



Office of the Vice-Provost and Dean
Yeates School of Graduate Studies

Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan

Periodic Program Review (PPR)

Master of Health Science (MHSc)

Nutrition Communication

School of Nutrition

Faculty of Community Services

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Table of Contents

FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT	1
Executive Summary	1
Periodic Program Review	2
Program Strengths, Weaknesses and Opportunities	2
Summary of PRT Recommendations with Graduate Program and YSGS Responses	4
Academic Recommendations	4
Administrative and Financial Recommendations	6
Implementation Plan	9
Academic Recommendations	9
Administrative and Financial Recommendations	12

FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

In accordance with the University Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), this final assessment report provides a synthesis of the external evaluation and the internal response and assessments of the graduate program in **Nutrition Communication** delivered by the School of Nutrition. This report identifies the significant strengths of the program, together with opportunities for program improvement and enhancement, and it sets out and prioritizes the recommendations that have been selected for implementation.

The report also includes an Implementation Plan that identifies who will be responsible for approving the recommendations set out in the final assessment report; who will be responsible for providing any resources entailed by those recommendations; any changes in organization, policy or governance that will be necessary to meet the recommendations and who will be responsible for acting on those recommendations; and timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations.

Executive Summary

The School of Nutrition offers a Master of Health Science degree in Nutrition Communication that prepares graduates for dietetic careers in health and community settings, food service and food industries, education, private practice, and entrepreneurial endeavours.

Option 1 (practicum) students complete the program in four semesters and qualify to write the Canadian Dietetic Registration Exam and become dietitians. Option 2 (MRP) students complete the program in three semesters and are predominantly practicing dietitians who wish to expand their nutrition communication expertise and provide professional leadership in this field. The program provides students with opportunities to develop the capacity to:

- a. Identify and interpret a broad range of nutrition and food issues and perspectives.
- b. Identify, critically appraise and interpret research to form an evidence-based position.
- c. Plan, implement and evaluate effective, ethical dissemination strategies.
- d. Articulate and demonstrate a philosophical approach to practice that is consistent with academic integrity, ethical guidelines, jurisprudence and responsible conduct of research.
- e. Use knowledge translation principles to translate scientific information for diverse public and professional audiences.
- f. Recognize the complexity of knowledge and the contributions of other disciplines.

Analysis of the Periodic Program Review self-study report shows five primary strengths of the program: unique program focus, evidence-based approach, knowledge translation, diversity of perspectives, and student support.

The Periodic Program Review process has enabled the program to create a developmental plan that builds upon the program's strengths, takes action to address its weaknesses, and embraces opportunities identified. The priority areas of action identified in this plan are:

- a. Ensure the ongoing currency, breadth, and relevance of the curriculum.
- b. Enhance opportunities for preceptor engagement.
- c. Increase the number of Option 2 applications and overall MRP quality.
- d. Enhance students' communication skills.
- e. Create an "innovation ecosystem" for dietetics in the School of Nutrition at Ryerson.

Periodic Program Review

Master Health Science (MHSc) in Nutrition Communication

The School of Nutrition submitted a Self-Study Report to the Yeates School of Graduate Studies that outlined program descriptions and learning outcomes, an analytical assessment of the program, program data including data from student surveys and the standard data packages. Course outlines and CVs for full-time faculty members were also appended.

Two external and one internal arm's-length reviewers were selected from a set of proposed candidates. The Peer Review Team (PRT) for the Periodic Program Review (PPR) of the Master's program in Nutrition Communication consisted of **Dr. S. Berenbaum**, Professor, Division of Nutrition and Dietetics, College of Pharmacy and Nutrition University of Saskatchewan; **Dr. B. Roebbothan**, Professor, Division of Community Health and Humanities, Faculty of Medicine Memorial University of Newfoundland; and **Dr. A. Valeo**, Associate Professor, School of Early Childhood Studies Ryerson University.

The appraisal committee spent two days at the Ryerson School of Nutrition. The visit included interviews with the University and Faculty Administration including the Provost and Vice-President Academic; Vice-Provost Academic; Vice-Provost and Dean Yeates School of Graduate Studies (YSGS); Associate Dean of YSGS, Dean of the Faculty of Community Services(FCS), Associate Dean of FCS, Graduate Program Director of the Nutrition Communication Graduate Program, and meetings with a group of current students, faculty and support staff.

