

Medicine Graduate Program Quality Assurance (QA) Review: 2020-2021

Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry

Excerpted Report

Graduate Program Review

Programs: MSc (Medicine); PhD (Medicine); MSc (Translational Medicine)

Date of review: September 29, 2020

Reviewers: Paula James (Chair), Queens University; Siobhan Byrne, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR), University of Alberta

Program Strengths

The strong and vibrant graduate programs within the Department of Medicine at the University of Alberta are well-supported and integrated within the Department as well as the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry.

Identified strengths include:

- 1) Program leadership were identified at all levels of the review as engaged and supportive.
- 2) The students recognize and value the significant commitment and support provided by the program administrative support staff.
- 3) Department of Medicine faculty members are highly accomplished and successful researchers, with significant expertise in graduate student education.
- 4) The graduate students themselves are a major program strength as smart and committed young scientists, and they are largely very happy with the program. They identified the program courses and structure as effective in helping them achieve their academic goals.
- 5) The funding model within the Department of Medicine provides real protected time for faculty of the program, who feel supported at the Divisional and Departmental levels to supervise graduate students.
- 6) All levels of leadership within the Department, Faculty, and the University recognize the value of the program and support its mission.
- 7) The environment is collegial and junior faculty spoke of the importance of the mentorship they are provided by senior researchers within the Department, as well as opportunities for professional development of their skills as graduate supervisors.

Teaching and Learning Environment

Recommendations	Response by the Department of Medicine	Responses by the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry and/or the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR)
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<p>The programs should develop and post a comprehensive Graduate Program Handbook.</p>	<p>The DoM is in full agreement to developing and posting a graduate program handbook on their website.</p>	<p>Agree</p>
<p>The relationship between the Department leadership and the Department of Medicine Graduate Student Association should be formalized in order to better integrate the students into Departmental activities, including establishing regular program meetings, Grand Rounds, and social events to strengthen the sense of community in the Department.</p>	<p>The department will, in a more formalized manner, engage with the DoM GSA. New priorities from this initiative will include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grad Student Orientation (formally presenting and advertising activities) 2. Faculty Search & Selection Committee – non-voting representation from GSA when appropriate (Ad hoc) 3. Mentorship Committee (include Sr. graduate students – to formally promote initiatives to enhance the graduate mentoring environment) 4. Graduate Education/Office of Research Meetings (twice annually – we will seek input from the GSA on important department graduate student directives (e.g. handbook, research day, special events, etc.) <p>As part of this initiative, the DoM has provided the DoM GSA with financial support to conduct activities aimed at enriching graduate students experience.</p>	<p>These are positive initiatives and we look forward to their implementation.</p>
<p>Opportunities for enhancing cross-Departmental relationships should be explored. This could include establishing guaranteed access to courses outside of the Department of Medicine for Medicine graduate students with the reciprocal offer of places in Department courses for students from other programs. It could also include the development and implementation of learning events across the Faculty for grant writing and other research success skills.</p>	<p>The upcoming academic restructuring, in association with the U of A's for Tomorrow initiative, is expected to foster cross-departmental relationships. Potential mergers of graduate programs are also expected to enhance collaborative opportunities. Restructuring may also facilitate students access to increasing number of courses in various departments.</p>	<p>Sharing of courses, PD offerings, seminar programs, research day etc. are all possible and hopeful outcomes of the restructuring of Depts and graduate programs</p>

<p>We strongly urge that the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) support the Department to make Indigenous student recruitment, training and retention a first priority. The Vice-Provost (Indigenous Programming and Research) should be consulted to develop student recruitment efforts.</p>	<p>The DoM prioritizes Indigenous student's recruitment in the competition for PhD recruitment scholarship of \$20K. We will also consult with Dr. Wayne Clark, newly hired by the FoMD as executive director for the Indigenous Health Initiatives Program, to develop additional strategies toward recruitment of Indigenous students into our graduate programs and develop specific educational training for supervisors on Indigenous history and awareness, which is expected to assist in promoting Indigenous students' recruitment.</p>	<p>Lots of work is required here across all Depts and Programs. Impressive that DoM is already ahead of many programs in this regard.</p>
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Student Experience

