

Psychology

B.Sc., M.Sc., and Ph.D. in Psychology, and M.Ed. in Counselling

Faculty of Human and Health Sciences

Reviewers are asked to provide a report that:

- Identifies and commends the degree program's notably strong and creative attributes
- Describes the degree program's respective strengths, areas for improvement, and opportunities for enhancement
- Recommends specific steps to be taken to improve the degree program, distinguishing between those the program can itself take and those that require external action
- Recognizes the institution's autonomy to determine priorities for funding, space, and faculty allocation; and
- Respects the confidentiality required for all aspects of the review process

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PART 1 - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Executive Summary will be made publicly available on the Provost's website.

ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT

Department of Psychology

DEGREE PROGRAM(S) UNDER REVIEW

B.Sc. in Psychology, M.Sc. in Psychology, M.Ed. in Counselling, Ph.D. in Psychology

CHAIR/DIRECTOR

Professor John Sherry

DATE OF DEGREE PROGRAM(S) REVIEW

September 16-17, 2024

DATE OF THE PREVIOUS DEGREE PROGRAM(S) REVIEW

April 12-13, 2011

INTERNAL RESOURCE PERSON

Caitlin Berg, Administrative Assistant, Faculty of Human and Health Sciences

REVIEWERS

Christina Thorpe	Dan Bailis	Catherine Nolin
Professor	Professor	Professor
Memorial University	University of Manitoba	UNBC (Internal)
Department of Psychology	Department of Psychology	GEES

I. SUMMARY OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW OF DEGREE PROGRAM(S) PROCESS

After accepting invitations by the Office of the Vice-President Academic and Provost in March 2024 to serve as external reviewers, Dr. Christina Thorpe (Memorial University) and Dr. Dan Bailis (University of Manitoba) reviewed a self-study document prepared by the Department of Psychology in August 2024. The reviewers, with the addition of Dr. Catherine Nolin, Department of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, as the internal resource person, then participated in a site visit over September 16-17, 2024.

The site visit consisted of a series of individual meetings with senior administrators, the Department Chair, faculty, students, and staff of the Department of Psychology, during which the review team asked questions pertinent to the template of this report, took written notes, and

prepared and exchanged daily summaries. Our visit also included tours of the campus, Library, and teaching and research spaces used by Psychology.

At our request during the site visit, additional information to that of the self-study was generously provided by Caitlin Berg (Administrative Assistant) regarding course offerings, and by Dean Margot Parkes (Faculty of Health and Human Sciences) regarding faculty and student headcounts. We also requested and received from the Office of the Vice-President Academic and Provost a time period after the site visit until November 18, 2024, to provide our written report. During this time, the external reviewers contributed equally to the preparation of this report via online meetings and email exchange of successive drafts.

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Major Strengths of the Degree Program

The department has a very strong complement of faculty with a diverse range of expertise and experience. The department has seen a recent renewal in faculty with four new tenure-track professors hired in the past two years. This has further strengthened the department by increasing the ability to offer a broader range of courses and research opportunities. There are also opportunities for collaborations which will be an asset to future graduate students.

The undergraduate program is a key strength of the department, offering a broad range of courses taught by highly qualified instructors. The curriculum emphasizes a strong foundation in research, with multiple courses in research methodology and statistics, as well as opportunities for independent research projects and honours theses. This focus prepares students with the knowledge and practical skills that are highly valued in the workforce. Student surveys indicate strong post-graduation employment outcomes, with graduates reporting high levels of satisfaction with the program and their preparedness for careers in the field.

The transition of the MEd in Counselling Psychology to the department has been a significant asset. This program is in high demand, meeting or exceeding the expectations of current students while addressing critical community needs especially among disadvantaged groups. It plays a vital role in enhancing mental health not only in Prince George, but also extending to northern regions of BC. The impacts that this program has on the region and on the university's mission of community engagement cannot be understated.

Significant Areas of Weakness or In Need of Further Development

One of the biggest concerns identified by the faculty and the external review committee is the sustainability of the graduate programs. For the MSc and PhD programs, low enrolment has been a significant issue, reflecting a lack of demand that needs to be addressed through targeted recruitment efforts and improved strategies to support timely graduation. Conversely, the MEd in Counselling Psychology has seen demand exceed available resources. And there are concerns about

the program's long-term viability without a clear succession plan in place. Balancing the demand for the MEd program while enhancing recruitment and retention for the MSc and PhD programs will be crucial for maintaining the overall sustainability of the department's graduate offerings.