The PRT site visit was conducted on October 6 and 7, 2016. The PRT report was communicated to the Associate Dean, YSGS on November 4, 2016, and the response to the report from Journalism was communicated to YSGS on January 30, 2017.

Program Strengths, Weaknesses and Opportunities

The Peer Review Team identified Program Strengths, Weaknesses and Opportunities and stated that the MHSc program in Nutrition Communication is a unique program in Canada with its stated focus of helping dietitians and future dietitians develop advanced communication knowledge and skills. This section will summarize these strengths, weaknesses and opportunities.

Strengths

- a. Overall, this is a very strong program and the program should be proud of its development over the years. The program has depth and breadth in most courses. There is significant research and scholarship. The level of knowledge application is high and the students have the opportunity for professional capacity and development.
- b. The program is committed to growth, change and improvement. It has shown much flexibility over the years in its willingness to make changes.
- c. Most program courses appear to be equivalent in currency and rigour, to those offered by other graduate level nutrition programs in Canada.
- d. The two program options are viable. Option 1 provides a great service to the dietetics profession by helping more individuals become registered dietitians. This option is accredited by the Partnership for Dietetic Education and Practice, the national accrediting body for the dietetics profession. Option 2 has an emphasis on research methodologies, critical thinking and systematic reviews, important elements in the research process. The program certainly enhances students' appreciation for research and scholarship.

- e. The program faculty are strong. Faculty have PhDs and engage in teaching and research in their areas of expertise. They also contribute administratively to the program and the university.
- f. Dr. Paisley's strong leadership is to be noted.

Weaknesses

These are areas that could be strengthened. They are offered in no particular order.

- a. This is a Masters of Health Science in Nutrition Communication but without experts in communication on faculty. The faculty, although strong, are not much different from faculty in other graduate nutrition programs across Canada, all of which have PhDs in nutrition, dietetics or food and teach/research in their area of expertise.
- b. The curricula and faculty are quite similar in many ways to other nutrition programs in Canada (although other programs do not call themselves a MHS in Nutrition Communication).
- c. The course NC8102 Epidemiology for Nutrition Research and Interpretation could be enhanced as previously discussed.
- d. We understand the rationale for removing electives from both options, but we wonder at what cost. The program is so tight (and we heard this many times from others) that it does not allow for students to explore areas of interest, as if often found in graduate programs.
- e. The research rigour in the program could be stronger. The program has set lofty goals for its masters program (e.g., 'ability to conceptualize, design, and implement research for the generation of new knowledge' and 'ability to produce original research, or other advanced scholarship...to merit publication'), difficult at the best of times even with thesis based masters programs. Option 1 students do not have a focus on research. Option 2 students appear to mostly conduct advanced literature reviews rather than conduct small research studies with the intent of collecting and analyzing raw data or participating directly in primary research.
- f. The scope of the Practicum Coordinator's responsibilities appear to be beyond what you would typically see in most other programs. She is commended for the time and effort she puts into the program, but we wonder if the program has unrealistic expectations for this position.
- g. The issue of funding, as with most nutrition programs across Canada, is a concern.

Opportunities

- a. There is an opportunity to differentiate this program from other nutrition graduate programs in Canada. Having a PhD expert in communications would truly set the program apart from other programs.
- b. The program has the opportunity to be a real leader in nutrition communication in Canada. Strengthening the communication focus of its course offerings and faculty expertise would make the program truly unique.
- c. Dr. Paisley has many very good ideas for future program development (e.g., preceptor education program). These should be further explored as very few programs of this nature exist in Canada.
- d. The Faculty of Communication and Design provides an opportunity for a partnership that would again provide a uniqueness to this graduate program. Although some discussions have happened with this Faculty, more should be done here.
- e. The program exists in a setting unique to Canada. Ryerson could be the envy of other nutrition graduate programs should they offer significant placements in the communications field (e.g., t.v., radio, newspapers, marketing, etc.). These opportunities often don't exist in other places in Canada.

Summary of PRT Recommendations with Graduate Program and YSGS Responses

Academic Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Continue to build on making this program unique with a focus on nutrition communication. Many programs cover aspects of what this program does in nutrition (but do not title their masters as such) but the fact that you have chosen to name the program as a MHSc in Nutrition Communication and to focus on some areas is unique. Identify other key communication issues that would truly help set this program apart.

