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MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION	Senate	DATE	January 14, 2025	
FROM	Dilson Rassier, Provost and Vice-President Academic, and Chair, SCUP	PAGES	1/39	
RE:	External Review Report and Action Plan for the Department of Gerontology (SCUP 25-09)			

At its meeting on January 8, 2025, SCUP reviewed the External Review Report for the Department of Gerontology that resulted from its External Review.

The Educational Goals Assessment Plan was reviewed and is attached for the information of Senate.

Motion: That Senate approve the Action Plan for the Department of Gerontology that resulted from its External Review.


C: Laurel Weldon, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION Dilson Rassier, Chair, SCUP
FROM Peter Hall, Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-
President, Academic 
RE: External Review of the Department of Gerontology
DATE November 19, 2024
PAGES

Attached are the External Review Report and the Action Plan for the Department of Gerontology. The Educational Goals Assessment Plan and constructive feedback from SCUTL are included for information only. The site visit took place at the Vancouver campus from March 25 - 27, 2024. The external review committee met with students, faculty, staff, and senior administrators.

Excerpt from the External Review Report:

"It is clear that the Department has many strengths and offers innovative academic programs which fulfill community needs and help to supply highly trained individuals for leadership positions in gerontology in Vancouver, British Columbia, and further afield. Not surprising given its history, the Department boasts great strengths in its research which is highly relevant, prolific, and well-funded, despite its small faculty size. Notable successes in the Department are the various endowments for post-doctoral fellows and the research structures (Gerontological Research Centre [GRC] and STAR Institute). The Department also has many connections to others at SFU, the local and provincial community, as well as many national and international research collaborations."

Following the site visit, the report of the External Review Committee* for the Department of Gerontology was submitted in April 2024. The reviewers made a number of recommendations based on the Terms of Reference that were provided to them. Subsequently, a meeting was held with the dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, the chair of the Department of Gerontology, and the vice-provost and associate vice-president, academic to consider the recommendations. An action plan was prepared taking into consideration the discussion at the meeting and the contents of the external review report. The action plan has been endorsed by the department and the faculty dean.

Motion:

That SCUP approve and recommend to Senate the Action Plan for the Department of Gerontology that resulted from its external review.

***External Review Committee:**

Michelle Porter, University of Manitoba (Chair of External Review Committee)
Malcolm Cutchin, Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences
Christine Walsh, University of Calgary
Nicholas Blomley (internal), Simon Fraser University

Attachments:

1. External Review Report (April 2024)
2. Department of Gerontology Action Plan
3. Department of Gerontology Educational Goals Assessment Plan
4. Feedback on Educational Goals Assessment Plan

cc Laurel Weldon, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Habib Chaudhury, Chair, Department of Gerontology

Report of the External Review Committee
Department of Gerontology, Simon Fraser University
April 2024

From March 25 to 27, 2024, the external reviewers met with all faculty and administrative staff members of the Department of Gerontology at Simon Fraser University (SFU). We also met with sessional instructors/adjuncts, post-doctoral fellows/research associates, graduate students (from all degree programs), alumni, and a couple of current Diploma students. We did not meet with any students from the Minor Program. Additional meetings were held with representatives from the Libraries (including the Gerontology Liaison Librarian); the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences; the Vice-Provost and Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies; the Quality Assurance Manager; the Director of Academic Planning & Quality Assurance; the Associate Vice-President, Research *pro tem*; the Vice-Provost and Associate VP Academic; and the Provost and Vice-President Academic. Through these meetings, reviewing the Self-Study Report and Department websites, we are able to provide our assessment of the Department of Gerontology along with making several recommendations.

Our report

We have organized our report according to each of the items in the Terms of Reference provided to us. At times there are overlapping items between these sections, whereby we might refer to recommendations made in a different section.

Overview

It is clear that the Department has many strengths and offers innovative academic programs which fulfill community needs and help to supply highly trained individuals for leadership positions in gerontology in Vancouver, British Columbia, and further afield. Not surprising given its history, the Department boasts great strengths in its research which is highly relevant, prolific, and well-funded, despite its small faculty size. Notable successes in the Department are the various endowments for post-doctoral fellows and the research structures (Gerontological Research Centre [GRC] and STAR Institute). The Department also has many connections to others at SFU, the local and provincial community, as well as many national and international research collaborations.

Review Committee

Michelle Porter, University of Manitoba (Chair)
Malcolm Cutchin, Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences
Christine Walsh, University of Calgary
Nicholas Blomley, Simon Fraser University (Internal Committee Member)

- 1. The quality of the unit's programs (graduate and undergraduate) is high and there are measures in place to ensure the evaluation and revision of the teaching programs. Some issues to consider include:**
- **degree requirements, structure, breadth, orientation and integration of the programs including the course offering schedule of the graduate programs, and practicum requirements;**
 - **enrolment management issues, student progress and completion, and support for graduate students;**
 - **educational goals that are clearly aligned with the curriculum and are assessable.**

Programs offered

These are summary details for the academic programs offered by the Department of Gerontology.

Undergraduate

- **Minor**
 - For 3rd and 4th year SFU students
 - Admission requires 60 units and a 2.0 or higher GPA + prerequisite courses or minimum grades in GERO 101 (B) or GERO 300 (C)
 - Program requires 15 credit hours total for those with GERO 300, and GERO 101 + 15 credit hours.
- **Diploma**
 - Admission requires a bachelor's degree with a GPA of 2.5 or greater, three letters of reference
 - 30 credit hours of approved course work, 6 from required courses, 24 from specified list, and for those without experience working directly with older adults a practicum of 260 hours (or 130 hours for those with a partial waiver)
 - Most of the program courses can be taken through distance learning, except for GERO 400 which is an applied seminar with group projects

Graduate

- **MA admission**
 - Admission requires an undergraduate degree in a health-related discipline with some aging-related coursework or papers, and SFU criteria for graduate student admission
 - For those without all of the above, pre-requisite coursework may be required
 - All applicants are required to include a statement of work/volunteer experience or something regarding their experience with older individuals
 - All applicants are required to provide a three-to-four-page research interest statement with a critical synthesis of a body of research
- **MA program requirements (Capstone and Thesis)**
 - For those lacking work experience with older people, a practicum of 300 to 350 hours is required

- Two required courses (one on quantitative research and one on qualitative research)
- MA Capstone program requirements
 - Five elective courses from the two concentrations (health and environment)
 - Written project that could be a critical synthesis, an original grant proposal, a new program intervention, an evaluation proposal of a program, a critical analysis of a policy
- MA Thesis program requirements
 - Three elective courses from the two concentrations
 - Thesis
- PhD
 - Admission requirements – 3.5 or greater GPA, Master’s in Gerontology or other discipline with a significant amount of course work or thesis on aging
 - All applicants are required to include a statement of work/volunteer experience or something regarding their experience with older individuals
 - All applicants are required to provide a three-to-four-page research interest statement with a critical synthesis of a body of research
 - Program requirements – three core courses, two electives, two comprehensive exams and a thesis

From a historical perspective, the Diploma was the first program of the Department (established in 1983). The MA program was established in 1998, the Minor in 1999, and the PhD program in 2004.

Program data

Each year the Department offers about 11 different undergraduate courses and six graduate courses, with multiple offerings of some, and in class and virtual delivery. It is unclear how many students take undergraduate courses in a given year as the summary (on page 7) indicates about 500 students, whereas on page 35 it is stated that 150 students take undergraduate courses in any given year, with average class sizes increasing from 18 to 36 in the past five years. In the five years of reporting from the SFU tables, on average there are 62 students approved annually for the Minor, although for the last year of reporting there was a decrease to 49. There are 25 active Diploma students. There are currently 17 MA and 11 PhD students, with 12 MA students accepted for 2024/25, but no PhD students being granted admission although there were eligible applicants.

Since 2007 there have been 4 PhD graduates. On average there are 5 MA graduates every year. There are about five Diplomas awarded on an annual basis as well. The average annual rate of Minors awarded is 32.

The average semesters to complete the Thesis MA option is over 10. For the MA non-thesis option, the completion time is shorter at about 9 semesters. For the PhD completion times, the data shows 18.5 semesters one year and 24.0 semesters in another. However, these completion times are only based on 3 PhD graduates in the five years reported.

Undergraduate program comments

Both the Minor and Diploma programs provide foundational knowledge for students interested in Gerontology. Students already in existing degree programs can supplement their learning with a focus on Gerontology to achieve their Minor. Students who already have degrees can also focus on Gerontology without having to complete a degree with the Diploma program. This latter program is often suitable for a mature student coming back to university who is not interested in the research elements of completing an MA degree. Students from both programs take the same undergraduate courses, so there are efficiencies and also opportunities for knowledge exchange (which is potentially inter-generational) between the Minor and Diploma students as well as other undergraduate students who take the courses. These undergraduate students can also feed into the MA program, particularly the Minor degree students.

