

Two-Year Progress Report

Work and Health (PhD Collaborative)

September 2014

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1. Background and Overview

The Collaborative PhD Program in Work and Health received final approval from the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies in the spring of 2007 and the first cohort of students was admitted in the fall of 2008. The program is unique in Canada as it considers the impacts of work on health from a broad, multidisciplinary perspective in contrast to other academic programs that focus on specific aspects such as ergonomics or occupational hygiene. The objectives of the Work and Health Program align perfectly with the mission of the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences (AHS), which stresses collaboration and partnership to create and apply knowledge "...to protect and promote health and well-being, prevent illness and injury, and optimize abilities across the life course for all". The program is valued added to the three academic units of the Faculty-- Departments of Kinesiology and Recreation and Leisure Studies, and the School of Public Health and Health Systems--as the multidisciplinary area of work and health is foundational to the missions of each unit.

The Collaborative Program leverages the resources of faculty across AHS to create a learning environment that facilitates the goal of producing scholars and researchers who will be successful in the multidisciplinary field of work and health. The program allows students to pursue the work and health program of study while also developing and strengthening specific methodological/disciplinary skills through meeting the academic requirements of their home academic unit. The Work and Health program has three core courses and students entering the program take HSG/KIN/REC 730 first as it is a foundations course that provides an examination of the major substantive topics in work and health from a multidisciplinary perspective. The "Approaches to Research in Work and Health" course (HSG/KIN/REC 731) focuses on contemporary research methodologies and methods along with their theoretical and epistemological underpinnings. The seminar courses (HSG/KIN/REC 732A & 732B) expose students to current research in the field through their engagement with guest speakers and Work and Health faculty, and by presenting their own research proposals and study findings.

The Work and Health Program is administered by a Steering Committee composed of faculty from each of the three academic units. Members of the Steering Committee have included R. Wells (Kinesiology), N. Theberge (Kinesiology), P. Bigelow (SPHHS), H. Mair (RLS), and M. Havitz

(RLS). The Steering Committee oversees course administration; core course content planning; the administration of the comprehensive examinations; and, in collaboration with graduate officers from the academic units, admissions, student progress and advising. In the program's self-study completed in 2011, six faculty members (2 from each unit) were identified as category 1 (core) faculty who either teach work and health courses or who supervise students in the Work and Health Program. Since that time, with one retirement and changes in the supervision of students in the program, that number has dropped to three. However, the complement of affiliated/adjunct faculty (categories 2 and 3) who participate in the program by participating on student committees and guest lecturing has increased to over 20.

The self-study for the Work and Health program was completed in the fall of 2011 and reviewers recommended that the program be continued. In response to the comments and recommendations from the external reviewers, the Work and Health Steering Committee met on numerous occasions to provide a response to the review team and develop an action plan. The action plan was presented to the AHS Administrative Council on March 14, 2012. The action plan as well as program activities completed and underway since the self-study are described below.

2. Action Plan and Progress

The reviewers' report noted that the Work and Health program has added considerable value to the University of Waterloo and should be continued. They commented that:

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.

The reviewers recommended that the university provide strategic support to ensure the growth and sustainability of the program. Additionally, recommendations were made to develop program structures that would address issues of teaching credit, release time, and dedicated resources for the programs. In the action plan presented to the AHS Administrative Council, the Work and Health Steering Committee proposed a number of action items:

- (1) Formalize the commitment, on a continuing basis, of teaching resources to cover teaching assignments for the three core courses.
- (2) Ensure that dedicated assistance is provided for marketing and recruitment
- (3) Ensure that resources are available to support visiting speakers and teleconferencing

The Work and Health Steering Committee developed a draft business plan that was presented to the AHS Administrative Council on January 22, 2014 but has not yet finalized the program's Synergy and Sustainability Plan. The draft plan proposes a structure that formalizes the role of the Program Coordinator, makeup of an Executive Committee¹ (comprising the Program Coordinator and one faculty member from each of the other units), support from the Departments/School to provide instructors for the two 0.5 credit courses (HSG/KIN/REC 730 and 731), and financial support for visiting speakers. The AHS Administrative Council was fully supportive of the draft plan.

Although all core faculty in the Work and Health program are committed to the program's growth and development, progress in moving forward with the Synergy and Sustainability Plan was delayed due to the retirement of the Program Coordinator (N. Theberge) and added administrative responsibilities of two other members of the Steering Committee (P. Bigelow and H. Mair – both Graduate Officers). However, as both Bigelow and Mair are nearing the end of their administrative appointments and with an influx of new faculty with strong interests in work and health, the Steering Committee is moving forward with our action plans.