Nutrition Communication Response

In response to this recommendation, the graduate program in Nutrition Communication will review and revise program materials to ensure that the nutrition communication focus is clearly articulated, and task the MHSc Nutrition Communication program curriculum committee to:

- a. Review the curriculum of Canadian graduate nutrition programs to inform our efforts to further differentiate our program.
- b. Examine the breadth and depth of the nutrition communication focus reflected in our curriculum and identify areas for enhancement.
- c. Identify areas (e.g., course titles, outlines, and descriptions) where the program's nutrition communication focus can be articulated more clearly.
- d. Compare current and original course outlines to identify curriculum 'drift'.
- e. Examine NC8101 Epidemiology for Nutrition Research and Interpretation content, compare to original content, and identify areas where revisions are required to enhance program focus and differentiation.
- f. Identify opportunities to expand the depth of communication theory within NC8201 Theoretical Approaches to Nutrition and Health Behaviour

YSGS Response

YSGS supports efforts of NC in further differentiating itself from similar programs at other institutions, and in the enhancement of its curriculum offerings.

Recommendation 2: Work on collaborating with more programs at the university; there might be new and unique ways to work together with the Faculty of Communication and Design (e.g., joint courses/workshop; students collaborating on projects together in the community). This is an opportunity that other universities would not be able to capitalize on.

Nutrition Communication Response

In response to this recommendation, the graduate program in Nutrition Communication will continue to collaborate with Professional Communication program, with support from the Dean FCS, have purchased a "Strategic Communication" workshop, offered for all MHSc students on Jan 10 and 12, 2017 by a professor from Cornell, will investigate additional opportunities to collaborate. The appointment of an FCS Associate Dean, Graduate Studies and Strategic Initiatives, has expanded opportunities for collaboration and information sharing among FCS programs that has benefited preceptor and student education initiatives. The program will continue to pursue opportunities to collaborate with other FCS programs.

YSGS Response

YSGS encourages collaboration between NC with other programs at Ryerson, both within FCS and outside (continuing its collaboration with Professional Communication).

Recommendation 3: Strengthen the research component. We recognize that this is a professional program vs a thesis based program, however, as previously described, the research component and the Epidemiology course could be strengthened. A small well-defined research project where data are collected and analyzed (vs systematic literature searches) would be valuable for students. Projects focusing on researching communication strategies would fit well with a masters focusing on nutrition communication.

Nutrition Communication Response

We do not offer a thesis-based masters; however, it has been possible for some Option 2 (MRP) students to complete a small original research project within the 1-year program, many of which have led to publications.

Will revise GDLEs analysis using 2016 framework: We have provided a revised analysis of our MHSc GDLEs using the 2016 framework (Appendix I). We believe that the current program-specific expectations (Appendix I, column 3) align closely with the 2016 GDLEs framework across all six categories, and, that these expectations can be met by students in both Options 1 and 2.

YSGS Response

While we support the strengthening of SRC elements within the NC program, we advise against making changes that potentially would compromise degree completion.

Recommendation 4: Consider what the students had to say about the program. These did not necessarily transfer into concrete recommendations, but these comments are important to consider nevertheless.

- Course work not that difficult, but there is a lot of it
- The cases we work on are not that complex; we had more difficult cases in our undergraduate programs; more challenging cases are needed
- More content is needed in some courses and perhaps at a higher level
- At times, there is too much self-directedness and teaching themselves and other graduate students
- We would like more clinical courses; more needed before rotations on developing clinical skills
- If you did your undergraduate degree at ryerson, some of the courses are exactly the same in the graduate program; need to differentiate more
- Counseling work in courses was offered too early – too distant from actual placements
- Offer an orientation before rotations start
- More focus on two way communication and team building needed (too much focus on writing reports and on giving presentations)
- The program is recommended, but it does have more potential
- The unpaid internship is a problem
- More scholarships are needed
- A better understanding is needed of why we are charged what we are for this program

Nutrition Communication Response

We place great value on students' feedback concerning our program. One item raised by students was already on our radar and has been addressed:

- a. A motion was passed at Grad Program Council on Feb 1, 2017 to change NC8300 Professional Practice courses from Pass/Fail to graded.

In the coming months, we will examine the following issues through curriculum meeting discussions:

- a. level of difficulty of coursework; articulation of graduate level expectations

- b. total student workload
- c. the suggestion re: adding clinical courses
- d. overlap between our BAsC and MHSc curricula
- e. scheduling of counselling workshops
- f. ensuring a breadth of communication activities
- g. discuss changing NC8104A/B Nutrition Comm Seminar from Pass/Fail to graded.

