

Graduate Program Quality Assurance (QA) Review: 2024-25

Excerpted Report

Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry

Graduate Program Review

Programs:	Master of Science in Psychiatry; Doctor of Philosophy in Psychiatry
Date of Review:	March 12, 2025
Reviewers:	Marco Leyton, Committee Chair, McGill University; Margaret McKinnon, External Member, McMaster University; Michael Serpe, GPS Council Member & Internal Member, University of Alberta.

Program Strengths
The department has a superb reputation with a history of high-caliber research, the recruitment and retention of internationally renowned scholars, and evidence of a vibrant new wave of tenure-track assistant and associate professors. An analysis of outcomes among recent graduates is encouraging, providing evidence that over 95% are employed in training-related areas or completing further post-secondary education (e.g., medical school). The Department Chair, faculty, and students are highly invested in creating an environment that fosters community and belonging for all Department members. Other features that highlight a strong and exciting graduate program include: • Innovative and productive research programs • Articulate and motivated graduate students • Exemplary opportunities for trainees to meet patients • Retention of an oral defence exam at the MSc level, providing a distinct opportunity for students to cultivate professional level presentation skills and to demonstrate that they understand the rationale behind their project and the implications of their results. • Faculty supervisors who are well-funded, innovative and productive; excellent library staff support; and extensive e-library resources. • Evident richness to the department membership both at faculty and student levels. Together, these features have created a superb program, in many ways unique in Canada.

Teaching and Learning Environment	
Recommendation: Increase the number of elective courses.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: Several students have opined in the recent past that the number of elective courses (one for Master’s students, two for Doctoral students) is insufficient to provide the breadth and depth of understanding of the subject that might reasonably be expected of a Master’s or Doctoral graduate in Psychiatry, and the Department is in agreement with these opinions.	Action Plan: A meeting of current and potential instructors in Psychiatry graduate courses will be organised to discuss a restructuring of the graduate courses offered by the Department that are necessary as a result of recent and upcoming retirements, loss of teaching faculty and a changing research landscape. When details of changes have been established, we will then revisit requirements for elective courses and will assess all possible options for increasing course requirements.
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD is supportive of the program determining the optimal number of elective courses to offer.	Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: GPS supports this recommendation and its associated action plan. We encourage the Department to compile a list of relevant and useful graduate-level courses in the FoMD and the College of Health Sciences as an advising tool to support students’ choice of elective courses. The Department may consider developing a strategic plan for cycling the elective course offerings over a two-to-three-year period to ensure that a diverse array of options is available to students throughout their program.
Recommendation: Increase course option flexibility for part-time students (e.g., scheduling some courses outside of normal working hours or making recorded lectures available, flexibly scheduled tutorials/virtual office hours for student-professor discussions).	
Department of Psychiatry Response: Most supervisors of part-time students are able to be flexible with respect to availability to meet with students, and the majority of Psychiatry graduate courses currently offered are small-group or individually-tailored courses that could be offered on a flexible schedule to accommodate part-time students. With restructuring of Psychiatry graduate courses, it is not clear at this point what degree of flexibility will exist within future courses.	Action Plan: During planned discussions on restructuring of the graduate course options, we will incorporate consideration of how part-time students might best be accommodated. While this may include recording of lectures with ScreenPal software and hosting of lectures on the university’s YuJa video platform, it would be to the advantage of part-time students to be able to attend course sessions in-person. Offering this opportunity to our part-time students should be a primary objective of restructuring.

Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD is supportive of the program determining how to best support part-time students.	Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: GPS supports this recommendation. Where appropriate, the Department may explore hybrid or flexible delivery models for the elective courses to increase accessibility for students, particularly those with clinical commitments or unique scheduling needs, without compromising quality. A combination of synchronous and asynchronous modalities allows for more flexibility for both instructors and students.
Recommendation: Increase the number of psychiatry-specific graduate courses. (e.g., a higher-level statistics course supporting increased statistical literacy. Suitable statistics courses may already be available through other departments. Students would also benefit from dedicated offerings in clinical phenomenology, the history of ideas within the discipline, and the impacts of both acute and intergenerational trauma).	
Department of Psychiatry Response: Our capacity to offer a higher number of courses is limited by faculty availability.	Action Plan: Restructuring of our course offerings will include seeking increased contributions from clinical GFT faculty members who possess the expertise to provide students with the clinical curriculum material they and the review panel are asking for.
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD is supportive of the program determining optimal course offerings in the context of a Faculty wide graduate programs review and University wide course rationalization.	Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: GPS acknowledges and appreciates the recommendation to increase the number of higher-level statistics courses. Considering the department’s teaching capacity limitations, it would be helpful to develop and vet a list of advanced statistics courses in FoMD and the College of Health Sciences that would be relevant and suitable for Psychiatry students. The Department of Psychiatry can then ensure that the graduate students and supervisors are aware of these available courses and that they are appropriately integrated into students' individual program plans. In addition, the department can advise students to take external courses based on the GPS Western Canadian Deans' Agreement to allow students to take courses from other institutions that are members of this agreement.
Recommendation: If the number of courses is increased, contemplate instituting a course-based MSc. This would be a unique program within Canada and has potential for those who do not envisage a research-focused career. This program could be income-generating.	

