

**Health & Rehabilitation Sciences
Final Assessment Report &
Implementation Plan
March 2022**

Faculty / Affiliated University College	Health Sciences	
Degrees Offered	MSc, PhD	
Date of Last Review	2012-2013	
Approved Fields	Health and Aging Health Professional Education Health Promotion Hearing Science Measurement and Methods Physical Therapy Speech and Language Science Occupational Science	MSc, PhD MSc, PhD MSc, PhD MSc, PhD, MCISc/PhD combined MSc, PhD MSc, PhD, MPT/PhD combined MSc, PhD, MCISc/PhD combined MSc, PhD, MScOT/PhD combined
External Reviewers	Marcia Finlayson Director, School of Rehabilitation Therapy Queen's University	Patricia Manns Associate Dean, Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine University of Alberta
Internal Reviewers	Tom Drysdale, Associate Dean, Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry and Member of SUPR-G	Maksim Faronov, PhD Candidate Electrical and Computer Engineering
Date of Site Visit	November 8-9, 2021	
Date Review Report Received	November 22, 2021	
Date Program/Faculty Response Received	Program response February 28, 2022 Dean response March 3, 2022	
Evaluation	Good Quality	
Approval Dates	SUPR-G: May 16, 2022 SCAPA (rating approval, and academic program change recommendation): May 25, 2022 Senate (FYI for program recommendation, approval for academic program changes): June 10, 2022	
Year of Next Review	Year of next cyclical review: 2028-2029	

Overview of Western's Cyclical Review Assessment Reporting Process

In accordance with Western's Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), adopted on May 11, 2011, and revised June 22, 2012, this Final Assessment Report provides a summary of the cyclical review, internal responses, and assessment and evaluation of the Health & Rehabilitation Sciences Graduate Program delivered by the Faculty of Health Sciences.

This Final Assessment Report (FAR) report considers the following documents:

- the program's self-study,
- the external consultants' report,
- the response from the Health & Rehabilitation Sciences Graduate Program Chair, and
- the response from the Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences.

This FAR identifies the strengths of the program and opportunities for program enhancement and improvement, and details the recommendations of the external consultants, noting those recommendations that require attention.

The Implementation Plan details the recommendations from the Final Assessment Report that have been selected for implementation, identifies who is responsible for approving and acting on the recommendations, specifies any action or follow-up that is required, and defines the timeline for completion.

The Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan is sent for approval through SUPR-G and SCAPA, then for information to Senate and to the Ontario Universities' Council on Quality Assurance. It is publicly accessible on Western's IQAP website.

The FAR, including the Implementation Plan, is the only document from the Graduate cyclical review process that is made public; all other documents are confidential to Western's Faculty of Health Sciences, the Health & Rehabilitation Sciences Graduate Program, the School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies, and SUPR-G.

Executive Summary

The Graduate Program in Health and Rehabilitation Sciences (HRS) offers both an MSc and a PhD degree, wherein students may select from amongst nine Fields: Health and Aging; Health Professional Education; Health Promotion; Rehabilitation Sciences, Hearing Science; Measurement and Methods; Occupational Science; Physical Therapy; and Speech and Language Science. These Fields are distinguished from each other, in terms of course requirements, by both a Field-specific course, and a Field-specific seminar. The Fields are also distinguished by the nature of their thesis content, and the content of their comprehensive examinations (at the PhD-level only). The formation of HRS in 2006 was a direct outcome of an earlier strategic direction to enhance interdisciplinary graduate education in the Faculty of Health Sciences.

To inform the self-study for this program review, input was collected from program faculty members via a survey (response rate of 67% at $n=34$) regarding the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of the program. Dedicated surveys to current students (response rate of 45% at $n=99$) and to recent graduates (response rate of 28% at $n=78$) collected feedback on areas such as the quality of courses, facilities, student supports, program communications, clarity of program requirements, workload, supervision, funding, and professional development opportunities.