Recommendation 1.1. *As mentioned in the Self-Study Report, more promotion of the Minor across SFU using a variety of methods (student advisors, social media, information provided in relevant introductory classes, etc.) could be used to increase enrollment.*

Recommendation 1.2. *Consider allowing earlier entry into the Minor. If students were able to enter the Minor in the 2nd year instead of the 3rd, this would potentially enable more students to achieve the number of credit hours required for the Minor. Allowing for three years to complete the Minor might also make it seem more viable for potential applicants. With more promotion of GERO 101 and a possible increased enrollment, this could mean that more students will also learn about the Minor earlier in their degrees.*

For the Diploma Program we heard many positive comments about the quality of teaching, teaching assistants being helpful, etc. We also received suggestions for improvement. For example, GERO 300 was highly appreciated, and the Department was encouraged to promote the Diploma more since it offers a terrific opportunity for students interested in this program.

Recommendation 1.3. *The incorporation of more applied learning opportunities with older populations within courses would be suitable for students. Students enroll in the program, which is advertised for individuals wanting to work with older people. More curricular mapping of program learning objectives and course learning objectives could help to ensure that key applied learning experiences are, in fact, contained within the courses students are taking.*

The practicum was seen as being particularly appealing for those who have never worked with older people before or wanted to improve their skills. However, some enhancements would improve the learning opportunities.

Recommendation 1.4. *Increased clarity/transparency is needed on the practicum in general (e.g., what qualifies for waiver, how waivers are given). Also, more structure/facilitation is desired by students to assist in making matches between students and organizations.*

Recommendation 1.5. *More frequent offerings of existing courses seem warranted, particularly those with a health lens. This links to Recommendation 5.1, which suggests hiring in the health area.*

There are two courses which provide an introduction to gerontology for undergraduate and Diploma students – GERO 101 and GERO 300.

GERO 300 received rave reviews from Diploma students. It is offered in a variety of ways (in person and virtually) multiple times a year, with relatively high enrolment rates and the potential to increase enrolment by increasing enrolment caps. In contrast, GERO 101 has lower enrolment rates and less overall demand. In discussions, it was felt that perhaps this course could become a 200 level course, and that might be more appealing to students and increase enrolments.

Recommendation 1.6. *Careful consideration should be given to the need for two foundational introductory courses which apparently have substantial overlap, when doing curricular mapping exercises and introducing or redeveloping courses for the 200 level.*

Graduate Program Comments

Similar to the feedback we received about the Diploma program, there was concern amongst graduate students that the health-oriented courses are not offered often enough.

Recommendation 1.7. *Find ways to offer graduate courses from the health stream more often and more consistently. This is linked to Recommendation 5.1.*

Graduate students who are required to complete a practicum made similar suggestions as the Diploma students (see *Recommendation 1.4*), in terms of transparency of the requirement and the need for students to secure their own suitable placement with little or no assistance from the Department. The situation could also be improved by implementing *Recommendation 4.1*. This need was also addressed specifically in the Self-study Report.

Students and alumni clearly articulated that they would like to see more applicable skills introduced directly into their existing courses. Given their high course loads, it does not make sense to burden them with additional extra-curricular workshops.

Recommendation 1.8. *As with the undergraduate program, further curricular mapping at the graduate level could assist with determining learning objectives broadly for the programs and future careers of the students, along with where those learning objectives can be attained in individual courses. A challenge with this activity is that all MA students as well as PhD students take the same courses, but the students in these different programs have unique needs. For example, the students in the MA Capstone program are less interested in the research domains of the program and require more tangible skills (e.g., writing for the public) for the types of leadership positions that they might acquire. There could even be entrepreneurial elements added to the program since this is a common pathway for graduates.*

Related to the above, we heard that the librarian specialist associated with the Department is more than willing to be involved with courses and introduce the students to information technology tools and skills within existing courses.

Students were frustrated by the lack of courses being offered in the summer by the Department, even though they are paying tuition fees then. They also expressed concern about being restricted to one course from outside the Department. In a similar vein, students questioned paying tuition

fees, while completing an unpaid practicum, or without receiving an honorarium. Many chose to find relevant paying work that could count for their practicum time instead. Another frustration we heard from graduate students and alumni was that it was not clear upon admission that MA students did not have autonomy to choose the type of program that they would complete (i.e., thesis or capstone) even though they indicate the path they desire in their application. Instead, to students, it appears that faculty make the determination if a student is going to complete a capstone project or a thesis based on unknown indicators (i.e., supervisor's decision or student's performance in the program).

Recommendation 1.9. *Provide explicit information on the website and on other MA student recruitment materials that all students will be enrolled in the Capstone option, with the possibility that only a few students may be able to pursue the thesis route. Greater transparency is required on how decisions are made regarding the thesis option. Perhaps a Department-wide application process for acceptance into the thesis route should be considered rather than leaving the power to decide with individual advisors.*

In the past five years of reported data for the Department, there have only been 3 PhD graduates and only 4 since 2007. PhD headcounts have gradually increased from 2 in 2018/19 to 11 in 2022/23. No PhD students have been accepted for the 2024/2025 academic year, due to new Departmental policies. Given the caliber of research and amount of research funding in the Department, this rate of PhD completion seems low, particularly since many students are successful in receiving nationally competitive fellowships/scholarships.

Recommendation 1.10. *Further Departmental discussions are warranted on how to ensure that a strong focus is maintained on training PhD students and ensuring timely completion. Other relevant recommendations can be found below which may assist with funding as well as enrollments (1.11, 6.4.2).*

Student funding

Funding for students takes a variety of different forms. The Department is growing its scholarships and bursaries through donations. The Department is allotted Graduate Fellowships on a proportional basis like other units that are part of Graduate Studies. Students have also been successful in receiving awards from national (e.g., CIHR, SSHRC and Alzheimer's Society of Canada) and provincial granting agencies. There are also several employment-based funding opportunities in the Department through teaching (TA) and research assistantships (RA). Given the Department's success with research funding and the two Research Centres, there are many RA positions available (e.g., with the data collection sites associated with the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging).

Even with all these funding streams available, we heard from several sources that student funding, and consistency in funding, remain an issue. This is particularly relevant since the cost of living is high in Vancouver. In addition, there are now minimum thresholds for funding for PhD students, with minimum thresholds for future MA students coming in the future.

Recommendation 1.11. *Fundraising efforts could be targeted toward graduate students instead of providing more endowed post-doctoral fellows. While endowed post-doctoral fellow initiatives in the past have been very successful and drive future successes of the GRC and the STAR Institute, it*

seems that funding for PhD students remains a pressing issue as enrolments are being directly affected by insufficient funds.

Recommendation 1.12. *Providing more opportunities for PhD candidates to teach would also assist with funding as well as developing and enhancing their teaching skills.*

2. The quality of faculty research is high, and faculty collaboration and interaction provide a stimulating academic environment.

The faculty is extremely productive in research as evidenced by scholarly output. According to the Self-Study, between 2015-2023 the faculty published 11 books, 259 peer-reviewed articles, and 39 book chapters, which represented a modest decline in books and book chapters (12 and 41, respectively) and a significant increase in peer-reviewed articles (previously 108) from the previous reporting time frame, 2007-2014. The faculty received more than \$86,224,000 in research funding (a combination of tri-council, and foundation grants) between 2015-2024, a substantial increase from the 2007-2014 reporting period. The Department makes an important contribution to gerontology research nationally and internationally. All stakeholders that we heard from during the review commented favourably on the research output and impact of the faculty. In fact, the Department was noted as having the highest productivity within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) and second highest in the university. This level of productivity is anticipated to be maintained or increased with the addition of the new hires. However, it would be important to attend to threats to junior scholars' retention and success as outlined in *Recommendations 4.3 and 6.4.2*.

The GRC, which hosts two data centres for the CLSA, carries out essential research in gerontology in Canada. The previous review raised concerns that the GRC “would mainly reflect the research program of the Director”. This remains a concern under the current Director. The anticipated transition in the Director position presents an opportunity to consider a shared leadership model with the aim of mentoring junior colleagues, providing security through succession and continuity of leadership, and broaden the research program through their greater involvement of additional Department researchers in the GRC to enhance Departmental collaboration. This would require particular attention directed at collaborating with interdisciplinary scholars across SFU and beyond. Moreover, collaboration by researchers within the Department could be enhanced.

Recommendation 2.1. *The GRC should consider adopting a co-director model of leadership for the GRC with emphasis on providing mentorship to a junior faculty member in the co-director position.*

Recommendation 2.2. *To maintain and increase the research productivity of the GRC, the Centre should develop opportunities for further engagement and collaboration with scholars from within the Department, other departments across SFU, and through national and international networks.*

During the 2015-2023 period, the GRC hosted several conferences and 13 post-doctoral/ research fellows, illustrating the Centre's commitment to training the next generation of scholars. This research training opportunity could be expanded if *Recommendations 2.1 and 2.2* are implemented. In addition, the GRC could provide additional research training for research-oriented undergraduate and graduate students in line with *Recommendation 4.2*.