A further challenge for the MEd program is its reliance on the Community Counselling Centre for practicum training, a clinic that UNBC does not directly own, lease, operate, or oversee, and its operations are primarily supported by the UNBC faculty volunteers who provide practicum supervision. If even one MEd faculty member chose not to participate or if the cohort in a particular year was small, it could jeopardize the clinic's operations and the viability of the MEd program. Given the importance of the clinic to the program's success, it is essential that the university explore sustainable solutions to secure the clinic's long-term operations.

An additional challenge for the undergraduate program is the over-reliance on online courses, particularly for senior-level (4th-year) courses. This limits in-person engagement and may have a negative impact on the mentorship available to students at a critical stage of their education. To address this, greater emphasis should be placed on having junior faculty teach high-demand senior courses in-person, ensuring that students benefit from more direct interaction with faculty. Additionally, while the co-op degree option offers significant value by providing students with hands-on experience and opportunities to connect with potential employers, it is underutilized. Many students are unaware of this option, highlighting the need for better communication and promotion of co-op opportunities to ensure students can take full advantage of this valuable asset.

A key challenge facing the psychology department is its relationship with senior administration, particularly in terms of aligning priorities and fostering mutual understanding. This issue may be partly attributed to the fact that several key leadership roles, including the VP Academic & Provost and the Dean of the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, are currently held by interim leaders, while both the Chair of the Psychology Department and the VP Research & Innovation are relatively new in their positions. As a result, there has been limited opportunity for these parties to build stronger working relationships. Additionally, the department could do more to effectively communicate its strengths, including its award-winning researchers, tri-council funding, and its capacity to contribute to university-wide strategic goals. Greater recognition of the department's research achievements and its alignment with broader university goals could help strengthen the relationship with senior administration and enhance support for the department's priorities moving forward.

Comments of the Future Direction of the Degree Program(s)

Undergraduate Program: The undergraduate program is thriving and continues to attract high-quality students, benefiting from a strong reputation and excellent training. Moving forward, we recommend expanding in-person senior-level courses in high-demand areas to enhance student engagement and strengthen the program further. This will also help with recruitment into the MSc program, providing a clear pipeline for future graduate students.

MSc Program: The MSc program faces significant challenges and risks becoming unviable unless a clear, strategic plan is developed. The low enrollment and lack of "critical mass" have persisted since the last APR, with only two students currently in the program. A comprehensive approach to recruitment, retention, and support will be essential to its future success. With the addition of four new faculty members, there is renewed potential for growth in the MSc program, and their energy and expertise will be instrumental in the program's revitalization. To assist with this, the university should provide funding for early career researchers to support new MSc students.

MEd Program: The MEd in Counselling Psychology is at risk of becoming unsustainable unless the department can address staffing and resource needs. With increasing demand, additional faculty are needed, as well as support for practicum supervision to ease the burden on the current faculty. Furthermore, a work-life balance plan for clinical hires and a robust succession plan for the program's leadership will be crucial for its long-term viability.

PhD Program: Given the current enrollment of just three PhD students—one of whom has been in the program for over a decade—it would be prudent to pause admissions until the MSc program reaches a critical mass. Pausing the PhD program will allow resources to be redirected to strengthening the MSc program, which will ultimately improve the graduate experience and ensure a more sustainable path forward for doctoral students in the future.

III. SUMMARY OF THE REVIEWERS' RECOMMENDATIONS

Courses

- 1) Priority should be placed on increasing the number of in-person 4th year classes, taught by junior faculty, especially as it may assist with recruitment of MSc students.
- 2) Increased offering of 4th year counselling-related courses would improve undergraduate students' opportunities to decide if the MEd program is something that they would like to pursue.
- 3) Moving toward open-access software (e.g., R, Jamovi) in undergraduate statistics and methodology courses will improve students' ability to apply this knowledge in future work and study contexts after they graduate.
- 4) The department should work closely with the Co-Operative Education (co-op) Department to ensure that all students and faculty are aware of the program.
- 5) New courses on topics such as environmental psychology, indigenous psychology, health psychology, gerontology, and rural issues, may be of particular interest to students from Prince George and would also help to distinguish UNBC from other Canadian Psychology departments and attract new students.

