

FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT
Interdisciplinary School of Health Sciences
Faculty of Health Sciences
Cycle: 2020–2021
Date: 2021-11-03

I. Programs

- Master of Science, Interdisciplinary Health Sciences
- Doctorate in Philosophy, Population Health

II. Evaluation Process

- The Final Assessment Report for the evaluation of the programs was based on the following documents: (a) the self-study brief produced by the academic unit, (b) the report produced by the external reviewers following their site visit, and (c) the comments from the Dean, Lucie Thibault, the Interdisciplinary School of Health Sciences Director, Karen Phillips, and the Assistant Director of Graduate Studies and Research, Frédérique Tesson, on the aforementioned documents.
- The site visit, which took place on March 29 and 31, 2021, was conducted by Michel Bédard, Lakehead University, and Cheryl McCormick, Brock University.
- The visit was carried out virtually due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The reviewers were provided a comprehensive self-study brief that had been previously presented and discussed at the School Assembly prior to revision. Nonetheless, the reviewers had the opportunity to see the physical space through electronic presentations. The virtual visit included Steffany Bennett, Brain and Mind Research Institute, as internal delegate.
- During the site visit, the external evaluators met with the Vice-Provost, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, Claire Turenne-Sjolander, the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, Lucie Thibault, the Vice-Dean Academics, Program Quality and Delivery, Christine Dallaire, Interdisciplinary School of Health Sciences Director, Karen Phillips, Assistant Director of Graduate Studies and Research, Frédérique Tesson, members of the support staff, regular professors, as well as graduate students.

III. Summary of Reports on the Quality of Programs

This section aims to inform the unit on the strengths and weaknesses observed during the evaluation process to improve its programs.

1. EMPHASIZING THE STRENGTHS AND IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES

Strengths

- Highly relevant programs with respect to social needs and students' demands.
- The interdisciplinary nature of the program is unique and is enriched by including biosciences.

- The unit recognizes the importance of bilingualism as an important factor for students to work and obtain employment in the Ottawa area. The bilingual nature of the PhD program makes it distinct from other universities.
- In the PhD program, 34% of the students are francophone, 60% are female and 42% are international. Such a good balance of the population is exactly what the University of Ottawa is trying to achieve.
- The requirement that the students must complete a learning plan is a strength of the PhD in Population Health.
- MSc in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences has fewer courses compared to programs at other universities, but also a unique modular course structure allowing the students to devote the maximum time to research activities and training.

Challenges

- The misalignment of the research areas of the professorship and the PhD, which is negatively impacting supervisory opportunities, as well as teaching quality.
- Rigid program structures that prevent in program flexibility for comprehensive exam deadlines or course progression. Curriculum is largely based on compulsory courses delivered once per year. Little opportunity for electives in either program. Course content favours broad knowledge over depth.
- Distribution on three campuses of faculty members decreases student-supervisor interactions, students contact with professors, and is a threat to the interdisciplinary nature of the programs. This also negatively affects a sense of program cohesiveness or “*sens d’appartenance*”.
- The need for formal integration of professional skills development and career-building opportunities into the program.

2. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- Consistently with the Strategic Plan of the University of Ottawa, the Interdisciplinary School of Health Sciences offers bilingual programs at the graduate level, the MSc in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences, and the PhD in Population Health.
- These programs were found to be “extremely well aligned” with the University of Ottawa’s Strategic Plan and Research Area, as well as the Faculty Strategic Plan.
- The MSc program is an established program. Whereas the PhD has a complex history and was only recently found a home at the Faculty of Health Sciences. In both cases, there is an opportunity to enhance the integration of faculty members. In the case of the PhD program, to favour a better alignment with their research.

3. CURRICULUM AND STRUCTURE

- Whereas the inclusion of biosciences in the MSc program provides the students with a rich experience, the lack of a formal admission requirement in biosciences means that the level of preparedness varies in the student population.
- Both programs have a coherent curriculum with clear learning outcomes. At the PhD level, this evaluation identified the need to further the learning outcomes.
- The success rate for the completion of both programs is high. However, time to completion could be improved. Factors such as financial needs, mental health, childcare duties, timely thesis advisory meetings, and the requirement for additional guidance are contributing to the delays.