Recommendations	Response by the Department of Medicine	Responses by the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry and/or the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR)
<p>The program should carefully reflect on the culture of graduate student education within the Department of Medicine and institute a process of regularly surveying students about issues such as expected working hours, the ability to be off work for statutory and other holidays, relationships with supervisors and how well the program has done at creating an inclusive and safe learning environment. This could include revisiting and revising the Working with Respect Guidance document.</p>	<p>We require all supervisors and students to complete the conversation checklist for a new graduate student that outlines the expectations between the graduate student and supervisor. New supervisor initiatives from FGSR propose new processes to ensure that this requirement is met. In addition, we will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Add additional statements to the conversation checklist to emphasize the importance of open communication & dialogue between the supervisors and grad students regarding expectations on working hours, safe learning environments and other initiatives. 2. We will consult with Dr. Penny Smyth in the Office of Professionalism to ensure that all 	<p>Establishing effective communication and clearly delineating expectations and responsibilities from the outset of the program will greatly reduce conflict and enhance the student experience. The Faculty greatly appreciates the careful consideration and steps that the DoM will take to address these issues.</p>

	<p>important points are addressed in our conversation checklist and clearly communicated. As half of our grad students are mature and/or international students, we will make sure our document addresses the concerns of this demographic within our graduate program.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. We will engage with the DoM GSA to also provide another avenue of support to graduate students for effective communication with supervisors. For example, when the mentorship program is established (please see above), senior graduate students will be trained to advise new graduate students on the issues of effectively communicating expectations and conflict resolution. 4. We will conduct surveys every 3 years regarding the well-being of our graduate students. 	
<p>The Office of Advocacy and Wellness could be better publicized within the student body with links and contact information provided within the Graduate Program Manual.</p>	<p>The Graduate Advisors will add the link to the Office of the Advocacy and Wellness into their email signature lines. The office will also be clearly advertised in the online graduate program handbook that is being developed.</p>	<p>Fine</p>
<p>The program should require the formation of Thesis Advisory Committees within a few months of a student joining the program. The timing of required Thesis Advisory Committee meetings should be shortened with the first meeting happening before the end of the first term and then at least annually after that. Multi-disciplinary and cross-departmental committees should be strongly encouraged.</p>	<p>The DoM requires that within one year, all MSc and PhD students have a committee meeting, and provide their progress report in keeping with FGSR regulations.</p>	<p>FGSR allows one year. Annual meetings are already a requirement and the DoM is meeting this requirement.</p>

Faculty and Supervision

Recommendations	Response by the Department of Medicine	Responses by the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry and/or the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR)
A clear process for all faculty, but Assistant Professors in particular, to identify and recruit high-quality graduate students should be developed and publicized.	Through the DoM's Faculty Development Office, Assistant Professors are required to attend the Academic Learning Series. These workshop/seminars are designed to help Assistant Professors in honing their skills and knowledge for establishment of a successful academic career. This includes inputs toward recruitment and mentorship skills.	Grad programs throughout the FoMD would benefit from a strategy to recruit high quality graduate students (and PDFs).
While we appreciate that there is a hiring freeze at the University of Alberta, we recommend that the Department prioritize the hiring of Indigenous faculty at the very first recruitment opportunity. This is critical, not least because it will support the recruitment and training of Indigenous trainees. The Vice Provost (Indigenous Programming and Research) should be consulted to develop faculty recruitment efforts.	This is dependent on the hiring committee at the faculty level.	

Resources

Recommendations	Response by the Department of Medicine	Responses by the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry and/or the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR)
The program should explore the possibility of creating TAships for students within the program, both as a way of providing valuable teaching experience but to offset the supervisor contribution to the student stipend. At a minimum, the Department could circulate information regarding TA opportunities in other Departments.	Since we do not have an undergraduate program, and other departments prioritize TA for their graduate students, currently this is not an opportunity that is available to us. However, with the ongoing academic restructuring, as mentioned above, such an opportunity may become	The TAship question is one that applies to most grad programs in FoMD. It derives from comparison with Faculty of Science which commits a substantial portion of its budget to TAs to assist with their many undergraduate lab-based courses. Lab-based courses in FoMD basic programs were "designed" out of many courses

	available, depending on the outcome of restructuring plan.	several stark budgets ago. So neither the course structures, nor funding model in FoMD are organized to facilitate this on a large scale. The restructuring and new budget model may provide an opportunity to change.
The Department of Medicine should consider ways of providing partial support for the \$30,000 student stipend, and target those initiatives towards junior faculty taking on new students. Faculty-level bridge funding should also be considered. Possibilities for doing this include the establishment of a Departmental tithe to support the academic mission and activities of the group.	At the moment, funding is limited at all levels at the U of A and finding funds to start such an initiative is unlikely.	This does not address the rationale for having a minimum 30K base salary for PhD students. This is higher than the GSA recommends and much higher than allowed by CIHR/NSERC.