The external reviewers shared a positive assessment of the Health & Rehabilitation Sciences Graduate Program, indicating that “*our recommendations are intended to help strengthen an already very good program.*” In addition to four overarching recommendations, they offer constructive considerations for further enhancement.

Strengths and Innovative Features Identified by the Program

- Combined degrees with the Rehabilitation Schools, whereby the HRS PhD is offered concurrently with the MSc(PT) as of 2007, MSc(OT) as of 2011, MCISc (SLP) as of 2012, and the MCISc (AUD) as of 2012.
- Affiliations with three Collaborative Specializations in Musculoskeletal Health Research, Music Cognition, and Global Health Systems in Africa.
- Breadth of expertise available within the HRS program creating opportunities for exposure to complementary perspectives to research questions and access to the research networks of their mentors.
- Research facilities and strong links to research institutes and community partners, and alliances with hospitals and clinics facilitating patient-centred research.
- The annual HRS Graduate Student Conference and the Faculty’s Research Day to provide students opportunity to present their research in a professional setting.
- New exit interview between the Program Chair and students will take place after a student has completed the program or when leaving the program (whenever possible).

- Implementation of Pathfinder – a degree planning portfolio that enables students to record their accomplishments and plan towards the completion of their degree.

Concerns and Areas of Improvement Identified by the Program

- Faculty members advocate for more advanced quantitative (statistics, mixed methods, scoping/systematic reviews, measurement) courses.
- Opportunities to form a sense of community among students pursuing combined degrees. Consideration of a handbook specific to combined degree students.
- Students mentioned that areas of program priority should be:
 - o Increasing student funding (funding package, internal scholarships, jobs, additional GTAs).
 - o Expanding/renovating the physical space at Elborn to create a sense of cohesion/culture.
 - o Offering greater professional development opportunities (writing workshops, promotion of student research, exploring employment options).
 - o Expanding course offerings and greater integration with clinical programs.

Review Process

As part of the external review, the review committee, comprising two external reviewers, one internal reviewer and a graduate student, were provided with Volume I and II in advance of the scheduled review and then met over two days with the:

- Associate Vice-Provost of the School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies
- Vice-Provost, Academic Planning, Policy and Faculty
- Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences
- Current and Former Associate Deans, Faculty of Health Sciences
- Department Chair
- Graduate Program Chair
- Admission Committee, Scholarship Committee and Graduate Committee Members
- Graduate Program and Department Staff
- Program faculty members
- Graduate students

These formative documents, including Volumes I and II of the Self-Study, the External Report, the program response and the Dean's response, have formed the basis of this summative assessment report of the Health & Rehabilitation Sciences Graduate Program, collated and submitted to SGPS and the Senate Graduate Program Review Committee (SUPR-G) by the Internal Reviewer with the support of the Office of Academic Quality and Enhancement.

Summative Assessment – External Reviewers’ Report

Strengths of the Program

- Time-to-completion data provided in the submission are very good.
- Major research requirements for degree completion are reasonable and leading to high quality products.
- Collaborative specialization options.
- Combined programs are innovative and are offered in four disciplines which sets them apart from other combined program offerings at other Universities.
- strong and well-resourced administration, and also receives excellent support through SGPS.
- Despite student concerns, there is an exceptional level of financial commitment to students through the Faculty base budget.
- Engagement with research centres and labs off campus is strong and provides students with unique and valuable learning experiences.

Areas of Concern or Prospective Improvement

- Lack of discussion about EDI issues throughout admission processes, and attention to diverse ways of knowing and strategies to decolonize curriculum.
- Consideration needs to be given to the number and naming of the fields in the HRS program.
- Inconsistencies across combined programs in the ability to become licensed after completion of the clinical components of the degree (but before completion of all degree components).
- The common seminar learning outcomes and their evaluation are unclear.
- Given the inherent interdisciplinary nature of the research in health and rehabilitation sciences, and the value of ensuring that all students have a common and critical understanding of these key constructs. As such there is some concern that the focus on fields tends to create silos that could be a barrier to interdisciplinary thinking. It seems that the program’s *Common Seminar* represents untapped potential to drive interdisciplinarity.

