

# UTQAP Cyclical Review: Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan

## 1 Review Summary

<b>Programs Reviewed:</b>	Behaviour, Genetics and Neurobiology, BSc: Specialist Exceptionality in Human Learning, BSc: Specialist and Major Psychology, BSc: Specialist, Major, and Minor
<b>Unit Reviews:</b>	Department of Psychology, University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM)
<b>Commissioning Officer:</b>	Amrita Daniere, Vice-Principal Academic and Dean, UTM
<b>Reviewers:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Professor Tara Perrot, Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, Dalhousie University</li><li>2. Professor Jeffrey A. Simpson, Department of Psychology, University of Minnesota</li></ol>
<b>Date of Review Visit:</b>	January 31 – February 1, 2019
<b>Date Presented to AP&amp;P:</b>	October 30, 2019

## Previous Review

Date: January 3-4, 2012

### Summary of Findings and Recommendations

#### 1. Significant strengths of the program:

- Integration of outstanding research programs with teaching, including research teaching at the undergraduate level
- Faculty members' exemplary ability to teach undergraduates not only empirically based causal reasoning, but also the process of laboratory research itself
- Department's grace and collegiality in handling enrolment expansion

#### 2. Opportunities for program improvement and enhancement. The reviewers recommended that the program consider:

- Ensuring that the curriculum structure can accommodate larger enrolments
- Reviewing and revising admission requirements as planned to ensure sufficient student preparation in math and science
- Examining the adequacy of technical and administrative staffing resources to support teaching and research
- Reviewing space plans with respect to communal meeting areas and research labs that support teaching and research

## Current Review: Documentation and Consultation

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### Documentation Provided to Reviewers

Terms of Reference; Department of Psychology Self-Study, 2019; Previous Review Report and Administrative Responses; Department of Psychology, Faculty CVs; UTM Degree Level Expectations, 2016; UofT Facts & Figures, 2016; UTM Divisional Academic Plan, 2017; UTM Vision Statement, 2017; UTM Academic Calendar, 2018-2019; UTM Viewbook, 2018-2019; UofT Domestic Viewbook, 2018-2019; Tri-Campus Framework.

### Consultation Process

The reviewers met with the Vice-Principal, Academic and Dean; the Acting Vice-Dean, Teaching & Learning; the Vice-Principal, Research; the Chair of the Department of Psychology, UTM; junior and senior research stream faculty members; teaching stream faculty members; sessional and contractually limited term appointment instructors; undergraduate students; graduate and postdoctoral students; departmental administrative staff; teaching lab technicians.

# Current Review: Findings and Recommendations

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## 1. Undergraduate Program

*Unless otherwise noted, all bulleted comments apply to all programs reviewed.*

**The reviewers observed the following strengths:**

- Overall quality
  - Programs provide valuable experiences for students
  - Extremely strong foundation of research-based teaching
- Objectives
  - Course offerings are consistent with departmental objectives to provide both comprehensive and specialized programs
  - Hands-on research participation opportunities align with the University's goals of incorporating research and experiential learning into the undergraduate experience
  - Positive program name change to Neuroscience reflects faculty members' research
  - Psychology programs are in line with University objectives and provide a broad overview of the discipline
- Admissions requirements
  - Consistent with standards across Canada
  - Increased admissions requirements since the last review to ensure students are prepared for rigors of the discipline
- Curriculum and program delivery
  - Excellent breadth and depth of curriculum
  - Variety of research and experiential learning opportunities in the form of Research Opportunity Programs (ROP), Individual Research Projects (IRP), and undergraduate student theses
  - Positive decision to remove major in Exceptionality in Human Learning, while continuing to offer the specialist
- Innovation
  - Experiential learning opportunities include access to state-of-the-art labs and world-renowned researchers
- Quality indicators – undergraduate students
  - Program is among a select few across North America providing hands-on research experience at every year of study
  - Student ratings are consistently higher than average
- Quality indicators – faculty
  - Faculty complement increased from 24 to 27 since 2012, allowing for increased opportunity for student ROPs, IRPs, and theses

The reviewers identified the following **areas of concern**:

- Objectives
  - Faculty members identified a discrepancy between the University's mission to increase Psychology program enrolments vs. the high standards and requirements of the UTM Psychology programs
- Curriculum and program delivery
  - High number of courses offered each year
  - Faculty are concerned about balancing conflicting expectations of research productivity and increasing amounts of undergraduate supervision
- Innovation
  - Faculty feel overwhelmed by the number of institutional initiatives aimed at enhancing the undergraduate experience
- Student engagement, experience and program support services
  - Maintaining the overall quality of undergraduate students while faced with declining enrolments is a concern for the department
  - Lack of clarity regarding the division of advising between the first-year course coordinator and the undergraduate advisor/coordinator; advisor/coordinator is over worked
- Quality indicators – undergraduate students
  - Declining enrolment in recent years, despite class size increases instituted in 2011