The STAR Institute conducts leading edge research related to technology and aging. The funding of the Institute, however, remains in jeopardy. Given the limited opportunity to examine this Institute

within the course of this review, the Committee cannot provide clear directions going forward. We also wonder if having two centres for gerontological research with different aims and reporting structures can be maintained within a relatively small Department.

Recommendation 2.3. *Explore options for enhanced funding for the STAR Institute or integration into an expanded GRC.*

3. Unit members participate in the administration of the unit. Some issues to consider include unit size, adequacy and effectiveness of the administrative complement and facilities.

Given the small size of the Department and the fact that there are two research units led by individuals within the Department (GRC and the STAR Institute), all individuals are or have been involved with administration, except the newest members of the Department. In some cases, individuals have more than one administrative role. Roles include Department Chair, Graduate Program Chair, Undergraduate Program Chair, Director of the GRC, Director of the STAR Institute, and Associate Director of the GRC.

Staff positions in the unit include: Manager (Academic and Administrative Services; 1.0 FTE); Graduate Program Assistant (0.6 FTE); Research Grants & Projects Coordinator (0.8 FTE); and Communications Coordinator (Alumni Outreach & Community; this position supports the Department and the GRC, with a 30:70 split respectively). The latter two positions are new to the Department, as they were approved by the FASS Dean in 2023. The addition of the new positions has certainly lightened the load for the Manager and will provide for more operational support for the Department. As this new administrative structure evolves and individuals learn more about the various tasks associated with their positions, there are opportunities to develop efficiencies, cohesion, and community within the Department by ensuring that everyone is well supported and appropriately informed about all aspects of the Department.

Recommendation 3.1. *Given the significant complexity involved in administrative responsibilities, because of the numerous programs and the research projects, this brings risk of poor coordination. We recommend more structured and regular communication as well as training/education to help develop efficiencies, cohesion, and community.*

4. The unit's workplace environment is conducive to the attainment of their objectives, including working relationships within the unit, with other university units, the community and the unit's alumni.

The physical environment of the Department is impressive. Located in the Harbour Centre within the downtown campus, the Department appears to have quality office, lab, and classroom space that is well-maintained and easily accessible by students, staff, faculty, and community members. While the Department's location allows it proximity to units with which it shares faculty and interests, such as Urban Studies and Public Policy, the downtown location does place the Department spatially distant from other collaborating departments and faculties, such as Sociology/Anthropology and Health Sciences. It appears, however, that faculty and students have long adjusted to the distributed campus geography. One way the University has helped with the quasi-isolation is the location of a dedicated SFU Library and Librarian in Harbour Centre. That is an asset to the Department, as are the GRC-related facilities in the same building. The downtown

location also limits access to wider University services, such as the Faculty of Graduate Studies. Although the Central administration is aware of this issue and taking some steps to address it (i.e., travelling to the Harbour Centre location to hold meetings and workshops), perhaps more regular linkages need to be established.

Gerontology also appears to continue strong and productive collaborations with other university units, community organizations, and departmental alumni. While some alumni remain connected with the Department, they expressed a strong desire for a workable set of networking tools (such as web-based communications platforms) to connect alumni with each other, with the Department, and to associated gerontological organizations in the region. Alumni have been requesting progress in their ability to be better connected for at least a decade. To act on this front would not only strengthen alumni relationships, but it also would support further development of community engagement, an important strategic goal for SFU.

Recommendation 4.1. *Implement a long-discussed networking system to better connect alumni, the Department, and community organizations, even if that requires an investment to make it happen.*

Community and provincial organizations have important connections to the Department through the positions of alumni, including some in important leadership roles. That is a key strength of the Department. At the same time, such relationships could be better structured and utilized when it comes to the practicum option for MA students. Instead of leaving students on their own to navigate practicum opportunities, the Department could better facilitate student-organization matches to enhance those external learning experiences and increase the satisfaction of MA students.

Recommendation 4.2. *Develop better coordination of student practicums in the community by working more closely with organizations to develop an approach to better match students to organizations.*

Gerontology has extensive research collaboration networks with other units at SFU, across Canada, and internationally. The activities of the GRC and the STAR Institute are more obvious examples of the sort of productive relationships across SFU and beyond. Other examples include the ability to negotiate shared faculty hires and re-assignments with other Departments that serve common goals. Further examples are the various postdoctoral fellowships in the GRC that serve PhDs from other departments, some of which are split with other units on campus or with external entities, both public and private.

As far as working relationships and the social environment internal to the Department, we found a more complex situation. The Department at last review was composed of 4.5 faculty positions and is at the time of this review, 6.5 FTE (five senior faculty members who have held departmental appointments of 15 years or more, and three faculty members who have held appointments of five years or less). While the growth was clearly warranted by the previous review and known factors, and the growth in productivity has been concomitant with an increase in faculty numbers, the faculty has bifurcated by seniority, viewpoint, and/or power, especially that in shaping the future of the Department as well as how it functions presently. We heard from various groups (including alumni) that the internal relationships, politics, behaviour, and ongoing tensions stemming from them were counter-productive, distracting, disconcerting, or uncomfortable, especially to the least

powerful in the situation—students. Negatives in the social environment also have potential implications for the long-term development and retention of junior faculty. We do not fully understand what the many complicated and differentially perceived elements of the social situation within the Department are, yet we encourage Departmental and Faculty leadership to (a) come to terms with the significance of what are, at the least, widespread perceptions of a ‘culture’ problem in Gerontology, and (b) work toward lasting solutions to that problem.

Recommendation 4.3. *Use formal arbitration or other means to facilitate reconciliation and improved collaboration among the faculty that would lead to a more positive environment for all members of the Department. This might include changes to administrative structures and implementation of more equitable decision-making processes that are more consensus-based and inclusive of all voices.*

5. Future plans of the unit are appropriate and manageable.

Main elements that are planned for the next period focus on the students’ education experience, incorporating skills training in existing graduate courses, opportunities for experiential learning and community engagement within courses, exploring opportunities for collaborating with SFU Faculty of Health Sciences, marketing/promotion of the MA and Diploma programs, and working with SFU Advancement and Alumni Engagement regarding endowed faculty/research positions.

In our meetings with students and alumni, we heard broad encouragement for the items listed in 6.1 and 6.3.1 of the Self-Study Report. All these elements could help to enhance the student experience, increase their skills, and foster their experiences with organizations and communities beyond the University. Given the high course load for MA students, it makes sense to incorporate as much as possible into existing courses rather than introduce workshops or other extra-curricular activities.

Regarding academic quality and the curriculum, the plans related to updating/redeveloping existing undergraduate courses, with support from Centre for Educational Excellence (CEE) to conduct curricular mapping and create 200 level courses, is appropriate. This work could help to increase the enrolment of other SFU students in these courses, and also increase the number of students who complete the Minor in Gerontology, by enabling earlier entry.

The plans to enhance promotion of the MA and Diploma programs are also appropriate. Noting that dealing with elements mentioned in section 4 (Recommendation 4.3) could also help with recruitment, by enabling positive word-of-mouth communications by existing students and alumni of the program.

International engagement and additional fundraising initiatives also seem suitable for this Department with experience and success in both of these areas over their history. Clearly more scholarships and bursaries for students would assist with the many financial challenges they face, particularly with the high costs of living in Vancouver.

Faculty renewal and succession planning are both outlined in future plans. In the next few years there will be several changes in which individuals are in administrative roles (e.g., Chair, Director of the GRC), and some plans appear to be in place for these changes. In terms of a new faculty position, preliminary discussions have already occurred. As described above, given the future

possibilities with the new Medical School and the need for more of the existing health courses to be taught, a position in this general topic area is needed.

Recommendation 5.1. *Pursuing a teaching faculty position in health-related gerontology would provide much needed current course coverage at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.*

6.1. Identify a few opportunities for growth and collaboration connected to the SFU Medical School (e.g., prioritized new faculty position in Health and Aging with focus on community-engaged health research, selected gerontology courses offered as electives in the Medical School's curriculum).

The developing Medical School at SFU is a significant new issue that certainly presents opportunities for Gerontology to play a role in health and medical teaching and research. As noted in the most recent Gerontology strategic plan, the hire of a Health and Aging gerontologist would possibly be a strong fit with the Medical School focused on primary care and prevention, and a strong working relationship could encourage training to address a critical gap in the health care system: geriatric specialist care for an aging society. At this time, however, the vision and realities of the Medical School, such as its curricular approach and other primary orientations and goals are unknown; that makes it impractical at this moment to make a strategic hire that will most likely to be successful in collaboration with the Medical School. We also note the current curricular need associated with *Recommendation 5.1* above. There are two significant goals at work with regard to the Health and Aging agenda: one is to cover Departmental teaching needs; the other is a combination of teaching and research that would connect in meaningful ways with the new Medical School. This may require more than one FTE faculty member.

