

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

**FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT & IMPLEMENTATION PLAN for the  
REVIEW OF THE MScN PROGRAM  
in  
Laurentian University's School of Nursing**

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 MScN program in the School of Nursing. This report identifies the significant strengths of the program, 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 MScN Program  
in Laurentian University's School of Nursing**

The MScN program offers two streams for Registered Nurses, a thesis stream and an Advanced Practice Nursing (APN)<sup>1</sup> stream. While freshly-graduated Registered Nurses (RNs) may enter the thesis stream directly upon graduation, the School prefers that they have at least three years of nursing experience before they do. For those choosing the APN stream, at least three years in the clinical area of focus for the scholarly project required for the degree are mandatory.

In September 2013, responding to local demand, the School began offering the M.Sc.Inf. en français although it dropped the admission requirement for the APN stream from three to two years.<sup>2</sup>

For students who are licensed as nurse practitioners<sup>3</sup>, the MScN program also offers two options: the first program option includes three MScN courses and the completion of a project and scholarly paper. The second option is a course-based program. Students need to complete four core MScN courses and one 3 credit elective.

The NP option is also available in French at the Master's level.

On December 2012, the School Nursing submitted its self-study to the office of the Vice-President

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<sup>1</sup> "Advanced Practice Nursing is an umbrella term describing an advanced level of clinical nursing practice that maximizes the use of graduate educational preparation, in-depth nursing knowledge and expertise in meeting the health needs of individuals, families, groups, communities and populations. It involves analyzing and synthesizing knowledge; understanding, interpreting and applying nursing theory and research; and developing and advancing nursing knowledge and the profession as a whole." See Canadian Nurses Association. 2008. *Advanced Nursing Practice: A National Framework*. Ottawa, ON: CNA.

<sup>2</sup> Note that this program came into effect AFTER the IQAP evaluation—so it is only the English program at issue here.

<sup>3</sup> "Nurse practitioners have the competence to provide comprehensive health assessment, to diagnose health/illness conditions, and to treat and manage acute and chronic illness within a holistic model of care. Nurse practitioners order and interpret screening and diagnostic tests, perform procedures and prescribe medications, while integrating the principles of resource allocation and cost-effectiveness, in accordance with federal, provincial and territorial legislation and policy." See Canadian Nurses Association. 2010. *Canadian Nurse Practitioner Core Competency Framework*. Ottawa, ON: CNA.

Academic and Provost. This contained an introduction, an overview of the various streams available, a discussion of program objectives as well as learning objectives and outcomes. The document also reviewed the human and physical resources available and reflected on the fate of graduates. Since this was not the program's first review, the self-study also reflected on concerns addressed since the 2007 review. In addition, it identified the process used in preparing the current document<sup>4</sup>. There were also eight appendices supporting the self-study including faculty c.v.s.

Shortly thereafter, two external reviewers were appointed by the Provost: Dr. Debbie Kane, RN, BScN, MScN, PhD, Associate Professor and Graduate/NP Coordinator in the University of Windsor's Faculty of Nursing and Prof. Karen Poole, Director of the School of Nursing at Lakehead University. On campus Dr. Karen McCauley (Social Work) and Dr. Shelley Watson (Psychology) were added to the team, as were two students, Tina Bloomfield and Rochelle Hatton.

The external evaluation was held on site on 17 and 18 June 2013. Over the two days, the team was able to see the school's classrooms and offices, tour lab facilities and the computer room, and visit the J.N. Desmarais Library. The team also met with senior administrators, with faculty, as well as with current students, alumni and key stakeholders. It also "had the pleasure of observing a MScN student in the advanced practice stream present her APN project."

The external reviewers submitted their report on 31 July 2013 which "outlined the many strengths of the Laurentian's MScN programs," and commended the School "for maintaining a strong program within the reality of limited faculty resources."

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.

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<sup>4</sup> That said, tracked data on applications, registrations, attrition rates, completion times, academic awards and teaching evaluations [were not] provided. The Reviewers discussed this missing data with the program coordinators and the Dean and it was noted that with the addition of the administrative individual shared between the NP program and the Masters program a system is now in place to collect this data for future evaluations.