Please note the following corrections to information in the PPR report:

- a. at the present time, there is no mechanism in Ontario, or Canada, that would enable dietetic interns to be paid
- b. students participate in orientations (at Ryerson and at each practicum location) prior to their participation in the practicum courses.
- c. Students reported that one course in the curriculum is "entirely self-directed" (p. 2, paragraph 2 of Self-Study Report). We assume that this refers to NC8205 Directed Studies, taken by Option 2 students only. Through this course, each Option 2 student works closely with their faculty supervisor to identify course deliverables and outcomes that will support completion of their MRP. Students meet regularly with their faculty supervisor for guidance, obtain detailed feedback on submitted deliverables, and assess their progress through mid and end of semester evaluations. A standardized course outline, which is augmented to meet each student's learning needs and MRP goals, is used to ensure that the course meets our shared expectations in terms of student-faculty interaction, level of learning, and quality of outcomes.

YSGS Response

YSGS supports the program response, and echoes the values placed on student feedback before, during, and after the PPR. We encourage the participation and engagement of our graduate students on governance issues through GPCs and Department/School councils.

Administrative and Financial Recommendations

Recommendation 5

Strengthen the funding base for the program. It is expensive to offer a program for individuals aiming to attain registered dietitian status. It appears that similar programs in Ontario are paying field preceptors for their services or entering into exclusive agreements. This program may be at a disadvantage in the future in attracting high quality preceptors.

In addition, a program focusing on Nutrition Communication must look at state of the art communication technologies, and these are expensive.

Finally, the current responsibilities of the Practicum Coordinator are not reasonable or feasible. Additional funding to hire a second coordinator is probably warranted. We recognize that all of these suggestions would require external support.

Nutrition Communication Response

1. Examine options for paying preceptors:

We engaged the Dean and Associate Dean Grad Studies (FCS) in discussions of the ways in which program funding might be altered to enable payments to preceptors (Feb 3, 2017).

The impact on all Ryerson dietetic practical training programs at Ryerson needs to be considered. Further discussions upcoming.

2. Examine our technology needs:

Consult with faculty to determine technology needs. Seek the support of the Dean FCS and Associate Dean Grad Studies, FCS regarding acquisition of equipment, as well as funding for the ongoing licensing and access fees associated with these technologies.

3. Examine Practicum Coordinator position description:

We agree. We engaged the Dean and Associate Dean Grad Studies (FCS) to analyse the current human resource model used to implement the practicum components of our MHSc and PMDip Dietetics programs. When considered in relation to models used in the Schools of Social Work and Nursing, which involve similar responsibilities and tasks, inconsistencies were noted. Next steps involve discussion of alternative funding models with FCS Business Officer and UPO.

YSGS Response

YSGS supports the effective and appropriate funding of all our graduate programming. We support efforts of NC to work with FCS towards these goals.

Recommendation 6

Aim for more scholarships for students in both options.

Nutrition Communication Response

Contact Deans FCS and YSGS, Associate Dean Grad Studies, FCS, and the FCS Director of Development to discuss development of scholarships and awards.

YSGS Response

YSGS supports the program response.

Recommendation 7

Re-examine the responsibilities of the Practicum Coordinator.

Nutrition Communication Response

See response to the fourth recommendation above.

YSGS Response

YSGS supports the program response.

Recommendation 8

Continue to provide preceptors with the support they need. As there is competition for preceptors from programs in Ontario the program needs to continue to monitor the situation and if possible, offer incentives to preceptors.

Nutrition Communication Response

- 1 Continue to provide preceptor support: through the activities of our Developing Preceptor Excellence Committee. We currently offer bi-annual preceptor education events, web-based education resources, a bi-annual newsletter, open classroom events, and a process through which preceptors can apply for Associate Member status in YSGS as incentives for preceptors who supervise practical training for our students.
- 2 Regarding incentives to preceptors: see the fourth recommendation above.

YSGS Response

YSGS supports the program response.

Recommendation 9

Continue to explore the feasibility of conducting an employer survey. We note the difficulty of such a survey, but it could give more insight into community and societal needs.

Nutrition Communication Response

Since there are confidentiality and privacy issues associated with conducting employer surveys at the individual program level, a provincial or national survey, conducted by Dietitians of Canada or the College of Dietitians of Ontario, might be more feasible and appropriate

YSGS Response

YSGS supports the program response.