- 6) The department should reduce the number of required MSc courses by one to two. Having six required graduate courses is costly for teaching resources and limits the time that students can spend on their research. Thus, a reduction in course load may help with recruitment, retention, and time to graduate.
- 7) The department should consider ways to reduce duplication of MEd/MSc courses. The MEd program offers distinct Counselling courses in research design, quantitative and qualitative analysis, and human development, all of which have MSc Psychology courses as counterparts that are currently undersubscribed.

Agenda Items for Departmental Retreat

- 8) MSc recruitment should be included in strategic planning at the department level, where relevant supports perhaps can be offered to students and faculty members by holding informational events, advertising opportunities in research labs, and revising the MSc curriculum to provide training opportunities that are more differentiated from the undergraduate experience (i.e., learning opportunities that are more specialized, exclusive, and experiential).
- 9) Strategic planning should also take stock of how the department's various activities (e.g., research grants and undergraduate credit hours) contribute to university revenues, which may be redirected to supporting the graduate program, as well as to determine if it is indeed the department's own strategic priority that the MSc program should be maintained.
- 10) The department currently lacks a succession plan, which should be addressed in overall strategic planning by the department as well (see specific recommendations below).

Program Resources

- 11) In our view, the MEd program specifically needs additional faculty members. The counselling program also needs to develop a succession plan so that no loss in training opportunity or quality occurs when a current faculty member leaves or retires (see specific recommendations below).
- 12) We recommend for the department chair and Dean of FHHS to investigate organizational and financial integration of the community clinic with UNBC to ensure continuity of the MEd program for students, and so that community members' access to mental health services through the clinic is secured against potential disruption by ordinary events.
- 13) We strongly advise that the Psychology Department should pause admissions for new PhD students until a critical mass is reached for MSc students. Pausing the PhD program will allow resources to be redirected to strengthening the MSc program, which will ultimately improve the graduate experience and ensure a more sustainable path forward for doctoral students in the future.
- 14) The Dean of FHHS and Vice President Research and Innovation should consider providing early career researchers with graduate student support for MSc students, in the first five

years of their faculty position. We would also recommend for the Dean and VPRI to consider strengthening existing mentorship opportunities in grant-writing for early career researchers.

Other Space and Administrative Resources

- 15) The department and senior administration should work to strengthen their relationship. Given that several key leadership positions are either currently held by interim leaders or those new to their role, an effort needs to be made to build stronger working relationships. Regular meetings between the chair of the department and the Interim Dean of Health and Human Sciences, in which the psychology department communicates its strengths and its capacity to contribute to university strategic plans would be a good starting point.
- 16) Further administrative support staff for departmental communications (whether placed in Psychology or in the Faculty of Health and Human Sciences) may be necessary. With or without an infusion of additional administrative support, we would also recommend that the Psychology department create a social media committee consisting of students and a faculty mentor to highlight the teaching, research, and outreach activities of the department.
- 17) The department's ability to plan, especially in recruiting and retaining faculty, is clearly hindered by the unpredictability and amount of information-search required in the current process for space allocation, which is currently overseen by the Vice President Research and Innovation.

Specific Recommendations on Succession Planning

- 18) Develop a timely and thoughtful strategy for Dr. Lavalley's replacement, which takes intrinsically motivated, collectively determined future development goals into account and is not dictated by immediate teaching needs or who happens to apply for an open position.
- 19) Plan for future hiring in the MEd program, in a way that also redesigns faculty roles to be feasible for and attractive to junior faculty.
- 20) The department should request a tenure-track position for an Indigenous Scholar. Given UNBC's commitment to the people of Northern British Columbia, increasing the representation of Indigenous faculty members should be a priority for the department.
- 21) Versus the faculty-line replacement strategy that has been used historically, it may be mutually advantageous for the department and administration to consider the optimal size and shape of the department in some different ways.

Department Of Psychology
BSc. Psychology, MSc. Psychology,
MEd. Counselling, PhD. Psychology

Sherry Beaumont, Annie Duchesne, Julie Howard, Christopher Kowalski, Xiaoxue (Sonia) Kong, Loraine Lavallee, Linda O'Neill, Nick Reid, Jennifer Roters, Anita Shaw, John Sherry, Paul Siakaluk

Chair: Dr. John Sherry

Interim Dean: Dr. Margot Parkes

Interim Provost and Vice President, Academic: Dr. William Owen

**Date UNBC Received the External Review of Degree Programs Report:
November 25, 2024**

Please Note: The Responses to the External Review of Degree Program(s) Report, Action Plan and the 36 Month Action Plan Progress Report are made publicly available on the Provost's website.