Additional Notes from Department/Faculty/FGSR:

Surgery Graduate Program Quality Assurance (QA) Review: 2020-2021

Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry

Excerpted Report

Graduate Program Review

Programs: MSc in Experimental Surgery; MSc in Surgical Education; PhD in Experimental Surgery

Date of review: January 6, 2021

Reviewers: Fackson Mwale (Chair), McGill University; Douglas Gleddie, FGSR – University of Alberta

Program Strengths

The Department of Surgery's graduate programs are successful, innovative, flexible and impactful. The strengths of the programs include:

- The Clinician Investigator Program
- Connections between clinical and basic science
- Academic advising and support for students
- World class students and researchers
- Successful learning environment
- High degree of student satisfaction

Teaching and Learning Environment

<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>Response by the Department of Surgery</i>	<i>Response by the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry and/or the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR)</i>
Highlight the Office of Advocacy and Wellbeing as a key resource to continue supporting and improving the teaching and learning environment.	We will continue to promote the OAW and invite the Assistant Dean to student orientation sessions. Promote/remind the use of the office through the additional communication methods including the Departmental newsletter	We support this approach.

	“Sutures.” Work with students to help get the message out	
Explore opportunities for assistance (especially to new faculty) to help set up labs and find funding.	The Department of Surgery Research committee is developing a number of mechanisms to help mentor new investigators as well as assist established investigators in increasing grant success. These include new idea incubators, fostering collaborations and internal peer review of grant applications. These processes will work alongside FOMD grant review processes.	Mentorship of new faculty is very positive. With regard to helping labs setup and new faculty find funding, inclusion of mechanisms to assist with grantsmanship is a very cost effective of way helping new faculty get off the ground as soon as possible, which of course provides additional graduate student training opportunities. These are all positive steps. The internal grant review established by the Office of Research will also aid new investigators in their grant submissions, as will membership with the Research Institutes which have mechanisms to support investigators including opportunities for bridge / seed funding.
Refining and defining a stronger Graduate Student Association within the Department would improve research collaboration and promote sharing and socializing between programs.	We will work with students to organize a Graduate Students Association in the Department.	We support this strategy.
Consider a community facing ‘shift’ to highlight excellence in the Department (students and faculty), connect with the community (school visits, pub nights and other forms of layperson dissemination) and promote the programs, people and research in the Department.	We will continue to promote the Department and build on the social media platforms by working with the DoS communications director.	We support this strategy and encourage communications support at the level of the faculty and College of Health Sciences, as well as accessing Central services.
Consider developing courses organized around contemporary issues that are attractive to the diverse interests of today’s student such as Digital Health Innovation and Medical Artificial Intelligence.	A working group for graduate education will explore new courses to address these needs including transition for credit courses to graded courses. We will also look to develop new courses that focus on research skills acquisition	We support this approach and this aligns well with the Precision Health Signature Area which the Faculty is leading and includes a focus on Artificial Intelligence and digital health.
Why only the tenured faculty members have to the right to direct students? There may be merited to bringing in non-tenure	The department does not limit supervision to tenured faculty. Tenure-track faculty members are eligible to supervise	FoMD and FGSR are satisfied that the Department of Surgery is assigning supervisory privileges in

<p>track faculty as this has been done successfully elsewhere.</p>	<p>students. FGSR has specific guidelines on who can supervise graduate students. According to the University Calendar, supervisors must:</p> <p>“be a tenured, tenure-track, or retired faculty member, or a Faculty Service Officer, of the University of Alberta (current or retired categories A1.1, A1.3, or current category C1.1, as defined in the University's Recruitment Policy (Appendix A) Definition and Categories of Academic Staff and Colleagues)”;</p> <p>Faculty members who do not meet those requirements can supervise graduate students provided a second faculty member who does meet the above criteria is assign as an additional supervisor.</p> <p>FGSR also requires that supervisors hold the equivalent degree or higher to that of which the student will earn. The FOMD has developed policies that allow Faculty members that hold an MD degree only to supervise MSc and PhD students. These supervisors will work with a faculty member who hold appropriate degree and has an established track record of supervising graduate students. Once the non-degree holding faculty member has successfully demonstrated supervisory experience (usually be graduating a student) these restrictions are lifted.</p>	<p>a manner that is consistent with UofA policies.</p>
<p>Professors who do not teach classes, have little to no access to</p>	<p>Efforts are in place by the Department of Surgery</p>	<p>Attracting graduate students is a problem in all departments in</p>

