



# Cyclical Program Review of Psychology

## Final Assessment Report

### PROGRAMS:

Honours BSc Psychology Comprehensive Program  
Honours BSc Psychology Research Specialist Program  
Honours BA Psychology Comprehensive Program  
Honours BA Psychology Research Specialist Program  
Master of Arts in Psychology  
Master of Science in Psychology  
Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology

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Date: February 29, 2016

## **PART ONE: EXECUTIVE RESPONSE**

Please provide a brief response to each of the following.

### **A) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REVIEW DOCUMENTS (SELF-STUDY, REVIEWERS' REPORT, UNIT RESPONSE)**

#### **Self-Study**

The Psychology self-study was challenging to put together as a cohesive document due to the number of programs being reviewed across three degree levels and two campuses. The authors of the Final Assessment Report appreciate the thorough discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of each program at both the Brantford and Waterloo campuses and the forward-looking approach of the programs. It would be similarly challenging to attempt to summarize the 350 page self-study here, so the summary will focus on the areas that Psychology asked the reviewers' to focus on, as well as some of the information provided in the conclusion to the self-study.

Psychology asked the reviewers for feedback on the following initiatives that they are interested in pursuing or developing:

1. Transformation of the BSc to a Psychology/Neuroscience program to reflect the changes and growth in the discipline;
2. The creation of an elite five-year joint BSc/MSc program in neuroscience side to attract excellent students to permit them to complete both degrees one year faster;
3. The combining of the current Behavioural and Cognitive Neuroscience fields into a single Cognitive and Behavioural Neuroscience field;
4. Feedback on Psychology's intentions to develop a "Learning in and with the Community" focus;
5. Feedback on the use of technology in teaching and learning;
6. The appropriateness of hiring a Masters graduate to act as a staff person to do undergraduate advising and relieve the faculty of this responsibility;
7. Specific comments on the Community Psychology graduate programs and how it might be supported in financially challenging times;
8. Feedback on the development of a Forensic Psychology degree to be offered at the Brantford campus, which would differentiate Laurier in the Ontario landscape and would potentially attract more students to Brantford.

The conclusion to the self-study echoes many of the aforementioned planned initiatives and concerns of the Psychology programs at both campuses. Reiterated in the conclusion to the document are the strengths of the programs as evaluated through the IPRM process, concerns over the sufficiency of the existing faculty complement, the desire to strengthen the neuroscience area of the programs, and the interest in differentiating the program offerings at the Brantford campus through the development of a program in Forensic Psychology.

## **Executive Summary of the External Reviewers' Report**

The Psychology department at the Waterloo campus is among the most productive research and teaching units in the university, both in terms [of] research productivity and in terms of teaching at the undergraduate and graduate levels, with a large service teaching commitment and many online courses. The area approach consolidates strengths in particular areas, provides sense of community, flexibility, and rich exchanges within a large department. However, the committee is in agreement with the self-study observation in noting that the department is currently working at the edge of its available resources. The department is hampered by insufficient resources on a variety of levels, notably on space. Most significantly, however, the department is facing significant decreases in the faculty complement in psychology, especially in community psychology, threatening this unique and innovative facet of departmental strength and undermining Laurier's aspirations and presence in the community. This is an unacceptable situation that must be addressed.

The 2009/2010 graduate programs review noted that senior administration and the Dean of the Faculty of Science need to work with each other and with the Department to create a coherent and clear plan for growth that will provide the Department with the guidelines it needs to make important decisions regarding space, student/faculty ratio and support staff. This concern has not been sufficiently addressed. While the IPRM exercise, the Laurier strategic planning efforts, and the current departmental self-study have allowed the department to clarify certain of its own objectives, the context of institutional instability (e.g. the transition to new models of financing and accounting) and a lack of clear agreements and support from the administration forces the department to deal with certain issues in a reactive manner. A clear strategic plan developed in partnership with administration and supported with adequate institutional resources is necessary to ensure continued vitality of the department and its programs.

Brantford psychology offers an alternative to traditionally large, less personal undergraduate psychology programs, with its smaller class sizes, more direct contact with faculty, and a community-focused campus experience. It offers unique specialties and it benefits from dynamic and enthusiastic faculty who are excited about their teaching and research and eager to embark on graduate supervision activities. Graduate supervision by Brantford faculty would benefit both faculty and graduate students. A program in Forensic Psychology would consolidate many of the strengths of the Brantford psychology and related departments, further distinguish the program within Laurier and in Ontario as a whole, and attract new students to this campus.