Upcoming Program Changes Proposed During this Cyclical Program Review

(to be submitted for approval at a future date as per Western’s internal governance process)

- Change in the format of the Common Seminar series (a program milestone) from a within-program offering to requiring students to complete at least six offerings from centrally run groups.
- Removal of the Rehabilitation Sciences Field
- Removal of HS 9679 Research Topics in Hearing, Speech, and Language Science, which was attend by MSc, PhD and Combined degree students in the Hearing Science and Speech & Language Science fields in the HRS Program. Replacing this course with CSD 9512a Acoustics, Perception, and the Auditory System or CSD 9516b Auditory Evoked Potentials and Emissions for students in the Hearing Science field, and CSD 9613a Language Acquisition: Foundations

and Critical Applications or CSD 9615a Speech Science for students in the Speech and Language Science field.

Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations and Program/Faculty Responses

The following are the reviewers' recommendations in the order listed by the external reviewers.

Reviewers' Recommendation Recommendations requiring implementation have been marked with an asterisk (*).	Program/Faculty Response
<p>1. Fields. Critically examine the size and naming of the fields and ask whether there are opportunities to collapse fields, make their labels more inclusive, and support more explicit interdisciplinary work.*</p>	<p>Program: The program has explored the possibility of reducing the number of fields a few times since the inception of the program. This resulted in the removal of the Child and Youth Health field (2016) and the Rehabilitation Sciences field (2020). In the last HRS Program Committee meeting where this recommendation was reviewed, faculty did not support the removal of additional fields, though there was some support for re-naming fields to improve inclusivity.</p> <p>Just recently, the School of Health Studies (SHS) has defined three primary research priorities: health promotion, systems analysis and policy, and knowledge mobilization. The SHS has also, in this budget cycle, been awarded resources to launch a new course-based graduate program around health equity and sustainability, which will provide additional faculty through new tenure-track and renewable contract positions which will provide additional workload to launch new graduate courses. Given these additional resources and the practice of FHS to share courses between graduate programs, it makes sense to revisit the discussion around collapsing, renaming, or adding fields once that program has been approved by the University.</p> <p>Faculty: As noted in the Program response, there has been continued evaluation of both the size and names of the fields of study within the HRS program, with discussions currently underway to examine inclusivity. Whereas interdisciplinary representation is currently widespread among supervisors within the HRS fields (e.g., supervisors from each Faculty of Health Sciences [FHS] School contribute to the Health Promotion field), fostering interdisciplinarity in both graduate coursework and graduate research training has been identified as an area of strategic importance in academic planning by Western and FHS; accordingly any changes to HRS fields which enhance interdisciplinarity will be supported by the Faculty.</p>
<p>2. EDI. Review and critically examine the HRS program from an EDI lens. In particular, curriculum and admission processes should</p>	<p>Program: The program's current admissions process is a review of the application file against SGPS and Program eligibility criteria. As there is very little descriptive information on the application, decisions pertaining to eligibility at SGPS and within the Program, are not influenced by sex, gender, disability status, ethnicity or culture. To be eligible for admission, students are required to secure a thesis supervisor. Where the program may be vulnerable to EDI-related biases may be at the level of the individual faculty member when deciding</p>