<p>students. Consider ways to engage more faculty in guest teaching and provide opportunities for further interaction.</p>	<p>research committee and communications director to promote research opportunities. These will include targeting undergraduate students, medical students and residents. The development of a Surgery Grad Student association will also be valuable to liaise with undergrad student association to events to show case the research opportunities in the Department.</p>	<p>which faculty do not teach large undergraduate classes. The steps described here should help address the challenge.</p>
<p>The required courses are not graded. Consider grading them.</p>	<p>We will develop grading mechanism for Surg 530 and 600.</p>	
<p>Consider making the required statistics course an elective.</p>	<p>There is a great value in our students having a strong background and understanding of statistical methods. However, we will discuss with our graduate research committee and Department faculty members the possibility of making this course an elective. The proposal will be that students can seek an exemption if they have previously taken an undergraduate statistics course.</p>	<p>We agree that a strong background in statistical methods is important. We also agree that there is no great benefit of having student take another stats course if they have already taken one as an undergrad. We therefore support making the stats course optional for those students who have taken a stats course at the undergraduate level.</p>
<p>Although the Department is certainly aware and encourages diversity, inclusion and equity, there is a need to define what that might actually mean in a Department of Surgery.</p>	<p>The Department of Surgery understands that adopting mechanisms to address equity, diversity and inclusion is a constantly evolving process that requires constant reflection and readjustment. A statement emphasizing the values of fostering and supporting EDI has been added to the graduate program manual. These values will also be emphasized during new student orientation. Initiatives</p>	<p>The University of Alberta released its Strategic Plan for Equity, diversity and inclusivity in 2019. The plan aims to embed EDI into the culture of the University of Alberta community at all levels to empower faculties, departments, and administrative units to develop and implement their own EDI plans and initiatives. This is an important goal of the FoMD; to go beyond defining and understanding the main pillars that build EDI and instead live them every day. We acknowledge and</p>

	<p>around EDI are also being developed in the Department of Surgery and will be embedded in the renewed strategic plan.</p>	<p>appreciate the Dept of Surgery's commitment to EDI. We also understand that developing strategies to move beyond the first step of understanding the pillars that build EDI is a challenge for all units in FoMD. Following the lead set out by FoMD to focus on 7 EDI pillars (https://www.ualberta.ca/medicine/about/social-accountability/diversity/living-edi/index.html) could be helpful in defining departmental goals.</p>
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Student Experience

<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>Response by the Department of Surgery</i>	<i>Response by the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry and/or the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR)</i>
<p>Examine options for course-based programming to both complement the thesis programs and meet emergent needs in the field.</p>	<p>A working group for graduate education will explore new courses to address these needs including transition for credit courses to graded courses. We will also look to develop new courses that focus on research skills acquisition. Lastly, we will explore the possibility of course-based degree programs as a means to recruit from a different student base than our current program draws upon. Such an option could include the Department's office of global surgery.</p>	<p>Course-based MSc degrees are a major area of growth on campus (and a great source of revenue). We agree that there is value in exploring these opportunities.</p>
<p>Explore ideas for cross-over opportunities between individual labs and programs.</p>	<p>We will work with the Dept. of Surgery Research committee to facilitate interactions between different research programs</p>	
<p>Consider adding teaching opportunities for students to the program – building stronger CVs for those seeking academic jobs.</p>	<p>Teaching opportunities through teaching assistantships can be difficult to obtain in a primarily clinical program. We will promote the</p>	<p>Providing graduate students with teaching opportunities is a challenge for many programs in FoMD, since laboratory components of most courses were</p>