## **List of Recommendations**

**Recommendation #1:** (i) Monitor the impacts of lower admission standards on student progression and time to completion. (ii) Given that the English entry grade appears to be an important determinant of student ability then ask admissions to include the English grade in the calculation of the Entry Average, especially if the Entry Average is reduced. (iii) Make

explicit the entry requirements to the PhD program for students who have completed their Masters at WLU.

**Recommendation # 2:** At the undergraduate level, (i) drop the BSc comprehensive program and transform the BSc Research Specialist stream to a Psychology/Neuroscience program; (ii) add a 5 year combined Honours BSc/MSc in Behavioural Cognitive Neuroscience; (iii) review the Honours BSc Computer Science and Psychology; (iv) create a new specialized Forensic Psychology degree at the Brantford campus ; (v) develop a departmental focus on "Learning in and with the Community"; (vi) review the split of the introductory psychology class (PS100) into two half credit classes (PS101 & PS 102); (vii) consider further promoting the Psychology Minor and structuring it around particular themes such as the proposed "Learning in and with the Community" departmental focus. At the graduate level, (viii) combine the two neuroscience specialty areas (Cognitive and Behavioral Neuroscience) into one area; (ix) consider reducing graduate requirements to one comprehensive rather than two; (x) develop and maintain a better system for following the success of graduate students; (xi) examine barriers that may prevent students from pursuing coursework related to their thesis research but outside their specialty area; (xii) review whether students are systematically exposed to qualitative research methods and whether students using qualitative or mixed methods in their research have sufficient hands-on training to master relevant techniques; (xiii) consider means to promote further integration of CAS and postdocs into departmental life.

**Recommendation #3:** (i) Make the recommended changes in the BSc program to encompass the three streams of biopsychology, cognitive neuroscience and cognitive psychology. Also, faculty renewal is vital to maintain breadth in the courses offered at the undergraduate level. (ii) Update PS600 and PS601 along the lines indicated above and in consultation with graduate students and Faculty.

**Recommendation #4:** (i) Experiment with methods for increasing student attendance. Possible initiatives could include: providing grades for attendance or penalties for lack of attendance (attendance can be taken manually or via clickers), reducing or eliminating the amount of lecture material that is provided on course based websites and, using a 'flipped classroom' model. (ii) Hold proctored mid-term exams outside of class-time to reduce cheating. This is done in SBE for both Economics and Business Programs. (iii) Do not allow students taking on-line courses to write unproctored exams in labs so as to prevent students from accessing on-line answers to testbank questions. Students either come onto campus to write proctored exams or pay for proctored exams at off-campus locations.

**Recommendation #5:** (i) Reduce or eliminate course releases for undergraduate advisors and hire a staff advisor. (ii) Maintain course release for graduate director but make them jointly responsible (along with the newly created Assistant Chair position) for developing databases for dealing with TA allocations and applications. (iii) Change the job description of the Graduate Administrative Assistant to include the development and maintenance of databases to deal with TA allocations and applications. If necessary upgrade the position to accommodate the additional responsibilities and skills. (iii) Move graduate students from 232 King to Bricker once the new building is built and the Math department moves out of

Bricker. (iv) Involve Brantford Faculty in the admission and supervision of graduate students. (v) Appoint a faculty member to act as a library coordinator to facilitate communication regarding the services that the library has to offer for instructors. (vi). Promote the use of the ASPIRE program among MSc and PhD students. (vii). Develop dedicated social science teaching research space with appropriate computer support

**Recommendation #6:** An interdisciplinary “Graduate Program in Neuroscience” would be a bold step forward in providing a broader based opportunity for graduate training in this highly popular and rapidly expanding field. Such programs have had good success in other Ontario universities and Laurier should consider developing such a program. This would be of benefit to the neuroscience related graduate streams in the Psychology department.

**Recommendation #7:** Consolidate and enhance the community psychology specialty area through a minimum of two faculty hires, and develop a long term plan for returning to the faculty complement of 7 members which characterised this area at its height and which appears adequate for supporting Laurier’s larger ambitions in areas related to community psychology strengths, such as well-being, community engagement and partnerships, and community service learning. Consider seeking a CRC Chair in Community Psychology.