## Strengths

- MScN program is consistent with Laurentian's mission and academic plans.
- Admission requirements are aligned with the learning outcomes.
- Program requirements and learning outcomes are clearly outlined and consistent with graduate Degree Level Expectations.
- The School strives to provide flexible modes of course delivery in order to increase access to nurses living and working in remote, rural and northern areas who are unable to move to a central location to complete graduate education.
- The small but dedicated group of professors has identified a number of creative strategies for meeting program curricular requirements. For example, a collaborative relationship between the School and Laurentian's School of Rural and Northern Health allows for nursing students to complete an elective offered by the Interdisciplinary PhD Program in Rural and Northern Health.
- The methods used to assess student achievement of the defined learning outcomes and degree level expectations are appropriate and effective.
- Students were very supportive of the quality of their studies and the knowledge they were gaining related to their advanced practice roles.
- Graduates of the MScN program feel well prepared to pursue PhD studies.
- Library resources are a strength.
- The faculty are active researchers who have received research funding from ministry, professional, external and internal granting bodies.
- The Student Handbook is informative and concise, with information specific to the MScN program as well as broader LU policies and procedures relevant to graduate students.

## Weaknesses

- Although Laurentian's Academic plan sets aboriginal programming as a priority, there does not appear to be a focus on Aboriginal content within the MScN courses.
- Nursing Science and Theory course (NURS 5136) has been eliminated from the course work within the APN option.<sup>5</sup> A course focused on the theory of nursing science is fundamental to any graduate nursing program and so it is unclear as to how the APN project option students will obtain this critical knowledge.
- There are few electives; an advanced statistics course is a priority elective.
- While the ability to complete course work without being required to attend classes on campus on a weekly basis was identified as a strength, the inconsistency of the scheduling of on-site class attendance is problematic for students trying to coordinate school and work schedules in advance.
- There is a lack of classroom space to accommodate the larger classroom sizes and there is no dedicated meeting place for graduate students.
- There is little opportunity for graduates to realize their full scope of practice as masters prepared nurses
- The NP graduate diplomas must be integrated into the MScN program as soon as possible.

On 20 December 2013, a month after the External Review was received, the School submitted its response to the Dean, and on 27 February 2014, the Dean reacted both to the reviewers' recommendations as well as to the School's response. On 22 May 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.

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<sup>5</sup> Although it has been retained for those NP students completing the MScN in the course-based option

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

- 1.i. Consider changing the required theory courses within the MScN – APN stream so that Nursing Science and Theory (NURS5136) is included.
  - a) Unit's response: Following a curriculum review committee meeting, they will consider changing the required theory courses in the MScN – APN stream and include Nursing Science and Theory (NURS5136). The MScN Coordinator will take responsibility in addressing this topic.
  - b) Dean's response: I agree with the reviewers and the unit plan on addressing this concern.
  - c) Graduate Studies Director (GSD)'s response: Agrees with Dean.
- 1.ii. Consider more structure to the Thesis Seminar Course (NURS5005) in order to support students in the development of their thesis proposals.
  - a) Unit's response: This is to be considered by the Curriculum review committee in 2014.
  - b) Dean's response: The comment made by the reviewers suggests that there is minimal communication between the students, their supervisor and the Professor teaching this course. I suggest that the graduate curriculum committee discuss the NURS 5005 course and consider implementing a solid set of skills for students in consultation with all Nursing Graduate Supervisors
  - c) GSD's response: Agrees with Dean.
2. Consider establishing a yearly plan, with input from students, for the delivery of elective courses and post the schedule on the home website and in the Handbook Survival Guide.
  - a) Unit's response: Attempts were made two years ago and will be discussed again at Curriculum review committee in 2014.
  - b) Dean's response: The unit should address this challenge by making their course delivery times predictable and logical to maintain schedule flexibility for students.
  - c) GSD's response: As the program grows and is likely to attract a diversity of students, the course scheduling should be considered attentively.
3. Examine ways to expand the use of technology such as videoconferencing and webinars to support distance learners and perhaps reduce the travel time to campus.
  - a) Unit's response: The unit will meet with Information Technology and try to offer an elective course (Health Promotion) as an intensive course. The unit will also explore other options (ie. Compressed courses, intensive course delivery, and better coordination with other onsite required courses).
  - b) Dean's response: The Dean appreciates the reviewers' concerns and the unit will make efforts to accommodate this interest. Currently, the MScN is not an online program. Perhaps this will be the beginning of an online graduate program. The library is already in tune with online databases and will likely continue in this venue.
  - c) GSD's response: With such a diversity of students undertaking the MScN, new and creative delivery methods become a natural development. This is in fact a reality for LU at a whole and will thus directly benefit the program.
4. For on-site requirements, consider options such as compressed or intensive course delivery, and coordinate with the other required courses' onsite requirements.
  - a) Unit's response: The program Curriculum Committee will examine these options and others in 2014.
  - b) Dean's response:
  - c) GSD's response:
5. Consider a home D2L site for all MScN students that could house the Handbook Survival

