



Internal Academic Review 2007-2008
Department of Community Health and Epidemiology
Internal Academic Review Committee Report to Senate

The Internal Academic Review (IAR) of the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology is now complete. The Internal Academic Review Committee (IARC) has taken into consideration all of the IAR submissions related to the Department and respectfully submits the following report. The IARC Report to Senate is intended to supplement the findings of the attached Review Team Report and to provide a mechanism for the Head of the Department and the Associate Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences to report jointly on the progress in addressing the Review Team recommendations.

Summary of the Internal Academic Review of the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology

The Internal Academic Review Committee (IARC) acknowledges the success of the Department and would encourage the Department to undertake a strategic review to develop a framework that responds to its critical role within the Faculty of Health Sciences, and the larger University environment. This framework would help the unit to set academic priorities while, at the same time, recognize the multi-faceted aspects of academic and research initiatives happening in the unit.

The IARC supports the recommendation within the reviewers' reports that the Department identify research themes and directions that will allow the unit to set short and long-term priorities. The IARC agrees with the concept of establishing a Research Committee to align and focus research initiatives and facilitate communication and collaboration both internally and externally.

The IARC notes the Department's successful efforts to address space issues as identified in the reviewers' reports and would encourage the Department to develop a strategy for information technology to identify where the issues and synergies exist.

As described in the reviewers' reports, one valuable initiative would be the development of a published list highlighting the extensive service outreach of faculty members from the Department and underscoring how such endeavours contribute to the quality and vitality of the academic mission of the unit.

The IARC supports the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology in its efforts to address the recommendations put forth by the reviewers. The IARC applauds the Department for its performance and leadership, and encourages the Department to work in collaboration with the Faculty of Health Sciences to continue to harness the opportunities for strategic growth and academic excellence.

Outcomes of the Internal Academic Review of the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology

*Joint response submitted by the Vice-Dean Academic, Faculty of Health Sciences and
the Head of the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology*

The Internal Academic Review has highlighted the numerous successes of the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology. The Department has enjoyed impressive growth in its educational and research programs, both of which are recognized externally for their quality. The outstanding leadership the Department has enjoyed has been an important enabler of these academic achievements.

The Department of Community Health and Epidemiology is undertaking a comprehensive strategic review of its role, and that of the public health sciences, within the Faculty of Health Sciences and the University. This process will be informed by the strategic priorities of the Faculty of Health Sciences and the new framework for the basic science departments within the Faculty that is expected to emerge from the ongoing restructuring process.

The Department has established a Research Advisory Committee which will be responsible for coordinating the Department's plans to align and focus its research efforts to the extent possible, recognizing the essential role that the Department's public health scientists play in the diverse, multidisciplinary research units that are the main engine of research within the Faculty of Health Sciences.

The Department will continue to pursue its longstanding goal of concentrating as many of its core faculty as possible in a single location, while respecting the need for some individuals to be collocated with other scientists within the Faculty's multidisciplinary research units.

The Department will work with other units within the Faculty of Health Sciences to develop a strategy for information technology to support our collective research efforts. Central to this initiative will be the Queen's ICES unit through which the Department has now established access to all the data holdings of the Institute for Clinical and Evaluative Sciences in Toronto, through a secure internet connection.

The Department plans to expand its role in statistical consulting in support of other health researchers in the University. As part of this effort we will establish and advertise an inventory of the specialist expertise available within the Department. The consulting unit will operate on a cost recovery basis and will provide training opportunities for our graduate students in applied biostatistics.

The Department thanks the IARC, and all those who participated in this review, for their helpful and constructive recommendations. The Department will continue to work in collaboration with the Faculty of Health Sciences to seek opportunities for strategic growth and academic excellence.

Attachment:
Review Team Report

Queen's University
Department of Community Health and Epidemiology
Internal Academic Review
Report of the Internal Academic Review Team
March 2008

I. Summary

The Department of Community Health and Epidemiology (DCHE) of the Faculty of Health Sciences is a strong department that is under excellent leadership and is performing very well. It has a highly regarded graduate program and its research enterprise is respected and expanding. The Department now has significant opportunities for growth in both its educational and research programs. Its major challenges in the short to intermediate term will be to establish strategic priorities to take greatest advantage of these opportunities and to marshal the resources, both faculty and infrastructure, that will be necessary to enable it to manage its growth and achieve its objectives.