**Recommendation #8:** Continue to look for ways to use technology to engage and assess students in large first and second year classes. Examples to consider: Blended Learning, Flipped classroom, Clicker Participation Grades and use of electronic study guides provided by publishers. In addition, seek adequate resources for the technical infrastructure needed to support these activities

**Recommendation #9:** (i) Help students from all undergraduate programs understand research as early as possible, in particular by enhancing the PREP experience as a learning opportunity as much as possible. (ii) Enhance writing in the undergraduate curriculum.

**Recommendation #10:** Move forward on the department’s strategic planning process and use the results of this process to consolidate departmental strengths and advocate for adequate and equitable distribution of resources in key areas.

## **Unit Response**

The Psychology Chair at Waterloo and the Psychology Coordinator at Brantford collaborated on a very thorough response to the Reviewers’ Report, responding in detail to all of the sub-recommendations included within the ten overarching recommendations. In the summary to the Unit Response, the programs note that they were encouraged by the overall positive reviewers’ report and note, in particular, their agreement and acceptance of the reviewers’ recommendations related to maximizing the use of existing faculty resources and ensuring adequate resource allocation to the program, as well as the need to develop a strategic plan for the Psychology programs at both Brantford and Waterloo.

## **B) IDENTIFICATION OF PROGRAM STRENGTHS**

As recognized in the Executive Summary of the External Reviewers' Report, the Psychology Department is among Laurier's most productive research and teaching units. Its research intensity and its size allow it to compete very favourably with its sister departments at other Ontario universities. It has broad strength across the various sub-disciplines that exist within Psychology. The strength of its Community Psychology specialization and Community Service Learning courses is a differentiator for Laurier and has been singled out for its alignment with Laurier's mission and strategic mandate. Psychology has the largest and most successful graduate program within the Faculty of Science.

## **C) OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT**

Two important opportunities were highlighted in the External Reviewers' Report. One is the redesign and renaming of the BSc program to highlight a focus on Neuroscience. The other is an enhancement of the Community Psychology specialization and using it as a differentiator for Psychology at Laurier.

Another area with room for improvement is undergraduate recruiting. Psychology is a very popular discipline both as a major and for service teaching. That takes some of the pressure off of recruiting, but demographic trends and more intense competition for the most talented entering students mean that recruiting efforts need to be strengthened.

Cooperation between the Psychology faculty at the Waterloo and Brantford campuses is good but, as the reviewers pointed out, there is room for improvement, particularly in terms of participation of Brantford faculty in the Psychology graduate program. When the governance structure at Brantford was modified and the two new Faculties (Liberal Arts and Human and Social Sciences) were created, the Psychology faculty at Brantford had to choose whether to become part of the Department of Psychology within the Faculty of Science or join the new Faculty of Human and Social Sciences. They chose the latter, which makes sense in terms of supporting the new Faculty and overall coordination of programming at Brantford. However, Psychology as a discipline at Laurier might have been better served had they chosen the former. While decision that was made is respected, the option of formally joining the Department of Psychology remains open.

## **D) RECOMMENDATIONS APPROVED FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN PRIORITY ORDER**

### **Recommendation #1**

Dean of Science Response: I agree with this three-part recommendation and support the Department's approach to its implementation. Part (ii) has already been implemented as

part of a Faculty-wide change in the way undergraduate admission averages are calculated. Part (iii) is consistent with a broader trend in many graduate programs to encourage “fast tracked” transition from the Masters to the PhD level for graduate students who are progressing well.

FGPS Dean’s Response: Part (iii). It is not entirely clear what the reviewers are referring to with this recommendation, but if it has to do with “fast tracking,” the requirements are very clear in the calendar, and the department should not have to “undertake the task of explicitly articulating the rules and procedures governing this second pathway into the PhD program” as they have noted in the unit response. The calendar states:

*The transfer option is for exceptional students who, through at least two terms of registration in a master’s degree program at Laurier, have demonstrated superior academic credentials and outstanding research promise.*

*A recommendation for direct transfer must be initiated by the graduate co-ordinator or department chair of the student’s academic unit, and must be accompanied by a letter of support from the proposed doctoral advisor. The Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies is responsible for approving such a recommendation. Four basic criteria must be met before consideration for such a transfer will be given. The student must:*

- *be currently enrolled in a master’s program at Laurier;*
- *have completed a minimum of 2 terms and a maximum of 3 terms of the master’s program, and must normally have completed the program’s required coursework;*
- *demonstrate the ability for advanced independent research (e.g., an approved thesis proposal, a research outline, publications);*
- *be in good standing in the master’s program (minimum GPA of 10.5 on all master’s coursework completed).*

The most important point here is that the process begins with a recommendation from the graduate coordinator, not the students.