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PART 1 – ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT’S RESPONSE TO THE EXTERNAL REVIEW OF DEGREE PROGRAM(S) REPORT

(January 27, 2025)

I. Overall Impression of the Summary of Findings and Recommendations from the External Review of Degree Program Report

The September 2024 External Review of Degree Program Report for the Department of Psychology provides a detailed assessment of the BSc, MSc, PhD, and MEd Counselling programs. It highlights the department’s strengths, identifies areas for improvement, and offers actionable recommendations to align the programs with UNBC’s foundational goals and strategic priorities.

First, I want to acknowledge the considerable time and effort of Dr. Thorpe and Dr. Bailis, with the assistance and support of Dr. Nolan, dedicated to meeting with faculty, staff, and students and producing a thoughtful evaluation of our programs. Integrating the Counselling MEd program into the Psychology Department in their report presented unique challenges, which they navigated effectively with a few corrections, which will be discussed. Their work reflects a commitment to academic oversight and the advancement of UNBC’s teaching and research missions.

Second, as the recommendations in the report are reviewed and implemented, it is essential to consider the local and global contexts that shape the Department of Psychology's challenges. The geographic realities of northern British Columbia highlight the need for tailored strategies to recruit and retain faculty and students in remote locations. At the same time, global shifts in psychology education call for a careful balance between research-focused and career-oriented training to align with evolving student expectations. Post-pandemic educational trends further emphasize the importance of hybrid learning models while reaffirming the value of in-person engagement for mentorship and professional development. By integrating these contextual factors into strategic planning, the department, with assistance from the administration, can address the root causes of these challenges and ensure the continued success of its programs, faculty, and students.

Recruiting and retaining faculty and students in a remote community like Prince George presents significant challenges for the Department of Psychology. The limited local pool of qualified candidates in northern British Columbia necessitates national or international recruitment efforts, which can be costly and time-intensive. Prospective faculty often weigh the professional opportunities offered by UNBC against personal factors, such as access to amenities, quality schools, healthcare, and spousal employment options. These considerations can deter some candidates, even when the academic and research prospects are highly appealing. Additionally, stricter accreditation standards in areas like counselling psychology increase the

demands on faculty to maintain professional expertise while managing responsibilities such as clinical supervision, further complicating recruitment and retention efforts. Because of these factors, qualified sessional instructors are often relied on to teach many elective courses as well as offer clinical supervision, especially in our practice-based MEd Counselling Program. Additionally, retaining faculty can be difficult, as individuals may face professional isolation or struggle to integrate into the community. This is particularly true in specialized fields like research-focused psychology programs, where collaboration and funding opportunities are often concentrated in larger urban centres. Furthermore, recruiting clinical psychologists has become increasingly challenging, as salaries in private practice often far exceed those offered in academia, compounding the previously mentioned challenges.

Similarly, recruiting graduate students to experimental psychology programs is challenging, as many students prioritize programs with clear career pathways and immediate job readiness, such as the MEd in Counselling. Experimental programs, perceived as research-focused and less career-oriented, often struggle to highlight the value of their transferable skills, such as data analysis and critical thinking, further narrowing the recruitment pool.

Global trends in psychology and mental health education exacerbate these challenges. Students increasingly expect programs to provide applied skills that lead directly to licensure or career opportunities, making it essential for experimental programs to better communicate the real-world applicability of research training in industries such as healthcare, technology, and policy. This shift underscores the need for strategic program delivery and recruitment approaches that balance research excellence with career-oriented outcomes.

The external review underscores the strengths and challenges across all degree programs within the Department of Psychology, highlighting both areas of excellence and opportunities for improvement.

As noted in the report, the Undergraduate (BSc) program is a cornerstone of the department, offering a robust curriculum that emphasizes research methods, critical thinking, and experiential learning. The department is supported by a well-rounded faculty with extensive expertise across diverse areas of specialization. Faculty expertise and mentorship provide a supportive environment where students thrive academically and professionally. Expanding the course offerings and promoting the co-op program would enhance the student experience and align with UNBC's goals of fostering curiosity and experiential learning.