<p>be reviewed and at minimum more explicitly align with University EDI initiatives.*</p>	<p>whether to commit to mentoring a student or students. With respect to curriculum, faculty have been decolonizing curriculum over the past two years as this has been a university-wide and faculty-wide initiative.</p> <p>As part of its commitment to EDI, the Program will investigate the possibility of the following: 1) A campaign led by the Dean of FHS to advertise and strongly encourage faculty/staff completion of EDI workshops offered through the university. 2) Investigate whether completion of University-led workshops by faculty and staff can be or are tracked through myHR and can be exported as an aggregated report as this would provide supporting evidence of faculty/staff awareness of EDI issues.</p> <p>Faculty: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion - Decolonization is of paramount importance in Western's new Strategic Plan and, also, for the Faculty of Health Sciences and its constituent Schools and programs, including HRS. The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies at Western is exploring mechanisms to garner data related to the diversity of graduate students on Western campus and to foster holistic admissions processes and accordingly, expansion of the diversity of graduate students at Western. This will be a welcome process to assist the Faculty of Health Sciences and HRS in understanding the current diversity of students in the HRS programs, in reviewing and enhancing its admissions procedures, and in developing and monitoring EDI-D activities. Western's Office of Indigenous Initiatives plays a leading role in championing Indigenous strategic directions, building collaborative and community-engaged partnerships, and supporting campus partners in implementing Western's Indigenous Strategic Plan. Additionally, the Faculty has appointed an EDI-D coordinator to support its Schools and programs in this important work, and several faculty members from Health Sciences are leading or are members of university-level committees addressing decolonization of curriculum, anti-bias, anti-racism and anti-oppression, equity, diversity and inclusion, and accessible education. The Faculty is also currently completing a search for a new leadership position, an Assistant Dean of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Indigeneity and Accessibility, to spearhead this portfolio, aiming to have this new Assistant Dean start July 1, 2022. Both the Faculty of Health Sciences and HRS are deeply committed to EDI-D and will avail themselves of the growing number of supports offered by Western.</p>
<p>3. Core RS and Health components of the HRS program. Identify core Health and Rehabilitation Science knowledge with which every HRS student should leave the program and then develop a mechanism to address that</p>	<p>Program: In a recent meeting of the HRS Program Committee (Feb 2022), the program again 'took the temperature' for further reduction in fields and the introduction of a core program-wide course offering. As in 2018 (from a past town hall discussion), the response by faculty was lukewarm or opposed. First, addition of a common core course would necessitate increasing the number of degree course requirements. Second, given the size of the incoming class each year (nearly 100 students), opportunities for meaningful student interactions with peers and instructors and for deep discussion may be limited. Third, Faculty identify strongly with the theories and frameworks associated with their field and were only mildly receptive to the idea of a program-wide core course. Very few students expressed a desire for a core course beyond the research methods courses already required (see below for a more detailed description of survey results).</p>

<p>core knowledge in a collaborative way.</p>	<p>After reviewing the external reviewers' report, the program sent a survey to our 242 active students seeking their opinion on 1) the removal of fields, their perceived value of fields while in program and post-graduation, 2) ideas for new fields to improve inclusivity, and 3) the addition of program-wide core course requirements. The survey was open from December 2021 to February 2022 and data was anonymous. Ninety-seven (40%) of students completed the survey. With respect to removing fields, students were split (54% for and 46% against). Student reflections regarding each perspective are detailed in the program response. Regarding the core knowledge that every student in the HRS program should acquire, most students listed research methods (already a degree requirement) or professional development opportunities (already provided through the new Common Seminar format). Several students stated that a common course should not be required.</p> <p>As a result of these findings, the program will aim to improve communication to students and supervisors about available elective courses, professional development opportunities, and collaborative programs. Method to implement improvements: add links to program website for collaborative programs (done) and elective courses (done); continue to add professional development opportunities to the course outline for the Common Seminar (ongoing, updated regularly); advertise professional development opportunities in the weekly HRS Program Newsletter that is circulated to faculty and students; at student orientation each fall, provide students a more detailed description of elective courses and Collaborative Specializations.</p> <p>Faculty: The Program has provided detailed responses to these recommendations. The Faculty supports the Program's ongoing engagement with students, faculty and field leaders, the Assistant Dean of Interprofessional Education, and other stakeholders to (a) increase awareness of current and future opportunities regarding coursework, collaborative programs, and professional development.</p>
<p>4. Combined programs. Review combined programs for consistency across disciplines and explore opportunities to enhance student interaction and collaboration across these programs. Leverage the strength of having 4 combined programs to develop and train a cohort of clinician scientists across</p>	<p>Program: While all combined programs contain simultaneous participation in components of PhD training during years of professional degree training and vice versa, indeed, a few inconsistencies between programs exist. First, students in the combined MScOT/PhD and MPT/PhD degrees can graduate with their professional degree in Year 4 of their combined degree, whereas the CSD combined students (MCIsc/PhD) are completing their final placement toward their professional degree during Year 5. This can create feelings of inequity between students in different combined programs when OT/PT students have the option to begin working (at least part time) while they complete Year 5 of their training. Secondly, the program has had instances where students from the combined CSD degrees have completed their first two years of professional training and then elected to withdraw from the combined program, thus only earning their professional degree. Students in a combined degree receive doctoral-level funding from the faculty for all 5 years of their training, while students who are enrolled in the professional degree only do not receive funding support. In this case, the inequity is between combined degree and professional degree students.</p>