4. TEACHING, LEARNING AND EVALUATION METHODS

- Given the nature of these programs, the student evaluation places a strong emphasis on communication skills, as well as “robust” processes for the evaluation of the thesis.
- The modular course structure “seems to increase the workload” and create redundancy in the type of assignments.
- For the PhD, there is a need for more frequent meetings with the thesis advisory committee. The action plan developed by the academic unit addresses this recommendation with concrete actions.

5. STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND GOVERNANCE

- In general, the student satisfaction is high. Nevertheless, the evaluation identified areas for improvement, which include better professional development and career planning, as well as more guidance, especially regarding the progression through the program. For the MSc, more support could be provided for the transition to graduate studies.
- Access to courses outside the Faculty seems to be a source of frustration for the students.

6. PHYSICAL SPACES AND RESOURCES

- Strong faculty complement with solid record of external funding, publications, and awards. There is a concern, however, with the level of participation to the programs. This is especially true at the PhD level, where the alignment of the program with the research expertise of faculty members could be improved.
- Distribution across three sites is negatively impacting the sense of belonging to the program.
- The self-evaluation and the report of the external evaluation both raised concerns regarding the appropriateness of the funding. Given that a new model has been put in place only recently, the academic unit will closely monitor the situation.

IV. Program Improvement¹

The programs under evaluation are in conformity with the standards of the discipline. The following recommendations aim at maintaining or increasing the level of quality already achieved by the programs.

The order and numbering of the recommendations follow that of the external review’s report.

- **Recommendation 1:** Increase the involvement of Interdisciplinary School of Health Sciences faculty in the programs and increase the sense of community; Create a stronger integration of the identity of both programs.
- **Recommendation 2:** Reinforce the bilingual nature of the program while monitoring its effects on recruitment.
- **Recommendation 3:** Assist with the transition to graduate studies.
- **Recommendation 4:** Increase the number of course modules to allow more choice and decrease the number of assessments per module.
- **Recommendation 5:** Improve the website. For example, although the Self-Study noted how handbooks were distributed to graduate students, graduate students would like a reliable source of information on a site that was easy to access. Some links were not functional, and some content was outdated.

¹Based on the external evaluation report.

- **Recommendation 6:** Consider relocating the Interdisciplinary School of Health Sciences' main office to a suitable area.

V. List of courses not offered for more than three years and the reasons

- All courses have been offered at least once in the last 3 years.

VI. The Action Plan

The Action Plan was developed by the Interdisciplinary School of Health Sciences Director, Karen Phillips, and the Assistant Director of Graduate Studies and Research, Frédérique Tesson. The Interdisciplinary School of Health Sciences takes all the recommendations seriously and feels confident that by addressing them, it will make its programs even stronger.

VII. Conclusion

The Interdisciplinary School of Health Sciences offers programs that are “valuable to the students, the Faculty, and the University”. “The programs are focussed on health and are of high relevance to social needs and students demands.” The programs offer a breadth of topics and methodologies in health sciences.

The external reviewers have also identified areas for improvement. For instance, although the success rate for completion is high, it is difficult for the students to complete their degree within the prescribed time. Accordingly, recommendations are made to help improve the situation.

Considering this positive assessment, the committee members would like to thank all participants for the evaluation of the programs. They congratulate the unit on the rigour of the work accomplished and on the quality of the self-study report, as well as that of the report produced by the external reviewers.

Schedule and Timelines

A progress report that outlines the completed actions and subsequent results will be submitted to the evaluation committee on a date agreed upon at the time of the meeting regarding the action plan.

The next cyclical review will take place in no more than eight years, in 2027–2028. The self-study brief must be submitted no later than June 2027.

Unit Response to the External Review Report and Action Plan

Faculty: Health Sciences

Department: Interdisciplinary School of Health Sciences

Programs evaluated: Master of Science, Interdisciplinary Health Sciences and Doctorate (PhD) in Population Health

Cyclical review period: 2020-2021

Date: July 2nd 2021

Note: This document is submitted to the Senate, as well as the Quality Council, and will be published on the University Web site.