The MSc program offers advanced research training aligned with Canadian Psychological Association standards and stands to benefit from recent faculty hires, which provide growth opportunities. Despite its strengths, the program faces challenges with low enrolment and stringent requirements that create barriers to recruitment and retention. Reducing course loads and differentiating the MSc curriculum from undergraduate offerings are next steps to ensuring its long-term viability.

The PhD program provides opportunities for specialized research and aligns with tri-council funding priorities. However, with low enrolment, the program lacks the critical mass needed for a dynamic graduate experience. A strategic pause in admissions, focusing on rebuilding the MSc program to serve as a pipeline for doctoral candidates, is a practical recommendation to address this challenge.

The MEd Counselling program is a vital regional and professional asset, addressing significant mental health needs in northern British Columbia. Renowned for its rigorous curriculum and strong community impact, the program is highly regarded by students and professionals for its contributions to the field and the region.

To strengthen the Department of Psychology and address the challenges identified in the external review, several key recommendations have been proposed, aligned with UNBC's strategic goals:

1. Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is essential for the department's sustainability and growth. Developing a comprehensive faculty recruitment and succession plan will ensure long-term program stability, supporting UNBC's goal of Fostering Curiosity and Excellence. Revitalizing the MSc program through curriculum differentiation and targeted recruitment will address low enrolment and retention, aligning with the university's commitment to cultivating curiosity and enhancing learning.

2. Resource Allocation

Securing additional faculty for the MEd Counselling program is critical to its continued growth and community impact, advancing UNBC's mission of Empowering Northern Communities. Supporting the Community Counselling Centre will provide stability, ensuring its long-term contribution to regional mental health solutions. These efforts support the strategic goal of leveraging local resources to create solutions with both local and global impact.

3. Engagement and Visibility

Enhancing engagement and visibility is a priority for fostering greater community and institutional connections. Reintroducing the colloquium series and forming a social media committee will showcase the department's achievements and promote its role in addressing local and global challenges. These actions align with UNBC's focus on Fostering Local Solutions for Global Impact and mobilizing knowledge for positive change.

4. Addressing Student Needs

Promoting experiential learning opportunities, such as co-op placements, will prepare students for diverse career paths, reflecting UNBC's emphasis on expanding experiential education will improve engagement and mentorship, furthering the university's mission of Fostering Curiosity and Excellence. Additionally, incorporating innovative topics such as environmental and Indigenous psychology will align with

UNBC's commitment to Advancing Truth and Reconciliation, decolonization, and cultural humility.

In summary, understanding the local and global contexts in which the Department of Psychology operates is essential to fully appreciate the findings and recommendations in the external review report. Addressing the challenges of geography, evolving professional standards, and post-pandemic educational trends will allow UNBC to strengthen its recruitment, retention, and program delivery efforts. Following these recommendations and taking these steps will position the department to continue excelling in teaching, research, and community engagement, aligned with institutional goals and the broader community's needs.

II. Correction of Factual Errors or Areas of Misunderstanding in the Report

While the external review provides valuable insights, several factual inaccuracies and misunderstandings about the Program require clarification. The misunderstandings, particularly concerning the MEd Counselling Program, seem to stem from the reviewers' limited time with the program and their acknowledged lack of clinical expertise and familiarity with professional certification and accreditation requirements.

Community Counselling Centre (CCC)

The report inaccurately portrays the CCC as being primarily reliant on UNBC faculty volunteers for its operations. In reality:

- The CCC is an autonomous, non-profit organization, governed by the Northern Community Counselling Centre Society (NCCCS), with a robust contingency plan to ensure its sustainability.
- The CCC employs a director who oversees operations, supervises counselling students and staff, and ensures the quality of mental health services. This role is funded through an agreement with Northern Health, independent of UNBC.
- The CCC collaborates with the UNBC Counselling Program to provide practicum training, but the Program is not wholly dependent on it. Students also complete practicums at other community sites, including the Prince George Native Friendship Centre (PGNFC), Foundry, the Wellness Centre at UNBC, and Northern Health.
- Historical attempts to integrate the CCC into UNBC governance faced challenges due to administrative turnover and shifting priorities, which strained relationships between the university and the CCC ED and directors.

The CCC's operational autonomy and its collaboration with the Counselling Program provide a sustainable model that aligns with the program's needs while maintaining its vital independent role in the community.