We suggest that Dean Weldon of FASS begin and continue conversations with the Medical School leadership to lobby about the positive role of Gerontology in medical education at SFU—and to negotiate a role for gerontology courses and research as an essential part of the Medical School. Once more is known about how this can best be developed in the context of many other factors, perhaps in another year or two, the strategic hire of a Health and Aging Gerontologist tenure track faculty member can be better accomplished. Yet we should be clear: we do support the plan to hire in that direction both for course delivery to Gerontology students as well as collaboration with the Medical School.

Recommendation 6.1. *Gerontology should prepare the Dean of FASS to work with the Dean of the Medical School on the most advantageous ways to integrate a Health and Aging focus within the curriculum and research agenda of the new school.*

6.2 Is it recommended that the Department pursue an undergraduate major program in Gerontology? If so, what additional resources would be required? Are there other potential areas for generating increased enrolment across faculty/department?

We do not recommend that Gerontology pursue an undergraduate major program at this time. The current faculty and staff complement are already stretched by research, administration, and teaching in the current four programs. Adding a major would require additional course offerings and additional administrative burden on the Department. Moreover, the demand for a major is unclear

to all concerned. Instead, the Department's plans to enlarge key courses (e.g., GERO 300) and enhance online offerings, as well as shift 2-3 courses from the 300 level to the 200 level would be more likely to increase enrolments while adding fewer demands on Departmental faculty and staff.

Recommendation 6.2. *Gerontology should not pursue an undergraduate major at this juncture and should instead attempt to move ahead with strategies such as increased enrolment caps on the most popular courses, adding online sections, and shifting two to three 300 level courses to the 200 level.*

6.3 Is there a need in the market for a professional stream in aging and health? If so, what additional resources are required?

During the Review we heard of some Departmental interest in developing a professional stream in aging and health and there appears to be some capacity in this area given the faculty's expertise in aging and health, and specifically and the Tier II Canada Research Chair in aging and health, the recommendation for a new hire in aging and health and potential alliances with the new Medical School. However, as there has not yet been a market analysis to determine the interest in this stream, it seems premature to recommend a professional stream in aging and health, particularly since there are already two professional-based programs in the Department (Diploma, Capstone version of the MA).

Recommendation 6.3. *Complete a market analysis to determine the interest and need for a professional stream in aging and health and what recourse would be necessary to support the implementation of this stream.*

6.4 Suggest ways to maintain the unit's historical strength in graduate education and training, and address the potential growth of the MA program, as well as the PhD program, given increasing demand for the latter.

During our many conversations, we heard about the tensions and resource challenges between being able to offer all the courses required for the MA program (capstone and thesis versions), the requests by faculty to supervise PhD students, and the need to distribute the workload for MA student supervision equally across all faculty members. Pressures here include minimum numbers of students in classes, trying to ensure some funding for all MA students, as well as the new SFU minimum funding threshold for PhD students. For these reasons, a new policy was implemented in the Department which limits the number of PhD students that can be supervised by individual faculty members to two. All combined the various issues clearly have an impact on taking in and turning away top-quality students. We also heard from graduate students that supervision quality ranged dramatically between individuals and that time pressures from many demands was contributing to a poor experience for some students both from their supervisory interactions and in receiving timely feedback on course assignments. In terms of enrolment, in 2024-25, we heard that 12 MA students will be accepted, but no PhD students will even though there were excellent applicants. It appears that the MA program is competitive as there were 50 applicants.

Recommendation 6.4.1. *Decrease the number of courses that are required for MA students and re-distribute the required 30 credits. For both the capstone and thesis-based students the number of courses that are required is high (7 and 5, respectively). By reducing the number of courses that MA students take, the program may be more attractive to interested students and reduce the pressure*

on taking in large numbers of MA students to ensure that there are enough students in individual classes for them to be offered. It could also help with time to completion for the thesis-based MA students who currently take longer than is recommended to finish their degrees. Finally, a lower number of MA students overall could assist with enabling more individual time between supervisors and students as well as providing feedback on assignments in courses.

In addition to the above issues, the distribution of established and new faculty members mentioned in section 4 also acts as another point of tension in graduate student supervision and a potential impact on the career development for junior faculty.

Recommendation 6.4.2. *When considering the departmental policies regarding faculty members' graduate student supervision limits and distribution, ensure that issues of equity are also addressed, rather than focusing on equal distribution. This is particularly salient when faculty members have research awards that may have accompanying expectations of more PhD trainees involved in those projects.*

6.5 Suggest and prioritize strategies for supporting faculty and graduate students in sustaining and expanding community engaged research?

According to the 2019 SFU Strategic Community Engagement Plan, as a community engaged university the SFU “boldly seeks opportunities to address critical societal issues and complex challenges through principled, accountable and responsive collaboration and partnership” (p. 9). The Department has strong leaders in community engaged research; this type of scholarship should be acknowledged through faculty reward mechanisms and expanded through additional opportunities for linkages, to support further training, and education.

Recommendation 6.5.1. *In line with SFU policy, the Department needs to ensure that community-engaged scholarship is recognized and incentivized through published faculty reward mechanisms, including tenure and promotion policies and practices.*

Recommendation 6.5.2. *The Department could establish greater linkages with SFU's Community-Engaged Research Initiative (CERi), with faculty members offering leadership and in integrating community-engaged scholarship more widely in research and teaching.*

Recommendation 6.5.3. *The Department should consider exploring the role of the alumni in promoting community-engaged research opportunities for students, in particular, as research assistants and/or as practicum students conducting community engaged research in community organizations and agencies. This is in line with Recommendations 4.1 and 4.2.*

Recommendation 6.5.4. *The Department should consider the ways in which community engaged research can be incorporated into the classroom (e.g., inquiry-based, problem-based or experiential models of learning) to conduct community-based research driven by community needs. The SFU's CEE could be used to assist in curriculum design.*

An additional note. The SFU's Equity Compass is a “strategic framework outlines the focus on equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) work over the next five years (2023-2028) to help build an SFU where all can thrive” (2023-2024). Despite this, the Committee noted a concerning absence of any reference to EDI in the materials (e.g., Self-Study) and discussions included in the Review. In

addition, SFU and FASS fundamental values of advancing reconciliation and Indigenous achievement were not acknowledged or discussed.

Recommendation 7. *The Department should develop and implement an EDI strategic framework directing aspects of administration, research, teaching, and service, and plan for how reconciliation can be advanced.*



External Review Action Plan

Section A

To be completed by the Responsible Unit Person, e.g., Chair or Director

Unit Under Review: Department of Gerontology

Date of Review Site Visit: March 25-27, 2024

Responsible Unit Person: Dr. Habib Chaudhury, Chair, Department of Gerontology

Faculty Dean: Dr. Laurel Weldon, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Notes

- 1. *It is not expected that every recommendation made by the External Review Committee be covered by this Action Plan. The major thrusts of the report should be identified—some consolidation of the recommendations may be possible while other recommendations of lesser importance may be excluded.*
- 2. *Attach the required plan to assess the success of the Educational Goals as a separate document (Senate 2013).*
- 3. *Should any additional response be warranted, it should be attached as a separate document.*

1. PROGRAMMING	
1.1	Action(s) (description of what is going to be done)
<p>We express our gratitude to the External Review Committee for the constructive feedback and recommendations in the Report. Based on the recommendations, the Department has identified several action items for improving and enhancing our educational programs and governance aspects. We have also included relevant information to provide context and clarification regarding some of the issues raised in the report. These are linked directly to each recommendation section.</p>	

Undergraduate Programs

Recommendation 1.2 asks for early entry by second-year students into the Gerontology Minor. Currently, second-year students can enter the program, if they meet basic requirements.

Recommendations 1.1, and 1.3 to 1.6 pertaining to the Undergraduate Programs in Gerontology are consistent with the plans articulated in the Gerontology Self-Study Report. The Department plans to foster growth in the Minor program with the following **Action Items**:

- a) Developing two-three 200-level courses to add to GERO 101 and GERO 300 as entry-level courses;**
- b) Improving marketing of the Minor program through increased student advising, social media, and continuing the multipronged approach currently employed;**
- c) Continuing discussions with the Faculty of Health Sciences about introducing targeted Gerontology courses as electives (first meeting was in November 2023);**
- d) Enhancing applied learning opportunities for students (all UG courses have been reviewed in 2023, with directions to improve applied learning opportunities);**
- e) Improving the practicum description to have explicit description on the waiver option and the process of practicum placements;**
- f) Continuing outreach documentation to community and government organizations to support practicum placements and expected remuneration/stipend for the student; and**
- g) Development of a Major in Gerontology will be set aside for future consideration, as recommended by the External Review (Recommendation 6.2) and the department's Self Study Report.**

Expected Completion Date(s): Ongoing/2028

Graduate Programs

Recommendations 1.7 - 1.10 suggest several changes to admissions, course offerings, content and requirements, practicum support, and a greater focus on increasing doctoral student numbers and completion times.

