Western UNIVERSITY · CANADA

Pathologists' Assistant
Final Assessment Report & Implementation Plan
August 2026

Faculty / Affiliated University College	Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry	
Degrees Offered	Master of Clinical Science (MClSc)	
Date of Last Review	2017-2018	
Fields of Study	NA- Professional Program	
External Reviewers	Patrice Boulianne Regional Discipline Manager DMP/HLA Eastern Ontario Regional Laboratory Association	Dr. Fang-I-Lu Staff Pathologist, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, Associate Professor, Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathobiology, University of Toronto
Internal Reviewers	Dr. Elizabeth Hayden Associate Dean, Graduate Faculty of Social Science	
Date of Site Visit	February 19 and 20, 2026	
Date Review Report Received	March 18, 2026	
Date Program/Faculty Response Received	Program Response: April 21, 2026 Faculty Response: May 27, 2026	
Evaluation	Good Quality	
Approval Dates	SUPR-G: September 21, 2026 ACA: October 6, 2026 Senate (for information): October 23, 2026	
Year of Next Review	2033-2034	
Progress Report	June 2029	

Overview of Western's Cyclical Review Assessment Reporting Process

In accordance with Western's Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the Final Assessment Report (FAR) provides a summary of the cyclical review, internal responses, and assessment and evaluation of the Pathologists' Assistant Graduate Program, delivered by the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry.

This FAR considers the following documents:

- the program's self-study brief;
- the external reviewers' report;
- the response from the Program; and
- the response from the Dean, Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry.

This FAR identifies the strengths of the program and opportunities for program enhancement and improvement, and details the recommendations of the external reviewers – noting those recommendations to be prioritized for implementation.

The Implementation Plan details the recommendations from the FAR 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 FAR (including Implementation Plan) is sent for approval through the Subcommittee on Program Review - Graduate (SUPR-G) and the Senate Committee on Academic Curriculum and Awards (ACA), then for information to Senate and to the Ontario Universities' Council on Quality Assurance. Subsequently, it is publicly accessible on Western's IQAP website. The FAR is the only document from the cyclical review process that is made public; all other documents are confidential to the Pathologist's Assistant Graduate Program, the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, and School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS) and SUPR-G.

Executive Summary

Established in 2007, the Pathologists' Assistant graduate program is a professionally oriented six-term program combining intensive academic instruction with hands-on clinical training. Initially offered as a Master of Science (M.Sc.), the program evolved into a standalone professional degree in 2012 and is now conferred as a Master of Clinical Science (MClSc) in Pathologists' Assistant. Notably, it was the first program in Canada to receive accreditation from the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences in 2012, this was renewed in 2015 and 2022 for a ten-year term.

The curriculum begins with eight months of didactic instruction, followed by a two-month introduction to the clinical laboratory environment. This is succeeded by a 10-month practicum with rotations in surgical and autopsy pathology. The final phase, a two-

month community hospital placement, provides an opportunity for students to consolidate their training and develop greater independence. This comprehensive clinical exposure across both high-volume tertiary centres and smaller community settings equips graduates with the skills, confidence, and versatility required for successful integration into professional practice. The program admits six students annually, ensuring personalized instruction and close mentorship throughout the duration of the program.

The self-study included refinement of the program learning outcomes and a curriculum mapping exercise. It was equally informed by site visits to each key rotation sites (Ontario Forensic Pathology Services, SickKids Hospital, and Grand River Hospital) including meetings with the corresponding preceptors and supervisors. Additionally, two focus groups were conducted, one with students and one with faculty members, as well as a survey of program alumni, and feedback from employers.

The external reviewers shared a positive assessment of the Graduate Pathologist's Assistant Program. They offer three recommendations with considerations for further enhancement.

Strengths and Innovative Features Identified by the Program

- First to be accredited by the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences in Canada.
- The small annual cohort promotes personalized learning, strong peer relationships, and paired clinical rotations that provide students with ongoing mutual support.
- The centralized pathology department at the University Hospital offers students valuable clinical exposure and convenient access to the university's research facilities.
- Weekly evaluations from clinical preceptors at all sites provide continuous feedback on students' development and readiness to meet program competencies. The program and medical directors also conduct formal reviews of student progress throughout both the didactic and clinical phases.
- Laboratory tours, forensic and surgical experiences, professional seminars, and participation in Pathology Research Day connect classroom learning with professional practice and scientific communication.
- The practicum component of the program supports the transition to the workforce via networking and relationship building across multiple healthcare institutions.