Duplication of Courses

The report suggests potential duplication between MEd Counselling courses and MSc Psychology courses, which is inaccurate:

- The MEd research methods course (COUN 601-3) is tailored to counselling-specific topics, as required by the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) accreditation and the BC Association of Clinical Counsellors (BCACC). It is distinct from the MSc Psychology course.
- The MEd program does not offer a quantitative methods course. Students interested in statistics are directed to the graduate-level Psychology statistics course.
- The MEd program has not offered a Human Development course for years, and if requested, students are directed to similar courses in Education or offered a directed reading option.

This clarification underscores that the MEd program's curriculum is designed to meet professional certification requirements and avoid redundancy with the MSc program.

Faculty Workload and Succession Planning for the MEd Counselling Program

The review raises concerns about workload and succession planning in the MEd Counselling Program, but several key points require correction:

- The faculty workload adheres to UNBC's standard faculty work policy. Senior faculty have voluntarily taken on additional responsibilities out of professional dedication, not due to program expectations.
- The faculty has successfully advocated for the use of qualified sessional instructors, who contribute diverse expertise to the program and help manage workloads. Sessional instructors are integral to required and elective courses and should be included in succession planning.
- The report fails to acknowledge the chronic challenges in hiring counsellor-educators with PhDs, a well-documented issue in Canada and the U.S. Despite these challenges, the program recently secured a third faculty hire after years of requests, significantly strengthening its capacity.
- Current faculty have worked to leave the program in a stronger position for future hires, ensuring new faculty will inherit a sustainable and supportive work environment.

Professional Collaboration and Consultation

The report reflects a broader issue of limited collaboration between faculty, staff, and administration. The program's professional context, tied to provincial and national certification requirements, highlights the need for **ongoing dialogue and consultation** between all stakeholders to ensure alignment with professional standards and community needs. Administrative hierarchies and inconsistent communication have historically hindered such collaboration.

The MEd Counselling Program has demonstrated resilience and adaptability, maintaining its high standards and community impact despite limited resources and administrative challenges. The clarifications provided here emphasize the program's thoughtful planning, professional alignment, and creative solutions, ensuring its continued success. Moving forward, fostering greater collaboration and understanding between faculty, staff, and administration will be essential to addressing systemic issues and supporting the program's growth.

High Percentage of Online Courses

Additionally, the assertion that a high percentage of courses in the Psychology Department are delivered online is inaccurate and appears to reflect the opinion of a small number of students who provided feedback during the review process. The report itself acknowledges that online course delivery has decreased significantly, from 42% in 2022 (post-COVID) to 26% in 2024.

The majority of courses are now delivered in person, aligning with departmental and institutional goals to enhance student engagement and mentorship opportunities. However, the department recognizes the importance of offering a range of course delivery modes to meet the diverse needs of its students, including those with geographic or personal constraints. As such, the department plans to maintain approximately 20% of its courses online, ensuring flexibility while prioritizing in-person learning.

This balanced approach supports UNBC's goals of fostering curiosity, expanding experiential learning, and empowering northern communities by accommodating a wide range of student circumstances and needs.

The Department of Psychology has addressed all 21 recommendations from the External Review. **These recommendations have been grouped thematically into five areas of focus**, each of which includes several targeted actions to support coordinated implementation and long-term planning.

PART 2 - ACTION PLAN

What steps does the Academic Administrative Unit intend or propose to take in response to the recommendations from the *External Review of Degree Program(s) Report*?

UNBC Responses to the External Review of Degree Program(s) Report			
1	Recommendation	CURRICULUM REVIEW	
	Action	Increase in-person advanced-level courses Create courses aligned with faculty expertise Transition to open-access software for teaching and research Reduce MSc course load to focus more on research Assess potential curriculum overlap between MSc and MEd programs Develop a strategic hiring plan to address curriculum gaps and replacement for forthcoming faculty vacancy	
	Person(s) Responsible	Department Chair (lead), Graduate Committee Chair (curriculum revision), Faculty (course development). Chair to liaise with VP of Research and Innovation regarding software resources.	
	Target Implementation Date	January 2027	
		12 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		24 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		36 month Action Plan Progress Report	
2	Recommendation	STRATEGIC PLANNING AND DIRECTION	
	Action	Increase awareness of the Co-op program	