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Objectives
  - Develop a strategic plan to effectively balance the desire for larger student enrolment with the unique requirements of each of these programs
- Admission requirements
  - Consider removing the minimum cGPA requirement for enrolment in the Minor program, and lowering this requirement for the Major program, to increase overall program enrolments
- Curriculum and program delivery
  - Reduce annual third-year lecture course offerings; offer some on a biannual basis
  - Amend the existing Research Design and Analysis in Psychology II course to better articulate design and methodology content. Make this course required for all Major and Specialist students, to provide foundation for third-year lab courses
  - Offer more (and require some) standing lab courses in both the Major and Specialist programs
  - Convert some current third-year lecture courses to labs with a hands-on element, to increase experiential learning opportunities without substantially increasing faculty workload
  - Pursue plans to add a Neuroscience major, which will likely increase enrolment; collaborate with Biology on shared courses and research opportunities as the program grows

- Innovation
  - Investigate new innovations in instructional methods (e.g., flipped classroom)
- Assessment of learning
  - Identify critical general skills being taught in courses; develop more refined course evaluations to assess whether relevant skills are being gained
- Student engagement, experience and program support services
  - Increase communication with undergraduate students, including a 'roadmap' from the first to the fourth year
  - Increase graduate students' involvement in teaching and teaching-training, in addition to marking and proctoring
  - Consider adding capacity in student advising and redistributing responsibilities

## 2. Graduate Program (n/a)

## 3. Faculty/Research

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- Research
  - Stellar researchers in the Department, including recent hires

The reviewers identified the following **areas of concern**:

- Overall quality
  - Faculty are stretched too thinly with competing demands for research productivity and providing experiential learning for undergraduate students; disconnect between how faculty are evaluated and actual expectations for work in this area
- Faculty
  - Increasing faculty complement will be difficult unless student program enrolments begin to rise

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Faculty
  - Streamline research and teaching duties of faculty; consider giving course teaching credit for undergraduate research project supervision on a rotating basis
  - Amalgamate sessional appointments into more stable limited-term appointments

## 4. Administration

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- Relationships
  - Congenial atmosphere among faculty and staff
- Long-range planning and overall assessment
  - Faculty members are happy with recent excellent hires
- International comparators
  - Among the best research-intensive psychology departments in North America

The reviewers identified the following **areas of concern**:

- Relationships
  - Communication within the department, as well as with the Office of the Dean and other units, could be improved upon
- Organizational and financial structure
  - Staff workload is problematic, particularly for the undergraduate advisor/coordinator who is performing some tasks that should be handled by course instructors

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Relationships
  - Implement regularly scheduled activities to bring department members physically together more often, given the department's current multiple building configuration
  - Improve communication between the Dean's office and the Department
  - Expand relationship with the Department of Biology, especially as Neuroscience program is further developed
- Organizational and financial structure
  - Improve staff resource management:
    - Hire an undergraduate assistant, the norm for similarly sized Psychology departments
    - Determine appropriate capacity of technical and financial personnel to support the programs and the department
    - Consider appropriate work arrangements for the academic counsellor's assistant and the assistant to the chair
- Long-range planning and overall assessment
  - Hire two research-stream faculty to replace retiring members within the PCL group
  - Develop a strategic plan for the next 5-10 years, involving all relevant members of the department
  - Seek approval for an additional hire once strategic planning is complete

## 2. Administrative Response & Implementation Plan



UNIVERSITY OF  
**TORONTO**  
MISSISSAUGA

OFFICE OF THE DEAN

October 23, 2019

Professor Susan McCahan  
Vice-Provost, Academic Programs  
Simcoe Hall  
University of Toronto

Dear Professor McCahan:

We are writing to provide an administrative response to the External Review of UTM's Department of Psychology, which was held in January-February of 2019. This Department includes programs in Behaviour, Genetics and Neurobiology; Exceptionality in Human Learning; and Psychology. Overall, the reviewers found the Department to be a strong unit that compares favourably to the best research-intensive psychology departments in North America and is able to carry out its academic and research missions. The excellent breadth and depth of curriculum, the unique focus on hands-on research experience throughout a student's undergraduate program, and the high caliber of tenure-stream hires were highlighted by the reviewers. These features set a strong foundation for the Department to build on as they plan for the next five years and beyond.

