

FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

Institutional Quality Assurance Program (IQAP) Review

Nursing – Graduate Programs

Date of Review: May 18th and 19th, 2021

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 graduate programs delivered by 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.

Executive Summary of the Review

In accordance with the Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the School of Nursing program submitted a self-study in April 2021 to the Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies to initiate the cyclical program review of its graduate programs. The approved self-study presented program descriptions, learning outcomes, and analyses of data provided by the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis. Appendices to the self-study contained all course outlines associated with the program and the CVs for each full-time member in the department.

Two arm's length external reviewers and one internal reviewer were endorsed by the Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences, and selected by the Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies. The review team reviewed the self-study documentation and then conducted a review on May 18th and 19th, 2021. The review included interviews with the Provost and Vice-President (Academic); Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies, Associate Dean, Grad Studies and Research, Assistant Dean of the School of Nursing and meetings with groups of current students, full-time faculty and support staff.

The Assistant Dean of the School and the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences submitted responses to the Reviewers' Report (August 2021 and November 2021). Specific recommendations were discussed and clarifications and corrections were presented. Follow-up actions and timelines were included.

Program Strengths:

Reputation for Excellence

The School of Nursing at McMaster University is recognized nationally and internationally for excellence. The School of Nursing is ranked 15th in the world (2021 Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings by subject) demonstrating recognized academic excellence, world renowned professors, and alumni accomplishments. The School of Nursing's leadership, and faculty are to be commended for the extensive process undertaken to revise learning outcomes and curriculum across the MScN and PhD graduate programs of study in Nursing. The PHCNP diploma is part of a 9-university collaborative program in Ontario and was not included. The rigorous process of program renewal involved literature reviews, consultations with key stakeholders and consultation with curriculum experts internationally. The focus for the consultations centered on the needs of the health system and the advanced education needs of the nursing profession.

Curriculum Designed to Prepare Nurse Leaders

The enhancements to the graduate programs are innovative and timely given the need for graduates to be prepared to take on leadership roles in the transformation of the Canadian healthcare system post-pandemic. A unique aspect of the McMaster SON graduate programs is the aim of having all graduate students as nurse leaders, an important competency of nurses within the healthcare systems. This has involved all graduate students taking a graduate course on leadership.

1.1.1 Response to Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The school's work with Dr. Bernice Downey, a nursing professor, and Indigenous Health Lead for the Faculty of Health Sciences to respond to the call for Truth and Reconciliation is a strength. Dr. Downey is a member of the Curriculum Committee and has advised throughout the curriculum revisions. In addition, Dr. Downey has played a key role in the Indigenous Health and Indigenous curriculum workshops for faculty. All graduate students are required to take online Indigenous Relationship and Cultural Safety courses, there is an Indigenous thread throughout the graduate programs' curriculum, and Dr. Downey meets with all Indigenous graduate students.

Research Support and the Appointment of an Assistant Dean of Research (note: information related to titles of SON members corrected in this paragraph)

Another quality enhancement for graduate students and professors was establishing an Assistant Dean of Research who currently holds a University Scholar Award. This role focuses on enhancing quality of doctoral student education (PhD seminar), graduate student success with national and provincial funding fellowships, and professor success with grant applications.

Student Focused Adjustments to Teaching and Enhanced Communication

The School of Nursing was required to make a rapid shift to providing courses using distance technologies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was a challenge but has led to some very positive outcomes for students who commented on increased communication by having access to "town hall" sessions on Zoom. Many graduate students and professors are hoping to continue with some of the

advantages.

Program Areas for Enhancement:

The reviewers agree with the proposed areas for improvement stated in the self-study:

1.1.2 Master's Thesis Admissions and Time to Completion

The self-study report identified a decline in applicants for the Master's Thesis stream in the past 2-3 years, and a more recent increase in the number of students transferring from the Master's Thesis to Master's Course stream. Time to completion for Master's Thesis students was also identified as problematic with many students defending in their third year. The review team recommends supporting more graduate students to complete their thesis and ensure appropriate time to completion. In fact, improving time to completion may incentivize more students to enter the thesis stream. The reviewers acknowledge that this issue is not unique to McMaster and that nurses who are employed with competing demands on their time may find the course-based master's option more achievable.

The reviewers also reported some thesis students identified the need for coaching on how to work with supervisors to make plans, ensure timely feedback and best ways to make contact.

Program Response: COVID saw students switch from thesis to course because of barriers to conducting research. Recently, we have incoming students change their admission from course to thesis programs after discussion with faculty advisors and the Assistant Dean. In 2021, four incoming students will switch to the thesis program. At fall Open House and recruitment sessions, we will continue to provide information about the Masters thesis and provide consultation to interested students.

For both incoming and current Masters Thesis students, we are planning several initiatives. We will continue to ensure Thesis students have a committee meeting during term one, that includes the AD. At this time a review of the schedule for completion will be discussed. All thesis students and their supervisors will be provided information from the School of Graduate Studies about Getting the Supervisory Relationship off to a Good Start (https://gs.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2020/02/supervisory_relationshipjuly_222016.pdf). In addition to this, we plan to have a Town Hall meeting for thesis and PhD students to discuss the topic which will include current students to share ideas and strategies.