The graduate program numbers have changed since the Self-Study Report (see below). In addition, we would like to share the Department's supervisory policies and SFU's doctoral minimum funding policies (\$112,000 per student over four years) for clarification and context in relation to recommendations 1.7-1.10. Under program data, the external report notes that we have "17 MA students and 11 PhD students," and that "no PhD students [were] granted admission although there were eligible applicants." As of the end of Summer 2024, there will only be 12 MA students due to recently graduated students and one recent drop-out, and most of the remaining students have completed coursework. Another 5 MA students will likely defend their thesis/capstone by the end of 2024. This was the rationale for admitting a large cohort of MA students (10 admitted for September 2024) in the last admission intake. With respect to doctoral student intake, one international doctoral student who was admitted in a previous admission cycle also started in Fall 2024 bringing the current total to 11 PhDs. One doctoral student recently defended in Fall 2024, and 4-5 doctoral students are anticipated to defend by Summer 2025. It should also be noted that we have two admission cycles (Fall and Spring), and we anticipate admitting additional doctoral students for the Fall 2025 intake (see Recommendation 1.9). The decision of PhD student admission in the last admission cycle was informed by our faculty members' current supervisory workload, SFU's new funding policy and available faculty funding research support, and a need to prioritise the intake of MA students to have a sufficient number of graduate students to fill our classes over the next several terms.

It is a priority to have a minimum number of graduate students taking the courses to meet the policy of at least 5 students in graduate courses in FASS. The Department currently offers 11 graduate courses, not including Special Topics or Directed Studies. We offer 6 graduate courses per year on a rotating basis (except required courses) with a wide range of topics. The courses equally cover the two streams in our programs: health and aging & environment and aging, and all courses have significant health and aging content, in response to Recommendation 1.7 (increasing the health and aging courses).

Action Item: The department will continue to engage in curriculum mapping and admissions to balance program needs (e.g., filling courses, efficient completion times, faculty workloads), and student and faculty preferences (course selection, timing, and supervisory loads).

Expected Completion Date(s): Ongoing

Ideally, we would like to have an open policy pertaining to doctoral student admission; however, this is not possible due to the following reasons. 1) The new minimum funding policies for PhD students (\$28,000 per year for four years), and our departmental expectation that faculty must contribute about \$8,000 per year for four years for new students. 2) The need to have a large MA cohort taking courses (most elect the Capstone option with 7 courses), which helps reach minimum number of graduate students needed to offer the courses. 3) The need to maintain a fair distribution of supervisory loads (number and mix of MA/PhD graduate students per faculty) among the faculty. Since the Self-Study Report, the Department has developed a supervisory load policy reflecting the above principles and has received a majority departmental vote in support. Graduate supervision workloads will be periodically assessed by the Graduate Admissions Committee to: a) maintain balance of supervisory load within the department; and b) in recognition of balance according to full or part-time appointment and rank, where senior faculty are expected, or may prefer, larger supervisory workloads. The maximum number of doctoral students per faculty member will *typically* be two, however, this will be considered in conjunction with related factors, such as the particular members' PhD students' stage in the program, administrative or service roles, etc.

Currently, courses are offered in the Fall and Spring terms, with practicums typically undertaken in the summer term. Approved elective courses can also be taken outside of the department in a summer term. In the past, the department has attempted to offer gerontology summer course, however, the courses could not meet the minimum enrolment number.

Action Item: The department will examine the use of the Special Topic and Directed Studies courses to meet student demand in these areas, and will continue to offer all health and aging courses within a two-year window.

Expected Completion Date(s): 2026

Recommendation 1.8 notes that all graduate students (MA Capstone, Thesis and PhD) take courses together, but they may have different pedagogical needs, in particular, applied/community-based training.

Given that we are a small department (6.5 faculty FTEs; 8 faculty total), and we only have about 25-30 graduate students at any given time; it is not feasible to split the MA and PhD students into separate streams of courses. A significant majority of our MA alumni are employed in upper management and leadership positions with non-profit organizations, service providers, health authorities, municipal governments in BC and other provinces, and we have received feedback that the strong research-based training embedded in the MA curriculum is instrumental in obtaining these positions.

Action Items:

- a) The Department will continue to revise course content and expectations retrofitted to student type/programs;**
- b) The Department will continue to incorporate applied and community-based content into all courses (applied problem-based projects, targeted guest lectures from community leaders in the seniors' sector, field trips, etc.);**
- c) The Department will review program descriptions for clarity of course content and learning objectives; and**
- d) The Department will continue to track the employment trajectories of students and adjust course offerings accordingly.**

Expected Completion Date(s): Ongoing/2026

Action Item: The Department will continue to monitor the training needs of students, and provide transparent descriptions of the programs on our website concerning thesis and capstone stream trajectories (Recommendation 1.9).

Expected Completion Date(s): Ongoing

Recommendation 1.10 points to ensuring that a strong focus on the PhD program is maintained, and ensuring efficient completion rates. As noted above, the maturity and growth of the doctoral program required time, given the department size (only 4.5 FTE CFL faculty up until 2019). Additionally, 7 of the 11 current doctoral students will graduate before Fall 2025, with a completion time of approximately 4.5 years. The completion times have been decreasing since the COVID-19 pandemic period.

Action Item: As current doctoral students complete the program in the coming semesters, the Gerontology Admissions Committee will accept a greater number of doctoral students over the next admission cycles, along with the consideration of our need for a larger proportion of MA students, and available funding, given the new SFU doctoral minimum funding policies. As the department's research faculty capacity grows with addition of new CFL faculty members, we will consider the feasibility of offering selected PhD-focussed classes or content, as recommended by the external review.

Expected Completion Date(s): Ongoing/2026

Student Funding

The External Report notes the strong CIHR, SSHRC and MITACS funding, as well as teaching assistantship opportunities. Given the high cost of living in Metro Vancouver, the optimal amount of graduate funding remains an issue.

Recommendation 1.11 suggests that fundraising efforts should be directed toward graduate students instead of post-doctoral fellowships. The External Review Committee was not fully aware of the post-doctoral funding history associated with the Gerontology Research Centre and the Department. The endowments used to support the post-doctoral students were established in the 1980s (Real Estate Foundation of BC & Tong Louie Living Lab support 2.5 post-doctoral fellows). Two other post-doctoral fellows are fully funded with Tri-Council funding. More importantly, 100% of all recent endowments (some of which have been substantial) since the last external review have been directed to graduate student scholarships (Jessie Childe Gerontology Graduate Scholarship; Louise Sampson Gerontology Scholarship, Wister-Mitchell Gerontology Scholarship; Heidi Andrie Scholarship, and Gutman Gerontology Graduate Scholarship).

Action Item: The Department will continue to work with the FASS Advancement office to generate additional graduate student funding.

Expected Completion Date(s): Ongoing

Recommendation 1.12 points to increasing teaching opportunities for ABD doctoral students. Over the last two years (including Fall 2024), there have been 7 graduate student sessional appointments, representing the majority of sessional appointments for the department. Given the impending graduation of a majority of the current doctoral students, there will be a lag before the department can reach the recent number of sessional instructorships, which requires students to be ABD. Also note that the Gerontology Research Centre has used endowments to offer additional courses taught by graduate students, including another sessional position included in the 24/25 budget.

Action Item: The department will continue to maximize the number of graduate student teaching opportunities based on our TI/TA budget.

Expected Completion Date(s): Ongoing

11 1.2	Resource Implications (if any)
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No additional resources are anticipated at this time.

1.3	Expected Completion Date(s):
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All of the above Action Items are either ongoing or will be completed within next 4-5 years.

2. RESEARCH4-

2.1	Action(s) (description of what is going to be done)
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The External Review notes the exceptionally large amount of research activity among the 8 current faculty in areas of publications and grant funding. The funding per faculty member is second to only the Faculty of Health Sciences at SFU. The External Review also underscores “the essential research in gerontology in Canada” undertaken by the Gerontology Research Centre (GRC). Two recommendations address the Gerontology Research Centre (GRC), and one is directed to the Science and Technology for Aging Research Institute (STAR).

- 1) GRC Director-based Research and Governance

The External Review notes that “the GRC houses two Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA) labs that support significant research opportunities” and that the previous review conducted in 2015 under the prior GRC Director pointed out that “the GRC mainly reflects the research of the Director.” This forms the rationale for suggesting “a dual-director model” (Recommendation 2.1).

2) Maintain and Increase the Research Productivity of the GRC

The second recommendation (2.1) directed at the GRC requests that research productivity be maintained and expanded within the department, SFU, nationally, and internationally.

The Self Study Report contains extensive details about numerous research activities, community outreach, conferences, training and mentoring activities, and media releases of the GRC (Pages 24 -29; and detailed Annual Reports for 7 years in Appendix 10 & 11). The GRC descriptions of research documented in the Gerontology Self-Study Report do not coincide with the conclusion that research “mainly reflects the research of the Director.”

All faculty members of the Department of Gerontology are Affiliated Members of the GRC. However, it is important to point out that the GRC Annual Reports do not include publications and grants of all Department faculty members since the VPR/Dean reports are intended to show the “value-added” nature of the centre. It should be noted that all Gerontology faculty are invited (and most participate) in the annual Friesen conferences, the Ellen Gee Memorial Lecture, and other lectures sponsored by the GRC. The GRC Communications Officer also highlights research projects of all Gerontology faculty in the GRC Newsletters, social media outlets, and website. Additionally, new faculty are spotlighted in the GRC News, and a section is reserved to highlight gerontology graduate student research.

