

**REPORT OF THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
TO THE REGULAR June 2014 SENATE**

FOR INFORMATION

**FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT & IMPLEMENTATION PLAN for the
REVIEW OF THE INTERDISCIPLINARY PhD
in
RURAL AND NORTHERN HEALTH**

In accordance with the University Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), this final assessment report provides a synthesis of the external evaluation and the internal response and assessments of the Interdisciplinary PhD in Rural and Northern Health. This report identifies the significant strengths of the programs, together with opportunities for program improvement and enhancement, and it sets out and prioritizes the recommendations that have been selected for implementation.

The report includes an Implementation Plan that identifies who will be responsible for approving the recommendations set out in the Final Assessment Report; who will be responsible for providing any resources entailed by those recommendations; any changes in organization, policy or governance that will be necessary to meet the recommendations and who will be responsible for acting on those recommendations; and timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations.

Summary of the Cyclical Program Review of the Interdisciplinary PhD in Rural and Northern Health

Laurentian University's Interdisciplinary PhD in Rural and Northern Health (IRNH) was founded by faculty members from the Schools of Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work (which was subsequently divided into the Schools of Social Work and Native Human [Studies Services](#)¹), Human Kinetics, and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM). The initial proposal for the IRNH PhD Program was submitted to the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies in August 2004, revisions were submitted early in 2006, and it was accredited in the spring of 2006. The first cohort of doctoral students entered the program in 2006 and by June 2014, eight students had graduated. This is the program's first cyclical review.

In 2007, as a mechanism to hire faculty to support the program, the School of Rural and Northern Health (SRNH) was formed and placed within the faculty of Professional Schools². Effective July 1, 2013, the School was also made responsible for the Interdisciplinary Master's program in Human Development which, inspired by its own IQAP Review, was renamed Master's in Interdisciplinary Health (M.A. or MSc.) in September 2014. The two programs generate good synergies.

The IRNH program is designed to:

¹ [Now School of Indigenous Relations](#)

² In March 2014, the Senate voted to place the School within a new Faculty of Health.

- enhance both the quality and quantity of research focused on rural and northern health;
- train students to become high quality professionals in health research;
- promote the development of a critical mass of health research expertise in the north;
and
- facilitate linkages between the university and community health organizations.

The program strives to offer innovative, interdisciplinary, graduate education that supports research in the following areas: Aboriginal health; epidemiology; children's health; health administration; health policy; health promotion; health services; environmental health; mental health; occupational health; and population health in vulnerable populations.

The language of instruction for the program is English; however, students may complete their comprehensive examinations and all thesis research in either English or French.

On December 15, 2012, the School of Rural and Northern Health submitted a two-part self-study to the office of the Vice-President Academic and Provost. The first section which described the program contained an introduction, a review of faculty teaching in the program, and descriptions both of the physical resources available as well as of the student body. The first section also contained a summary of program regulations and courses, a note on future plans, and some conclusions. There were also eight appendices supporting the main section. Section two contained the curricula vitae of all faculty associated with the program.

Shortly thereafter, two external reviewers were appointed by the Provost: Dr. Jennifer Medves, RN, Professor and Vice-Dean Health Sciences and Director of the School of Nursing, Queen's University and Dr. Margo Greenwood, Associate Professor in both the First Nations Studies and Education programs at the University of Northern British Columbia. On campus, they were joined by two of Laurentian's faculty members, Dr. Pat Pickard, Professor in the School of Human Kinetics and Dr. David Pearson, Professor in Earth Sciences, as well as by two students enrolled in the program, Ms. Sophie Kam, and Mr. Basem Gohar.

The external evaluation was held on site on October 21 to October 22, 2013³. Over the two days, the team was able to see the J.N. Desmarais Library as well as the following spaces in the English Language School of Education which physically houses the program: classrooms, student study space, the student common room as well as faculty offices. The visit also included interviews with students, the teaching and supervising faculty, the program's advisory committee as well as the acting Vice-President Academic and Provost, the Vice-President Francophone Affairs & Research, the Director of Graduate Studies, the Director of Research Development and Creativity, the University Librarian, and the Dean of Professional Schools. Overall, the visit was coordinated by Dr. Elizabeth Wenghofer, Director of the School and primary author of the self-study.