General comments:

On May 19, 2021, the Director of the Interdisciplinary School of Health Sciences and the Assistant Director Graduate Studies and Research were made aware of the External Review Report produced in the context of the cyclical program evaluation. We were extremely pleased with the positive evaluation of our graduate programs. Given that the School graduate programs have committed to providing an outstanding training and research experience, we were gratified to see that the external reviewers found that “overall, these programs are valuable to the students, the Faculty, and the University”. We were also pleased with the fact that the report generally support the Action Plans proposed by the School for both programs. The report makes fifteen recommendations, of which four are considered high priority. We take all of the recommendations seriously and feel confident that by addressing them, our graduate program will be even stronger. The recommendations and our response, produced jointly by the unit and the Faculty, are included below.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Increase the involvement of ISHS faculty in the programs and increase the sense of community; Create a stronger integration of the identity of both programs.

Unit response	Priority Level*	Actions to be undertaken	Assigned to	Timeline	Curriculum change?
We recognize that in order for our programs to flourish and attract high quality trainees, it is important for all our faculty to feel invested in the success of these programs and proud to promote it to potential students.	1	Develop strategies to enhance the participation of all faculty members to the graduate programs.	Executive Committee of the School and Graduate Studies Committee	June 2021- June 2024	Not anticipated
	1	Organize regular seminar series with internal and external invited speakers, as well as PhD students.	Executive Committee of the School and Student Associations	June 2022	Anticipated
	1	Encourage the continuation of the Profiles in Leadership series, launched Fall 2020, by the PhD Population Health and the MSc Student Associations with the support of the School.	Student Associations with support from Assistant Director Graduate Studies and Research	June 2022	Not anticipated
	1	Continue and improve the annual ISHS Research Day that brings together senior undergraduate students, MSc students and will be expanded to include PhD students.	Graduate Studies Committee	June 2022	Not anticipated
	1	Incorporate a more inclusive definition of Population Health, harmonizing with the Canadian Research and Development Classification 2019 initiative in admissions, thesis proposals, and comprehensive examinations. This more inclusive definition will recognize contributions of population health, biosciences, and health technologies researchers and thesis topics.	Executive Committee of the School and Assistant Director Graduate Studies and Research	June 2021- June 2023	Not anticipated
	1	In collaboration with Student Associations, organize events (e.g., retreats, town halls, social gatherings) to encourage interactions between graduate students and ISHS professors.	Executive Committee of the School, Graduate Studies Committee, and Student Associations	June 2022	Not anticipated

RECOMMENDATION 2: Reinforce the bilingual nature of the program while monitoring its effects on recruitment.

* PRIORITY LEVEL: 1. URGENT-IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED 2. IMPORTANT-ACTION REQUIRED WITHIN 18 MONTHS (MAXIMUM) 3. ADVISED: DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGY-ACTION TO BE DISCUSSED AND MUST BE IN PLACE BY MID-CYCLE (WITHIN 4 YEARS)

Unit response	Priority Level*	Actions to be undertaken	Assigned to	Timeline	Curriculum change?
<p>We are committed to the bilingual nature of the programs.</p> <p>The program aims to maintain or improve bilingualism among students.</p>	1	<p>Improve bilingual course delivery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make all course syllabi available in both English and French. - Ensure that courses are equally taught in both languages. - Encourage individual professors to take initiatives offered through the Vice-Provost's Office to secure funding for delivering course material in both languages. 	School Director and Graduate Studies Committee	June 2023	Not anticipated
	1	Consider mentorship opportunities in student second language in collaboration with Student Associations.	Graduate Studies Committee, Administrative Assistant, Graduate Programs, and Student Associations	June 2022	Not anticipated
	1	Inform students of opportunities to improve language skills through the University ILOB's activities.	Assistant Director Graduate Studies and Research and Student Associations	June 2022	Not anticipated
	1	Promote the bilingual graduate studies on the website as a strategic mechanism for career advancement in public and private sector, nationally and internationally.	Assistant Director Graduate Studies and Research with Marketing and Communication Team	June 2022	Not anticipated
	1	Prioritize recruitment of bilingual professors.	Executive Committee of the School	Dec.2021-June 2026	Not anticipated
	1	Continue to offer events (e.g., retreats, town halls, social gatherings) as bilingual activities.	Executive Committee of the School, Graduate Studies Committee, and Student Associations	June 2021-June 2026	Not anticipated

