form, for example as MKT courses.

**Note regarding 898 and 899 (special-topics) courses: These courses are arranged according to availability of instructors, on an as-needed basis, either for individual students or small groups. The examples given above are of special-topics courses that have been taught recently (in the last several years). If the same course is offered repeatedly (three times), it will be developed as a regular course.

Concentration Area Seminar Statement

Students will satisfy their colloquium (seminar) requirement by attending, participating, and making at least one presentation in the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives Seminar Series. These seminars are held monthly or biweekly and draw an audience of faculty from the concentration area as well as others, on-campus and off, who are interested in research concerning co-operatives. Each term's seminar series will include both research about co-operatives and also sessions concerning interdisciplinarity and interdisciplinary methods. All student presentations are expected to include a component related to interdisciplinary methodology.

Qualifying and Comprehensive Examinations (Ph.D. students only)

The qualifying examination for Ph.D. students will take the form of a one-hour diagnostic interview by the advisory committee during the student's first term in the program. The purpose of the examination is to discuss and assess areas in which the student needs further preparation.

Comprehensive examinations for Ph.D. students will be taken in 2-3 relevant fields as recommended by each student's advisory committee. The fields, the nature of the examinations,

and their timing will be discussed by the advisory committee following consultation with the student during the first year of the program. Normally, comprehensive examinations will be taken in the second year of a Ph.D. program following completion of required course work. The advisory committee will appoint field examiners who will set the examination questions and evaluate the candidate's knowledge within the field on the basis of both written and oral questioning.

Concentration Designation

Once a concentration is officially designated as such, it will be able to function as an identifiable research and graduate training unit. Faculty in concentration areas are able, and indeed are encouraged, to market their set of courses and research activities as a package, and to develop a clear identity as a location for research and graduate work.

Administration

Concentrations are administratively part of the Interdisciplinary Program in the College of Graduate Studies and Research and students in a concentration are formally in the Interdisciplinary Program. Students wishing to be admitted to a concentration have to make official application through the Interdisciplinary Committee. To streamline the application process, a *pro forma* application form is approved along with this Letter of Intent. Students interested in a concentration work with the faculty in that area to prepare an application. The area leader then submits the application on behalf of the student to the Interdisciplinary Committee. If the student meets the requirements for the Interdisciplinary Program and the concentration, the Interdisciplinary Committee will recommend the student for admission to CGSR. In making its decision, the Interdisciplinary Committee relies heavily on the recommendation of the area leader.

Once a student is admitted to a concentration, her/his program is governed by a Program of Studies, which must be approved by the student's Student Advisory Committee (SAC). As is the case throughout the CGSR, the SAC reports to the CGSR through the SAC and the Interdisciplinary Program chairs.

Students in concentrations have access to the same support and services (e.g., scholarships) that are available to all students in the Interdisciplinary Program.

Concentration Approval

The concentration will come into existence with the acceptance of this Letter of Intent by both the area leader and the Interdisciplinary Committee. The *pro forma* application form (titled Co-op Studies Application) is considered part of this letter of intent.

Murray Fulton
Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee

Brett Fairbairn
Concentration Area leader

Date

Date