## **Recommendation #2**

Dean of Science Response: This is actually a collection of thirteen separate recommendations that deal mainly with the structure of the undergraduate and graduate programs. I agree with the Department’s response as articulated in the Unit Response document, and will comment here on what I consider to be the highest priority recommendations.

I encourage the Department to move as quickly as possible to implement the proposal to drop the BSc Comprehensive stream and repackage the BSc Research Specialist stream as a BSc program in Psychology/Neuroscience. This will help with recruiting and establish a clearer identity for the BSc as distinct from the much larger BA Psychology program. In parallel with this, combining the Cognitive and Behavioural Neuroscience graduate areas will

simplify the program structure and raise the stature of Neuroscience as an important sub-discipline within the Department.

A five-year combined BSc/MSc program in Neuroscience is an excellent idea. It will help with recruiting, reduce times-to-completion and reduce overlap between senior undergraduate and graduate level course material.

The reviewers recommend that the Department develop a focus on “Learning in the Community.” I would argue that we already have such a focus in the Community Psychology area and the strong Community Service Learning component. Nevertheless, we should work on creating a more clearly identified concentration or minor in this area as outlined in the Unit Response. This will be done at a time when the University is trying to clarify how “minors”, “concentrations” and “options” are defined and to streamline what is now a confusing array of differently defined possibilities. Too much creativity in these things can be counterproductive.

As a result of Laurier’s multi-campus governance arrangements, the creation of a Forensic Psychology stream on the Brantford Campus will be a joint effort between the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Science, with the former playing the lead role. I will support this initiative, provided that it has wide support within the Psychology Department.

The splitting of the full course PS100 into two half courses, PS101 and PS102 has been reviewed recently, as was recommended. I agree with the Department’s conclusion that we should leave the two halves split.

I support the remaining parts of Recommendation #2. I don’t see any of them as having substantial budget implications that could cause problems.

FGPS Dean’s Response: ii) I am pleased to see the department considering the development a 5-year combined BSc/MSc program. This combination is already offered in select Arts programs, and FGPS and the Quality Assurance Office can provide assistance going forward.

viii) and ix) The program’s requests to combine the two neuroscience fields, and to reduce the number of comprehensives from two to one, are currently making their way through the appropriate Senate bodies.

x) FGPS investigated the status of this request which was made to ICT in June, 2015. The tracking is possible, but the work has not been done.

xi) and xii). Curriculum review continues, in part—as the department notes—as a consequence of reducing the number of comprehensives.

**Recommendation #3:**

Dean of Science Response: The transition from a multi-stream BSc in Psychology to a BSc in Psychology/Neuroscience is under way. The need for faculty renewal is recognized, but the University's current budget situation makes this very difficult in the near term. Within the Psychology Department, the Community Psychology area has the highest priority for new faculty hires.

FGPS Dean's Response: ii) I am pleased to see that there is an examination planned of all statistics and methods courses, and encourage conversations with other programs where such courses may be offered to students from more than one graduate program. Online modular offerings would also be useful to allow those students who might have deficiencies in their background to catch up.

**Recommendation #4**

Dean of Science Response: Issues of low attendance and cheating on tests are not unique to Psychology, but the large size of some Psychology classes can make these problems particularly serious. I support the steps being taken by the Department to address these issues. Also, the Associate Dean: Student Services, Dr. Bruce McKay, is particularly concerned with making cheating more difficult. He has personal experience in teaching large Psychology courses and has developed some useful strategies for his own use. In his role as Associate Dean, he is starting to address this as a Faculty-wide concern.

**Recommendation #5**

Dean of Science Response: The appointment of faculty members to serve as undergraduate advisors is a fairly entrenched practice at Laurier. It is even spelled out in the Collective Agreement. However, the reviewers were correct in pointing out that having two faculty members and four course release stipends for this purpose is excessive. This practice will change. Undergraduate advising takes place at multiple levels, central, Faculty, and Departmental, and a University-wide review is underway aimed at improving both service and efficiency.

The quality of space available for Psychology graduate students will improve over the next two years as the Faculty of Science acquires more space in the Bricker Academic Building following a series of other moves triggered by the opening of the new Lazaridis Hall.