Below you will find a brief discussion on specific areas raised by the external reviewers followed by an implementation plan identifying action items and timelines. This response was developed in consultation with the Department, through a Town Hall held on August 8, 2019, as well as from a Chair's Administrative Response submitted by Prof. Ashely Monks, Chair of Psychology. Progress checks and monitoring of the implementation plan will occur through the Chair's Annual Report to the Dean. The next external review of the Department of Psychology is scheduled for the 2024-2025 academic year, with a midway report submitted to your Office in 2021-2022.

***The reviewers suggested a number of ways to facilitate sustainable levels of faculty engagement with teaching and research while ensuring continued student opportunities for research and experiential learning, including offering fewer/less frequent 300-level courses, and more lab courses.***

Psychology plans to have their curriculum committee review course offerings on an on-going basis, with attention to the recommendation to offer fewer 300-level courses, balancing this with the need to maintain sufficient diversity in course offerings to meet program learning objectives and requirements. In terms of lab course and directed-research offerings, Psychology is in the process of introducing curriculum changes to add lab sections to existing courses, and has increased research opportunity program offerings. Support for these changes will flow

through the established channels at UTM (i.e. resource implications related to curriculum review and ROP Funding Requests via the ROPAPP).

***The reviewers found that the participation of graduate students in the programs could be increased, and they encouraged finding ways to get graduate students more involved in teaching and teaching-training.***

The planned introduction of practical instruction in existing courses is expected to increase the opportunities for classroom/ lab teaching for graduate students. Psychology could choose to explore some of the GEF-funded events and workshops introduced in other units that have successfully overlapped graduate and undergraduate interactions with visiting scholars, in addition to their recent successful graduate-focused workshops.

***The reviewers also suggested that the faculty could receive course credit on a rotating basis for significant amounts of directed research.***

While there was support for this suggestion among Psychology faculty, there are appropriate concerns about ensuring that a fair and transparent policy is created detailing conditions for any credit or release system. The department and the Dean's Office are in agreement that any system increasing reliance on LTAs may have negative impacts on course and program quality, so want to pursue options that would avoid this. Psychology proposes exploring options through their curriculum committee and through discussions with the Dean's Office for best-practice ideas. Examples drawn from other units include having students enroll in a research seminar course with an overall instructor, but with various faculty taking on supervision for sub-groups of projects within the course relating to their own specialties.

***They also suggested offering an expanded research methods course, and capstone-like courses to further support undergraduate research opportunities, independent studies projects, and theses.***

There is considerable discussion in Psychology about the nature of their 200- and 300-level research design and statistics courses, and the department intends to strike a sub-committee to their curriculum committee to focus on this topic. Capstone courses and independent studies, in relation to undergraduate research opportunities, are also under discussion as an intertwined part of the process of revising faculty credit for directed research, as mentioned above.

***The reviewers observed that staff as well as faculty are stretched too thin and suggested evaluating the duties assigned to staff versus faculty and how those could be better distributed.***



There are various aspects related to staffing needs in the department. The Psychology lab technician position was recommended for increase from 0.8 to 1.0 by the reviewers, and this has already been done. The change in workspace for the Assistant to the Chair recommended by the reviewers is underway, with a project request to modify the space to a private office being submitted in September (once construction drawings are complete). Psychology has suggested some changes to staff positions that will be evaluated within the Dean's Office (in conjunction with Human Resources, as appropriate) following the standard staffing review model currently in place at UTM. Expected changes to online syllabus systems at UTM may also help reduce the work done by the Undergraduate Counsellor in providing template syllabi and other tasks.

***The reviewers encouraged the department to re-evaluate program admissions requirements in relation to their goals and potentially increase enrolment as a result.***

Psychology is opposed to simply reducing admission standards until enrolment targets are met; rather, they propose ensuring that their admission standards are consistent with those of UTM more generally and also appropriate for the pedagogical goals for their students. The department does wish to undertake a long-term strategic plan relating to enrolment targets, in association with the Dean's Office.

***The reviewers recommended developing ways to assess students' development of critical general skills.***

The department recognizes that this recommendation relates to needed improvements in their learning objectives and curriculum mapping projects, in which they identify their goals for skills instruction. The reviewers' comments and suggestions will be considered more fully as the department undergoes curriculum alignment. Psychology further noted that while they find the use of student opinion surveys as a method of assessment of skill acquisition problematic, they do periodically survey their graduates to assess their perceived preparation for the job market.

