Final Assessment Report

Academic Review of Collaborative PhD in Aging, Health and Well-Being

March 2012

Background and process

This program began in 2006, and can be completed from any of the three Departments within the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences. The program has so far had five graduates. The area of aging has increased in importance within the Faculty, with at least three research centres in the Faculty on this topic (the KG Murray Alzheimer Research and Education Program, the Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging, and the RBC Retirement Research Centre), and with various associated research chairs. One faculty member is associated with a large international collaboration (interRAI), from which many of the students have benefitted.

A self-study was prepared for the program, and external reviewers visited on December 12 and 13 2011. The external reviewers were Dr. Paul Demers, Professor at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto, and Director of the Occupational Cancer Research Centre at Cancer Care Ontario, and Dr. Norah Keating, Director, the Global Social Initiative on Ageing, International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics, and Professor in the Department of Human Ecology, University of Alberta. Professor Steve Drekic of the Department of Statistics and Actuarial Science served as the internal reviewer.

There are two collaborative doctoral programs in the Faculty, namely this one and the one in Work and Health. Normally, collaborative PhD programs are reviewed with one of the “parent” Departmental programs. (The Departments of Kinesiology and of Recreation and Leisure Studies are also undergoing a review this same academic year; and the School of Public Health and Health Systems will undergo a review next academic year). This cycle, an exception was made, and the two collaborative doctoral programs were given their own review. One of the external reviewers was chosen from a list provided by the Program in Aging, Health and Well-being, and the other from a list provided by the Program in Work and Health.

The review report was received on January 3 2012. The response from the faculty members in Aging, Health and Well-being was received on March 19 (following some earlier clarifications of small matters of fact). The Dean of the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences also submitted a response on March 19 2012, covering both program reviews. This final assessment report is based on the self-study, the review report, the program response and implementation plan, and the Dean’s memo.

This Final Assessment Report, along with the self study, the review report, the program response and implementation plan, and the Dean’s response, were provided to a reading subcommittee of Senate Graduate and Research Council. The subcommittee consisted of one graduate student representative, one research staff member, and a faculty member, all of whom are from outside the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences. This group led the discussion of the Final Assessment Report at the Council meeting of April 9 2012, and provided advice on the final rating from the review. The Final Assessment Report (with any modifications suggested by Senate Graduate and Research Council) will be forwarded to Senate for information in the consent agenda on May 22 2012.
Self Study

Both collaborative PhD programs allow students to draw on expertise from all three Departments in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences. The current PhD in the newly-renamed School of Public Health and Health Systems is in Health Studies and Gerontology, so it is also possible to complete a PhD with a focus on gerontology within one of the three Departments. There is only one other Anglophone program in gerontology in Canada (at Simon Fraser University), and one francophone program (Université de Sherbrooke).

There are 27 faculty members affiliated with the program (24 tenure stream, and 3 definite term faculty). Although there have been a number of retirements/resignations (7 during the program’s history), there have been new additions (8). There have been two Schlegel Research Chairs appointed, associated with the program (in the Research Institute for Aging), with two other appointments underway; two other faculty affiliated with the program hold Early Researcher Awards, and one holds a Tier 2 Canada Research Chair. Aging is a University of Waterloo’s priority research area. The affiliated faculty held over $20m in research funding over the past seven years, have strong publication records and have received a number of prestigious awards).

Students in the program have won external fellowships including CIHR and OGS fellowships (about 25% of student funding over the program’s history has been in external awards), and external awards in the area of aging such as conference prizes, and CIHR Awards/Prizes.

Students are admitted through one of the three home departments, and have to fulfil the requirements of the home department to complete the degree, but in addition have to fulfil the collaborative program requirements which are one course plus a program doctoral seminar. With overlaps, this typically requires students to complete only one extra course than usual. The Aging Health and Well-being Seminar course and doctoral seminar provide a “small-group” experience, as these are restricted to students in the collaborative program, and program enrolment has been modest. The one course and seminar are team-taught, and this counts on top of faculty’s teaching responsibilities in their home department.

Students have also organized special sessions on Aging at the Graduate Student Research Conference, to continue the connection among students in the program once they have completed the doctoral seminar. Students consulted for the review expressed the desire for some greater coordination and communication of program requirements. One past issue was that the three home departments have had different comprehensive requirements (one Department required two comprehensive papers, one required one, and one stated that two were required but in practice required one). The three Departments have recently moved to harmonize their requirements, which should help.

The program admitted 16 students in total between 2006 and 2011, of whom five have completed as of time of writing this report. Students register full-time. One graduate is now an Assistant Professor at the University of Regina; one is undertaking a postdoc in Italy; and one is working for CIHI. Students have typically received at least $25,000 in financial support per year on average over the program’s history. Students are funded for the first four years of the program, with a mix of external awards, teaching assistantships, and research assistantships plus University scholarships, and most students so far have finished during their fifth year. Student funding is the responsibility of the home Department with involvement of the supervisor. To date, 11 of the students have registered in Health Studies and Gerontology (now the School of Public Health and Health Systems), 4 in Recreation and Leisure Studies, and 1 in Kinesiology.
To date, there have been no international students. The self-study cites funding issues as the main reason for the lack of international students. The University provides International Doctoral Student Awards to cover the fee differential for up to four years; however, there are fewer external awards available for international students. The program aims to have 12 students in progress in steady state (which would be equivalent to admitting about 1 student per year in each of the three Departments).

