Final Assessment Report

Academic Review of Collaborative PhD in Work and Health

March 2012

Background and process

This program admitted its first students in 2008. The objective of the program (as described in the Self Study) is to produce scholars and researchers with expertise in work and health who can assume positions in academia, or in other related non university settings, e.g., Government Ministries of Labour or Health; policy analysis; workplace health and safety associations such as the Public Services Health and Safety Association.

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 Aging Health and Well-Being. 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 Work and Health 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. Although there are other programs in Ontario and in Canada with a focus on specific aspects of work and health, there is no other doctoral program with a similarly broad (and interdisciplinary) scope. There are two research institutes, one in Ontario (Institute for Work and Health) and one in Quebec (Institut de recherche Robert Sauvé en santé et en sécurité du travail); however, neither of these institutes operates a graduate program.

There are 18 faculty currently affiliated with the program, of whom 5 teach core courses in the program and/or supervise, and a sixth who assists by serving on the steering committee. The affiliated faculty held over $10 million in research funding over the past seven years. Funding sources (in addition to the Tri-Councils) included the Research Advisory Council of WSIB, the Worker’s Compensation Board in Manitoba, OHSA in the US, and PHAC, among others. The affiliated faculty all have strong publication records.

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 two courses plus a program doctoral seminar. With overlaps, this typically requires students to complete one extra course (for students in Kinesiology, and in Recreation and Leisure Studies), whereas students in the School of Public Health and Health Systems can complete the requirements without any additional courses. The two Work and Health courses 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 seminar is team-taught, but individual faculty members teach the two core courses, and this counts as part of the faculty member’s teaching responsibilities (workload) in their home department.

Students come with a range of disciplinary backgrounds relevant to work and health, including environmental and occupational health, ergonomics, biomechanics, sociology, philosophy, law, environmental studies and labour studies, as well as professional backgrounds such as nursing. The program has found variability in the research backgrounds of students coming from professional Masters programs and has identified a need to ensure they acquire sufficient research skills to success in the program. Students have come primarily from Ontario, although one student is international.

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 11 students in total between 2008 and 201, of whom one has transferred to the home Department, and one withdrew from the program due to requirements of his full-time work position. It is too soon for any to have completed yet. Of the nine remaining in the program, 6 are full time and 3 are part-time. These nine are split across home Departments as follows: 3 full-time in Kinesiology; 1 full-time in Recreation and Leisure Studies; and 2 full-time and 3 part-time in the School of Public Health and Health Systems.

Students who are full-time are eligible for the university Minimum Funding Guarantee amount for doctoral students (currently $20,000 per year) for up to four years. Students have typically received a mix of external awards, teaching assistantships, and research assistantships plus University scholarships. Student funding is the responsibility of the home Department with involvement of the supervisor.

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 work and health. 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 Work and Health has effectively used strong existing faculty and resources at AHS to create a unique program that has the potential to attract students from across Canada and elsewhere. It certainly builds on the strengths at UW in biomechanics/ergonomics and public health. However, by taking a very broad perspective on work and health it has taken a unique position in Canada. For example, I know of no other program that emphasizes quality of life issues, such as work-home balance and the health issues of non-traditional work arrangements. These are some of the major future issues for the field of work and health. The program is still rather new, but it is gaining visibility in the Canadian Association for Research on Work and Health and if it continues to grow it will become one of the leading programs in the country.”

**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

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 response from the Steering Committee of the program was as follows:

1. As endorsed by reviewers, there is a need for formal commitment on a continuing basis of teaching resources to cover teaching assignments for these three courses (HSG/KIN/RLS 730, 731 and the seminar course 732).

2. We do not think that the recommendation of teaching relief for the program coordinator is warranted in the case of the Work and Health program at this time. However as the program grows this may become necessary. This responsibility, as it is carried out in the Work and Health Program currently, is like other service activities and we feel that at this
time is best recognized as such. (The current cost of teaching relief for three courses is just over $20,000 per year).

3. As endorsed by reviewers, there is a need for dedicated assistance with marketing and recruitment. We understand that this will be addressed through anticipated staffing in the Faculty Office.

4. It is the view of the Work and Health Steering Committee that special policies to cover funding for Work and Health students are not needed. We would expect that Work and Health students would be considered on the same basis as other students in their home departments for the allocation of departmental support in the form of Teaching Assistantships and other funding sources such as special scholarships.

Two-year implementation plan

The Work and Health Steering Committee has submitted a business plan to the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences’ Administrative Council (March 14 2012), and will continue to work with the Dean and Administrative Council on a long-run plan.

A main focus of activities in the next two years will be enhanced marketing and recruitment of potential students. The Steering Committee will work closely with staff in the Faculty Office in this effort. The target would be a yearly entry class of 3-5 students by the Fall of 2014. The program believes this is a viable target and one that would ensure the sustainability of the Program.