Students in the biochemistry graduate studies program enjoy an exemplary learning environment. Recent thematic hiring has established expertise in key emerging areas, while state-of-the-art facilities have allowed new research competencies to be introduced to the biochemistry program. As the external evaluators noted, these initiatives provide training opportunities not available in other biochemistry graduate programs across Canada. The success of our faculty members in obtaining external funding and the publication records of program participants demonstrate that the biochemistry graduate program is supported by a dynamic and productive research community. The strength and enthusiasm of faculty members has made significant innovations in the program possible.

The external evaluators noted that the three fields the program offers no longer fully represent the considerable strengths of the program, and as a result, the program should be restructured. Program governance also needs to be clarified, particularly the mandate and responsibilities of the Graduate Studies Committee, the program director, thesis supervisors and the Faculty of Medicine’s Graduate Studies Office. Ongoing efforts are needed to ensure that all students consistently receive the support they need in a timely manner. Although progress has been made in bridging the physical separation of graduate students (through initiatives such as program-wide events and compulsory research seminars at different campuses on a rotating basis), an ongoing effort is required in order to integrate students into a shared, collective research culture. Proactively providing students with career mentoring and guidance at the program level would help address student anxiety about an uncertain job market. In its response to the evaluation report, the program administration indicated that it is taking appropriate steps to address this concern.

Recommendations

1. The three fields the program offers should be revised to better reflect the program’s current strengths.
2. Program governance needs to be updated to reflect the program’s size and complexity, including revisiting the Graduate Education Committee’s mandate and more clearly defining and communicating the roles and responsibilities of program participants to all members of the program.
3. Ongoing efforts are needed to ensure that all thesis supervisors and students at the different sites are fully integrated into the program, that they are aware of their roles and responsibilities and that all students receive the support they need in a timely manner.
4. Greater emphasis should be placed at the program level on providing career development workshops to students. Steps should also be taken to make students more aware of such activities within the Faculty of Medicine and the FGPS.
5. Continued attention must be given to completion rates in both the master’s and PhD programs and to PhD students’ time-to-completion rates.

Timetable and deadlines

The next cyclical review must be completed by July 1, 2019. The five recommendations above are to be addressed in the next review.
Authority

The director of the biochemistry graduate program, the chair of the Department of Biochemistry, Microbiology and Immunology as well as the vice-dean of graduate studies at the Faculty of Medicine are responsible for following up on these ions.