The collaborative activities of the GRC shown under publications and grants include all Gerontology faculty (including all junior faculty members present during the period of review); numerous post-doctoral fellows and graduate students; over 150 different SFU, national and international researchers associated with 50 different academic institutions and community partners organizations, situated in many different countries globally. Below are a few noteworthy examples of recent collaborative activities of the GRC. First, the CLSA research clusters at SFU that the GRC formed and supported comprised of numerous Gerontology faculty, post-doctoral fellows, and national/international collaborators, who have generated extensive publications. This includes a series of grants and over 25 publications that were generated from the CLSA COVID-19 studies that required pivoting all 15 CLSA staff members at the two SFU labs (see Appendix 10 & 11). Second, the Tong Louie Living Lab, a collaboration between SFU Gerontology and BCIT Make + Program addressing disability and assistive technology challenges for older adults supports a dozen core researchers across the two institutions, and numerous external collaborations. Third, the DemSCAPE project led by the Associate Director-- a large multi-year collaborative project contracted to study dementia-friendly communities, funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada.

External Review Report Note on GRC Governance: New strategic initiatives and comprehensive governance changes to the GRC have occurred over the last several years. The last review (2015) was conducted during the appointment of the previous Director and resulted in several discussions of governance by the GRC Steering Committee (SC) and the current Director, who was appointed in 2016. This resulted in two significant sets of revisions to the GRC Constitution (2018 &

2020) under the advice of the GRC Steering Committee, and supported by the Director and the FASS Dean. These reforms included: adding the Department Chair as a SC member to better align the GRC with department strategic initiatives and foster greater synergies and collaborations; formalizing the Associate Director position; formalizing the terms of office and selection process of the Director; the research stipend, and negotiating an MOU with the Dean's office that details the Director's course releases and the funding of these through GRC endowments. The following points reflect important governance developments.

One important constitutional reform was to formalize an Associate Director position, including roles and responsibilities. The purpose of this change was to foster mentorship opportunities in the GRC. Since 2018, two different Associate Directors have been appointed by the Director for three-year terms - one junior faculty member and one senior faculty member. The current Director sits on the CIHR Directors of Research Centres of Aging as one of three Director Co-leads (SFU, UBC & U of Toronto directors). Of the 40 centres and institutes across Canada participating in the CIHR biannual Director meetings, there are no dual or shared leadership models; however, a few larger centres have an Associate Director similar to the GRC. Additionally, the Associate Director model is used at SFU for larger centres, whereas we could only identify one dual director model for a fledgling under-resourced centre, and this model is non-existent among larger centres such as the GRC. A dual director model is uncommon for many reasons, including administrative barriers and unintended challenges pertaining to finding consensus on important issues such as budget allocation, pitfalls that are particularly relevant for larger centres such as the GRC.

In July 2024, the GRC Steering Committee (SC) reviewed the GRC Constitution concerning governance. The GRC SC discussed the issue, and after deliberation, decided to make one change to clarify the faculty status of the Director. The change entails a requirement that the GRC Director hold a full-time appointment in the Department of Gerontology, or if jointly appointed, has Gerontology designated as their home department. The previous wording was simply "a member of the Gerontology faculty," which is very broad. This change has been approved by the Dean's office. The rationale for this amendment is to ensure that the GRC and related endowments continue to be connected to the Department and that the two units remain synergetic. The GRC supports the department financially and academically (e.g., annual Friesen conference, endowment-supported lectures and periodic sessional instructorships, post-doctoral fellowships, GRC News, and graduate student financial support).

Action Item: The GRC Director will discuss with the GRC Steering Committee a plan to formalize a rotating 2- or 3-year term Associate Directors policy to enhance the mentorship of Gerontology faculty.

Expected Completion Date(s): 2025

Action Item: As per the GRC Constitution, the succession to a new GRC Director will begin prior to the current Director's appointment end date (Aug. 31, 2026), and will be approved by the Steering Committee (SC).

Approximately 6 months prior to the end date, the Director will request nominations from the Department and GRC (ST). The SFU Equity, Diversity & Inclusion office will meet with the GRC SC and make a presentation. The GRC SC, under the SC Chair (Dr. Scott Lear), will review nominations and select a candidate(s), who will be asked to make a short presentation to the SC followed by a standard question period developed by the SC. A secret ballot will be

conducted with only GRC SC voting members. The current Director and Associate Director do not vote. A recommendation for the new Director will be forwarded to the FASS Dean by the Chair of the ST for approval.

Expected Completion Date(s): 2026

Action Item: The Canadian Longitudinal Study of Aging, a major research project of the GRC that is currently under the direction of the GRC Director as SFU PI will continue to be the responsibility of this faculty member once a new Director is appointed. This will alleviate some of the intensive CLSA research demands on the new Director.

Expected Completion Date(s): 2026

Action Item: Since the External Review, the CLSA SFU PI has named a new SFU CLSA co-lead from the department, who is a junior faculty member to facilitate research mentorship.

Completion Date: Fall 2024

Action Item: The GRC will continue to maintain and further enhance the extensive university, national, and international collaborations linked to the GRC.

Expected Completion Date(s): Ongoing

Action Item: The GRC has included in the 2024-25 budget a line item to support a university-wide Gerontology Research Day that will bring together a wide range of faculty and graduate students working in the areas of aging and gerontology. Rapid presentations and networking opportunities will comprise the core elements.

Expected Completion Date(s): 2026

Action Item: The GRC will continue to hire student RAs in support of the CLSA labs and several other major externally-funded and GRC-funded projects. Over the last two years, the GRC has appointed 15 student RAs. In addition, the GRC has budgeted \$25,000 for new graduate student RAships in its 24/25 fiscal year, and will extend this support

Expected Completion Date(s): Ongoing

Science and Technology for Aging Research Institute (STAR)

The External Review Report suggests additional funding for the STAR Institute or amalgamation with the GRC. However, SFU does not fund institutes except under new strategic initiatives. The GRC has Technology and Aging as one of its six thematic research areas.

None	
2.3	Expected Completion Date(s)
Noted above.	
3. ADMINISTRATION	
3.1	Action(s) (description of what is going to be done)
<p>Action Item: The process of appointing a new Department Chair was initiated and completed by the FASS Dean's office. The new Chair will assume this role from Jan. 1, 2025.</p> <p>Action Item: A new GRC Director will be appointed with a Sept. 1, 2026 start date (see GRC Succession above).</p> <p>Action Item: As noted under #3 in the External Review Report, the two faculty members with more than one administrative post will only maintain one administrative position in the future. The current Chair ends their term Dec. 31, 2024. The Undergraduate Chair position has been shifted from the GRC Director to a junior faculty member from September 1, 2024, with mentorship support provided by the past Chair who has extensive administrative experience.</p> <p>Action Item: More regular meetings that combine department and GRC members will be structured.</p>	
3.2	Resource Implications (if any)
None	
3.3	Expected Completion Date(s)
4. WORKING ENVIRONMENT	
4.1	Action(s) (description of what is going to be done)
<p>The External Review Report acknowledges the strong and productive community, university, and government collaborations that the Department and GRC have fostered historically.</p> <p>Recommendation 4.1 suggests a networking system to coordinate alumni, the department, and community partners.</p> <p>Action Item: The department and GRC will continue to support university-community partnerships in research projects, including Mitacs projects that support strong community-engaged research activities. We will engage with our graduate alumni networks to foster partnerships with their respective institutions and we will also seek their input in formalizing existing, and establishing new partnerships with community organizations.</p> <p>Expected Completion Date(s): Ongoing</p> <p>Action Item: In line with Recommendation 4.2, the department will proactively strengthen the coordination of student practicum in the community via expanding the organization list, and contacting appropriate organizations.</p>	

Several current research projects have conducted full environmental scans of all BC organizations serving older adults, and have developed working relationships with a significant number of these groups to launch this action item. We also plan to explore the establishment of MOUs with targeted community organizations for practicum placement of our students on a regular basis.

Expected Completion Date(s): Ongoing

Action Item: In response to Recommendation 4.3, the department has arranged for a mediator to address faculty conflicts. SFU Labour Relations is now engaged in this process and is working with the Dean's office to initiate the mediation process. Also, we will engage with the SFU Equity office to provide a workshop for our faculty and staff for more equitable and inclusive decision-making processes.

Expected Completion Date(s): Ongoing

4.2	Resource Implications (if any)
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None

4.3	Expected Completion Date(s)
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See above.

5. OTHER: New Faculty Position Linked to Medical School

5.1	Action(s) (description of what is going to be done)
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We are pleased to have received support and approval from the Dean's and Provost's offices for a new CFL in the area of "Healthy Aging in the Community." A job advertisement has been developed (<https://www.sfu.ca/vpacademic/academic-careers/faculty-positions/arts-social-sciences.html>) and search committee has been formed. We are advertising the new position in Fall 2024 with the aim of hiring a new full-time faculty joining the department from September, 2025.