II. Preamble

This report has been prepared by the DHCE Internal Academic Review Team, the membership of which included: Iain Young (Chair), Estelle D'Souza, Peter Hodson, Heather Jamieson, Karina McInnis, Teri Stuckless and James Wilson.

The information on which this report is based was derived from the following two sources: the self study prepared by DCHE; and, the report of the external consultants, Drs. Allan Donner and Dr. Jeremy Taylor. In general, the IAR team agrees with both the evaluation of DCHE that was conducted by the external consultants and with their recommendations.

III. Education

1. Overview

i. Graduate Program

The Graduate Program is the main focus of the teaching activities of DCHE and is currently constituted primarily by a thesis-requiring MSc degree. A recently established PhD program in Epidemiology has just enrolled its initial student cohort and its evaluation would consequently be premature at this time.

The MSc program is very well regarded and is under excellent leadership. Its curriculum is well designed, the faculty are very supportive and the thesis requirement is viewed as a particular strength. The relatively small size of the program is considered to be a significant contributing factor to its success.

Concern has been expressed regarding the level and ongoing security of the funding for students although sufficient financial support does appear to be provided to each student. The small number of teaching assistantships available to students increases the Department's challenge in generating adequate financial support.

The Department has had to address an issue regarding the length of time to completion of the MSc degree and it appears to have been successful in rectifying this problem for full-time students. The problem persists for part-time students but it was recognized that the Department has little control over the major factors contributing to the length of time to completion for this group.

DCHE now has abundant opportunities to expand its Graduate Program. Apart from the newly established PhD program and a planned collaborative biostatistics program, the Department has also become the initial home for a new Masters of Public Health. In addition, should the Queen's initiative to establish a School of Public Health come to fruition, CHE faculty may play an integral role in the establishment and eventual activities of such a school. Although these new programs provide extraordinary opportunities for growth, they also present significant challenges. These challenges will include, but not necessarily be restricted to, the need to establish strategic academic priorities, managing the increasing teaching demands on faculty, maintaining the high quality of the graduate program as it expands, and maintaining the integrated role DCHE has in the Faculty of Health Sciences.

ii. Undergraduate Program

DCHE's contribution to undergraduate teaching is relatively limited and involves teaching two courses (EPID 301 and EPID 499) within the multi-disciplinary Life Sciences program with a third course in Biostatistics to be implemented in the Fall 2008. The Department has recognized that its engagement in the training of health professionals could be expanded and this has been achieved to some extent through its contributions to undergraduate medical education including introductory lectures, modules and small group sessions.

iii. Postgraduate Training Program

Although not a component of this review, the newly accredited residency program in Community Medicine leading to Fellowship with the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada is a noteworthy addition to DCHE's educational programs. This clinical program is provided in collaboration with the Department of Family Medicine but a significant proportion of the program is the responsibility of DCHE. This program will require resources to meet the accreditation standards of the Royal College and the necessary resource allocation is very likely to have an impact on other educational programs within the Department.

iv. Teaching and Learning

The overall quality of instruction appears to be high in all educational programs of the Department although the absence of formal reports of student evaluations from the self study limited the extent to which this could be assessed. Nonetheless, the undergraduate courses appear to be well received and the students were reported as being generally pleased with the quality of the instruction. The external reviewers were particularly impressed with the complete and well-organized documentation regarding DCHE's involvement in the Life Sciences program.

