

FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT
Institutional Quality Assurance Program (IQAP) Review

Health, Aging and Society (BA & MA Programs)

Date of Review: June 17 – 19, 2014

In accordance with McMaster's Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), this final assessment report provides a synthesis of the external evaluation and the internal response and assessments of the **Health, Aging and Society (Undergraduate & Graduate) BA and MA Program**. 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.

This Final Assessment Report includes an Implementation Plan that identifies who will be responsible leading the follow up for the proposed recommendations; any changes in organization, policy or governance that will be necessary to meet the recommendations; and timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations.

Executive Summary of the Health, Aging and Society (Undergraduate & Graduate) Cyclical Program Review

The **Health, Aging and Society Program** operates through an interdisciplinary approach throughout its curriculum at both undergraduate and graduate levels. In accordance with the IQAP, the undergraduate and graduate programs submitted a joint self-study in February 2014. The self-study presented the program descriptions and learning outcomes, an analytical assessment of the program, including data collected from students along with the standard data package prepared by the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis. Appended were the course outlines for all courses in the program and the CVs for each full-time faculty member in the Program.

Two arm's-length reviewers, one from Ontario and one from California, and one internal reviewer participated in a three-day site visit organized by the School of Graduate Studies. The site visit consisted of meetings with faculty members, staff, as well as undergraduate and graduate students. The Review Team highlighted their findings in a report submitted in June 2014. The Review Team was genuinely impressed with the organization of the undergraduate program and the positive feedback received from students when discussing the program, faculty and staff. The only question that remains is about the viability of the three-year BA program given the university's focus on graduate student education. Overall, the review highlighted a very positive student experience and no other recommendations were put forth. The MA program in Health, Aging and Society is represented by students with very different disciplinary backgrounds. Although the Review Team does agree that this is the basis for a rich graduate student experience they do note the challenges the program faces in ensuring the course content meets all students' needs and that students are provided with the appropriate level of direction in their present and anticipated careers.

The Chair of the Health, Aging and Society program and the Acting Dean of Social Science submitted responses to the Reviewers' Report. Specific recommendations were discussed and clarifications were presented. Follow-up actions and timelines were included.

McMaster's Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) reviewed the above documentation and the committee determined that reviewers' comments and feedback were generally positive. QAC recommends that the program follow the regular course of action with an 18-month follow-up report and a subsequent full external cyclical review to be conducted no later than 8 years after the start of the next review.

The following program strengths and weakness were also noted:

- **Strengths**

The review team noted that the Health, Aging and Society faculty have developed an innovative undergraduate curriculum with a strong experiential component

The students in the undergraduate program have a close sense of community leading to a very positive student experience.

- **Weaknesses**

There is a heavy reliance on cross-appointed faculty. Although having cross-appointed faculty allows a diverse educational experience for both BA and MA students, this model is also associated with competing demands from other departments in the Faculty.

Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations with the Department's and Acting Dean's Responses & Follow Up Process

Recommendation #1: Eliminate the three-year BA program.

Response: The Department expressed an interest in moving to an exclusively honours BA program or to direct entry degree programs.

Responsibility for following up: Department Chair and Dean

Timeline: Update at 18 month report

Recommendation #2: Uneven interest in gerontology and health studies.

Response: The Department places an equal emphasis on both areas but attracting students into gerontology continues to pose challenges. Department can encourage students to take a combined honours degree.

Responsibility for following up: Department Chair

Timeline: Update at 18-month report

Recommendation #3: Address the diversity of student backgrounds in the MA program.

Response: The Department agrees with the review's assessment and believes that the introduction of two PhD programs and new faculty with this degree may allow the Department to offer a greater range of courses that will meet the diverse needs to students. The Department has also conducted a labour market assessment, which will allow them guide students in careers relating to their degrees

Responsibility for following up: Department Chair & Dean

Timeline: Update at 18-month report

Recommendation #4: Graduate students should have access to a greater number of courses in their areas of interest.

Response: The Department fully agrees and will begin to address this topic at the faculty retreat. They point out that the new PhD program will also make this a more viable option.

The Acting Dean adds that the Chairs and Directors in the Faculty of Social Sciences are discussing how to facilitate students who wish to register in courses in other departments. The Department is also speaking with units outside of the Faculty of Social Sciences to explore joint graduate courses.

Responsibility for following up: Department Chair & Dean

Timeline: Update at 18-month report

Quality Assurance Committee Recommendation

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