Concerns and Areas of Improvement Identified and Discussed by the Program

- Put in place a dedicated orientation session to better support incoming Pathologists' Assistant students.

- Increase frequency of check-ins and establishing clear goals and objectives for each rotation with the students.
- Increase coordination meetings among preceptors to discuss student progress and teaching strategies.
- Review and Realignment of the Infectious Disease Course Curriculum.
- Re-evaluation of the competencies list to reflect evolving surgical trends.
- Develop and transition the grossing course (0.5 credit) into the academic year and led primarily by Pathologists' Assistant

Review Process

As part of the external review, the review committee, comprising two external reviewers, one internal reviewer, were provided with Volume I and II of the self-study brief in advance of the scheduled review and then met in-person over two days with the:

- Vice-Provost, Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies
- Associate Vice-Provost, Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies
- Vice-Provost, Academic Planning, Policy & Faculty
- Director of Academic Quality and Enhancement
- Administrative Coordinator, School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
- Associate Dean, Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies, Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry
- Vice-Dean, Basic Medical Science, Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry
- Western LibrariesTeam Members
- Program Directors
- Department Chair
- Graduate Education Committee Members
- Program Faculty Members
- Program Staff
- Graduate Students
- Community Partners

Following the site visit, the external reviewers submitted a comprehensive report of their findings which was sent to the Program and the Decanal Office for review and response. Formative documents, including Volumes I and II of the Self-Study, the External Report, and the Program and Decanal responses form the basis of this FAR. The FAR is collated and submitted to SUPR-G by the Internal Reviewer with the support of the Office of Academic Quality and Enhancement.

Summative Assessment – External Reviewers' Report

External reviewers shared that the program "*offers an excellent curriculum to their students, thanks to their discipline-relevant didactic courses in year one that provide students with a solid knowledge base in human pathology and human anatomy, and their practical rotations in surgical pathology specimen grossing and autopsy at various academic, regional and community hospital labs that ensure the students have the knowledge, skills and confidence to work independently.*"

Strengths of the Program:

- Excellence and dedication of the program director and the pathologists and Pathologists' Assistant teachers from London Health Sciences Centre (LHSC).
- Practical rotations at LHSC offer students valuable clinical exposure to simple and complex surgical and autopsy specimens and allows the teaching faculty members to closely monitor students' progress early on in their training.
- Interdisciplinary learning through rounds with other medical learners (pathology, medical students, oncologic residents).
- Regional/community practical rotations are done in pairs, ensuring peer support.
- The Capstone research project has resulted in students sharing their findings at conferences at the provincial, national and international level, with several published in reputable pathology journals.
- EDID principles are integrated into academic programming through seminars incorporated into Departmental Grand Rounds and Seminars, including sessions addressing bias and discrimination in STEM and equity reform for trainees.
- Strong on-time completion rates and employment outcomes for students.

Prospective Areas of Improvement for the Program to Consider

- The program director and all teaching faculty members are funded by LHSC's department of pathology. As a result, they are often pressured to prioritize clinical work over their teaching and administrative commitments, impacting the implementation of program changes or innovations.
- The existing lab space for Pathologists' Assistant students at LHSC is suboptimal, with only two benches available for all medical trainees, limiting the amount of specimen grossing training for all trainees.
    - Due to the human and physical constraints at LHSC, collaboration with new labs would be necessary to increase student enrollment.
- Students must arrange their own travel and accommodation for out-of-town clinical rotations, and pay for all costs, with limited assistance from the Program.
- Incorporating other innovative courses in research, teaching and lab management/leadership, and novel technologies such as artificial intelligence, digital pathology and simulation.
- Competitive admissions and the high employment rate indicate a strong need to expand student enrollment to meet the high demand of Pathologists' Assistants in Canadian healthcare system.