		Hire a graduate student, restart colloquium series, form social media team	
		Integrate MSc recruitment strategies into department planning	
		Prioritize MSc program in the department's strategic vision and budgeting	
		Temporarily pause PhD admissions to focus on MSc development	
		Explore options to provide additional resources for new faculty to support graduate students	
		Refine and review department planning processes to align with UNBC and Faculty Planning Processes	
	Person(s) Responsible	Department Chair (lead), Graduate Program Coordinator (MSc recruitment strategy), Department Chair and Chair of the Undergraduate Committee (Co-op program expansion), Chair of the Colloquium Committee (colloquium/social media team), Graduate Student Assistant and Administrative Assistant (social media team), Chair to liaise with Co-op Office and Dean of FHHS as needed.	
	Target Implementation Date	April 2028	
		12 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		24 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		36 month Action Plan Progress Report	
3	Recommendation	RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE	
	Action	Create a faculty succession plan	
		Secure additional faculty for the MEd Counselling program	
		Explore support for the Community Counselling Centre (CCC)	
		Increase administrative staffing to support department operations	
		Reevaluate faculty complement and plan for future hiring	

		Establish a transparent space allocation process for faculty and labs, aligned with updated Faculty and University processes	
	Person(s) Responsible	Department Chair (lead), MEd Counselling Coordinator (MEd faculty needs), Chair to consult Dean of FHHS regarding staffing and CCC support.	
	Target Implementation Date	January 2027	
		12 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		24 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		36 month Action Plan Progress Report	
4	Recommendation	ENGAGEMENT, VISIBILITY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS	
	Action	Reinstate the colloquium series and improve social media outreach Enhance communication between the department and senior leadership Create a succession plan for the MEd Counselling program that includes sessionals Expand Indigenous content within courses Hire an Indigenous faculty member to support curriculum development and representation	
	Person(s) Responsible	Department Chair (lead), Chair of the Colloquium Committee (event planning), Faculty (curriculum development), MEd Counselling Coordinator (succession planning), Chair to liaise with Dean of FHHS regarding Indigenous faculty hire.	
	Target Implementation Date	April 2028	
		12 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		24 month Action Plan Progress Report	

		36 month Action Plan Progress Report	
5	Recommendation	ADDRESSING STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND NEEDS	
	Action	Expand and update in-person course offerings (e.g., selected topics courses) to reflect student interests and enhance engagement. Promote experiential learning through Co-op placements Reduce course demands in MSc program for better student support Improve graduate student recruitment through program redesign Fund supervision and mentorship for graduate students Ensure continuity in student supervision through sustainable faculty planning	
	Person(s) Responsible	Department Chair (lead), Graduate Committee Chair (curriculum and supervision planning), Faculty (course instruction), Chair to liaise with Co-op Office and Dean of FHHS regarding resources.	
	Target Implementation Date	January 2027	

FOLLOW UP DATES

As per the *External Review of Degree Program(s) Procedures*, the Academic Administrative Units are responsible for submitting Action Plan Progress Reports to the Dean on the following dates:

- 12 month Action Plan Progress Report: _____ 30 June 2026 _____
- 24 month Action Plan Progress Report: _____ 30 June 2027 _____
- 36 month Action Plan Progress Report: _____ 30 June 2028 _____

PART 3 – DEAN’S AND PROVOST AND VICE PRESIDENT, ACADEMIC’S RESPONSES

I. Summary of the Degree Program Review Process

An external review of the Psychology Degree Programs took place in 2024, with a focus on four programs: BSc, Psychology, MSc. Psychology, Med. Counselling, and PhD Psychology. Dr. Christina Thorpe (Memorial University) and Dr. Dan Bailis (University of Manitoba) accepted to serve as external reviewers and Dr. Catherine Nolin, Department of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, served as the internal UNBC reviewer. Reviewers received the self-study document prepared by the Department of Psychology in August 2024 and all three reviewers participated in the review in September 2024. The external reviewers provided their report at the end of November 2024. The Department of Psychology Responses to the External Review of Degree Programs was submitted to the Interim Dean FHHS in April and revised in response to the discussions with the Dean. The Interims Dean’s response to Recommendations and Action Plan was finalised in June 2025.