Department of Psychiatry Response: At the present time, we do not have the faculty capacity to support an independent course-based Master’s degree. A joint venture with another department(or other departments) may be possible, if the demand was supported by market research. The value in any contribution from the Department of Psychiatry would likely be in the clinical content that could be offered, and this would require substantial teaching commitments from clinical GFT Psychiatrists, which is not realistic.	Action Plan: While our faculty members could contribute expertise to development of cross-Departmental course-based Master’s programs in, for example, AI in healthcare, such contributions do not address the current recommendation.
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD is supportive of the program exploring a business case for a course-based MSc.	Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: GPS acknowledges this recommendation as it presents a significant strategic opportunity for enrolment expansion and program growth.
Recommendation: Formalize requirements for MSc and PhD dissertations.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: As pointed out by the review panel, flexibility would be crucial in interpreting whether or not each student’s thesis work meets requirements based upon the number of original papers that could, in theory (and perhaps in practice), be published based upon the work done. As such, these would be guidelines rather than requirements.	Action Plan: Outline thesis guidelines/expectations in the Department’s Graduate Program Manual.
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD is supportive of the program ensuring that requirements for MSc and PhD dissertations are clearly delineated and communicated.	Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: GPS supports the recommendation and the department’s action plan. Formalizing these requirements creates a predictable and equitable pathway for all students, reducing ambiguity and supporting their timely progress and successful completion.
Recommendation: Monitor and address concerns of some students surrounding ability to publish.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: It will be important to monitor student output on an ongoing basis, moving forward.	Action Plan: A revised annual report form for students will be designed that provides a mechanism to monitor student progress more effectively than is currently the case. This form will be completed and submitted to the Graduate Program Director in advance of annual meetings between students and the Program Director. Included on the form will be

	a record of publications and manuscripts in preparation, allowing students lagging in this aspect of their training to be identified and, if appropriate, for the matter to be raised with their supervisor.
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD is supportive of the program ensuring that students have the opportunity to share their research findings including through publication.	Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: GPS supports this recommendation. The department is encouraged to use the standard GPS Progress Report for this purpose as it provides data fields that are specifically designed to capture student progress related to publications and presentations. Also, the Supervisor-Student Guidelines (SSG), which is completed once by the student and supervisor, provide an opportunity for initial discussion and setting academic and publication-related expectations and agreements.
Student Experience	
Recommendation: Encourage faculty to (i) return to campus, (ii) meet face-to-face with their students at least twice a month, (iii) hold weekly lab meetings, and (iv) develop activities that bring the whole department together.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: The Department is currently working with FoMD to resolve space issues that have been a significant barrier to having faculty and trainees on site at the same time.	Action Plan: These recommendations will, where appropriate, be included in our Graduate Program Manual, under “Supervisor responsibilities”.
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD is supportive of the program determining the best way to bring faculty and students together into an engaged community of study and research. The FoMD expects faculty members to provide effective supervision and mentorship of students.	
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: GPS appreciates the recommendation that a strong on-campus community, frequent in-person interaction, and a sense of shared intellectual space are vital for a vibrant, high-quality graduate experience. While we recognize the benefits of remote work and hybrid models for	Action Plan: We will encourage supervisors to meet face-to-face with their students at least twice a month. These meetings are crucial for discussing research progress,