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	Program/Faculty Response
Recommendation #1: Increase resource support from the university: a. Consider allowing the LHSC's department of pathology control over a larger share of students' tuition. This would allow for transparency and more freedom in financial resource allocation (e.g., funding for more dedicated teaching time for the program director +/- clinical teachers/preceptors). b. Provide more non-clinical teaching personnel (teaching assistants, digital media intern, teaching scholar) to the program as needed. c. Improve the awareness of existing resources from the university (e.g., faculty teaching training, workshops on research by teaching librarians, access to library database).	**Program:** a. The program recognizes the need to explore a range of approaches to increase resources available to support the program. At present, implementation of this recommendation would require in-depth discussions with senior leadership across Western University, the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, and LHSC. These discussions would need to consider institutional policies, funding models, and broader resource allocation frameworks. The Program Director will take the initiative to establish appropriate communication channels with relevant constituents to explore the feasibility of this recommendation. b. This need has been identified internally, and recent discussions with the Department of Pathology. Proposed measures include the addition of teaching assistants and/or teaching scholars to support course coordination. In parallel, the program is exploring the use of digital media support personnel to assist with maintenance of online course materials. The program is actively working with departmental leadership to assess resource availability and implementation pathways. c. To address this, the Program Director and administrative staff will take a more proactive role in regularly disseminating information about available workshops, seminars, and training opportunities at Western University to clinical preceptors. In addition, the program will collaborate with leadership at the LHSC to support protected time for preceptors to participate in these activities. This aims to enhance engagement with available resources and support ongoing faculty development. **Faculty:** The decanal team supports the program's response. The Chief/Chair of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine can request additional teaching assistant (TA) support through the Bachelor of Medical Sciences Undergraduate Education (BMSUE) office. The BMSUE office administers the application process and TA funding. Teaching scholars are not directly hired by a department. However, when there are calls for teaching scholar applications, qualified members of the department can apply for the positions and should be encouraged to do so by the department. There are many resources available through Western and/or the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry that can assist with training, design, implementation renewal etc. There are also faculty and staff in the Dean's office that can help navigate the available resources and help with program design and implementation.

Recommendation #2: Seek collaboration and resource support from outside of the university: a. Collaborations with other Pathologists' Assistant programs in Canada to share teaching resources and coordinate admission. b. Collaborations with other healthcare professional organizations (e.g., Canadian Association of Pathologists, Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario) to advocate for more funding from the government. c. Partnership with other academic hospitals that can offer specialized pathology services (e.g., pediatric pathology, forensic pathology). d. Partnership with community hospitals in out-of-town and underserved areas.	**Program:** The program recognizes the value of strengthening partnerships with other institutions across the region to support both clinical training and potential future enrollment growth. This approach has previously been implemented successfully, as demonstrated when enrollment increased from four to six students through the addition of external institutions as core clinical rotation sites. Building on this model, the program will continue to expand its network of affiliated institutions at both the local and provincial levels. Established relationships with community partners have already created opportunities for new clinical placements, and ongoing discussions with Hamilton General Hospital reflect continued progress in this area. In addition, the program will seek to strengthen collaboration with other accredited Pathologists' Assistant programs in Canada to promote shared academic practices and resource optimization. These partnerships may include alignment of admissions processes, exchange of curricular insights, and discussion of sustainable funding models. Planned actions are outlined in the Implementation Plan below. **Faculty:** The decanal team supports the program's response. There are currently initiatives underway in the Dean's office to expand our network to include underserved and Northern communities for other programs. Working with the Dean's office may help to develop a local group that can share contacts, experiences and best practices.
Recommendation #3: Curriculum improvement suggestions: a. Consider redesigning the Infectious Disease course to better relate with the Pathologists' Assistant profession. b. For Practical courses: - Support students with logistic and financial support for their out-of-town rotations. - Better prepare students for the	**Program:** a. Didactic course- A meeting has been scheduled with the course coordinator to develop a plan to consolidate the course from two academic terms into a single term. This restructuring will focus on refining course content to ensure that lecture material is concise, relevant, and aligned with the competencies required for the Pathologists' Assistant profession. b. Practical courses-The program acknowledges that financial support for out-of-town clinical rotations remains an ongoing challenge, with limited dedicated funding currently available. To help mitigate financial barriers, recent efforts have focused on improving access to existing funding opportunities. The financial structure supporting student attendance at academic conferences has been revised to enhance accessibility and increase participation in professional development activities. To strengthen exam readiness,