The external reviewers submitted their report on November 22, 2013 and in it they noted that "Every person we spoke to was uniformly positive about the program. Graduates and students were and are truly grateful to have a PhD offered on site close to home.... The program is

³ In light of the delay between the original self-study and the site review, the School prepared an appendix updating the self-study which it made available to the reviewers on October 9, 2013. This update noted the addition of the Master's program (and Dr. John Lewko) to the School and it updated the summary of enrollment and graduations.

exciting and innovative [and] as the program evolves in the next few years, faculty and graduates of the program will be able to reflect on past achievements and ways to continue to develop. It was a real pleasure to meet so many truly enthusiastic faculty, staff and students and we wish everyone the best of luck in the future.”

The external report was not only positive overall, but was well written and addressed all key elements found in the IQAP requirements: Objectives, Admission requirements, Curriculum, Teaching and Assessment, Resources, Quality indicators, Additional Graduate program criteria and Quality enhancement.

The following is a synopsis of key strengths and possible weaknesses of the program as identified by the reviewers.

Strengths

- IRNH is a signature program at Laurentian University; the program outcomes fall in the research mission of Health and Wellness.
- The Director of the Program has to be highly commended for outstanding leadership and vision for the PhD. During the site visit her vision, leadership and in particular attention to individual students was consistently and constantly identified by students, staff and faculty.
- Admission requirements appear to meet the competencies for the program.
- The Graduate Degree Level Expectations are clearly mapped to the courses and competencies expected at the doctoral level of graduate education.
- Small class size supports direct and ongoing contact with instructors and adequate opportunity for individual student attention.
- The program is linked with a number of Laurentian’s existing research centres (e.g. Centre for Rural and Northern Health Research (CRaNHR), Evaluating Child Health Outcomes (ECHO), Centre for Research in Human Development and Centre for Research in Occupational Safety and Health (CROSH)) and community partners (e.g. the Sudbury and District Health Unit).
- Student study and common room space is such that it will be adequate for the inclusion of graduate students from other programs in the School

Weaknesses

- There is no explicit statement of the conceptual framework that anchors the discipline and therefore the curriculum.
- Level of knowledge about research methods varies (understandably given the many different backgrounds of the students)
- The syllabi of individual courses do not reference Graduate Level Degree Expectations
- There is no evidence of team teaching: “One person should not develop the weekly sessions in the curriculum and have others teach on a given topic. That is multidisciplinary teaching. True interdisciplinary teaching requires professors from other disciplines being present in class to provide context and teaching.”
- The use of technology in class is modest at best; IT support is “patchy.”

- Given the interdisciplinary nature of the program, it was strange that no-one had been successful in obtaining a PHARE grant⁴.
- The website needs improvement (for marketing purposes).
- Library resources are not adequate

On December 20, 2013, a month after the External Review was received, the School submitted its response to the Dean, and on February 27, 2014, the Dean reacted both to the reviewers' recommendations as well as to the School's response. On April 6, 2014, the Director of Graduate Studies responded to the recommendations contained in the original report as well as the comments from the School and Dean.

Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations with the School's, Dean's and Graduate Studies Director's Responses

Recommendations

1) Vision

External report: The evaluators recommended that the School revisit its building blocks: a clear philosophy, vision, mission and values statement. A conceptual map linking the core concepts and competencies was deemed important for future program development.

School's response: The School agrees in principle.

Dean's response: I agree with the reviewers. If it was identified as a concern, it is likely because it was not obvious.

Graduate Studies Director's response: I believe this concern has now been addressed.⁵

2) Website

External report: The website for the School is in dire need of improvement; its weaknesses include but are not limited to: attraction for prospective student questions; clear identification of the curriculum and core Faculty members; core research programs, etc. The evaluators encouraged that students, staff and faculty feedback be solicited.

School's response: The School strongly agrees with these comments. The School believes it essential to encourage graduate students to enquire and want to attend the program at LU.

Dean's response: I agree

Graduate Studies Director's response: A web committee has been struck to respond to the web concerns across graduate programs.

