

## Final Assessment Report

### Academic Review

#### Psychology

#### **A. Summary**

- i. The Self Study was presented to the PPC on October 26, 2012.
- ii. The Review Committee consisted of two external reviewers: Dr. Ann Bigelow, St. Francis Xavier University and Dr. Tammy Ivanco, University of Manitoba and two internal reviewers, Dr. Jeff Dech and Dr. David Borman.
- iii. The site visit occurred on November 22 and 23, 2012.
- iv. The Reviewers' Report was received on December 21, 2012.
- v. The Department's response was provided on March 11, 2013.
- vi. The Faculty Dean's response was received on April 22, 2013.

The academic programs offered by the Department which were examined as part of the review included:

BSc Honours Specialization  
BSc Specialization  
BSc Major  
Certificate in Neuroscience  
BA Honours Specialization  
BA Concurrent Education with an Honours Specialization  
BA Specialization  
BA Major  
BA Minor

This review was conducted under the terms and conditions of the IQAP approved by the Nipissing University Senate on May 17, 2013, and ratified by the Quality Council on June 28, 2013.

#### **B. Strengths**

The Review Team noted the following regarding the strengths of the Psychology Program:

*"The Review Team finds the faculty of the Psychology Department at Nipissing University to be dedicated teachers, with active research programs. The program offered contains a number of innovative and creative features, with ample hands-on research experience for students. Indeed, students have high praise for the Psychology faculty and are generally pleased with the program.*

*Department's strengths*

- *Faculty commitment to teaching.*
- *Lab component in Introduction to Psychology course.*
- *Students have opportunities to work in faculty research labs, contribute to the research, present the findings at conferences, and co-author papers.*
- *Empirical thesis option for honours students.*
- *Statistical and methodology courses.*
- *Neuroscience courses and Certificate.”*

### **C. Opportunities for Improvement and Enhancement**

The Review Team offered the following specific recommendations:

1. More Psychology courses be offered at the upper levels, especially the 4000 level.  
Recommendations for the University:
  - a. Add more tenure-track positions to the Psychology Department.
  - b. Recognize that some departmental resources are dedicated to service courses for other faculties/departments, which jeopardizes the Department's program offerings.
 Recommendations for the Department:
  - a. Allow existing faculty to teach in their areas of expertise, which may mean unloading service courses to other departments.
  - b. Formulate a strategic plan to articulate the areas of expertise needed to fill out the Department complement.

In its response, the Department stated that “as we consider the first recommendation it is important to note at the very outset that the Program is under significant internal threat because of some recent changes to the Collective Agreement, which will negatively impact on our capacity to offer an appropriate diversity of courses. This is discussed more fully below. In our view the Department has been at the forefront of encouraging undergraduate research at Nipissing. In fact, the Department has successfully adopted what has been called “A Graduate Model in an Undergraduate Institution”. This has led to substantial research productivity for our undergraduates and great success in gaining entrance to post graduate programs. Hopefully, we will be able to generate creative solutions to the dilemma of either seeing a contraction in our course offerings or a reduction in the numbers of students who wish to carry out undergraduate research under the supervision of a faculty member. This makes Recommendation 1a (the addition of more tenure-track positions to the Psychology Department) critical, as faculty resources become strained and courses reduced, and as we struggle to follow the letter of the new collective agreement. Unfortunately the wording of the new collective agreement was not available to the reviewers. It should also be noted that, unlike many other departments, psychology faculty complement has not grown significantly in the recent history. Currently, we have the highest average student per faculty ratio of any of the other departments. Since the last review (2003), at which time more faculty resources were also recommended, the department has not grown significantly faculty complement. In 2003 we had six full time faculty members and seven part time instructors. Some of these part-time instructors taught more than one course. In the years between the two program reviews we have moved from a high reliance on part-time instructors to more full-time faculty. In 2001, for example 17 half course equivalents were taught by part time-faculty. This year that number is only seven, a positive development that was implemented as per the 2003 review recommendations.

Today, our full-time faculty complement has risen to 9. Unfortunately this does not translate into an ability to teach more courses because of the impact of past and current collective agreements. At the time of the

previous Program Review the normal teaching load for faculty was 3/3 and the Psychology Faculty routinely taught overload and supervision of individualized courses was encouraged. The university has since moved to a normal work-load of 3/2 or 2/2 for research-intensive loads and the number of individualized course supervision is limited to 18 credits. Furthermore, when a faculty member elects to supervise individualized courses he/she is compensated through a 3-credit course release and is not eligible for overload. Other factors that further prohibit overload are found in section 27.7b of the current Collective Agreement. Specifically, members may not teach overload if they are: i) on a research-intensive load; ii) on a tenure-track appointment; iii) if they have course releases for any other reasons; or iv) Chairs or Directors of academic units. Although the rationale for limiting overload is desirable and laudable, the above-noted restrictions will necessarily lead to a reduction in the number of courses offered or the number of students supervised until such time when additional faculty resources are secured.