flexibility, we also understand their potential to inadvertently diminish the informal, spontaneous, and hands-on interactions that are so critical for graduate student mentorship, collaboration, and learning.	providing in-depth feedback, and offering the personalized mentorship that is a hallmark of graduate education. Weekly Lab Meetings: We will strongly encourage the consistent scheduling and holding of weekly, in-person lab meetings. Lab meetings are the intellectual hub of a research program, fostering critical thinking, peer-to-peer learning, and a sense of team cohesion that is difficult to replicate online
Recommendation: Review the Research Day event and adopt recommendations to increase the time allotted to poster sessions and judging work based on the poster presentations. Encourage all faculty members to attend.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: Since the external reviewers’ report was received, Research Day 2025 has already taken place. Numerous changes were made to the format to optimise the value to students, and feedback on this year’s event has been extremely positive. All students had an opportunity to present their posters (or their oral presentations) to two pairs of judges, and so received numerical and written feedback from four judges. Students unable to attend Research Day in person were able to present virtually to the judges and to answer questions <i>via</i> zoom. Students have been enthusiastic about the changes that were introduced.	Action Plan: We have already met to discuss further improvements that could be made for Research Day, 2026, which will include, for example, a requirement for students to prepare both a scientific abstract and a lay abstract. Student involvement in the planning process was increased significantly for 2025, and this level of input will be maintained moving forward.
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD is supportive of the program maximizing the effectiveness and efficiency of the research day event, including exploring interdisciplinary training and research opportunities with other departments and/or research institutes.	Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: GPS appreciates the proactive approach and action to enhance the student research experience through the Research Day.
Recommendation: Encourage faculty to provide feedback on student scholarship applications. These scholarships benefit supervisors, trainees, program reputation, and the university overall.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: The Department’s view is that committing to accept a graduate student is a commitment to participate in all of the work required to support a student’s success, and this includes both writing reference letters and reviewing / advising	Action Plan: The Graduate Program Manual will be updated to include an expanded section on supervisor responsibilities. The new annual report form will include a section

on scholarship applications.	on scholarships applied for / secured, and discussion of this section will address the role played by the student’s supervisor in preparation of applications.
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD is supportive of the program developing a strategy to encourage and support students in applying for scholarships.	Action Plan: FoMD will ask the Associate Dean Graduate Studies to work with the Faculty’s graduate programs to develop a strategy to encourage and support graduate students to apply for national scholarships.
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: GPS supports this recommendation and the action plan by the department. Faculty members’ involvement in a student’s scholarship application process is a crucial form of mentorship. To achieve this, the department is encouraged to consider: • Highlighting the benefits of a successful scholarship application for the faculty member’s own research program. • Acknowledging faculty contributions to scholarship success in their annual reviews. • Sharing examples of successful applications with faculty and students to provide a model for high-quality writing.	
Recommendation: Distribute evidence of positive outcomes reported by previous program graduates, which may help alleviate student concerns about employment opportunities following graduation.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: Currently, no formal process exists to monitor the career paths of program graduates; this was recognised as a weakness during preparation of the 2024-’25 QA report, when difficulties were encountered in obtaining details of current positions of former graduates. A process to track the careers of our graduates must be developed and put in place, to generate the data required to address this recommendation.	Action Plan: We will reach out to those graduates for whom we have contact details, and will develop a process to ensure that current and future students remain in contact with the program. We will then look at strategies to publicise the career paths taken by our graduates, which may include creating a section of our website dedicated to our graduates.
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD is supportive of the program ensuring that its education offerings adapt to meet the needs of students.	

Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: GPS supports and appreciates this recommendation.	Action Plan: One of the key objectives of the GPS Graduate Marketing, Recruitment and Enrolment team is to partner with faculties to target working professionals and alumni and to leverage Graduate Student Ambassadors who can share their U of A graduate student experience. This will provide concrete data on the alumni career paths and employment outcomes to help inform FoMD in addressing this recommendation.
Recommendation: Provide additional training in both written and oral communication.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: Students have asked specifically about more opportunities to learn about and master communicating with lay audiences.	Action Plan: We will continue to look for opportunities for our graduate students to work on their communication skills. As the restructuring of Psychiatry graduate courses proceeds, we will consider how student communication might be incorporated into student assessments where possible.
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD is supportive of the program determining the communication training needs of its students.	Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: GPS supports and appreciates the department’s action plan to enhance student engagement and participation in oral and written communication through research activities and presentations. It also recognizes the department’s active encouragement of students to consider GPS-provided PD opportunities and programming related to oral and written communication.
Recommendation: Maintain and enhance resources to support an equitable and inclusive environment that fosters the recruitment, retention, development and recognition of individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: The Department has created a position of Director of Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity and Social Climate. That individual has overseen the creation of multiple faculty development opportunities to enhance skills in these domains. They also collaborate with the Directors of Education and Research to ensure attention to EDI-related issues in all of our Department’s work.	

Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD is supportive of the ongoing efforts of the Department of Psychiatry to build an equitable and inclusive environment that will attract, train and retain individuals with a diversity of lived and professional experiences.	Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: GPS agrees with the recommendation to maintain and enhance resources that support an equitable and inclusive environment. The department is encouraged to consider strategies such as: • Targeted Outreach: Developing a strategic outreach plan to attract applicants from underrepresented groups. • Bias Training: Providing training for all admissions committee members to ensure that the process is free from unconscious bias. • Holistic Review: Implementing a holistic review process that considers applicants' life experiences and unique perspectives in addition to their academic records.
Recommendation: Assist in providing adequate support for international students, including through enhanced navigation to University- and community-based financial, mental health and well-being, and social supports.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: Our graduate program has a large cohort of international students.	Action Plan: The current GPS leadership works closely with UofA International and other institutional groups that serve our overseas graduate students; we will continue to pass on information and advice received from GPS to these students. We have bookmarked a section in our Graduate Program Manual that will contain advice and information for new students in our program to assist them in finding their feet in Edmonton and at the University; when complete, this section will include webpage links to numerous resources and supports offered by the University to international students.
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD is supportive of GPS in providing university wide support for international students.	
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: GPS recognizes the unique challenges international students face and is committed to providing the support they need to succeed. GPS provides virtual onboarding sessions for international and domestic students in August and January every year to introduce them to the University and community services and supports, including mental health and social support.	Action Plan: GPS is planning to enhance international student support through partnership with the International Education and Enrolment Office and also through peer mentorship in order to provide new students with a dedicated point of contact who can help them with their transition and provide valuable advice.

Faculty and Supervision	
Recommendation: Provide clinician-scientists with compensated research time.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: The Department is utilizing AMHSP positions to protect time for faculty to conduct research and support trainees in this work. We are advocating with the University and with government to try to increase the number of AMHSP positions available.	Action Plan:
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD supports the Department of Psychiatry in strategically using its AMHSP agreement (which compensates time spent on research at the same rate as time spent on clinical work) to support the recruitment of clinician-scientists.	Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: GPS strongly supports this recommendation and the Faculty's action plan. Providing clinician-scientists with compensated research time will also provide opportunities for clinicians to enhance supervision activities and ultimately enhance student success and experience.
Recommendation: Encourage new faculty to develop and teach new courses.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: At this time, the Department is limited in our ability to hire new faculty (we can only hire AMHSP physicians). Education is a key component of the ISA for all of those individuals. However, given the nature of the AMHSP, this education is often directly linked to the clinical mission of the department.	Action Plan:
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: The FoMD has developed policies for general teaching expectations and course review and is supportive of the program engaging all faculty members in teaching and exploring the strategic development of new courses.	Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: GPS recognizes the department's limited capacity in developing new courses. The department is encouraged to consider the development of a course-based master's and graduate certificates that will ultimately provide resources to support the development of new courses. There are strategies that other faculties have considered to address this recommendation as follows: Course Release: We will encourage the department to consider providing a course

	release for new faculty who are developing a new graduate course, acknowledging the significant time commitment required. Formal Recognition: We will ensure that the development and teaching of new courses are appropriately recognized in annual reviews and during the tenure and promotion process.
Recommendation: Encourage faculty to use grant application review opportunities.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: The Department shares with our faculty all available resources for grant application review and other research training.	Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: GPS supports this recommendation. The department may also consider initiating connections beyond the department and within the College of Health Sciences, where support for grant application review is offered in other faculties and at the college level to benefit from existing resources and support.
Resources	
Recommendation: Modernize lab spaces.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: The Department agrees with the recommendation.	Action Plan: The Department is advocating with FoMD and the University to modernize and optimize research facilities.
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: The FoMD strategically allocates CFI opportunities to support development of communal research infrastructure.	Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: GPS supports the current action plan.
Recommendation: Continue lab manager and technician salary support for faculty members with especially active research programs. In some cases, faculty might also institute a fee-for-service policy.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: Current salary support is partially funded through an endowment spread across the multiple researchers using those resources.	

Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD supports the Office of Research’s strategy for core research facilities that include cost recovery.	Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: GPS supports the Faculty’s approach.
Recommendation: Office space for faculty and students need to be addressed, including: (1) providing all faculty members with a private office space, (2) providing adequate research space for faculty, and (3) providing adequate office space for students.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: The Department is advocating with FoMD and the University to ensure adequate space for faculty and trainees to conduct their work.	Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD has recently launched a centralized space management committee to review and optimize space use (including offices and dry/wet laboratories).
Recommendation: Encourage faculty to update their online profiles.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: The Department has encouraged all faculty to update their profiles. We have shared instructions with our faculty for how to do this.	
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD is supportive of the Department of Psychiatry encouraging its members to maintain up to date online profiles.	Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: GPS agrees that accurate and current online profiles are essential for showcasing the department's research strengths and attracting top-tier graduate students. A faculty member's online profile is often the first point of contact for a prospective student, and it is crucial that this information is complete, professional, and up-to-date. The department is encouraged to emphasize to faculty members that maintaining a current profile is a key part of their professional and academic responsibilities. Central support can be provided to help faculty address this recommendation. Possible ideas to achieve this goal are as follows: • Awareness Campaign: launch a campaign to remind faculty of the importance of updating their profiles; highlight how a complete profile can enhance their own visibility, attract graduate students, and strengthen the reputation of the department. • Centralized Resources: Work with the Faculty’s IT services to ensure that faculty have access to clear, easy-to-follow instructions for updating their profiles. We will also offer workshops or one-on-one sessions to assist faculty who need extra help.

Additional Recommendations	
Recommendation: Enhance efforts to foster institutional resources for international students. These efforts are best suited to collaboration between the central University and the department.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: We have addressed the provision of resources for our international graduate students earlier in this document.	
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD is supportive of GPS working with the program to optimize international student awareness of university resources.	
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: As noted earlier, this is one of GPS Action and Partnership Plan's priorities.	Action Plan: GPS is planning to enhance international student support through partnership with the International Education and Enrolment Office and peer mentorship, to provide new students with a dedicated point of contact to help them with their transition and provide valuable advice.
Recommendation: Bring faculty members up to date on a developing plan to transition to cross-department graduate training streams. This will increase transparency and provide opportunities to contribute input.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: Faculty members were made aware of open houses that were offered by FoMD specifically on this process.	Action Plan: We will continue to pass on relevant details, as they become available.
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD is conducting a review of existing graduate training programs that has included opportunities for program, faculty and student engagement and input. Recommendations from the review will be shared with the Dean and ultimately the Faculty.	Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: The department may consider communication opportunities such as departmental meetings and written updates to provide regular updates on the developing plan, including timelines, key milestones, and a clear explanation of how the new structure will work.
Recommendation: If FoMD graduate programs transition to cross-department streams, retain existing strengths of programs that are already very strong, such as Psychiatry. Without adequate care, there is a risk of decreasing intellectual and research collaborations instead of increasing them. Losses might outweigh potential savings in administrative overhead.	
Department of Psychiatry Response: The Department will consider how best Psychiatry can play a significant role in graduate education in FoMD, if and when this transition	Action Plan: Regardless of the specific details surrounding the organisation of a new graduate program structure within FoMD, the Department of Psychiatry will retain the

occurs, and at a point when it is clear how the new organisational structure will operate.	supports necessary to host a departmental graduate student community. While administration of the program may occur centrally, and the name of the program may no longer include “Psychiatry”, little else is likely to change. We will have the same supervisors and the students with the same needs for support, community and advocacy.
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Response: FoMD strongly agrees that any changes to the Faculty’s graduate programs resulting from the current review need to focus on leveraging and spreading existing strengths. The FoMD does not anticipate financial savings from any changes to the Faculty’s graduate programs, but rather is focused on ensuring that the programs have a critical mass of students and faculty members to ensure vitality and are positioned to be adaptable to meet the needs of current and future students.	Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) Response: Retaining the existing strengths of strong programs like Psychiatry during a transition to cross-department graduate training streams is key. Examples of actions to ensure this may include: • Mentorship: Ensure that the transition does not interfere with the one-on-one mentorship that is a hallmark of the Psychiatry program. • Research: Ensure that students and faculty continue to have access to the specialized research resources that they need. • Culture: Important work to maintain the strong sense of community and intellectual collaboration that currently exists within the department.
Additional Notes from the Department of Psychiatry	
Department: The extended report from the external review panel contains additional suggestions not mentioned in this excerpted document. We will work to address all of the committee’s suggestions and recommendations over the coming months and years. We are confident that the quality of our program and the experience of our students will be enhanced as a result.	