1.1.3 Decision on Neonatal Nurse Practitioner Program

The self-study report and the site visit confirmed that this program has not run for over seven years yet remains a program offering. Dr. Nancy Carter sits on a national advisory panel to look at the lack of Neonatal Nurse Practitioner programs in Canada, and potential for a consortium approach. Neonatal nursing was not identified as a strength of the program during the curriculum renewal process or during the site visit. The reviewers recommend that a decision be made about the Neonatal Nurse Practitioner Program as soon as possible.

Program Response: We recommend that the Neonatal Nurse Practitioner Program be closed. The Canadian Council of Registered Nurse Regulators (CCRNRR) has begun an implementation plan (The Nurse Practitioner Regulation Implementation Plan Project) to standardize NP education in Canada to the level of the generic all-ages NP role with entry-level competencies and examination. Specialized NP programs, including the Neonatal NP, will no longer be viable. Currently, the School of Nursing does not have faculty with a specialization in Neonatal Nursing. This area of nursing was not supported during the Curriculum Renewal process.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation	Proposed Follow-Up	Responsibility for Leading	Timeline
Develop a plan to ensure that early and mid-career graduate faculty receive support to develop their research and teaching expertise (capacity building strategy).	Currently there are several processes in place to support early and mid career faculty: Research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start up funds supported by SON/FHS for new faculty Proposal for use of funds reviewed with the AD Research – within first 12 months Grant submission and review support from AD and FHS Health Research Services Assignment of a research mentor (senior faculty) Teaching: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-teaching new courses with experienced faculty Graduate supervision privileges in first year Support from AD Grad and AD Research for student applications for tri counsel funding and other. 	SON Leadership Team including Assistant Dean Research Assistant Dean Graduate Studies	Discuss annually
Evaluate the new graduate curriculum as planned, including tracking graduates to measure the impact of the leadership focus.	The focus of activities for the Graduate Curriculum Committee will the development and implementation of an ongoing evaluation process. From our program perspective, leadership is not a position or title, but a skill or attribute that all nurses can possess to improve health care, education,	Assistant Dean and Graduate Program Curriculum Committee, with support from McPherson Institute	Winter 2022 for completion of plan to be carried out after 2021 2022 Academic year

	and research. It may be difficult to evaluate, but we will discuss this further.		
Increase the transparency for funding of part-time versus full-time doctoral studies.	The Assistant Dean will continue to have individual conversations with all incoming PhD students and their supervisors about funding. This information is in offer letters. Graduate faculty are provided this information at year graduate faculty orientation.	Assistant Dean and Graduate Program Admin Assistant	Ongoing
Provide guidance in working with supervisors for thesis students i.e., panel of supervisors for Q& A or a workshop.	This excellent suggestion can be organized as a virtual session in the fall. We will also send material from SGS (Getting Supervisory Relationship off to a Good Start for instance) to all student/supervisor dyads and invite current students and supervisors to attend.	Assistant Deans of Graduate Studies and Research	Fall 2021
Prioritize a discussion in the School of Nursing around the admission of International Students into Master's and Doctoral thesis programs.	An international PhD student begins the program in the fall of 2021, and there may be opportunity in the future. Discussion will occur at the SON Leadership Council, as well as the Graduate Faculty meetings. We will seek out advice from other Ontario Nursing Graduate Programs who admit international students.	SON Leadership Team, Graduate Faculty	Fall 2021 discussions
Assist students to gain a better understanding of reasonable timelines for preparation to apply for external awards i.e., CIHR, SSHRC.	Timelines for external awards deadlines are shared with students and Graduate Faculty. External award applications are also discussed at the first committee meetings students have which includes the Assistant Dean. It will be incorporated into student orientation.	Assistant Dean, Graduate Faculty	Fall 2021

Faculty Response

The Faculty thanked the reviewers, Drs. Linda Patrick, Dawn Stacey and Emma Apatu for their thorough, thoughtful, and constructive review of the graduate programs in Nursing at McMaster University. They appreciate that the reviewers identified strengths of the programs including its reputation for excellence. They agree with the reviewers that the suite of graduate nursing programs are well positioned to address the post-pandemic challenges of leadership, research, and

clinical care in the profession. They are well-supported by the vibrancy, strategic direction, and strong leadership of the School of Nursing.

They have reviewed the program's response and we support their plans to address the recommendations in the report. They are thankful for several thoughtful suggestions about the curriculum, and are confident that these will be carefully considered by the Nursing program leaders. The IQAP review was particularly timely, being well aligned to the broader strategic planning process in the School, the recent curriculum renewal, and the reappointment of the Assistant Dean, Dr. Carter. Dr. Carter and her team have clear guidance about enhancement for graduate training in Nursing over the next 5 years. They agree that support for supervisory capacity in the thesis-based programs and the evaluation of the curriculum are key priorities and will work with the School of Nursing to support their innovations in these areas. They recognize that international enrollment has been low and look forward to further discussions with the programs and the School about the advisability of international recruitment.

They extended their thanks to Dr. Carter, Dr. Carroll and the faculty and staff of the School of Nursing for their excellent work on the self-study and site visit and to Dr. Welch and his staff in the School of Graduate Studies for their support of the IQAP process.

Quality Assurance Committee Recommendation

The Quality Assurance Committee on Jan 26, 2022, recommend that the graduate Nursing programs should follow the regular course of action with an 18-month progress report and a subsequent full external cyclical review to be conducted no later than 8 years after the start of the last review.