

Final Assessment Report
Submitted by SUPR-G to SCAPA

Program:	Biology	
Degrees Offered:	MSc PhD	
Approved Fields:	Cell and Molecular Biology Physiology and Biochemistry Ecology and Evolution	
External Consultants:	Leslie Buck, Professor , University of Toronto, Department of Cell & Systems Biology	Jane Waterman , Associate Head Grad Professor, University of Manitoba, Department of Biological Sciences
Internal Reviewers:	Lina Dagnino , Professor, Physiology and Pharmacology, Member of SUPR-G Committee	Tamara Tavares , Graduate Student Neuroscience
Date of Site Visit:	November 27, 28, 2017	
Evaluation:	<i>Good Quality</i>	
Approved by:	<i>SUPR-G on May 14, 2018</i> <i>SCAPA on May 30, 2018</i>	

Executive Summary

The External Reviewers' report provides an analysis and evaluation of the Graduate Program in Biology. The External Reviewers met with graduate students at MSc and PhD levels, faculty, program administrative personnel as well as the Acting Dean and the Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) of the Faculty of Science.

Significant Strengths of Program:

The Biology Graduate Program is strong, and has clearly defined and appropriate learning outcomes, and effectively combines training through a combination of formal and well-defined milestones, as well as informal opportunities to achieve them. It also has a high level of research activity, resources and success, which translates into high levels of expertise and knowledge for graduate students.

Suggestions for improvement & Enhancement:

Opportunities for enhancement identified included continuing efforts to recruit students with high probability of successfully competing for scarce external funding, as well as continuing efforts to further facilitate the integration and active participation of graduate students whose research takes place off campus, specifically those who work at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC).

1. The Reviewers noted that there appears to be heterogeneity in supervisors' expectations concerning student performance and time dedicated specifically to develop their research work, especially vis-à-vis other student activities, such as TA and course work. The program proposes the development of a supervisors' manual, including an "orientation checklist" for new and existing supervisors. The Graduate Chair will conduct this task, with

the material to be completed and the new procedure brought to the department for approval by 1 July 2018.

2. The Reviewers noted differences in assessment on the best format for Comprehensive examinations for doctoral students among interviewed faculty. To improve on assessment processes, the Graduate Chair will evaluate and potentially revisit the Comprehensive Examination process for Ph.D. students. The timeline for implementation is the 2018-2019 academic year.

3. The Reviewers noted there was concern among students regarding the effectiveness on the design of the department website to relay information on supervisors' areas of research. This is crucially important for both new and prospective student recruitment. The department proposes update and improvement of its website to facilitate finding information regarding resources available to graduate students, supervisors' areas of research, etc. to increase visibility for existing and prospective graduate students. The Associate Chair (Research) and the Graduate Chair will be responsible for this task. The time for implementation is December 2018.

4. Feedback from students at AAFC indicated there still exist significant challenges for them to travel between the University and the AAFC campus. Although the Program has addressed this issue in the past, it will work together with AAFC students and faculty to identify feasible and acceptable plans to try to address the challenge of transportation between the AAFC site and the Western campus. Expected time for implementation: September 2018.

5. The Reviewers indicated concern among some graduate students regarding frequency of some course offerings and/or relevance of such courses to their research and specific training, and particular interest in Bioinformatics instruction. The Graduate Chair will continue to facilitate offering of a balanced and diverse array of graduate courses, and alert students about additional courses or workshops elsewhere, as well as about professional development opportunities.

6. The Reviewers identified the need for and importance of stable financial support for graduate students in the form of TA positions as a critical element to maintain a strong Graduate Program. To this end, continuous effective communication between the Faculty of Science, the Graduate Chair, and individual faculty members will be ensured, particularly focused on providing adequate financial support to graduate students in the form of Teaching Assistant positions.

Recommendations required for Program sustainability:	Responsibility	Resources	Timeline
Development of a supervisors' manual, including an "orientation checklist" for new and existing supervisors.	Grad Chair	None	July 1, 2018
Improve assessment process for Comprehensive Exam	Grad Chair	None	September 1, 2019
Ensure greater clarity on program website for prospective student recruitment	Associate Chair (Research) Grad Chair Individual Faculty Members	None	December 1, 2018

Improve integration and active participation of all graduate students from one and off campus locations	Grad Chair	None	September 1, 2019
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