

**REPORT OF THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE  
TO THE REGULAR September 2013 SENATE**

**FOR INFORMATION**

**Recommendations and Commendations of ACAPLAN following the Graduate Program Review: Interdisciplinary Human Development**

The Master of Arts/Science in Interdisciplinary Human Development (IHD also known as DEVE) is a bilingual program in which three fields, Psychology, Human Kinetics and Sociology, are combined to provide students with an integrated view of human development over the life course. The program was initiated in 1979, and since that time, has continued to evolve in keeping with the gradual transformation of the field of human development. From its early focus on “child and development studies,” the Program now reflects a life course perspective that is consistent with the direction in which the field is moving.

In the fall of 1979 the Program started with part-time students in order to develop the framework and procedures, and shifted to a combination of full-time and part-time students in 1981. Previously the Program has been run out of the Centre for Research in Human Development (CRHD), but effective 1 July 2013, the Program will be situated within the School of Rural and Northern Health (SRNH). As well, hitherto the Dean of Social Sciences and Humanities and the Dean of Professional Schools were jointly responsible for the Program at the university-wide level, particularly with regard to budget and personnel issues. Also on 1 July 2013, co-incident with the transfer to the SRNH, and in response to a recommendation from the review team, the Program will be the primary responsibility of the Dean of Professional Schools.

One newly-elected Coordinator administers the Program. A Program Committee of faculty members from the three contributing parent units (Human Kinetics, Psychology and Sociology) serves as the key Program and policy decision body. The Committee is comprised of two faculty members (English and French) from each of the units, two second year graduate students from the Program (English and French), the coordinator, and the Director of the Centre for Research in Human Development. Staffing of the Program is primarily based on integration of courses into the regular faculty teaching load and thesis advising is recognized through financial means.

In 2011, the Program began its fifth review since inception—and that began with a self-study submitted in accordance with the new IQAP guidelines in March 2012. In the fall of 2012, two external reviewers arrived to make their assessment on behalf of the review team—the first was Dr. Michèle Preyde, an Associate Professor in the College of Social and Applied Human Sciences at the University of Guelph and the second, Dr. Donato Tarulli, Associate Professor of Child and Youth Studies at Brock University. On October 22, 2012, the review team submitted its assessment, concluding that the Program “*seems especially well-positioned to meet several of the aims, priorities, and research values expressed in the University's academic, research, and strategic plans, and, accordingly, would seem clearly to warrant the continued support of Laurentian University.*”

In February 2013, the Program responded to reviewers’ comments. ACAPLAN also received written comments from both deans to whom the Program reported as well as the Director of the School of Graduate Studies.

## **The Program**

### **Student Issues**

1. Commendations
  - a. This Program is highly student-centered, as reflected, for example, in the decision to offer classes from 4:00 to 10:00 pm to accommodate student schedules.
  - b. Some of the class sizes are small. In general, the students rate their courses favorably.
  - c. While there continues to be some concern about the time students are taking to graduate from the Program (the medians for full-time and part-time students are 3 and 6 years, respectively), under the guidance of its current Coordinators, and partly in response to the previous external review, the Program has initiated a plan to help students complete in a timely fashion.
  - d. Graduates have secured a wide range of prominent professional positions and several graduates have continued in PhD programs within Laurentian University and across Canada. These data would suggest that students are meeting or exceeding Program goals, are learning an interdisciplinary perspective on health and well-being, and that graduates appeal to a variety of employers and doctoral programs.
  
2. Recommendations
  - a. The downturn in current enrollment statistics for the Program, particularly for Francophone students, warrants a concerted effort to actively promote and recruit students (particularly those outside Laurentian University).

### **Program Issues**

1. Commendations
  - a. A highly significant and unique feature is the inclusion of kinesiology and physical well-being in a graduate-level human development program. Many graduate human development programs are considered interdisciplinary, and this often translates into the inclusion of psychology, sociology and perhaps education or counseling, human resources; etc. However, concentration on the interconnections among physical, psychological and social health and well-being within historical, cultural and geographical contexts is not only distinctive in terms of difference from the parent departments of Psychology, Sociology and Human Kinetics, but also distinctive in relation to other human development programs.
  - b. While each of its parent units (Psychology, Sociology, Human Kinetics) has its own graduate program, the IHD Program remains unique in its (historically groundbreaking and continually innovative) interdisciplinary orientation.
  - c. The Program has been more recently expanded to include a lifespan approach, which is consistent with advances in human development programs. Its interdisciplinary

- orientation, coupled with the Program's ongoing proposals for developing curriculum content that highlights health and wellness, and Aboriginal communities, aligns the Program with the larger mission of the University
- d. In response to student concerns about the courses described as part of the Program and what is actually offered (not an uncommon complaint by students in many undergraduate and graduate programs), the Program recently provided Graduate Studies with a list of “Active” (regularly offered), “Pending”, and “Obsolete” DEVE courses, effective September 2013. Outside the three core courses, there is a total of 8 active Anglophone and 5 active Francophone elective courses in the DEVE program.
  - e. In response to students’ views that there needed to be a greater variety in elective courses, the Program has expanded the cross-listing process. For instance recently the Program has allowed students the opportunity to take more elective courses in programs such as Rural and Northern Health, Nursing, and Native Studies and the move to the School of Rural and Northern Health will only increase such opportunities. Such varied elective options will allow students the ability to better customize their programs.