	<p>Graduate Teaching Certificate program to our graduate students as an opportunity for teaching experiences and skills. Grad students can easily obtain Level 1 and Level 2 of the GTC. The department can work with students to provide teaching opportunities to complete Level 3. This teaching certificate would be of great value to students as it is documented record of the acquired skills including teaching methods and development of curriculum and learning outcomes. From this experience students can begin to create their teaching portfolio.</p>	<p>phased out many years ago. Thus, TAships are not generally available. However, as pointed out by the Dept, the Teaching Certificate Program developed by GTL is, arguably, a superior option as it provides students with actual instruction on how to approach this endeavor. It is a staged program so students can develop this skill as much as they like. The certificate demonstrates a greater commitment to teaching than simply listing TAship experience or a guest lecture on one's CV. Thus, we support the Department's approach to providing teaching experience.</p>
<p>Ensure that community engagement is provided as an opportunity but not as an expectation.</p>	<p>Creating a Graduate student Association (GSA) will increase the presence of the program. Working with this group and other graduate student associations we will promote existing and establish new outreach opportunities. A GSA can also provide opportunities to recruit new grad students to the program through running events with undergraduate student associations to showcase the research opportunities.</p>	<p>We agree and are supportive.</p>

Faculty and Supervision

<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>Response by the Department of Surgery</i>	<i>Response by the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry and/or the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR)</i>
<p>Consider initial Departmental funding/ support as a catalyst for emergent faculty (new, pre-tenure)</p>	<p>Start-up funding provided to new faculty members can be used to support graduate</p>	

<p>to recruit and retain graduate students.</p>	<p>students. The current financial landscape likely prevents any new initiatives to recruit and support new students. Every effort is made to approach alternate funding sources for new recruits when their job description is equal to or greater than 30% research. We have recently been successful in achieving significant start-up dollars from foundation sources.</p>	
<p>Consider Departmental funding/support for emergent faculty to begin a research agenda and provide time and resources to facilitate supervision a. Assess workload variance to ensure equity of access to supervision (teaching, clinical, research, etc.) and provide targeted support.</p>	<p>The surgical research committee is developing resources for new faculty and emerging researchers (residents) to provide support in beginning research endeavors. This will include meeting with individual faculty members interested in supervising graduate student to discuss the graduate program, responsibilities as a supervisor and supports available for successful mentoring of graduate students.</p>	<p>As mentioned below by the DoS, FGSR resources developed to aid in advancing supervision and mentorship skills will also be useful in this domain (https://www.ualberta.ca/graduate-studies/policies/resources-for-faculty-and-staff/resources-for-supervisors/mentorship-academy-workshops.html).</p>
<p>Continue to explore other sources of funding for grad students (TA-ships, endowments) to supplement external research funding.</p>	<p>We will work with faculty members to identify and apply for training and education programs such as NSERC Create</p>	<p>Increased support from tricouncil training programs like NSERC Create and the new pilot from CIHR, the Health Research Training Platform, is an important goal for all graduate programs in FoMD and the Office of Research is looking to develop resources to increase success in these funding opportunities.</p>
<p>Consider both informal and formal mentorship mechanisms to maintain and improve supervision. a. Evaluate supervisory loads/expertise and provide training and support for those who need it.</p>	<p>Currently new supervisors are paired with established ones to provide mentorship in graduate student supervision. Supervisory training initiatives are being developed by FGSR. We will continue to work with all supervisors to continue to refine their supervisor practices. FGSR resources developed to aid in advancing supervision and</p>	<p>FGSR's supervisory initiatives, in partnership with departments and supervisors, will provide clear information on resources/offices available across campus so that graduate students are equipped at the start of their programs with the information they need to establish strong, positive working relationships, leading to improved student experience and academic success.</p>

	mentorship skills will also be recommended to all faculty (https://www.ualberta.ca/graduate-studies/policies/resources-for-faculty-and-staff/resources-for-supervisors/mentorship-academy-workshops.html).	
Continue the process to move Surg530 and Surg600 classes from credit to 'graded' (more access to scholarships and funding).	A working group for graduate education will explore new courses to address these needs including transition for credit courses to graded courses. We will also look to develop new courses that focus on research skills acquisition	
Consider changing the required Statistics course to an elective.	As mentioned above, we will discuss with our graduate research committee and Department faculty members the possibility of making this course an elective. The proposal will be that students can seek an exemption if they have previously taken an undergraduate statistics course.	

Resources

<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>Response by the Department of Surgery</i>	<i>Response by the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry and/or the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR)</i>
The Office of Advocacy and Wellness is working well – continue resourcing that office and the assistant deans in charge.	We will continue to promote the services offered from this office as well as others in	

Additional Notes from Department/Faculty/FGSR: