

Final Assessment Report
Submitted by SUPR-G to SCAPA

Program:	Neuroscience	
Degrees Offered:	MSc, PhD	
Approved Fields:	Molecular and Cellular Neuroscience (MCN) Behavioural and Cognitive Neuroscience (BCN)	
External Consultants:	Alan Fine Professor, Department of Physiology & Biophysics Dalhousie University	Kathryn Murphy Professor and Director, Neuroscience McMaster University
Internal Reviewers:	Catherine Nolan, Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) Don Wright Faculty of Music	Patricia Wilbur PhD Candidate Civil and Environmental Engineering
Date of Site Visit:	May 21-22, 2014	
Evaluation:	<i>Conditional with report due to SUPR-G September 2016</i>	
Approved by:	<i>SUPR-G on December 1, 2014</i> <i>SCAPA on January 14, 2015</i>	

Executive Summary

The Neuroscience program is a large Interdisciplinary program, hosted jointly by the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry and the Department of Psychology; the Molecular and Cellular Neuroscience, or MCN, field is affiliated with Schulich, while the Behavioural and Cognitive Neuroscience, or BCN, field is affiliated with Psychology. In addition to the two approved fields of research, MCN and BCN, the program has proposed a third field called Translational Neuroscience (TN) for the MSc degree; the TN field would be aimed at attracting medical residents, fellows, and other students who require advanced graduate training in neuroscience, but whose career pathway does not require the completion of a research-intensive MSc degree.

The Neuroscience program has a long history at Western. It was established in 1991, and pioneered graduate education in Neuroscience in Canada. The program has over 50 faculty members from a variety of Faculties and Departments across the University, and continues to grow. The enrolment in the program is healthy with about 60 students currently enrolled, and an intake of about 20 students per year. The program plans to expand its enrolment in part through the introduction of the new TN field.

The external reviewers comment favorably on the high quality of graduate supervision in the program and the disciplinary leadership of the primary faculty in the two fields. The reviewers raised concerns about deficiencies in student support practices and the effect of this on enrolment in the BCN field. The reviewers also expressed notable concerns that a strong vision of the interdisciplinary nature of neuroscience is not being adequately transmitted to the students, who tend to think of the two fields (MCN and BCN) as two programs, because of the disciplinary and cultural differences between the program members aligned with the two fields. The reviewers also expressed concern about creating a new field (TN) before the various issues about the current structure of the graduate program are addressed.

Significant Strengths of Program:

- Recognition of Neuroscience as a signature research area at Western
- Research strength of faculty
- Well-established research laboratories
- Leading-edge laboratory facilities
- Excellent library resources

Opportunities for improvement & Enhancement:

- The program has suffered from problems in leadership and administration. Action to address these problems has been initiated through the temporary appointment of two Interim Co-Directors representing the two units that host the program (Schulich and Psychology) and the creation of a Neuroscience Coordinator position that will encompass the undergraduate and graduate program in Neuroscience. The impact of these changes should be monitored over the coming year to ensure the long-term stability and success of the program. In particular, the success of the newly introduced Co-Director model of leadership of the program should be evaluated, with consideration given to its long-term potential.
- The program should ensure that students in MCN and BCN receive a uniform minimum funding level regardless of which field they are in. This issue has already been addressed through a budget model agreed upon between the two Deans.
- The program should take steps to build an inclusive Neuroscience community in order that students identify with the rich, interdisciplinary nature of Neuroscience, regardless of their field (MCN or BCN).

Recommendations for implementation:	Responsibility	Resources	Timeline
Establish effective and balanced leadership for the program. (See above.)	Deans	Faculty time	September 2015
Establish clear communication between the MCN and BCN fields.	Program leadership Program Committee	None	September 2015
Ensure that students in both MCN and BCN fields receive comparable minimum funding. (See above.)	Program leadership	None	Ongoing
Build a strong Neuroscience community with the introduction of events and opportunities that engage members of both fields. These might include: workshops, seminars, colloquia, student representation on selected committees, social events, etc.	Program leadership Program Committee Program members	None	Ongoing
Postpone introduction of the Translational Neuroscience (TN) field until stable, effective leadership is in place and until there is evidence of a strong Neuroscience community supporting the new field. When appropriate, the Program will complete the Major Modification template for the new field and submit to SUPR-G for approval.	Program leadership Program Committee	None	When ready
Ensure that all students in the program have access to the required Neuroscience 9500 course.	Program leadership	None	Ongoing
Reconstitute a Steering/Advisory Committee that will meet 2-3 times per year to set the overall direction of the program and receive reports of the Program Director (or Co-Directors) and consider issues that arise.	Deans		Ongoing