I fully support the recommendation for greater involvement of Brantford faculty in the Psychology graduate program. We would not try to force graduate students to select supervisors from Brantford, but we should do a better job of pointing out that possibility and involving Brantford faculty as committee members and co-supervisors.

FGPS Dean's Response: I am generally in favour of the recommendations made here regarding graduate matters, especially with regard to Brantford faculty members teaching and supervising in all aspects of the department's programs. These faculty members have already been appointed as regular members of the Graduate Faculty by a committee composed of the FGPS dean and associate deans and are approved to fill all teaching and supervision functions in appropriate programs. With regard to the department's comments about the challenges of multi-campus programs, I encourage them to discuss the solutions which members of the master's program in Cultural Analysis and Social Theory have found to increase their enrolments and teach courses across campuses by videolink.

I am pleased to see the strong support for ASPIRE. The associate dean visited the department to showcase this award-winning suite of professionalization workshops, and we hope more psychology graduate students will participate.

With regard to space, capital was contributed by FGPS to upgrade office furniture and improve lab space available for graduate students and others.

### **Recommendation #6**

Dean of Science Response: This is a good idea. Our preference, however, is to move quickly to transform the current BSc program in Psychology into a BSc in Psychology/Neuroscience and consider a corresponding reorganization of the Department's graduate programs after the undergraduate changes have come into effect.

FGPS Dean's Response: I like the idea of an interdisciplinary neuroscience program and discussed it with the area coordinators, but was informed that the current composition of faculty members and course offerings would make this difficult. Something to think about in the future as other psychology departments have moved in this direction.

### **Recommendation #7**

Dean of Science Response: The Psychology has seen its complement of full-time faculty members reduced in recent years due to retirements and resignations. The problem is particularly acute in Community Psychology, which is an area that has been singled out as being particularly strong at Laurier and one that should be enhanced. Subsequent to the program reviewers' visit, one new Community Psychology professor, Dr. Ciann Wilson, was hired. We plan to hire one or two additional faculty members in Community Psychology over the next two years, but these plans are subject to budgetary approval at the level of the provost.

FGPS Dean's Response: It is reassuring to see the Community area receiving support. It is a unique program. I do wonder about the appointment of non-psychologists (and had this

conversation with the program), and it will be interesting to see what the next reviewers will say.

**Recommendation #8**

Dean of Science Response: The enhancement of pedagogical excellence and innovation is a high priority across the Faculty of Science and the University as a whole, as described in Laurier's new Strategic Academic Plan. The Department is exploring ways to increase their use of blended learning and new classroom technologies and they have the support of the Centre for Teaching Innovation and Excellence for this.

**Recommendation #9**

Dean of Science Response: I agree that it is important to expose undergraduate students to research even if they don't see themselves as pursuing research after they graduate. The PREP program is one vehicle for doing this. We also emphasize the importance of final year thesis projects and paid undergraduate research assistantships.

**Recommendation #10**

Dean of Science and FGPS Dean's Response: The Department initiated a strategic plan update in the summer of 2015, and the Faculty of Science strategic plan will be updated in early 2016. The new Strategic Academic Plan for the entire University as well as the anticipated transition to a Responsibility Center Management (RCM) budget model make Faculty level and Department level planning more important than ever.

## PART TWO: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Please include any of the recommendations that came out of the review that are to be implemented by the academic unit.

| <b>Recommendation to be Implemented</b>  | <b>Responsibility for Implementation</b> | <b>Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)</b> | <b>Anticipated Completion Date</b> | <b>Additional Notes</b>  |
|--|--|--|------------------------------------|--|
| Drop the BSc comprehensive program and transform the BSc Research Specialist stream to a Psychology/Neuroscience program | Department Chair                         |  | July 2016                          |  |
| Add a 5 year combined Honours BSc/MSc in Behavioural Cognitive Neuroscience  | Department Chair                         | FGPS Dean & Dean of Science                          | July 2017                          |  |
| Develop a departmental focus on "Learning in and with the Community"   | Department Chair                         | Dean of Science                                      | July 2017                          |  |
| Reduce or eliminate course releases for undergraduate advisors and hire a staff advisor.                                 | Department Chair                         | Dean of Science                                      | July 2016                          | Staff advisors may be located centrally or in Faculty office; full outcomes on this recommendation should await the report of the university-wide undergraduate advising review. |