

FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

Institutional Quality Assurance Program (IQAP) Review

Health Policy Ph.D.

Date of Review: January 26th and 27th

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 Ph.D. program delivered by Health Policy. 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 Health Policy Ph.D. program submitted a self-study in December 2020 to the Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduates to initiate the cyclical program review of its Ph.D. program. 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 Deans, Faculty of Health Science, Social Sciences and Business and selected by the Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies. The review team reviewed the self-study documentation and then conducted remote review on January 26th and 27th, 2021. The review included interviews with the Provost and Vice-President (Academic); Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies, Faculty Deans, Associate Deans, Grad Studies and Research, Director of the program and meetings with groups of current students, full-time faculty and support staff.

The Director of the program and the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, Social Sciences and Business submitted responses to the Reviewers' Report (May 2021 and July 2021). Specific recommendations were discussed and clarifications and corrections were presented. Follow-up actions and timelines were included.

Strengths

- The program is extremely well-aligned with the priorities of the University.
- The program attracts outstanding students. The admissions process and the curriculum serve the program's learning objectives.
- The program is recognized for its strong rigor and deep intellectual engagement, both inside and beyond the classroom.

- Available resources are used effectively. The long-standing collaboration with associated departments is efficient and works well.
- The quality of graduate supervision is high and strongly appreciated by the students.
- The new emphasis on career competencies is important and demonstrates the program's alignment with recent innovations in health services and policy research training programs in Canada.
- The very strong leadership of the Program Chair, Dr. Julia Abelson and the effective administrative support from Sheri Burns (Program Administrator) have resulted in strong support of, and responsiveness to students' concerns, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Areas for Program Improvement and Enhancement

- The definition of the Social Organization track remains vague. Though this has both advantages and disadvantages, a working to develop a clearer identity may help attract both faculty and students. Increasing the availability of relevant (and core) courses should also be part of this process.
- The form and the content of the comprehensive exams may be re-examined in order to balance benefits gained from students' engagement with a large amount of interdisciplinary material (for both breadth and depth) with the costs of the associated burden.
- Opportunities to facilitate links between various policy programs on campus, and to strengthen students' connections to their supervisor's home department, should be explored to maximize benefits across the university.
- Faculty renewal and succession planning will be important to ensure the program has active champions in the coming years.
- The expectation that supervisors partially fund PhD students may differ from their home departments and can be a major challenge for junior faculty. Opportunities to develop central financing arrangements and additional supports to facilitate supervision by new and junior faculty members should be considered.
- MOUs with affiliated Departmental Chairs regarding adequate compensation for teaching contributions to interdisciplinary programs and a stated commitment to faculty participation in such programs may facilitate program sustainability.

Recommendation	Proposed Follow-Up	Responsibility for Leading Follow-Up	Timeline for Addressing Recommendation
Program Level (Governance and Resourcing)			
Adequate resources should be devoted to support the program doing what it already does well, and to enable it to take advantage of a growing interdisciplinary community at McMaster and beyond (this includes exploring the idea of central program financing in	Meetings with relevant Deans and Associate Deans to discuss the resourcing of interdisciplinary programs. Anything else is outside of program control.	Program Director	June 2021 – Aug 2022

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alignment with University's increasing emphasis on offering interdisciplinary programs).			
More explicit recognition should be given to the community benefits of affiliating with interdisciplinary programs in merit review and tenure and promotion processes.	Meetings with Associate Deans and Department Chairs to discuss opportunities for reinforcing the benefits of affiliating with interdisciplinary programs like HP. Anything else is outside of program control.	Program Director	June 2021 – Aug 2022
Faculty renewal and succession planning will be important to ensure the program has deeply committed faculty in the program who will be active champions for the program in coming years.	Meetings with Associate Deans and Department Chairs described above will include discussions regarding faculty renewal and succession planning and opportunities to leverage complementary interests and/or gaps to fill.	Program Director	June 2021 – Aug 2022
Development of MOUs between the health policy program and its affiliated departments to create more program sustainability, to help address succession planning issues and to encourage adequate recognition of, commitment to, and compensation for teaching in interdisciplinary programs.	Meetings with relevant Associate Deans and Department Chairs to establish MOU between program and affiliated Faculties and departments.	Program Director	June 2021 – Aug 2022
Curriculum			
Review and renewal of the Social Organization field to identify relevant domains of knowledge and courses that provide a clearer identity for the field while allowing for appropriate tailoring and flexibility to support focused study within the broader field.	Working group to be established to oversee this activity; activities may include: - faculty/student/program alum survey - review of field designations in comparable programs	Program director and key program faculty and students	June – December 2021
Review and renewal of course content to include the work of and frameworks from indigenous researchers and a decolonized perspective.	These activities are already under way – additional readings and sessions were added to the doctoral seminar and breadth comp exam reading lists in 20-21. A living document and repository of resources will be created for	Program director and Executive Committee members (faculty and students)	June – December 2021