Recommendation 6.1 points out identifying opportunities for growth and collaboration with the SFU Medical School. The approved new faculty position, with a focus on community-based health research will be an important addition to our research and education capacity to engage with the new Medical School. Dean Weldon is fully supportive of this recommendation and plans to initiate a conversation with Medical School leadership.

Action item: We will follow up with the Dean on this matter and explore possible collaboration in curriculum and research with the new Medical School.

Expected Completion Date(s): 2025-26

Recommendation 6.2 suggests increasing enrolment caps, adding online and blended sections and shifting two-three 300 level courses to the 200 level to bridge Gero 100 and our 300 & 400 course levels.

Action item: We have now increased the enrolment cap of our most popular course GERO 300 Introduction to Gerontology from 60-90, offered three times a year. Also, GERO 420-4 has recently been developed into an OL course and has been offered for the first time Fall 2024 with a full course of 50 students, and will be offered at least twice a year given its popularity as an upper-division course. Several courses have been developed or in the process of development for online offerings, including GERO 300, GERO 301, GERO 408, GERO 420. We plan to develop two-three 200-level courses to add to GERO 101 and GERO 300 as entry-level courses.

Expected Completion Date(s): 2028

Recommendation 6.4.1 suggests decreasing the number of courses that are required for MA students (7 for Capstone, 5 for Thesis and Doctoral students). This issue has been monitored and evaluated carefully by the department. Our requirements for admission to programs have been relaxed in recent years, including giving credit for strong gerontology content courses, to bolster enrolments. The rationale for the current number of required courses is to provide the foundational gerontology training that is often lacking among some of the incoming students, especially given our interdisciplinary pedagogy. Graduate students are provided course waivers if they have prior foundational gerontology training entering the program. This issue needs careful consideration before any changes are made.

Action item: The Department will review comparable MA programs in gerontology, consider the strengths and limitations of reducing the number of courses in the MA Program, and make an informed decision that takes into consideration comparable program norms, the strong aging focus of our program, enrolment numbers and graduation timeframes.

Expected Completion Date(s): 2027

Recommendation 6.3 requests a market analysis of a professional graduate program.

Action Item: the department will examine the feasibility of a professional program in health and aging in tandem with the medical school initiatives, including a market analysis. The School of Public Policy (SPP), with the support of the Dean, is working on developing a potential Graduate Professional Program in the area of public policy. The department will explore with SPP and the Dean about the possibility of a module on national and provincial policies addressing the health, housing, care, and well-being of older adults and their caregivers.

Expected Completion Date(s): 2027

Recommendation 6.5 has several parts to enhance and recognize community-based research. The department and GRC have detailed extensive community-based projects spearheaded by each faculty member, as well as pedagogical development initiatives in our Self Study Report. The Department recently amended its Tenure and Promotion policies to recognize community-based research by faculty and will maintain and further enhance community-based research and teaching in the following ways:

Action Item: a) The Department will examine ways to strengthen collaborations with SFU's Community Engaged Research Initiative (CERi); b) We also have been active in working with our alumni, which was at its height last year during our extensive 40th Anniversary Celebrations; c) The Department will strengthen integration of community engagement into our courses through community-based projects, targeted guest presentations, field work, and Mitacs projects.

Expected Completion Date(s): 2027

In response to Recommendation 7, the Department will take steps within SFU's "Equity Compass" strategic framework outlining the focus for SFU's institutional equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) work to create an environment where the units' faculty, staff and students can thrive.

Action Item: The Department will contact the SFU's Equity office requesting for an EDI workshop addressing EDI assessment and setting EDI objectives for the unit. In 2024-25, the search committee for hiring the new faculty will consult the EDI considerations put forward by the Equity Office in July 2024. In the area of reconciliation, our faculty will actively consider community engaged research or educational activities with Indigenous communities in BC.

Expected Completion Date(s): 2025


5.2	Resource Implications (if any)
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None

5.3	Expected Completion Date(s)
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Noted above

The above action plan has been considered by the unit under review and has been discussed and agreed to by the Faculty Dean.

Unit Leader (signed)	Date
Name 	October 23, 2024
Title Chair and Professor	

Section B

DEAN'S COMMENTS AND ENDORSEMENT OF THE ACTION PLAN

Thanks to all involved with producing the external review and Departmental response. I support growth of the minor and efforts to coordinate with FHS, the new SFU Medical School, and other units across our three campuses and in our communities. I urge the Department to try to serve the largest number of graduate students that is feasible and compatible with funding considerations and high quality advising. I note that the Department has no undergraduate major, and primarily serves graduate students, even with the expansion of the minor and undergraduate teaching capacity. As such, the commitment to serving and advising as many graduate students as possible should be a priority. I support the development of a professional MA option or module as part of these efforts, and advise caution about setting firm ceilings on the numbers of doctoral or master's students in the research stream. Equity across faculty members should not come at the expense of serving fewer students or failing to meet demand if that is not evenly distributed. I also urge the Department to recruit and retain PHD students who can teach in the undergraduate minor, as suggested by the external review committee. If this means adjusting the cap on the number of graduate students per faculty member in the short term, this might be advisable. I urge the department to consider steps that would enable it to offer PHD-specific classes or modules as recommended by the ER committee.


Faculty Dean (signature)



Date

Nov 17 2024

MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION: Department of Gerontology; SCUP; Senate	
FROM: Paul Kingsbury, Associate Vice-President Learning & Teaching <i>pro tem</i> and Alice Campbell, Senior Consultant, Program Assessment, Learning Experiences Assessment and Planning	
RE: Department of Gerontology Assessment Plan for Educational Goals associated with 2023/24 External Review	
DATE: November 18, 2024	

The Department of Gerontology has recently submitted its Educational Goals (EG) assessment report and plan to SCUTL following its recent External Review. We have reviewed your initial draft assessment plan in conjunction with the external review report and draft action plan.

We commend the department for its thoughtful and rigorous approach to assessing its Educational Goals, particularly through direct assessment of student learning at multiple levels. The wide-ranging scope of the work proposed, and the significant faculty involvement indicates that the department has a high level of readiness to engage in this work.

There are many excellent components to this plan:

- You are developing a new 2nd year course. We appreciate your work to leverage the Educational Goals assessment process to assess how well this new course helps students to meet the program's Educational Goals.
- Rigorous collection of different evidence of student learning at different time periods. You have already identified relevant classroom assessments to review.
- Continuous assessment across several academic years, which will provide an opportunity to reflect on and iterate the assessment process.
- Use of customized rubrics and independent assessment to assess an appropriate sample of student work.
- Developed assessment scheme for the graduate program that encompasses presentations/publications, internships and project/thesis/dissertation. This scheme may be valuable to other academic units seeking to assess their graduate programs.

We offer some suggestions for refinements to your overall plan to help ensure the data you collect and analyze will provide a helpful measure of student achievement.

Developing customized rubrics for analysis of student work can be challenging. It may be helpful to draw on the existing AAC&U Value rubrics, if any are aligned with your Educational Goals. These rubrics are open educational resources that address a wide range of broad learning outcomes, such as critical thinking, writing communication, and integrative learning. While broad they could be modified for your specific context if applicable.

We strongly appreciate your plan to use classroom assessment measures but offer a caution about using exam grades. Depending on the questions posed, exams may measure multiple Educational Goals. It is also often the case that students, in aggregate, perform better on some questions than others. As such, an exam grade is likely too coarse to provide a strong and valid measure of student attainment of a given Educational Goal. A finer-grained analysis of questions on exams that align with an Educational Goal will provide stronger evidence for what students are learning well, and where they may need additional supports.

We appreciate that there is a departmental committee formed to support this work. It would be worthwhile to further consider how the analysis of the student data will be shared and discussed within the department. The overarching aim of Educational Goals assessment is to generate evidence to support program improvements and, by extension, student learning. Including a plan to 'close the loop' by discussing and addressing Educational Goals will help to ensure the usefulness of this process for the department.

Educational Goals Assessment Timeline and Tasks: 2025-28

1. Committee & Data Collection Timeline

Educational Goals: See Appendix 1

Educational Goals Assessment Committee: Department Chair (B. Mitchell), Graduate Chair (A. Mahmood), Undergraduate Chair (T. Pauly), Department Manager (D. Lau) and Graduate Research Assistant (TBD)

List of courses selected for assessment and rationale:

Gero 101 Aging and Society (foundational course)
Gero 413 Sexuality and Aging (high demand course)
Gero 408 Families and Aging (high demand course)
Gero 302 Health Promotion and Aging (applied curriculum)
Gero 201 TBD
Gero 802 Development and Evaluation of Health Promotion Programs for the Elderly
(applied content experiential learning)
Gero 803 Analytical Techniques for Gerontological Research
(required in the graduate programs)
Gero 804 Qualitative

Assessment Timeline:

Semester	Courses to be assessed
Fall 2025	Gero 101, 803
Spring 2026	Gero 804, 413
Fall 2026	Gero 408/302
Spring 2027	Gero 802
Fall 2028	Gero 201

Assessment Scoring: Performance on each educational goal will be classified based on a four-point scale (exceeds expectations, fully meets expectations, somewhat meets expectations, does not meet expectations). The desired benchmark for educational goals is to have 75% of students fully meet or exceed expectations on each goal.