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RECOMMENDATION 3: Assist with the transition to graduate studies.					
Unit response	Priority Level*	Actions to be undertaken	Assigned to	Timeline	Curriculum change?
<p>We recognize that some students find challenging the transition to graduate studies.</p> <p>Moreover, the current pandemic has impacted the research trajectories of both MSc and PhD students, created widespread psychological and financial stress as well as uncertainty.</p>	1	Schedule town halls to better understand students' need in terms of transition to graduate studies. This will allow to assess the relevance of the 7 potential actions listed below.	Assistant Director Graduate Studies and Research, Student Associations	June 2022	Not anticipated
	1	Schedule town halls with the Grad director, key stakeholders, and graduate students at key points in the term about expectations, deadlines, role and responsibilities of the supervisor and time management.	Assistant Director Graduate Studies and Research	Sept. 2022	Not anticipated
	1	Plan ISHS graduate events to encourage interactions between graduate students and ISHS professors for the purposes of mentorship and networking.	Graduate Studies Committee	Sept. 2022	Not anticipated
	1	Provide support for MSc and PhD thesis proposals and comprehensive exam writing and encourage PhD students to play mentorship roles for MSc students.	Graduate Studies Committee, Student Associations	Sept. 2022	Not anticipated
	1	Encourage Student Associations to collaborate on both committee work and social events that involve the professors.	School Director and Assistant Director Graduate Studies and Research	Sept. 2022	Not anticipated
	1	Add a bioscience prerequisite for MSc admission.	Graduate Studies Committee	June 2023	Anticipated
	1	Advise students of the University initiatives to support student wellness.	Assistant Director Graduate Studies and Research and Administrative Assistant, Graduate Programs	Sept. 2022	Not anticipated
	1	Provide more information upon enrolment about financial planning.	Faculty of Health Sciences and Administrative Assistant, Graduate Programs	Sept. 2022	Not anticipated

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RECOMMENDATION 4: Increase the number of course modules to allow more choice, and decrease the number of assessments per module.					
Unit response	Priority Level*	Actions to be undertaken	Assigned to	Timeline	Curriculum change?
We recognize that we should offer the students a more flexible curriculum.	1	Redesign of the MSc program to reduce the number of courses and to achieve more flexible course offerings through a micro-course module (under 3 units) on various interdisciplinary health science topics that can be mixed and matched to provide a personalized and tailored course selection for students.	School Director and Graduate Studies Committee	June 2026	Anticipated
	1	Collaborate with other graduate programs (MSc, PhD) to create workshops. Design a modular statistic course with regular and advance entry levels and use of statistical packages.	School Director and Graduate Studies Committee	June 2024	Anticipated
	1	Increase opportunity for community placements through the uOttawa Community Service Learning (CSL) Program.	Graduate Studies Committee	June 2024	Not anticipated
	1	Ensure that the assessment activities are coherent with the learning outcomes and workload expectations related to the number of units of the course.	School Director and Graduate Studies Committee	June 2022	Not anticipated

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RECOMMENDATION 5: Improve the website. For example, although the Self-Study noted how handbooks were distributed to graduate students, graduate students would like a reliable source of information on a site that was easy to access. Some links were not functional, and some content was outdated.					
Unit response	Priority Level*	Actions to be undertaken	Assigned to	Timeline	Curriculum change?
We recognize that the external marketing of the graduate programs of the School has been limited by the slow and inconsistent development of the School and Faculty website.	1	Continue to work on improving both the website (content and access, both in French and English) and print materials. Ensure timely communication between the School and the Officer, Communications and Web Development to maintain the website up to date (i.e., changes in School personnel, deadlines or processes, etc.).	School Director, Graduate Studies Committee, Administrative Assistant Graduate Programs, and Student Associations with Officer, Communications and Web Development	June 2021- June 2023	Not anticipated
	1	Explore alternative methods of marketing such as social media, YouTube videos and podcasts.	School Director, Graduate Studies Committee, Administrative Assistant Graduate Programs, and Student Associations with Officer, Communications and Web Development	June 2021- June 2023	Not anticipated

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RECOMMENDATION 6: Consider relocating the School’s main office to a suitable area.					
Unit response	Priority Level*	Actions to be undertaken	Assigned to	Timeline	Curriculum change?
We recognize that the current School’s main office location is not ideal.	3	The Faculty is in the process of relocating offices.	Faculty of Health Sciences	June 2026	Not anticipated


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Faculty: Health Sciences

Programs evaluated: Master of Science, Interdisciplinary Health Sciences and Doctorate (PhD) in Population Health

Cyclical review period: 2020-2021

Department Chair:



Signature

10-12-2021

Date

Faculty Dean:



Signature

10-12-2021

Date

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