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	students and faculty members to access.		
Solidify the availability of qualitative methods course offerings within the program and across the University.	We are committed to offering our students reliable access to the program's qual methods course (HP 747) at a minimum of every other year, conditional on being able to secure a faculty member to teach this course. We will seek commitments from affiliated depts and programs to ensure access to other qual course offerings on campus as needed.	Program director + relevant program faculty	June 2021- August 2022
Teaching and assessment – Comprehensive exams			
Review current structure of comprehensive exams (i.e., 7-hour sit down exam) and consider the replacement of the methods and field exams with a take-home style exam or grant application (for methods) and a paper (for disciplinary-focused exam).	Working group to be established to oversee this review; activities to include: - faculty/student/program alum survey to assess strengths and weaknesses of current structure and to identify alternatives - review of comp exam structures in comparable programs	Program director with comp exam committee members and students	June – October 2021
Enhance communications with students about the exams to reinforce the purpose and benefits of the process and to help in managing exam-related stress (draw on upper-year students and program grads to help with this).	The program currently devotes considerable time and effort to orienting students to the purpose and benefits of the comprehensive exam process in Fall & Winter doctoral seminars. We will continue to look for ways to enhance communications in this area, particularly as we undertake our review of the current structure.	Program director and comps review team	September 2021 – August 2022
Quality indicators			
Program expectations regarding time to completion should be more clearly communicated to students and faculty with guidance provided about student funding sources beyond the four-year in-time period (viewed as especially	This recommendation is well received. Planned follow up includes an in-depth review of the program's time to completion data, the specific reasons associated with completing outside the 4-year in-time period, funding opportunities available and criteria to be used to determine student funding support beyond the 4 th year of study.	Program director and Program admin	July 2021 – Aug 2022

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important for international students).			
Program should consider subsidizing 1-2 years of student funding for junior faculty members.	This recommendation relates to more fundamental issues of how interdisciplinary programs are supported (discussed in the program section). Challenges related to student funding support aren't restricted to junior faculty members only. As the reviewers noted, they are an issue for <u>all</u> faculty members in Social Sciences and Business, in particular, where students are more generously supported by their home departments, and don't require the same level of faculty contributions that is generally expected in the Faculty of Health Sciences.	Program director and Associate Deans	July 2021 – Aug 2022
Program Enhancement			
Review and take stock of recently introduced career competencies initiative to identify relevant and appropriate supports for students to monitor and complete these in a manageable way.	We plan to survey our faculty and students to assess their experience with the career competencies initiative since its introduction into the program in Fall 2020.	Program director and program admin	May - September 2021
Increase opportunities for building connections between the Health Policy program and other policy-related programs and initiatives across the University to leverage complementary skills, explore shared interests, and to deepen students' network of peers.	The Health Policy Program has, historically, fostered links with other policy-relevant programs and initiatives throughout the University through its close relationship with the Centre for Health Economics and Policy Analysis (CHEPA) which includes representation from the same Faculties and Departments that contribute to the HP Program. We will seek to further leverage these relationships with a particular focus on enhancing the sense of community among policy-oriented students at McMaster both across and within Faculties and Departments.	Program director with program executive (faculty and students) and student ambassadors	July 2021- Aug 2022
Enhancing program material and communications to help students navigate "how things work" more effectively and	There are numerous "how things work" resources already available to students in the Student Handbook and through the program's incoming	Student representatives and program admin	June – December 2021

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efficiently (with support from upper-year PhD students, program graduates and through strengthening of the existing Buddy System).	student orientation. We recognize, however, that there may be additional informal knowledge about the program's workings that might lend itself to being more systematically organized and communicated. We will seek to identify key areas for enhanced communication between the program, students and supervising faculty members.		

Faculty Response

The Deans thanked the reviewers for their thorough, thoughtful, and constructive review of the PhD program in Health Policy at McMaster University. They appreciated that the reviewers identified strengths of the program, including the excellence of the students, its rigor and intellectual engagement, and the strong leadership team. They recognized that the program is well aligned to the priorities of the institution and is responsive to the career development needs of the students.

They reviewed the program's response and support their plans to address the recommendations in the report. They were thankful for several thoughtful suggestions about the curriculum, and are confident that these would be carefully considered by the HP program leaders.

They noted that the challenges and rewards of interdisciplinarity are a key theme that tied together many of the reviewers' comments and recommendations. They believed that the occasion of the review is an important opportunity for the three participating Faculties to review and discuss their commitments to the program, and to the overall project of interdisciplinarity at McMaster. They agreed with the reviewers' suggestion to consider the development of an MOU, and noted this would be a helpful way to structure and motivate the discussion among the Faculty deans.

An MOU is now standard practice for inter-Faculty programs; they noted that although there is currently no such document that addresses issues of governance and shared purpose, there is a detailed framework for distributing costs and revenues, and it is more sophisticated than is typical in an MOU. The framework was developed prior to the introduction of the activity-based budget model at McMaster, so it may be useful to review the mapping between the framework and budget flows. However, it was unclear to them that the institution's activity-based budget is necessarily a barrier to interdisciplinarity, as suggested in the report. The budget model does clarify how the costs of programs must ultimately be supported by program revenue and through deliberative decisions about their academic and financial priorities. The

reviewers' recommendation that the "central university" direct long-term financial support to any particular program is not consistent with this more general allocation framework. Similarly, while they agree that junior faculty may benefit from additional stipend funds to recruit graduate students, this is largely a matter of the priorities of academic departments with respect to faculty relations and hiring. The graduate programs do contribute importantly to this enterprise through their vigorous support of students' applications for extramural funding, and they congratulated the HP program director and faculty for their success in this regard.

The reviewers note that research and education about health policy is distributed throughout the institution in ways that do not necessarily intersect effectively with the HP PhD program. The Deans supported the program's proposed efforts to foster these connections. The review also includes broader questions raised about how to support interdisciplinary activity through departmental hiring, merit, tenure, and promotions. Ultimately, these processes necessarily reflect the aspirations and priorities of departments and must be considered in that light in renewed discussion among the program's institutional stakeholders.

Quality Assurance Committee Recommendation

McMaster's Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) reviewed the above documentation and the committee recommends that the program should follow the regular course of action with a progress report and subsequent full external cyclical review to be conducted no later than 8 years after the start of the last review.