- Guide, and refer to this site in all course syllabi.
- a) Unit's response: The program Curriculum Committee will examine this option although a preferred choice may be to use the LU Intranet. The program Coordinator will meet with the Nursing IT in the near future to add the Handbook to LUNET.
  - b) Dean's response: With this feedback, I am confident that the graduate program Coordinator will ensure that all students are made aware of the resource.
  - c) GSD's response: Together with a new important document on supervisor-student relationships, the Handbook Survival Guide should be communicated as early as the orientation session for new students. I believe this is the plan for the years to come.
6. Explore strategies to provide more formal orientation and mentorship recognizing the unique needs of distant, part-time students.
- a) Unit's response: The School will immediately set out to remedy this problem.
  - b) Dean's response: I am confident that the School will continue to explore the most appropriate strategies available for students at a distance.
  - c) GSD's response: My opinion is in line with the Dean's
7. Continue the development of the database that tracks applications, registrations, attrition, completion times, graduation rates and employment rates,
- a) Unit's response: Student registration list including registrations, courses and completion times have been tracked but it will likely become more challenging with accessing student transcripts and records because of privacy issues. The School has not tracked applications or employment rates after graduation.
  - b) Dean's response: The Institutional Planning office and the Admissions office would be able to assist with maintaining a yearly record, if they were told what the MScN Coordinator wishes to gather in terms of data.
  - c) GSD's response: I have no doubt this omission can be easily fixed.
8. Consider increasing Indigenous knowledge within the MScN program to be consistent with the Academic Plan (2010) priority.
- a) Unit's response: Invite faculty members from Indigenous studies to MScN curriculum review for their guidance and input.
  - b) Dean's response: The unit could also consider begin the curriculum process to cross-list some graduate courses in the Master of Indigenous Relations program as possible optional courses.
  - c) GSD's response: A wider sharing of courses across disciplines is now possible and should help students accessing indigenous knowledge.
9. Develop back-up delivery plans when core faculty members are on leave so that courses are taught in a logical sequence and students are able to enroll in courses each term.
- a) Unit's response: They will consider adding more Adjunct Faculty and cross-appointed Faculty members. They will also recruit from within the School of Nursing.
  - b) Dean's response:
  - c) GSD's response:
10. Continue exploring strategies to address recruitment and retention of doctorally-prepared faculty (eg. Grow your Own).
- a) Unit's response: The unit will recruit and explore options with full faculty members.
  - b) Dean's response: The Dean agrees with the reviewers and the unit is encouraging its faculty members to obtain doctoral degrees. The unit currently has ten out of twenty-four faculty members who are enrolled in a doctoral program.
  - c) GSD's response: While the "grow your own" approach is one solution, I would still encourage SON to recruit outside of Laurentian in order to bring different perspectives and teaching backgrounds.

11. Support students to apply for OGS, and include the process in the Survival Guide Handbook.
  - a) Unit's response: They will add the OGS information to the MScN Survival Guide, understanding that most MScN students won't qualify for OGS. Students must work more than 10 hours per week as an RN. Other scholarship options will be added to the Handbook.
  - b) Dean's response:
  - c) GSD's response: With an increase of fulltime students, there may be room for some of them to be eligible to OGS and CIHR scholarships. This will be presented to the students.
  
12. Continue to explore the possibility of fast-tracking from MScN to PhD.
  - a) Unit's response: Agrees in principle but timing of these discussions will have to take faculty resources and availability into consideration.
  - b) Dean's response: In the most recent set of curriculum changes (2013), the program has enhanced the fast-tracking of the MScN from 30 cr. to 18 cr.
  - c) GSD's response. Agrees with Dean.
  
13. Consider creating a dedicated space for students to meet outside of scheduled on-site classes.
  - a) Unit's response: Agrees.
  - b) Dean's response: There have been discussions with the School of Rural and Northern Health in terms of sharing graduate student space with other Masters and PhD students. The plan will be to share space on the second floor of the 'Education' building.
  - c) GSD's response: As the modernization of the campus unfolds, those needs are seriously taken into consideration.
  
14. Continue to plan for the termination of the stand-alone post-baccalaureate PHCNP certificate program around 2015, in alignment with the COUPN PHCNP IQAP review recommendations.
  - a) Unit's response: With a senate-approved integrated NP/MScN program in place, the Administration needs to agree to it.
  - b) Dean's response: Our intention is to be properly aligned with the COUPN and PHCNP recommendations.
  - c) GSD's response: [This change] has already been approved by the Council of Graduate Studies.
  