It is worth noting that two new faculty members in the School of Public Health and Health Systems are established researchers in work and health. Dr. Ellen MacEachen was a Senior Scientist at the Institute for Work & Health before joining the Faculty on July 1, 2014. Ellen is the co-director of the SSHRC-funded Centre for Research on Work Disability Policy. She is an executive committee member with the CIHR Strategic Training Program in Work Disability Prevention, an academic fellow with the Centre for Critical Qualitative Enquiry at the University of Toronto, and an academic council member with the Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences.

Dr. Craig Janes joined the School in July 2014 at its Director. Dr. Janes brings a global perspective to the Work and Health program. An anthropologist, Dr. Janes uses a variety of research methods, including ethnography, epidemiology, and spatial techniques, to examine the impacts of industrial development on rural populations. His research has extended from British Columbia to Tibet, China, and Mongolia. He is internationally known for his work on the impacts of mining and is the principal investigator of a recently funded project titled "Measuring the effects of mining on health: A new Canadian research initiative."

The Department of Kinesiology is in the process of recruiting a faculty member who has expertise in physical ergonomics; when this individual is hired, he/she will be encouraged to become a core Work and Health faculty member. Additionally, the Department will replace the faculty position open because of N. Theberge's requirement and that individual may have interests in work and health. These changes will increase the number of core Work and Health faculty, raise awareness of the program, aid in the recruitment of students, and will allow the program to grow to be the leading work and health program in the country.

¹ The current Steering committee will sunset when the new Executive Committee is formed

3. Update on Student Enrolment and Accomplishments

An update on student enrolment as well as achievements and accomplishments of Work and Health program students is provided below.

Student enrolment. No students were admitted to the program in the 2012-2013 academic year because of lack of capacity of Work and Health faculty to take on new students. As noted in Table 1, a total of 3 students have withdrawn from the program since its inception. Two of those who withdrew did so because of difficulties balancing graduate school with full-time employment. The other student withdrew because his research interest shifted and plans for his dissertation research are now not related to work and health.

Table 1. Number of Doctoral Students in the Work and Health Program

Year	New	Student Complement	Male		Visa		Withdrawals	Completions	Continuing
			#	%	#	%			
2008-09	4	4	2	50.00%	0	0.00%	0	0	4
2009-10	5	9	4	44.40%	1	11.10%	1	0	8
2010-11	1	9	5	55.60%	1	11.10%	1	0	9
2011-12	1	9	5	55.6%	1	11.10%	1	0	9
2012-13	1	9	5	55.6%	1	11.10%	0	0	9
2013-14	0	9	5	55.6%	1	11.10%	0	0	9

Accomplishments.

All students in the program are performing well and all but the latest student admitted (Fall 2012) have completed their comprehensive exams; two students will have dissertation defenses in the fall of 2014. Full-time students have received support through TAs, RAs on work and health research projects, as well as through external scholarships and awards, including a Mustard Fellowship in Work and Health. Four students were accepted into the highly competitive Work Disability Prevention CIHR Strategic Training Program. One student successfully completed the OBEL Gender, Work and Health Summer School (a CIHR-funded training program). All students have published aspects of their research and all have attended one or more conferences or meetings with a scope that includes work and health (e.g., the Canadian Association for Research on Work and Health Conference, the Association of Canadian Ergonomists, AUTO21). A number of students have very strong track records with each of them having authored or co-authored over 4 peer-reviewed articles in the past two years.

4. Summary and Next Steps

The Work and Health Program Steering committee will be meeting this fall to finalize the Synergy and Sustainability Plan that was presented in draft form to the AHS Administrative Council in 2013 and January 2014. The plan will then be presented to the heads of the departments/school and the new acting AHS Dean for approvals. We plan to have a Memorandum of Agreement regarding the Collaborative Work and Health Program in place by December 2014. This agreement will allow a newly formed Executive Committee to move forward with strategic planning to ensure the program's sustainability and growth.

Although the Work and Health program has an excellent reputation, student enrolment is less than ideal. The program reviewers noted "with greater visibility in marketing and recruitment, these programs could grow significantly in the coming years". Efforts will be made to act on this recommendation by working with AHS recruitment specialists and by encouraging core and affiliated faculty to promote the program at conferences and scientific meetings. We will work to improve the visibility of the Work and Health program on webpages in the school/departments as well as AHS. This fall we will be contacting AHS faculty to encourage those with interests in work and health to become active members of the program. Additionally, we have a considerable number of new faculty with interests in the field and we will provide them with information about the program and encourage their participation. As supervisory capacity is a limiting factor, our efforts to promote the program in AHS will be helpful in increasing student enrolment.

In summary, the Steering Committee and all affiliated Work and Health faculty are committed to the growth and vitality of the program. We will have two alumni of the program this year and they will be ambassadors with their future work and successes further enhancing our reputation. Although we have experienced some challenges in student recruitment and with faculty retirements, with new faculty and increased visibility and outreach, we will be well-positioned to grow into the leading doctoral program in work and health in Canada.