3) Course Titles

External report: The evaluators recommend that there be congruence between rural and northern health and the course titles with the course descriptions. In their view, they are currently generic and not enticing for prospective students.

School's response: The School agrees with this recommendation and will improve its admission pre-requisites and develop its program map upon which to base any editing of its course descriptions and titles. All changes will be reflected on its improved web pages to improve the quality and availability of program information for potential applicants.

Dean's Response: I agree Graduate Studies Director's response: I am confident that this can be easily fixed.

⁴ PHARE= Public Health and the Agricultural Rural Ecosystem Graduate Training Scholarships worth \$21,000 annually

⁵ This is not correct—hence this recommendation appears in the implementation plan.

4) Research Methods

External report: The evaluators noted that the Research Methods courses were not seen as depicting or providing students with the vision of the program. Pre-requisites to the program were recommended so that a doctoral level course can be provided. The evaluators encouraged the School to revert the current research course into an advanced research seminar on advanced approaches and methods.

School's response: The School does not teach a formal research methods course. There are currently two Research Seminar courses. The School will consider admission pre-requisites along with a new Master's program Methods course(s). The School will aim to reconstitute the Research Seminars with its original intent of advanced approaches and methods.

Dean's response: I agree.

Graduate Studies Director's response: I am confident that this can easily be fixed.

5) Retreats

External report: Regular faculty retreats with core and adjunct faculty will help in the development of the program and teaching allocations. We met many faculty members who would like to be involved in the teaching of courses in the program. Rotating course teaching amongst faculty associated with the program as well as implementation of interdisciplinary teaching through team teaching should also be taken into consideration.

School's response: The School agrees and will try to have more regular gatherings.

Dean's response: I agree.

Graduate Studies Director's response: I am confident that this can easily be accommodated.

6) Cohesion

External report: All those interviewed expressed a desire for 75% of students to be registered full time and 25% registered part time to encourage student participation in events and activities on campus and to develop a sense of cohesion amongst the students. Peer-to-peer support is very important in doctoral programs and students often learn as much from each other outside the classroom and formal events as they do inside the classroom.

School's response: It was never the desire of the faculty to have a part-time program, but this change was made by administration [who followed an existing policy which stated that in order to be considered full-time, a graduate student cannot work more than 10 hours per week on average unless that work is directly related to the student's research.]. Given the comments from the reviewers the School will strive to return to a primarily full-time complement. It feels that a larger proportion of full-time students will encourage the development of a strong "graduate culture" in the program and across Laurentian University. This focus will be conveyed in its recruitment materials and implemented during selection of the 2014-15 cohort

Dean's response: I agree that a 75%-25% arrangement would be a healthy composition to the program for the reasons expressed by the evaluators, provided that there a sufficient number of qualified full-time applicants.

Graduate Studies Director's response: A research-oriented graduate program at the doctoral level cannot rely only on part-time students and I am confident that as the program creates its niche and markets itself, the proportion will shift towards a better proportion of full-time students.

7) Comprehensive Exams

External report: The evaluators suggest that comprehensive exams be administered 4 months after the final course and that there be a split of 4 months before the thesis proposal.

School's response: The School agrees with this recommendation and the comprehensive examination restructuring will be a focal issue that will be discussed at an upcoming faculty retreat. The School hopes to have the 'split' between the comprehensive examination questions and proposal defense formalized prior to the commencement of the 2014-15 academic year.

Dean's response: I support the suggested direction.

Graduate Studies Director's response: I am confident that this can easily be accommodated.

8) Library Resources

External report: The evaluators recommend that the University should give priority support of library resources to the SRNH.

School's response: The School agrees.

Dean's response: I agree and will support their requests for more resources.

Graduate Studies Director's response: I agree.

9) IT Support

External report: The evaluators recommend more IT support for faculty members and students.

School's response: The School agrees.

Dean's response: I agree. With l'École des sciences de l'éducation and the School of Education, IT is considering a physical presence at this end of campus.

Graduate Studies Director's response: I agree

10) Aboriginal Mandate

External report: The evaluators were informed that an Aboriginal focus would become present in all program courses. Accordingly, the evaluators recommended that a Full-Time Aboriginal faculty member be hired to address this need.