15. Strengthen the research culture for students by implementing "brown bag" discussions of thesis/project work, and by encouraging students to participate in Laurentian's Research Week Symposium as well as the annual December professional conference.
  - a) Unit's response: Students will be encouraged to get involved with existing opportunities on campus.
  - b) Dean's response: I agree with the unit that many opportunities exist on campus. Additionally, the graduate Coordinator may consider inviting MScN students to the annual Collaborative Nursing program gathering, particularly at the Scholarship discussions.
  - c) GSD's response: With several prizes offered through the Graduate Research Symposium, it should be relatively easy to attract students to this platform among others.

In addition, the Reviewers made a number of suggestions in the body of their report that are worth pursuing:

16. There appeared to be a lack of available electives, thereby possibly delaying students' program completion.
  - a) Unit's response: This was recognized and efforts will be made to offer electives on a

regular basis (about two electives per year). Students in the program will also be provided with opportunities to take electives through interdisciplinary programs at Laurentian University. As per the reviewers' suggestion, students will be made aware of the Visiting Scholar option whereby they can take an elective at another Ontario University.

- b) Dean's response:
  - b) GSD's response: The Council of Graduate Studies recently voted a wider sharing of courses across disciplines, representing the true value of a graduate education. This should help the nursing students accessing more elective courses.
17. The reviewers were told by students that an advanced statistics course was identified as a priority elective.
- a) Unit's response: Students are eligible to take statistics electives from other programs at Laurentian University. However, there is a strong need for statistical support for both students and faculty. We would support a dedicated biostatistician position for Professional Schools.
  - c) Dean's response: I support the recommendation made by the students where an elective course of this nature could be very helpful. With similar courses in the other graduate programs either in our faculty or university, this request could be a simple arrangement.
  - d) GSD's response: The Council of Graduate Studies recently voted a wider sharing of courses across disciplines, representing the true value of a graduate education. This should help the nursing students accessing the statistical course they need.
18. The reviewers suggest changes to the NURS 5046 course so that it may include more structured guidance for students.
- a) Unit's response: The course syllabus for this course will be revised as per the suggestions in the near future.
  - b) Dean's response: I support any modifications that will assist students to develop research skills in preparation for their proposal and defense.
  - c) GSD's response: Any alteration to the syllabus that will improve student skills and education is always welcome.
19. The reviewers were informed by students that a student survey would help the Nursing graduate committee know their interests in evolving health care matters. It would also help better follow students in terms of progress in the program and in choosing elective courses.
- a) Unit's response: Attempts were made 2 years ago but it was stopped because of a reducing number of faculty members. It will be discussed at the curriculum review committee once again this year with the intent of creating a yearly plan, with student input. This information could help identify elective courses. If approved, the schedule and general information could be posted on the home website and in their Handbook Survival Guide.
  - b) Dean's response: I support the request made by the students in the reviewers' comments. A survey should become an annual procedure for identifying the most appropriate elective courses to be offered in the coming year. I encourage the unit to go in the direction being considered.
  - c) GSD's response: While an annual survey may be difficult to administer, such survey could take place every two years and yet give useful feedback to the faculty. It will also increase the communication and transparency between students and faculty.

#### **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. In fact because the School has been so pro-active on the review's recommendations, the following ones may be deemed completed:

*2. Consider establishing a yearly plan, with input from students, for the delivery of elective courses and post the schedule on the home website and in the Handbook Survival Guide.*

The plan is now in place.

*3. Examine ways to expand the use of technology such as videoconferencing and webinars to support distance learners and perhaps reduce the travel time to campus.*

As of January 2014, the School began using Collaborate through D2L for seminars in MScN courses.

*4. For on-site requirements, consider options such as compressed or intensive course delivery, and coordinate with the other required courses' onsite requirements.*

The School agreed to the delivery of an elective (Health Promotion) as an intensive in Sept 2013; onsite coordination between courses has always been implemented informally by faculty. Securing scheduled lab space for MScN courses and thesis defenses will facilitate better scheduling processes.

*5. Consider a home D2L site for all MScN students that could house the Handbook Survival Guide, and refer to this site in all course syllabi*

The better platform for this dissemination is the LU Intranet. The School would continuously update who had access to the D2L site, whereas all students will have access to intranet. In September 2013, the *Handbook* was placed on the intranet.

*6. Explore strategies to provide more formal orientation and mentorship recognizing the unique needs of distant, part-time students.*

The School had adopted a range of strategies to meet this goal.