The faculty input suggests that we are in favour of this recommendation regarding the creation of more fourth year courses but this is tempered by the realization that this increase in courses can really only be accomplished through an increase in the faculty complement. Barring new faculty, cycling some non-required courses that are currently offered every year may help. Cycling may have to be instituted in any event because the impact of the collective agreements will be to reduce the number of courses that can be mounted. Even the suggestions involving team taught courses may run into the problem of overload restrictions. We also agree that discussion of the dedicated service courses is worthwhile.”

The Faculty Dean did not add any additional information.

PPC response is as follows: **PPC notes according to Quality Assurance Framework Reviewers are asked to comment on the “Appropriateness and effectiveness of the academic unit’s use of existing human, physical and financial resources in delivering its program(s)”. In making this assessment, reviewers must recognize the institution’s autonomy to determine priorities for funding, space, and faculty allocation.” Accordingly, PPC refers this matter to the Dean for consideration as part of the normal budgetary process.**

**(1)However, the Department is encouraged to development a faculty staffing strategy to be submitted to the Dean in the event of additional resources being made available as part of the normal budgetary process. (2)The Department is also encouraged to prepare a plan to cycle more second and third year courses in order to be able to offer more fourth year courses.**

2. The Department be provided with administrative assistance.  
Recommendations for the University:
  - a. Assign an administrative assistant to the Chair of the Department.

The Department noted that “there is good consensus around this recommendation and some faculty see the role of the assistant as meeting several other recommendations such as updating faculty and departmental WEB pages, proving information to students, and other non-teaching duties that arise in the department. We support this recommendation.”

The Faculty Dean stated that “an administrative assistant could assist with providing initial advising to students, with updating the web on a timely basis, thus providing students with more knowledge of the

research opportunities, career opportunities etc, and assist with certain types of the administrative task that can distract from teaching and research.”

PPC response is as follows: **PPC notes the issue of administrative support is an administrative matter. PPC notes according to Quality Assurance Framework Reviewers are asked to comment on the “Appropriateness and effectiveness of the academic unit’s use of existing human, physical and financial resources in delivering its program(s)”. In making this assessment, reviewers must recognize the institution’s autonomy to determine priorities for funding, space, and faculty allocation.” Accordingly, PPC refers this matter to the Dean for consideration as part of the normal budgetary process.**

3. The Department be considered in long-term building and renovation plans.  
Recommendations for the University:
  - a. In consultation with the Department, plans be formulated to move the Psychology Department offices and labs to a centralized location.

The Department noted *“again, there is good consensus around this recommendation and we see such an opportunity at a time when the university is building and renovating other areas. Departments at other universities generally are located in a distinct area and we agree that Nipissing ought to follow that model. We understand, however, that the past practice of allocating office space on the basis of seniority and academic rank has resulted in a situation where faculty offices are dispersed among several wings of the buildings. Central to the co-localization of offices ought to be a central office for the administrative assistant. There may be an excellent opportunity to centralize the department given that we are in a period of growth and that least one department (Physical Education) will be moving in the not too distant future. This may give the university an opportunity to realize this recommendation.”*

The Faculty Dean stated *“in terms of lab space, this issue is being actively addressed, and new lab space should be available in the spring or early summer. Related to this is the need for collocated space and dedicated administrative support for the department. This is an issue raised by more than one department, and over the longer term needs to be addressed.”*

PPC response is as follows: **The primary object of this recommendation is outside the scope of the IQAP program review. However, it should be noted that the University agrees that offices for faculty within the same academic unit should be grouped together to create what could be described as “departmental space”.**

4. Steps be taken to facilitate the research of the Psychology faculty.  
Recommendations for the University:
  - a. Provide adequate lab space for all Psychology faculty.
  - b. Bolster the Office of Research Services so that they can fulfill their mandate to promote partnerships, develop research initiatives, and help faculty seeking grants and contracts.Recommendations for the Department:
  - a. Promote links between the Psychology Department and existing staff within the Office of Research Services.
  - b. Encourage faculty to acquire adjunct status at larger universities in order to supervise graduate students.

The Department stated that *“the issue of suitable research space is common at most, if not all universities. It is clear that some of the department’s current space needs improvement. The current administration has been sensitive to our needs with respect to research space and we expect to have new space that is being renovated this spring for [name deleted] use. The Administration is also aware that we will have a new tenure stream faculty member join us for the next academic year and they know that this new colleague will also require space. In addition, consideration of research space for Psychology also needs attention at our satellite campus, for faculty who at the present moment have no designated research and/or laboratory space for corresponding research agendas.*

*The Psychology faculty is fully engaged in research but recently we have not been successful in getting tri-council funding. During the last review we had two NSERC operating grants so we need to work with the Office of Research Services to explore not only tri-council but other funding sources and research partnerships. It is important to note that a number of faculty have been successful with finding support from other than tri-council sources and that we are optimistic at finding other sources. Our research productivity continues to be high and undergraduate students continue to have the opportunity of working in our laboratories. With respect to recommendation 4b some of our faculty ([name deleted] for example) are actively seeking adjunct status in order to supervise graduate students at Nipissing who are enrolled at larger institutions, and others ([name deleted] for example) already have long-standing adjunct appointments at major institutions with substantial graduate programs.”*

The Faculty Dean did not add any other information.