School's response: The School agrees and began working on the field of Aboriginal Health earlier this year 2014.

Dean's response: I will support the direction chosen by the program, provided that there is sufficient interest shown with student enrolment.

Graduate Studies Director's response: I agree (See comment #6).

11) Biostatistician

External report: The evaluators suggested that a Biostatistician and more cross-appointments would be helpful to both faculty members and students.

School's response: The School agrees and suggests expanding the potential assistance given by a Biostatistician to other Health and Social Science graduate programs, core and cross-appointed professors for tri-council funding, students in general and possibly offer external services.

Dean's response: I agree that this addition would be a strong asset when applying for tri-council funding. It would certainly assist graduate students from a variety of programs.

Funding is an issue but it should not be perceived as being unsurmountable.

Graduate Studies Director's response: I agree and in fact I suggest that SRNH prepares a hiring strategic plan with their various priorities.

12) Separation of Course Work and Dissertation

External report: The evaluators recommend a clear separation between course work and dissertation work for the sake of the student who may be placed in a dilemma because of two strong and influential opinions (course professor vs. PhD supervisor).

School's response: The School has clearly delineated the boundaries between both realities. Because of former situations, a number of steps have been taken. Students should expect to be challenged on their perspectives and should be able to justify why they choose one path over another. The student should be able to apply the course content to their work in some capacity. The student's supervisory committee should be regularly consulted as a sounding board. The School believes that such discourse will hopefully contribute to the development of independent researchers.

Dean's response: I agree with the School and its rationale. With having clearly outlined the distinction between both knowledge providers, the students need to develop an academic identity in terms of their research project.

Graduate Studies Director's response: Ultimately, the supervisor along with the supervisory committee is there to guide the student through his/her dissertation, the courses being there only to provide the necessary theoretical and practical background to achieve this dissertation.

13) SAGE

External report: The evaluators suggested that the SAGE program (Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement) be considered for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the School.

School's response: The School agrees and will inquire about its suitability.

Dean's response: I encourage the School to learn more about it since this is a path that they are contemplating.

Graduate Studies Director's response: I agree.

14) Interdisciplinary Culture

External report: The evaluators encourage the School to develop a more interdisciplinary culture as it moves forward.

School's response: The School agrees. It hopes that the support for true team teaching will help to foster a stronger interdisciplinary culture among faculty. In addition, regular faculty retreats (see #5 above) will also assist in allowing faculty to get to know one another better and promoting relationship development. This will be an ongoing initiative for the program and is one to which the School is committed to meeting.

Dean's response: I agree that this will be an ongoing pursuit.

Graduate Studies Director's response: I agree

15) Partnerships

External report: The evaluators encourage more partnerships in the form of collaborations between Universities with similar program interests. The suggested outcomes could be beneficial to students and faculty members alike.

School's response: The School agrees and has been proactive with inviting guest speakers, giving workshops and orchestrating summer institutes.

Dean's response: I agree that the School is making an effort and that this observation may spark additional efforts.

Graduate Studies Director's response: I agree and welcome their initiatives, be it a workshop during Research Week or an independent conference.

16) Course Evaluations

External report: The evaluators found the student course evaluations being very restrictive, limited only to the Dean. They recommend a parallel process for course evaluations so that the School or Director can act on the students' needs and expectations.

School's response: The School disagrees because course evaluations are mandated by the Senate. The data gathered by the evaluations is weak in providing guidance for a stronger curriculum. Because of the program's small size, confidentiality is a significant challenge. Other tools are used to gather qualitative feedback and students are generally very honest with their opinions. The School will continue to make the students feel safe and willing to share feedback either anonymously or publically.

Dean's response: I agree with the School. With maintaining a safe and respectful environment, students will share willingly either directly or in private. In its current state, the student evaluation is not constructed to offer curriculum-type feedback.

Graduate Studies Director's response: I agree and in fact, the School of Graduate Studies is contemplating the development of an exit survey where curriculum evaluation, supervisory support and general Laurentian experience will be collected.