II. Dean’s Response to the Recommendations and Action Plan (June 25, 2025)

The external reviewers provided twenty-one (21) recommendations in relation to the four degree program they reviewed. These recommendations were clustered in relation to five areas: Courses; Agenda items for Departmental Retreat; Program Resources (aligned with suggestions for each of the four programs); Other Space and Administrative Resources and Specific Recommendations on Succession Planning. Overall, these recommendations have underscored the recognition of a thriving undergraduate BSc program, and the need for specific attention to each of the graduate programs, including financial and mentoring support for MSc graduate students, a focus on succession planning for the MEd Counselling program and a recommendation to pause admissions in the PhD Program. The recommendations underscore ongoing, Faculty-wide needs to enhance graduate student support, mentoring of early career faculty members and succession planning.

The response from the Department of Psychology noted their appreciation for feedback that aligned with priority areas already identified by the program and for actionable recommendations that will better align Psychology programs with UNBC’s foundational goals and strategic priorities. The departmental response identified factual errors and areas of misunderstanding by the reviewers, especially in relation to the MEd Counselling program and detailed these in their report, above.

The Department response described four area they will be prioritising in responding to feedback provided (Strategic Planning, Resource Allocation, Engagement and Visibility, and Addressing Student Needs), and underscored ways in which these efforts also need to take into account local, global contexts in which the Department of Psychology programs operate including challenges of geography, evolving professional standards, and post-pandemic educational trends.

The Department of Psychology proposed an **Action Plan with five area of focus** where they intend to take steps in response to the recommendations. Each integrative area of focus has several interrelated actions that will be able to be progressed and reported on through the 12, 24 and 36 month reporting period.

The actions in relation to **#1. Curriculum Review**, propose actionable steps that will enhance both undergraduate and graduate curriculum, including looking ahead at succession planning. The actions proposed for **#2 Strategic Planning and Direction**, will benefit from the overall intent to refine and review department planning processes to align with UNBC and Faculty Planning Processes: decisions such as pausing PhD intake and program, reflect a willingness to make important decisions that reflect UNBC's student-first orientation. The recommendations relating to **#3. Resource Allocation and Infrastructure**, are prioritised for January 2027 completion and will require pro-active interaction with the Faculty Administrative Team, to ensure timely progress on these actions. The actions in **#4. Engagement, Visibility and Community Partnerships** identify necessary actions required to address specific relational needs within the Department: intentions relating to Indigenous content and Faculty members are realistic intentions and will need close attention during 12 and 24 month reporting to ensure that these priorities can also inform Curriculum review (#1) and Students Needs (#5). The actions described in **#5. Addressing Student Experience and Needs** are clearly aligned with departmental priorities and are proposed to be addressed by January 2027: this timeline is appropriate for progressing these key activities in order to inform others that have later implementation dates.

In sum: This response confirms the FHHS Dean's review of the External Reviewer feedback and recommendations as well as my review and endorsement of the Action Plan prepared by the Department of Psychology in response to the external review. I commend both the reviewers for their appraisal and the Department of Psychology for their thoughtful and systematic approach to responding this feedback. The proposed Action Plan charts a positive and achievable path forward that will support the far-reaching potential and contributions of the Department of Psychology in relation to students and colleagues within the Faculty of Human and Health Sciences, UNBC and beyond.

III. Provost and Vice President, Academic's Response to the Recommendations and Action Plan
13 August 2025

Regular and comprehensive degree program reviews support the commitment of the university and its faculty and staff to the quality, accountability, sustainability, and continuous improvement of UNBC's degree programs and academic service units.

Thank you to the review committee, the department faculty, staff, and students, central administration, and the Faculty Dean for their participation in the program review for the Department of Psychology.

I have carefully read the reviewers' report, the departmental response, and the decanal response. A meeting with the dean and chair on 13 August 2025 provided important additional context. I want to underscore the authority and responsibility of the dean and department for a large majority of the recommendations.

I broadly agree with the recommendations of the external review committee and how these recommendations have been incorporated into the departmental action plan. I also appreciate that the Department has already taken steps that align with the key recommendations.

As is usually the case, the external review committee has made recommendations that have some degree of resource implications. Whereas I broadly support suggestions to address a faculty succession plan, and to assess the level of administrative staffing for example, recommendations and actions that necessitate acquiring new resources or reallocation of resources will take some time to achieve and must align with the strategic direction and goals of the department and faculty.

I look forward to seeing the department's work on the action plan and to hearing about the positive impact on the program.