The quality of incoming graduate students is regarded as being very high and graduates of the MSc program have no difficulty securing employment on completion of their degrees.

v. Strengths and Opportunities

In its educational endeavors, the Department's strengths and opportunities are numerous and include:

- A very well functioning and highly regarded current MSc program
- Outstanding leadership provided by the Graduate Coordinator
- Establishment of the MPH program, initially within CHE
- The potential establishment of a Queen's School of Public Health
- The emergence of the collaborative Biostatistics program
- The establishment of the residency program in Community Medicine

vi. Challenges and Threats

The challenges and threats the Department must address as it continues the development of its educational programs include the following:

- Faculty workload
The significant expansion of the educational programs will strain faculty resources and future teaching demands may not be able to be met by current faculty capacity.
- Space demands
Current space is marginally adequate for the existing programs. Significant expansion of educational programs will outstrip the capability of the DCHE to house them.
- Information technology support
Central support for IT management is suboptimal and may become a significant liability as educational programs grow.
- Staff support
The two departmental non-academic staff, 50% of one position of which is funded from soft money sources, will likely not be sufficient to support the anticipated growth of the Graduate Program.

IV. Scholarship and Research

1. Overview

The Department has two Canada Research Chairs, which is high for most university departments, as well as several well-established scientists and many associated research centers (three) and groups (nine). Faculty members are well-funded and there appears to have been a dramatic rise over the past five years in both total awards and the success rate in external grant competitions. There is a very healthy level of productivity in terms of publications and graduate student supervision. This significant level of performance is in no small part related to the very strong leadership provided by the Department Head.

2. Strengths and Opportunities

The research strengths of the Department are many and include:

- Diversity of research activities.
The numerous research directions of the Department are currently directed by the varied interests of its researchers.
- The existence of the Centre for Health Services and Policy Research.
- Close links with the National Cancer Institute of Canada Clinical Trials Group that present opportunities for involvement in secondary data analysis. It was noted that the Department may not be taking as much advantage of this resource as it could for both research and teaching.
- Co-location of the Institute for Clinical and Evaluative Sciences.
- The existence of strong links to clinical research.

3. Challenges and Threats

The challenges and threats the Department must address as it expands its research programs include:

- Diversity of research
Although diversity of research can be a strength, it may also predispose to weakness in a department the size of DCHE through the dilution of its human resources and the difficulty of maintaining research strength across numerous areas. All departments face these challenges but they are greater in smaller departments and particularly in environments such as the current one in which competition for resources is intense.
- Demand for expertise
Needs for expertise in the Epidemiology of Infectious Disease and Clinical Epidemiology with Public Health expertise have been identified and may become acute if the School of Public Health proceeds and interactions with clinical medicine increase.
- Space
The potential for growth may be significantly limited by the availability of space.
- Information technology support
The absence of centralized support/management for IT will be a limiting factor to growth.

V. Service Contributions

Faculty members in the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology participate in a diverse range of services to the Department, colleagues, the University at large, and the community. The appreciation of the details and extent of the faculty contributions were limited by the absence of summarized data in the self study.

VI. Recommendations

DCHE is a strong department that is making significant contributions in both education and research. It is now presented with what appear to be unprecedented opportunities for growth in an environment in which competition for resources is intense. In this context, the IAR team offers the following recommendations for the Department:

1. Group existing project to establish focused strategic research themes/directions, that will:
 - a. Be developed in the context of emerging programs and opportunities.
 - b. Guide the establishment of priorities for future recruiting.
 - c. Provide a context for decisions regarding which collaborations to pursue can be made.
 - d. Inform space planning and, potentially, Graduate Program planning
 - e. Establish academic priorities
2. Continue to support and expand the development of the collaborative Biostatistics program at the Masters level.
3. Establish a Research Committee, as planned at the June 2007 Departmental Retreat, the mandate of which should include the facilitation of communication and collaboration with internal and external peers.
4. Engage in a thorough space audit to address the current and anticipated needs for administration, educational and research space (It is recognized that the Department has prepared a CFI application in support of its need to expand its available space).
5. Develop a strategy for increasing IT support including potential partnerships with other academic units.
6. Work to increase availability of teaching studentships for graduate students as curriculum expands.
7. Explore opportunities to expand research and educational collaborations with the National Cancer Institute of Canada Clinical Trials Group.
8. Catalogue and publicize the extensive service outreach of School faculty members to build the School's capacity to attract students and research funds and to demonstrate its strong role in both clinical and research domains.