disciplines who are ready to collaborate upon graduation.*

In terms of collaboration across programs, interprofessional activities for students in the combined programs have recently been put in place such as three course courses that students from all four programs take together. In addition to these formal IPE courses, each professional degree requires students to participate in specified hours of interprofessional activities including faculty-wide interprofessional initiatives
<https://uwyo.ca/fhs/education/ipe/index.html>.

Faculty: The Program has provided detailed responses to these recommendations. The Faculty supports the Program's ongoing engagement with students, faculty and field leaders, the Assistant Dean of Interprofessional Education, and other stakeholders to enrich consistencies and collaboration across the combined program fields.

Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan provides a summary of the recommendations that require action and/or follow-up. In each case, the Chair of the Graduate Program, in consultation with the SGPS and the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences is responsible for enacting and monitoring the actions noted in Implementation Plan. The number of recommendations prioritized for implementation has been reduced as they are already being actioned as explained in the program and faculty responses.

Recommendation	Proposed Action and Follow-up	Responsibility	Timeline
<p>Recommendation #1: Critically examine the size and naming of the fields and any opportunities to collapse fields, make their labels more inclusive, and support more explicit interdisciplinary work.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Initiate a dedicated discussion at upcoming HRS Graduate Committee meetings. Discussion with the Dean and FHS faculty would follow. 2. Investigate how the <i>Common Seminar</i> can be used to break down barriers between fields and serve as a driver for interdisciplinary thinking. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. HRS Graduate Committee, Assistant Dean of Graduate Programs FHS, Associate Dean of Graduate Programs FHS. 2. HRS Graduate Committee 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Decision by December 2022 If applicable, submission for major modifications by September 2023 2. By December 2022
<p>Recommendation #2: Review and critically examine the HRS program from an EDI lens, in particular the HRS curriculum and admission processes.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. With the support of the new Assistant Dean EDIIA and the Faculty's EDI-D coordinator, initiate a dedicated discussion at upcoming HRS Graduate Committee meetings and outline an actionable EDI strategy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider adding this topic as a standing item at each HRS Graduate Committee meeting. 2. Share and co-develop EDI best practices with other graduate programs. 3. Promote and strongly encourage faculty/staff completion of EDI workshops. In particular, target prospective supervisors who commonly serve as first contacts for students being admitted into the program. Workshops would support greater consideration of possible biases related to admission. 	<p>Assistant Dean EDIIA HRS EDI-D coordinator The HRS Program Committee Assistant Dean Graduate Programs FHS</p>	<p>By April 2023</p>

<p>Recommendation #4: Review combined programs for consistency across disciplines and explore opportunities to enhance student interaction and collaboration across these programs.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investigate the possibility for students in the MCIsc/PhD combined degree to complete their final placement in Year 4. 2. Invite combined students to participate in a regularly occurring meeting of combined degree students. 	<p>Field leaders for Hearing Science and Speech & Language Sciences Assistant Dean Graduate Programs FHS</p>	<p>By December 2022</p>
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Other Opportunities for Program Improvement and Enhancement

- The external reviewers recommend that the learning outcomes be made available to students on the website or in a student handbook.
- It will be important to continue to have an openness to embrace change in terms of online education which may increase opportunities for more diverse student representation including international, non-traditional, and students from equity seeking groups.