***The reviewers found that the department could improve its communication and collaboration, and found that the unit would benefit from the creation of a strategic plan to prioritize initiatives.***

In alignment with this recommendation, the department held a retreat on May 31, 2019, at which some progress was made to articulate vision, goals and strategies, but Psychology felt that this single retreat was not sufficient and suggests having a series of more focused retreats in future. In the meantime, the department has committed to undertaking the following to help improve communication and collaboration within the unit:

- Increase practical instruction and experiential learning opportunities in existing courses to increase student engagement and contact with faculty and/ or graduate mentors;

- collaboration with Biology (*Department, with assistance of Dean's Office through Programming and Curriculum*)
- Implement recommendations of curriculum sub-committee to review 200- and 300-level research design and statistics courses (*Department*)
  - On-going addition of practicals to existing courses (*Department, with assistance of Dean's Office through Curriculum Change and TA Rationale processes*)
  - Implement curriculum committee recommendations related to assessment of skills in courses and throughout programs (*Department*)
  - Explore use of Graduate Expansion Funds (GEF) for events encouraging graduate and undergraduate engagement (*Department, with advice from Associate Dean, Graduate if desired*)
  - Explore options for development of policy to recognize faculty commitment to directed-research projects (*Department with assistance of Dean's Office, including both Vice-Dean, Faculty and Vice-Dean, Teaching and Learning*)
  - Change in workspace for Chair's Assistant to private office (*Facilities, Management and Planning and Department*)
  - Evaluation of departmental staffing levels and needs (*Dean's Office and Department*)
  - Hold additional faculty retreats to develop departmental strategic plan (*Department*)
  - Request additional LTA and faculty appointments through normal UTM complement planning processes (*Department to Dean's Office*)

Long Term (3-5 years)


- On-going curriculum review of course offerings against program learning objectives and requirements (*Department*)
- Implementation of new Major in Neuroscience in collaboration with Biology (*Department, with assistance of Dean's Office*)
- Implementation of policy to recognize faculty commitment to directed-research projects (*Department*)
- Implementation of results of evaluation of departmental staffing levels and needs (*Dean's Office and Department*)
- Creation of long-term strategic plans for enrolment targets and associated faculty complement planning (*Department, in association with Dean's Office*)

Please let us know if you have any questions about this response.

Sincerely,



Amrita Daniere  
Vice-Principal, Academic & Dean



Heather M.-L. Miller  
Vice-Dean, Teaching & Learning

### **3 Committee on Academic Policy & Programs (AP&P) Findings**

The spokesperson for the reading group reported that the summary covered the full Review. The group agreed that the Dean's administrative response addressed the main identified issues.

No follow-up report was requested.

### **4 Institutional Executive Summary**

The reviewers found the department to be strong in relation to many of the best research-intensive psychology departments in Canada and North America. They found a “strong and fairly cohesive unit” that offers excellent breadth and depth of curriculum in its academic programs. They found the undergraduate learning experience to be unique in its focus on hands-on research experience at every year of study. They highlighted the excellent tenure-stream hires and stellar research activities of the department's faculty. The reviewers recommended that the following issues be addressed: facilitating sustainable levels of faculty engagement with teaching and research while ensuring continued student opportunities for research and experiential learning; increasing participation and involvement of graduate students in the undergraduate programs; providing faculty with course teaching credit for significant amounts of directed research; offering an expanded research methods course and capstone-like courses to further support undergraduate research opportunities; evaluating distribution of duties assigned to staff versus faculty; re-evaluating program admission requirements in relation to admission goals; developing ways to assess students' development of critical general skills; enhancing departmental communication and collaboration; and creating a strategic plan to prioritize initiatives. The Dean's Administrative Response describes the campus, unit and programs' responses to the reviewers' recommendations, including an implementation plan for any changes necessary as a result.

### **5 Monitoring and Date of Next Review**

Progress checks and monitoring of the implementation plan will occur through the Chair's Annual Report to the Dean.

The Dean will provide an interim report to the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs no later than 2021-22 on the status of the implementation plans.

The next review will be commissioned in 2025-26 for a site visit to take place no later than eight years from January 2019.

### **6 Distribution**

On October 26, 2020, the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan was posted to the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs website and the link provided by email to the Vice-Principal, Academic and Dean of the University of Toronto Mississauga, the Secretaries to AP&P,

Academic Board and Governing Council, and the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance. The Dean provided the link to the Chair(s)/Director(s) of the Program(s)/Unit(s).