- i. It implemented a June program orientation rather than Sept. to meet supervisor, other classmates, coordinator etc.
- ii. Promoted the use of 'common space' on campus for MScN and other grad students when they are at LU.
- iii. Implemented 'generic' email addresses for MScN program
- iv. Updated the MScN 'Survival Guide' and posted it on the intranet
- v. Expanded use of innovative delivery models to promote student engagement and interaction.
- vi. Began exit interviews with students to determine where program can make improvements

*13. Consider creating a dedicated space for students to meet outside of scheduled on-site classes.*

Approval has been obtained for MScN students to share IRNH PhD and DEVE student space (lounge, study area) in School of Ed building. Students were introduced to space at orientation in June 2014.

14. Continue to plan for the termination of the stand-alone post-baccalaureate PHCNP certificate program around 2015, in alignment with the COUPN PHCNP IQAP review recommendations.

MScN faculty gave the Coordinator, Dr. Roberta Heale, approval to pursue the integration of NP and MScN program. Funding mechanisms were confirmed and approval has been obtained from Dean, Director of Grad Studies, and the Registrar Changes have been made to website and the September 2014 intake will be the first into the integrated program.

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	Timelines for Addressing Recommendation
1.i. Consider changing the required theory courses within the MScN – APN stream so that NURS 5136 (Nursing Science and Theory) is included.	Discussed in February 2014 at MScN faculty meeting where it was decided to continue with current curriculum for another year but re-evaluate recommendation in 2015	MScN Coordinator	September 2015
1.ii. Consider more structure to the Thesis Seminar Course (NURS 5046) in order to support students in the development of their thesis proposals.	Course syllabus revisions for delivery of NURS 5046 in Winter 2014. MScN Faculty review course description and pre-requisites.	MScN Coordinator to submit prerequisites to Faculty of Graduate Studies Council	September 2014
7. Continue the development of the database that tracks applications, registrations, attrition, completion times, graduation rates and employment rates,	Registration list including registrations, courses and completion times. Potentially will become more difficult with changes to access to student transcripts. To date, have not tracked applications or employment rates. Explore ways to monitor these other areas.	MScN Coordinator and Admin. staff	Ongoing
8. Consider increasing Indigenous knowledge within the MScN program to be consistent with the Academic Plan (2010) priority.	i. Faculty members will invite a speaker from an Indigenous program to present to students or offer guidance and input. ii. Students will be encouraged to take an	MScN Coordinator	Ongoing

	elective re: Indigenous Studies through the IRNH PhD, or the new masters in Indigenous Studies offered at Laurentian		
9. Develop back-up delivery plans when core faculty are on leave so that courses are taught in a logical sequence and students are able to enroll in courses each term.	Adding to adjunct faculty. Adding cross-appointments. Recruitment from within nursing faculty.	MScN Coordinator	Ongoing
10. Continue exploring strategies to address recruitment and retention of doctorally-prepared faculty (eg. Grow your Own).	Recruitment within faculty. Explore options with full faculty.	MScN Coordinator	Ongoing
11. Support students to apply for OGS, and include the process in the Survival Guide Handbook.	Add to MScN Survival Guide. Most MScN students don't qualify for OGS because they work more than 10 hours per week as an RN. However, there are other scholarship options which will be added to the <i>Handbook</i> and emailed to students as they arise.	MScN Coordinator	Ongoing
12. Continue to explore the possibility of fast-tracking from MScN to PhD.	MScN faculty to determine timing of entering into discussions with PhD programs at LU. Currently NP is being integrated to MScN and French masters starting, both formally in Sept 2014 so timing of these discussions will have to take faculty resources and availability into consideration.	MScN Coordinator	Sept. 2015
15. Strengthen the research culture for students by implementing "brown bag" discussions of thesis/project work, and by encouraging students to participate in	MScN faculty to encourage students they supervise to present at symposia at Laurentian when appropriate. Grad Coordinator	MScN Coordinator	Ongoing

Laurentian's Research Week Symposium as well as the annual December professional conference.	ensures that students are aware of upcoming opportunities. MScN students presented at Pro Schools research day in Dec 2013		
17. An advanced statistics course must be made a priority elective.	i. Students are eligible to take statistics electives from other programs at Laurentian University.  ii. There is a strong need for statistical support for both students and faculty. We would support a dedicated biostatistician position for the Faculty of Health	MScN Coordinator to communicate this  ii. MScN Coordinator working with other health disciplines and Dean and to secure biostatistician position	i. Ongoing  ii. Ongoing
18. Change NURS 5046 course so that it may include more structured guidance for students	School will make change	MScN Coordinator	June 2015
19. Conduct student survey	Creating a yearly plan, with student input. This information could help identify elective courses	MScN Coordinator	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 May 2016, 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.