The program does not have dedicated space or staff support. These are provided through the home Departments.

Review Report

The reviewers noted that the program had enthusiastic leadership, but merited some additional support to achieve its goals. They supported the importance of collaborative and multidisciplinary approaches for the topic of aging. The program was judged to meet the various assessment criteria. The reviewers made two recommendations (common to both collaborative programs), which are quoted below:

**Recommendation 1:** “Both programs should be continued. These programs are excellent models for the kinds of innovative programs that are at the forefront for new knowledge frontiers”. They specifically commented on this program “The program in Aging, Health and Well Being is positioned to be one of the best in the country. There has long been a recognition that important breakthroughs in aging arise from transdisciplinary collaborative work. The AHWB program is training scholars who have these skills and sensitivities. Already students in the program have had exceptional success in gaining scholarships and fellowships to support their programs and attend national and international professional meetings. They have increasing visibility in professional organizations such as the Canadian Association on Gerontology where they are being recognized as potential leaders.”

**Recommendation 2:** “The university should provide strategic support to ensure program growth and sustainability. Both programs need to grow substantially in order to ensure long term sustainability and to reach their full potential. This will require some dedicated staff time and recruiting resources. The current programs were built with very little assistance and have little visibility. With greater visibility in marketing and recruitment, these programs could grow significantly in the coming years.

Support is also needed in terms of faculty time. Currently faculty in the two programs participate as program directors and instructors based on the generosity of the three collaborating departments. These programs were built based on informal commitments and the departments have received no additional resources. Faculty teach what are usually very small courses while their departments sometimes need faculty for much larger courses. Although the participating departments do get credit for the students who enter through their own department, this credit may not be proportional to their contribution of faculty. WH and AHWB program leaders should be encouraged to work with the Dean to develop a proposed structure and resources to address constraints on program growth. These may include:

Structure:
- credit for teaching for course instructors
- teaching release for program directors
- line authority re resources to relieve program leaders from the ongoing task of brokering support
- re-consideration of the expectations that faculty members guarantee funding to PhD students for 3 years. This is not possible for those whose funding is not renewable or whose grants span 1-2 years; it is particularly problematic for junior faculty members.
Resources
- enhanced program visibility through website development and other means
- targeted help with recruitment
- core program resources for teaching and program management”

Program Response/Dean’s Response

Two year implementation plan

The Dean endorsed the value of both interdisciplinary programs, and committed $15,000 to each program for financial year 2012-13 to ensure financial stability, and tasked the leadership of each program with developing a business plan over the next academic year. This plan “will provide a clear resource infrastructure to support and grow these programs in the short term. In addition, periodic reviews in the medium term will assess sustainability by reviewing the value added of each of the collaborative programs relative to costs.”

The executive committee of the program (three faculty members) responded on behalf of the program. Since the second recommendation is a broad one, and since there are other departmental and faculty-wide initiatives under way, there will also be longer-term planning required. The following will be implemented by September 2013 (the remainder of this section is quoted directly from the program response).

Proposed Structure:
- The acting AHWB Director will receive one course teaching relief to facilitate program development and student engagement, and to recognize the time spent in a teaching role as part of university teaching.
- The AHWB Executive Committee will have line authority regarding new and existing program resources and staff.
- To reduce the burden of securing funding to support AHWB students, and to encourage program growth, the Faculty will provide funding, in the form of research assistant or teaching assistant stipends to each of the three departments that can be allocated to support AHWB students. We have set enrollment targets (i.e., 2 admissions per department per year), and specific funds allocated to the AHWB program will enable the program to reach those targets. Consistent enrollment from each department/school is integral to making it a faculty-wide interdisciplinary program.

Proposed Resources:
- The Faculty has already begun to revise the website (http://uwaterloo.ca/applied-health-sciences/current-graduates/aging-health-and-well-being-phd) and promotional materials to enhance program visibility. Further revisions of the website are pending and will include pictures and bios of featured students and faculty.
- The AHWB program will need a budget for travel to conferences and promotional materials to increase program visibility. This budget will allow the AHWB Director to attend the Canadian Association on Gerontology Annual Meeting and a booth and promotional materials dedicated to increasing AHWB program visibility.
• The Faculty has recently established a dedicated staff position with responsibilities to support undergraduate and graduate growth and recruitment across the Applied Health Sciences Faculty. This individual will have dedicated time to work on enhanced program visibility and student recruitment specifically for the AHWB program.

• The Faculty will identify an individual with responsibility to provide administrative support to the AHWB program director. The administrative support staff person will serve as the primary point of contact for prospective and current graduate students during their tenure at the University of Waterloo. This position will provide the necessary teaching and program management support for the AHWB Executive Committee to enable the successful day to day operation of the Graduate program. It is expected that this individual will assume these responsibilities as a part of other related duties in AHS, given that a full 1.0 FTE is not justified by the workload associated with a program of this size.