ACAPLAN

Laurentian University's Academic Planning Committee (ACAPLAN) has reviewed all recommendations and prepared an implementation plan after discussions with the Director of the School and the Dean. The plan identifies follow-up actions, assigns responsibility for each follow-up and sets timelines.

Of course, there has been a time gap between the Reviewers' report and ACAPLAN's and this has affected the status of the recommendations.

On the plus side, the reviewers recommended that "the program should be examined to ensure that the research methods education in masters courses prepare students for advanced research methods at the doctoral level." This has been completed so there is no need for a further follow-up on Recommendation #4.

On the negative side the IT staff member who was at the School's end of campus did not have his contract renewed at the end of Dec 2013. Therefore the School now has less support (i.e., no support) than it did when it wrote its response to the Recommendation # 9.

More seriously, the School has been notified that it is losing its graduate student space, (Room 308 which includes 308a (Student Common Room) and 308b (Classroom) cited by the reviewers as one of the program's strengths in part because five graduate programs use the space and in part because it provides security for research data which is housed in several banks of filing cabinets.⁶ A degradation of current space may also affect the School's ability to attract students, especially those studying full-time. In addition, there is the question of the

⁶ The significance of this space was underscored by the reviewers: "With other graduate students from different programs also utilizing the space it has the potential to create a welcome haven for students and the potential for new and exciting partnerships across programs. The informal mentoring that will evolve out of the common space and co-location of graduate students will enhance the interdisciplinary PhD program."

secured filing cabinets. ACAPLAN will address the space issue in Recommendation #12 of the Implementation Plan.

It is also to be noted that ACAPLAN did not accept two recommendations:

“12) The evaluators recommend a clear separation between course work and dissertation work for the sake of the student who may be placed in a dilemma because of two strong and influential opinions (course professor vs. PhD supervisor).”

And

“16) The evaluators found the student course evaluations being very restrictive, limited only to the Dean. They recommend a parallel process for course evaluations so that the School or Director can act on the students’ needs and expectations.

ACAPLAN agreed with the School’s position on both these matters (see above).

In the end, the program has been approved to continue and will report to ACAPLAN in 18 months on progress in implementing the following recommendations.

The next—and second—review is scheduled for 2021-22 (in seven years).

Implementation Plan

Recommendation	Proposed Follow-up	Responsibility for Leading Follow-up	Timeline for Addressing Recommendation
1. A clear philosophy, vision, mission and values statement would assist in the further development of the program	Director will consult core faculty, prepare a draft and then host a retreat involving as many faculty and students as available to create a final document.	School Director	Fall 2015
2.Improve Website	a. All faculty who have not already done so should consider adding their photos and complete their profiles <u>and consider adding their photos</u> on the program’s home page b. <u>The</u> School will work with <u>the</u> Web Committee to make improvements affecting all grad programs	a. School Director a. School Director and Dean of Graduate Studies plus <u>the</u> IT Department who is ultimately responsible for	a. July 1, 2014 b. June 30, 2015

		making recommended changes	
<p>3. a. Improve congruence between rural and northern health and the course titles with the course descriptions. Currently they are currently generic and not enticing for prospective students.</p> <p>b. A conceptual map linking core concepts and competencies that is linked to objectives of core courses would assist students and faculty in ensuring graduate degree level expectations are met. Identification and description of the program's core competencies will be an integral outcome of this work.</p>	<p>a. School will develop its program map upon which to base any editing of course descriptions and titles. All changes, once ratified by CELP, will be reflected on the School's improved web pages to improve the quality and availability of program information for potential applicants.</p> <p>b. Individual syllabi will be adjusted to include GDLE's</p>	<p>a. School Director in consultation with colleagues will work with IT Department who is ultimately responsible for making these changes.</p> <p>b. School Director in consultation with colleagues</p>	<p>a. Fall 2015</p> <p>b. September 2014</p>
<p>5. and 14. Improve interdisciplinary culture</p> <p>a. Regular faculty retreats with core and adjunct faculty will help in the development of the program and teaching allocations.</p>	<p>a. Create a schedule on an annual basis dated from July 1</p>	<p>a. School Director in consultation with colleagues</p>	<p>a. July 2014 and ongoing</p>