Canadian and US certification exams. - Offer a more seamless and standardized learning experience for the students, such as implementing formal mid-rotation feedback/ evaluation, having more standardized and detailed grossing curriculum and student performance evaluation rubrics, and having a better learner handover process between clinical teachers/preceptors. - Have more emphasis on knowledge acquisition (rather than just skill acquisition) in year 2, such as regular knowledge assessment quizzes. c. Innovative curricula to better "future-proof" students: - Consider offering students formal teaching in research, teaching and lab management/leadership. - Expose students to new technologies that are poised to change the pathology profession (such as artificial intelligence and digital pathology), and health profession training such as (grossing simulation).	several targeted strategies are being implemented across the curriculum. Within clinical rotations, the program has recently introduced structured study guides designed to reinforce key competencies and promote critical thinking aligned with certification expectations. In the didactic curriculum, assessment methods are being revised to incorporate question formats that more closely reflect those used in certification examinations. These efforts are complemented by the existing annual seminar delivered by a recent graduate, which provides students with practical insights into the examination process, preparation strategies, and expectations. The program is currently undertaking a revision of its clinical rotation teaching model at LHSC to enhance continuity, communication, and student assessment. To strengthen coordination among teachers, regular communication structures will be implemented, including weekly check-ins and monthly review meetings. In addition, the program will introduce pre-rotation and post-rotation learning objectives for each clinical block. These will support goal settings, allow students to track their progress more effectively, and enable earlier identification of any areas of concern. Student oversight will be enhanced through scheduled progress meetings with the Program Director, occurring at a minimum of four intervals throughout the clinical year. To further reinforce foundational knowledge, additional structured worksheets will be incorporated during clinical training. These changes are scheduled for implementation in the upcoming academic year. c. Recent enhancements include the introduction of lectures on digital pathology and laboratory management, as well as the expansion of research opportunities in areas such as artificial intelligence applications in pathology. Exposure to a variety of clinical training environments further supports this objective. Rotations across multiple institutions provide students with broader perspectives on laboratory operations and alternative approaches to practice beyond those at LHSC. In addition, planned collaboration with other accredited programs is expected to create further opportunities for shared learning and innovation in these areas. **Faculty:** The decanal team supports the program's response.

Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan provides a summary of the recommendations that require action and/or follow-up. In each case, the Graduate Program Chair, in consultation with the SGPS and the Dean of the Faculty are responsible for enacting and monitoring the actions noted in Implementation Plan.

Recommendation	Proposed Action and Follow-up	Responsibility	Timeline
Recommendation #1 Increase resource support from the university.	a) Explore approaches to increase resources available to support the program. b) Consider adding Teaching Assistants and/or Teaching Scholars to support course coordination and the use of digital medial support personnel to assist with online course materials. c) More regularly disseminate information about available workshops, seminars, and training opportunities at Western to clinical preceptors and collaborate with leadership at LHSC to support protected time for preceptors to participate in these activities.	Program Director; Dean's Office	a,b) By September 2027 c) By January 2027
Recommendation #2 Seek collaboration and resource support from outside of the university	a) Continue to expand the program's network of affiliated institutions at both the local and provincial levels. b) Expand engagement with established community institutions to assess their capacity to serve as core clinical rotation sites. c) Explore partnerships with institutions in underserved regions, including Northern and Eastern Ontario, to assess the feasibility of supporting clinical training that aligns with regional workforce needs.	Program Director	a) By September 2027 b,c) By September 2028
Recommendation #3 Curriculum improvement	a) Restructure the Infectious Disease course to improve its content and better alignment with the competencies required for the Pathologists' Assistant profession. b) Review the effectiveness and impact of the existing targeted strategies (listed in the program response above); finalize revision of the clinical rotation teaching model at LHSC; implement regular communication structures including weekly check-ins and monthly review meetings; and	Program Director	All By September 2027

	introduce pre-rotation and post-rotation learning objectives for each clinical block. c) Review the effectiveness and impact of the recently integrated lectures on digital pathology and laboratory management as well as the expansion of research opportunities in areas such as artificial intelligence applications in pathology.		