PPC response is as follows: **Laboratory space for all faculty at the University is allocated on the basis of need and existing space, with priority given to those with funded research. However, this is subject to available space and funding for needed renovations. As for the Office of Research Services, faculty from the Department of Psychology have access to the same level of services as other faculty. The issue of applying for adjunct status at another university is an individual decision on the part of faculty members and ultimately the decision is taken by the other university, based largely on the perceived research contribution of the applicant.**

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| <p>5. Enhance the honours program.<br/>Recommendations for the Department:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Require that honours students in both the empirical and non-empirical thesis streams have opportunity to present their final theses to the faculty and fellow students.</li></ul> |
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The Department noted that *“this recommendation has been under consideration by the department, and in fact this was the intent when the Honours Theses option was originally introduced. For many years many of the Honours Theses were presented at various local, provincial, national and international conferences; most often as posters, but sometimes as talks. A few years ago, Nipissing created our Undergraduate Research Conference and some of our thesis students have presented their work at that venue. Nevertheless, we agree that it would be good to have a session, dedicated to the Empirical Thesis students where they can present their results. One suggestion is that this be made mandatory for them. It has to be acknowledged that under [name deleted] direction the students in the non-empirical thesis course already have that requirement. The psychology faculty and the Dean are invited to this formal conference-like venue. The results are all presented as talks.”*

The Faculty Dean noted *“to further enrich the program, the reviewers suggested that students in the empirical thesis option of the program present their findings to the Department, perhaps at one-day conference (or even perhaps, I would suggest, as an add-on to the undergraduate conference). Such a practice would be consistent with other programs across Canada, and in fact is already in place for students in the non-empirical option. The Reviewers failed to note (see page 13, where in fact the Reviewers wrongly note that these students do not present their work) that students in the non-empirical course present their work over two days at a conference, which has been supported by the Dean’s office. Perhaps students doing an empirical thesis could also participate in this event.”*

PPC response is as follows: **Based on the responses of the Unit and the Dean, it appears that what is being recommended is already occurring. PPC encourages the Department to continue its practice in this regard.**

6. The student concerns be addressed.  
 Recommendations for the Department:
- a. Ensure that students get information on (1) faculty research interests, especially opportunities for volunteering in faculty labs; (2) academic advising in Psychology, including the cycling of specific courses; (3) professional/career options in Psychology; and (4) graduate school and graduate scholarship applications. An updated Department website would facilitate these communications.

The Department advised that *“the response of the faculty to this recommendation was mixed although some seemed sympathetic to the main thrust of the recommendation. Yet it is arguable that some of the suggestions by the reviewers went a bit too far. For example, the student concerns about access to SPSS and preferred e-mail accounts may have been accepted by the reviewers too readily as bona fide concerns. There was empathy for better communication between the department and students on all matters that may have an impact on them. Again, the administrative assistant may prove to be invaluable in providing this link.”*

The Faculty Dean advised that *“the reviewers noted that the department covers the basic cores areas of Psychology at the second year level but selection at the third and fourth year is somewhat limited. Some areas, like neuroscience, statistics, which obviously reflect strengths of the department are well served, but other areas, like Developmental, Cognitive, Social, Forensic and Evolutionary Psychology, are absence, even though some of these areas, like forensic and evolutionary psychology, represent research strengths of certain faculty. The students themselves expressed frustration at this lack of diversity. Thus, there is a real need to expand the diversity of course offerings at third and fourth year. This can partially be achieved in two ways, by a more systematic cycling of courses (I would suggest the department establish a three to five year cycling plan so students can anticipate what courses will be offered in what years; such plans have been effectively implemented by other departments in Arts and Science) and secondly by assigning service courses, like Psychology 1036 (for Nursing students) and Psychology 2020 (for Education students) to part-time faculty, as was done in the past; this will free up some teaching by full-time faculty that can be dedicated to upper year courses. In the end, though, the department will need to expand its full-time complement in order to broaden the program more fully.”*

PPC response is as follows: **PPC notes that the website has been updated.**

**D. Specific Recommendations**

Below are the recommendations that require specific action as a result of the Review, along with the identification of the position or unit responsible for the action in question. Notwithstanding the position or unit identified as the being responsible for specific recommendations, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science has the overall responsibility for ensuring that the recommended actions are undertaken.

PPC Recommendations	Responsible	Projected Date
<b>(1)That the Department develop a faculty staffing strategy to be submitted to the Dean in the event of additional resources being made available as part of the normal budgetary process.</b>	Department	December 2016

<b>(2) That the Department prepare a plan to cycle more second and third year courses in order to be able to offer more fourth year courses.</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>February 2017</b>
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