## 1. Recommendations

- a. While cross-listing of courses drives many of its current offerings, there is always a risk that cross-listed courses will not reflect the aims of Interdisciplinary Human Development. The establishment of an interdisciplinary research design course (e.g., re-establishing DEVE 5206) as a dedicated DEVE course seems especially important in this regard. Upon completion students can choose from the array of data analytic courses (e.g., Applied Multivariate Analysis; Qualitative Data Analysis) to meet their learning objectives.<sup>1</sup>
- b. The thesis orientation course (DEVE 5000/5005), should also be revived since it can be redesigned to accomplish a number of functions: For example, gathering for this class once a week, DEVE students (all cohorts) can receive updates or information about expectations regarding timelines, be offered a venue to formally present their research proposal, allow students to practice their interdisciplinarity in commenting and asking questions on their peers' research or on invited guests' presentations.
- c. Students may benefit from greater structure in the lab component of courses (currently, some students are creating their own lab experiences).
- d. With the proposed areas of focus in “health” and “disability”, the special topics course, “Biopsychosocial Approaches to Disability” should be made a full course with its own course code (as opposed to a special topics course). It is a truly

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<sup>1</sup> It is possible that the course offered in the PhD Program on Rural and Northern Health and that is available to students in the DEVE program could also serve as a required research design and critical appraisal course.

interdisciplinary course and has been well received by students in each of its two offerings (2009 and 2011).

- e. A new direction focused on lifespan to include gerontology and the elderly populations would be promising, particularly if strengthened through linkages with LHIU (Local Health Integration Unit) and Huntington's Gerontology Program.
- f. Given the plan to develop Occupational Health and Safety undergraduate and graduate programs, and with its new curricular emphases, the DEVE Program would certainly share some content; thus, it may be useful to consider means by which any new programs in health studies could establish productive alliances with (e.g., via student recruitment, transfer into graduate programs, etc.) and build upon an interdisciplinary program (IHD/DEVE) that is already in existence, and that is well regarded within Laurentian University and the community.
- g. *The DEVE committee members need to articulate a shared vision and direction with the faculty in the parent disciplines although there seems to be an emerging consensus around the Program's emphasis on health and well-being in northern communities.*

## **Faculty and Staff Issues**

### 1. Commendations

- a. It is timely that a Coordinator was newly elected, since it comes with new energy and has proposed changes that build on the strong foundation.
- b. Faculty have considerable expertise and commitment to teaching.
- c. The greater involvement in the Program in recent years of faculty from other departments, programs, and schools (e.g., Gerontology, Nursing, etc.) further contributes to the establishment of an interdisciplinary ethos.

### 1. Recommendations

- a. Retain or recover, where possible, the team-teaching approach to DEVE courses, and especially to core DEVE courses.
- b. Make the discussion of interdisciplinarity, and the means of achieving and promoting it, the subject of explicit discussions at DEVE committee meetings. On the basis of examples that students provided, the reviewers reported that a course's interdisciplinary focus is sometimes compromised by the inability of its team of instructors to achieve a constructive dialogue across their respective differences.
- c. See also Resource Issues Section under Vice-President Academic and Provost.

## Research Issues

1. Commendations
  - a. Faculty members appear to be highly qualified, as suggested by an impressive number of publications in peer-reviewed journals and significant successes in securing funding for research.
  - b. A distinctive feature of the Program is how it facilitates research and scholarship through the requirement that students present in a research forum and attend 10 graduate defences—a feature of the Program that allows for the socialization of students into professional research forums, promotes a culture of knowledge exchange and mobilization, and fosters interdisciplinarity.
  - c. Students have appeared as co-authors on a number of scholarly outputs. MSc students are expressly engaged in two lab components that enhance learning experiences. More generally, students in the Program do engage with faculty research.
  
2. Recommendations
  - a. The time students require to complete their degrees has been negatively affected by delays in the Research Ethics Board Review process. The University must continue to find ways of reducing such delays, e.g., by encouraging students to complete the Tri-council tutorial on the ethics process.
  - b. Much could be done to strengthen the link between DEVE and the CRHD and to raise the profile of both (i.e., become well-known to the academic communities and rural and northern communities). For example, for faculty (and students) who do not have a research lab, the CRHD could enhance function as an asset in the pursuit of knowledge in that it can provide the capacity for faculty members to obtain research funds and conduct research.

## Resource Issues

1. Commendations
  - a. The faculty members who support the Program appropriately and effectively use existing human, physical and financial resources. There are a number of research laboratories in Kinesiology, and the Cognitive Health, Qualitative and Neuroscience Research Labs are viewed as particularly strong assets to the Program
  - b. The library is able to fully support the DEVE Program in terms of its collections and access to materials

- c. Students also indicated that they learn from each other and that access to a common graduate space is imperative for continued opportunities for peer- supported learning, as well as for access to a computer or computer lab that has data analytic software, such as SPSS.

### **Vice-President Academic and Provost**

#### **Resource Issues**

1. Recommendations
  - a. Given the relocation of the Program to the School of English Education building, the Program needs to retain a space (with adequate technological supports, such as computer stations and printers) where students can work and gather as a collective group. Such a space would provide ongoing opportunities for students to discuss ideas and further cultivate an interdisciplinary understanding of their chosen research topics. It would also help to encourage the formation of a collective graduate student identity and offer a palpable sense of belonging (again, a particularly salient concern when students cannot identify with a physical department as such).
  - b. In addition to replacing core DEVE faculty as they retire, the University should consider providing course releases to the DEVE Program Coordinator. Such releases are warranted by the critical tasks facing the Program both in the short run and in the long term: facilitating recruitment, retention, and graduation of students; monitoring ongoing opportunities for interdisciplinary scholarship and practice within the Program; advising students regarding course selection and regular monitoring of thesis plans; promoting the ongoing coordination of communication among parent units.
  - c. After the Program sharpens its focus and before the next review, funds should be allocated to develop and disseminate marketing materials that can be shared within the University but also be used to recruit students from outside Sudbury.