<p>b. Rotating course teaching amongst faculty associated with the program</p> <p>c. Implementation of interdisciplinary teaching through team teaching should also be taken into consideration</p> <p>d. Retain interdisciplinary space for students (See Recommendation 12)</p>	<p>b. School will make recommendations to <u>the</u> Dean concerning teaching loads</p> <p>This is a resource issue. This is a collective bargaining issue</p>	<p>b. School Director in consultation with colleagues</p> <p>c. Vice-President Academic and Provost <u>Dean</u></p>	<p>b. May 1, 2015</p> <p>c. May 2014</p>
<p>6. 75% of students should be registered full time and 25% registered part time to encourage student participation in events and activities on campus and to develop a sense of cohesion amongst the students</p>	<p>This focus will be conveyed in School's recruitment materials and implemented during selection of the 2014-15 cohort.</p>	<p>School Director in consultation with admission s committee</p>	<p>September 2014</p>
<p>7. Evaluate splitting the comprehensive exams from the proposal defense. The former could be completed within 4 months following the course work and candidacy within 4 months following the comprehensive exams.</p>	<p>School will examine a change its schedule after fully consulting those affected. The content of the comps. may also change.</p>	<p>School Director</p>	<p>September 2015</p>
<p>8. As a "signature program" of the university, librarians should give priority consideration to library resources supporting the program</p>	<p>Library budget assigned to program should rise</p>	<p>Dean of Health will make case to University Librarian</p>	<p>September 2014</p>
<p>9. Improve IT support</p>	<p>a. Classroom needs to be upgraded to accommodate current technology, especially equipment for video-</p>	<p>a. School Director must work with Director, Instructional Media Centre who is</p>	<p>The timing of this is dependent upon the classroom assigned the program. The</p>

	<p>conferencing</p> <p>b. IT must ensure better access to staff members that are proximally located to the SRNH offices</p>	<p>ultimately responsible for making improvements with budget provided for by University</p> <p>b. School Director working with Chief Information Officer</p>	<p>current one is used not only for teaching but for staff meetings, PhD defences but it may be a casualty of space re-assignment in the School of Education.</p> <p>b. Ongoing</p>
<p>10. To increase enrolment in the program it would help to include an Aboriginal focus where specific course content would be included in all courses and aspects of the program. In light of this change, the addition of an Aboriginal faculty member would be necessary to ensuring success.</p>	<p>School must draft case for such a position which will require the official development of a new field (which is a major <u>IQAP program change modification</u>).</p>	<p>School Director to work with Dean of Health and Vice-President Academic and Provost</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>11. School requires a biostatistician, as one student said, “even part time would be helpful.”</p>	<p>School will make case for separate funding since a qualified biostatistician could assist in several sectors of the university as well as provide support for tri-council funding applications (cf. Recommendation 10)</p>	<p>School Director working with Dean of Health</p>	<p>September 2015</p>
<p>12. Space</p> <p>a. Graduate Study Space required to house 5 graduate</p>	<p>a. Dean of Health will work with School to ensure appropriate</p>	<p>a. School Director plus Dean of Health</p>	<p>a. September 2014</p>

<p>programs (which promotes Interdisciplinarity) and provide security for research data</p> <p>b. Need dedicated classroom space, also used for PhD defenses, staff meeting, video-conferences (See recommendation #9)</p>	graduate study space with secure storage for files		
13. SAGE (Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement) program currently offered to Laurentian Aboriginal students may serve as a model or be expanded to include non-Aboriginal students as a way to build and maintain a sense of community amongst graduate students.	School will assess the applicability of this program;	School Director	September 2014
15. Continue to collaborate and network with other universities with similar programs	Workshops / lectures / summer institutes with guest speakers	School Director in cooperation with colleagues	Ongoing

MONITORING THE PLAN

The Dean of the Faculty shall be responsible for monitoring the implementation plan. The details of progress made shall be presented in the Dean's Annual Report and filed with the Vice-President Academic and Provost. By December 2015, after an elapse of 18 months, and per Laurentian's IQAP policy, the Dean will report on each of these recommendations to ACAPLAN. An Executive Summary and the monitoring reports will be posted on Laurentian University's web site.