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2. Collection and Analysis of Course Data

Data to be Collected: Gero 101, 803, 804, 413, 408/302, 802, 201

Data Collection Period: Fall 2025 – Fall 2028

Assessment Strategy:

The assessment strategy will include both independent assessment of assignments by the Committee, and also collection of course marks when independent assessment is not practical.

- Major Papers/Assignments/Projects: Based on grading rubrics and educational goals used by the respective instructor, the committee will conduct independent assessment of a sample of papers from the course. For graduate level assignments involving specific technical skills or specialized knowledge, input will be sought from the course instructor on how to assess the assignments/projects in a meaningful way.
- Exams: For exams the letter grades from the marked exams will be collected and used for the assessment.
- Presentations/seminars: For presentations/seminars the letter grades assigned in class will be collected and used for the assessment.

Sampling Strategy:

- Undergraduate Courses: For major papers and assignments/projects a sample of 20-30% of the class will be used for independent assessments, with a minimum of 6 students for each course. The sample will generally consist of 1/3 A+ to B+ assignments, 1/3 B to C+, and 1/3 C or less. For exams and presentations, the grades from the whole class will be taken as the sample as no independent assessment will be required.
- Graduate Courses: In the case of graduate courses all students will be sampled (estimated sample sizes of ~6-8 students for each course).

Tasks:

- Connect with course instructors prior to/at the beginning of each semester to inform them of the assessment process and confirm which course activities are the most appropriate to assess (Educational Goals Committee + RA)
- Seek input from course instructors on how to appropriately assess graduate level assignments/projects involving specific technical skill or specialized knowledge (Educational Goals Committee + RA)
- Develop rubrics needed for independent assessments of papers/assignments (Educational Goals Committee + RA)
- Conduct independent assessment of papers/assignments (Educational Goals Committee + RA)
- Collect course marks for exams and presentations/seminars (RA)

Assessment Scheme:

	Does not meet expectations	Somewhat meets expectations	Fully meets expectations	Exceeds expectations
Assignment Grade	D or below	C range	B range	A range

Course Assessment Schedule:

	Course	Instructor	Class Size	Sample Size	Assignments
Fall 2025	Gero 101: Aging and Society	Dr. Sixsmith	20	12 = 4 A+ to B+ 4 B to C+ 4 C or less	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final Paper Final Exam Assignment
	Gero 803: Analytical Techniques for Gero Research	Dr. Pauly	10	Full class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final assignment SPSS Computer Assignments Seminar presentation
Spring 2026	Gero 302: Health Promotion & Aging	TBD	20	9 = 3 A+ to B+ 3 B to C+ 3 C or less	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final Paper Final Exam
	Gero 413: Sexuality and Aging	Dr. Pauly	15	9 = 3 A+ to B+ 3 B to C+ 3 C or less	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Term Paper Final Exam
Fall 2026	Gero 301: Research Methods in Gerontology	Dr. Cosco	25	12 = 4 A+ to B+ 4 B to C+ 4 C or less	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
Spring 2027	Gero 302: Research Methods in Gerontology	Dr. Cosco	25	12 = 4 A+ to B+ 4 B to C+ 4 C or less	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
Fall 2028	Gero 201: To be determined	TBD	25	12 = 4 A+ to B+ 4 B to C+ 4 C or less	<ul style="list-style-type: none">

3. Collection and Analysis of Student Data

Data to be Collected: # of student presentations/publications; completed capstone projects/thesis and dissertations, internship assessments

Data Collection Period: End of the identified terms

Tasks:

- Annual collection of relevant student data at the end of the year (Dora Lau)

Assessment Scheme:

	Does not meet expectations	Somewhat meets expectations	Fully meets expectations	Exceeds expectations
Presentations and publications	Less than 20% of graduate students have presented or published during their degree program	20%-39% of graduate students have presented or published during their degree program	40%-59% of graduate students have presented or published during their degree program	60% or more of graduate students have presented or published during their degree program
Internship Assessments	Students receive an average rating below 3 on the internship evaluation	Students receive an average rating of 3.0-3.9 on the internship evaluation	Students receive an average rating of 4.0-4.4 on the internship evaluation	Students receive an average rating of 4.5 or higher on the internship evaluation
Project/thesis or Dissertation	Project/thesis or dissertation fails	Project/thesis or dissertation requires major revisions and judgement is deferred	Project/thesis or dissertation passes with minor revisions	Project/thesis or dissertation passes with no revisions

Appendix 1. Educational Goals, Components, Assessment and Relevant Courses

Gerontology Program Overarching Educational Goals

GERO EGs: At the end of these programs students will...	Components: Students will be able to...	Potential Assessment Sources
GERO EG 1. ... be able to critically analyze research, concepts, and theories in the field of gerontology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Critically evaluate assumptions, claims, evidence, arguments and theories -Critically appraise and integrate information which supports or does not support a position -Examine scientific research to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Essays and other written assignments -Online/in-class discussions -Presentations -Exams
GERO EG 2. ... be able to synthesize and integrate interdisciplinary knowledge in order to understand and address contemporary issues in gerontology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reflect on and challenge their own assumptions, beliefs and values about aging and older adults -Discuss contemporary issues within the field of gerontology -Synthesize and integrate evidence from multiple sources -Recognize the complex and interdisciplinary nature of issues within the field of gerontology -Critically analyze problems and identify potential solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Essays -Online/in-class discussions -Presentations -Exams -Capstone project/thesis or dissertation

Undergraduate Program Educational Goals

UGRAD EGs: At the end of this program students will...	Components: Students will be able to...	Assessment	Courses
UGRAD EG 1. ...demonstrate a basic mastery of academic writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Properly format and organize an academic paper -Synthesize information from multiple sources -Formulate an argument and critically appraise evidence which supports or does not support their argument -Properly cite and reference information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Essays and other writing assignments 	Gero 101, 413, 408/302, 201
UGRAD EG 2. ...demonstrate an understanding of key theories, concepts, and topics in the field of gerontology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Describe major gerontological theories and discuss their critiques -Describe the biological, psychological and social impacts of aging -Define key concepts and terms relevant to the field of gerontology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Exams -Online/in-class discussions -Essays -Assignments 	Gero 413, 408/302

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Demonstrate a basic understanding of research methods and the research process -Demonstrate a basic understanding of topics relevant to the field of gerontology (e.g., health, built environment, demographic trends, social policy, etc.) 		
UGRAD EG 3. ...be able to discuss the implications and challenges of population aging in Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Describe current demographic trends in Canada -Explain the social policy implications of population aging in Canada -Critique assumptions and myths about population aging -Discuss current issues and debates within the field of gerontology -Describe potential policy solutions for the challenges presented by population aging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Exams -Online/in-class discussions -Essays -Assignments 	Gero 101, 413, 408/302, 201
UGRAD EG 4. ...be prepared to apply their knowledge of gerontology in their chosen career.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Recognize the interdisciplinary nature of gerontology and its relevance for a wide variety of disciplines -Apply their knowledge of gerontological concepts, trends and theories to address the challenges and opportunities presented by an aging population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Applied learning assignments 	Gero 302, 201

Graduate Program Educational Goals

GRAD EGs: At the end of this program students will...	Components: Students will be able to...	Assessment	
GRAD EG 1be able to design, conduct and critically evaluate research in accordance with the principles and practices of sound scientific inquiry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Critically evaluate and apply theory in gerontology -Critically evaluate gerontological research -Utilize basic quantitative and qualitative research methods -Apply the principles and practices of sound scientific inquiry in their research -Design and conduct a major research project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Capstone project/thesis or dissertation -Comprehensive exams -Exams and assignments in relevant methods and theory courses -Publications and knowledge translation activities 	Gero 802, 803, 804
GRAD EG 2have developed an area of specialization within gerontology related to either the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Develop advanced knowledge in the environment and aging or health and aging concentration -Become an expert in a specialized area in gerontology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Coursework in required courses within the health or environment concentration -Capstone project/thesis or dissertation -Comprehensive exams 	Gero 802

and aging or health and aging.			
GRAD EG 3have acquired the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to prepare them to be leaders in the field of gerontology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Apply their knowledge of gerontological concepts, trends and theories to address the challenges and opportunities presented by an aging population -Effectively communicate and disseminate their knowledge of the discipline -Act as leaders in the field of gerontology and work to advance the quality of life and wellbeing of older adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Student internship assessments -Surveys of students and alumni -Capstone project/thesis or dissertation -Publications and knowledge translation activities -Student-led seminars -Applied learning assignments 	Gero 802, 804