



Annual monitoring: desk-based analysis of Middlebury College-CMRS Oxford Humanities Program, January 2020

Outcome of the desk-based analysis

1 From the annual return and documentary evidence, the monitoring team concludes that the Middlebury College-Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (CMRS) Oxford Humanities Program (the Program) is continuing to maintain academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities since the November 2018 [Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight review](#).

Changes since the last QAA review

2 For the semester starting in January 2020, there are 35 students currently enrolled. This number is broadly comparable with 2018-19 enrolment numbers. Students on the Program are mostly drawn from Middlebury College, the parent institution. In addition to Middlebury College, students from a further nine US colleges are currently attending the Program. In addition to students on the regular program, some students will also be enrolled onto the shorter summer Middlebury Museum Studies in Oxford course.

3 The Program employs four members of staff on full-time contracts: the Principal, Senior Tutor, Assistant Senior Tutor and Administrator. The Library Assistant is employed on a half-time, fixed-term contract. Two Junior Deans and two housekeepers complete the core staff, all on part-time arrangements. In addition to staff on permanent or fixed-term contracts, the Centre currently employs 35 academic tutors who are all employed on short-term contracts. These tutors deliver the highly-specialised lecture, seminar and tutorial sessions.

4 11 staff have changed since the last visit. The Senior Tutor resigned as from August 2019 and following a round of recruitment, the Assistant Senior Tutor in post was promoted. A new Assistant Senior Tutor was appointed on an interim basis for one year. An open competition will be held for a three-year appointment in spring 2020. A new librarian was also appointed on a short-term contract, and a new post of Facilities and Administrative Assistant was created in spring 2019.

Findings from the monitoring visit

5 The actions identified following the November 2018 Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight (RSEO) review have all been addressed, although some actions have yet to be evaluated and reported. The two areas of good practice have been consolidated, and the comprehensive and detailed information it provides for applicants has been expanded, and is updated each semester. The Program has also continued to provide a wide range of high-quality academic and pastoral support, enhanced by extensive staff training in key areas.

6 In relation to the desirable recommendations, the Program has taken action to provide systematic opportunities to further the sharing of good practice among tutors and in starting to monitor the consistency of the delivery of tutorial courses. A revised action plan was produced for 2018-19 and an updated plan has been submitted for the 2019-20 academic year.

7 The Program provides comprehensive and detailed information on recruitment and admissions, which continues to be updated each semester, as required. The Program has created a brief statement entitled *Why is this a Humanities Program?* which was subsequently made available to prospective applicants on the website and by email. Some students commented that they had not appreciated the implications of the Program being focused on the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and that this had not been made sufficiently clear prior to application. Some considered that the nature of academic rigour of the program at Oxford had also not been explained adequately. Information provided to students includes personalised, informal emails sent to each applicant. All new courses are advertised to students before final choices have to be made. Advice and pre-departure information is evaluated by students in the end of semester module evaluation form.

8 The good practice identified in the 2018 RSEO report has been consolidated in the provision of high-quality and wide-ranging academic and pastoral support. Students responded positively to the academic and pastoral support offered to them, and to the contribution this made to a positive academic experience. Students are well supported by email and through personal contact with tutors. The Program has continued to prioritise support for mental health, including ensuring that all academic tutors undertake regular training in mental health and first aid, in addition to the provision of a range of counselling support services. The Program also requires completion of a range of online training courses by staff, including unconscious bias training. Co-curricular activities are provided through a range of organised trips, talks and performances. Some students still consider that they are not fully integrated into Oxford college life, although the Program has worked hard to facilitate this. The Program has been proactive in various measures to enhance student safety and security, both on campus and in Oxford. An orientation event is held at the start of each semester. Individual cases of student need are monitored at the Academic Committee. Students evaluate seminars and research courses on completion.

9 The action plan identifies a need for pastoral support to be included as a standing agenda item on the Academic Board agenda, with a report prepared by the Academic Committee. This was introduced in summer 2019 and has enabled more systematic consideration of support at a strategic level, and provided the mechanism for recommendations to be implemented, as required.

10 In spring 2019, the remit of the semesterly tutors' meetings was extended to enable the sharing of good practice more effectively. The matters that arise from this are recorded by the Senior Tutor and discussed at the subsequent annual Academic Board. The practice was evaluated and presented to the annual board meeting in summer 2019. Good practice is also shared formally and informally.

11 The Program has also taken action formally to monitor the consistency of the delivery of tutorial courses. Students take two individual tutorials per week, for each of which they have to produce an essay. While the Program wishes to preserve the diversity and challenge presented by varied approaches to individual tutorials, the provision of consistently excellent tutorial teaching remains an aim. To help to achieve this, the Academic Committee has drafted a Criteria for Tutorial Courses document which will be formally presented for approval at the Academic Board in summer 2020. Some of the content of this is already covered at students' orientation. Helpful guidance for tutors is provided in the Tutors' Handbook. Students evaluate tutorials at the end of each semester, and the outcomes are reviewed by the Academic Committee. Students responded very positively to the tutorial provision, and value the rapport developed with the tutor.

Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

12 The Program has been mapping its activities to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) annually, and aligning its Quality Assurance Policy Document (QAPD) to this. The Program has recently begun to transition to the revised Quality Code. Formal adoption of any changes to the QAPD will not be ratified until the next annual Academic Board meeting, in summer 2020.

13 The Program meets the Core and Common practices for academic standards by ensuring that it aligns with UK Expectations through the Quality Code, with those of its US accrediting institution, Middlebury College, and with those of its US partner institutions. The Program is subject to review by the external parties, and includes external membership on its Academic Board. The Centre addresses the Common practices by subjecting its standards to annual review and scrutiny through the Academic Board.

14 While the Centre has not yet completed a full mapping against the Expectations for quality, many of the Core and Common practices of the Quality Code, such as admissions and student support, are in place. The Program collects feedback from students, and has reviewed its complaints and appeals policy in action.

15 The Program is also accredited by the British Accreditation Council (BAC), and a further review was carried out in Autumn 2019. The Program has supported its Senior Tutor to gain a Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The Tutors' Handbook of September 2019 requires updating in respect of data protection legislation and GDPR processes.

Background to the desk-based analysis

16 The desk-based analysis serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review monitoring. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring process or review.

17 The desk-based analysis was carried out by Dr Helen Corkill, Reviewer, and Simon Ives, QAA Officer, in January 2020. No meetings were held with students or staff, and the conclusions presented in this report are based on the analysis of documentary evidence submitted by the provider.

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