

## **Master of Health Studies & Master of Nursing, Generalist**

### **Program Review Summary Report, April 2025**

#### **Programs Reviewed:**

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Master of Health Studies

Master of Nursing:

- Generalist

#### **External Review Team Appointed by the Provost & Vice President Academic:**

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- Dr. Karen Spalding, Adjunct Associate Professor, School of Nursing, Queen's University
- Dr. David Kenneth Wright, Full Professor, School of Nursing, Interim Associate Vice-Dean Academic, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ottawa
- Dr. Larbi Esmahi, Associate Professor, Faculty of Science and Technology, Athabasca University (Internal Observer)

#### **Key Milestones:**

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- Program Review Kick-off: October 17, 2023
- Self-Study Approved by Faculty of Health Disciplines Faculty Council: May 24-29, 2024
- Virtual Site Visit: November 18 - 20, 2024
- Receipt of External Reviewer Report: January 9, 2025
- Program Response Report to Faculty of Health Disciplines Faculty Council: April 28 to May 2, 2025
- Program Response Report to Faculty of Graduate Studies Faculty Council: May 8, 2025
- Program Response Report to Academic Planning, Priorities and Standards Committee (APPSC) of General Faculties Council: June 3, 2025
- Public Posting of MHS/MN-GEN Program Review Summary Report: following APPSC meeting
- Annual Program Update to APPSC: June 2026

#### **Summary of Key Findings:**

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The External Reviewers' Report and the Self-Study identify the following program strengths:

**Teaching and Learning Environment:** A core mission of Athabasca University is to make education accessible to learners who might not otherwise have the opportunity to pursue higher learning. Faculty and staff who contribute to the MHS and MN-GEN programs are motivated by and take this mission seriously. Furthermore, the curriculum, policies, and procedures of these programs are indicators that

demonstrate that faculty and staff understand the learning needs of the students. These programs provide multiple levels of flexibility for their students who are health care professionals juggling full-time employment, family responsibilities, and school.

**Faculty Collaboration and Support:** Faculty and staff value and actively contribute to a culture of collegiality. Meetings with core faculty as well as with the non-academic staff reflected a high sense of team cohesion, shared values, care and concern for one another, and collaborative practice. Our meeting with sessional faculty was similarly characterized by a robust exchange of ideas amongst participants, in a context of mutual respect. Everyone, including senior leadership of the Faculty, are proud of this program and its students, many of whom go on to pursue PhDs at U15 universities and/or become leaders in the health care system across the country.

**Student-Centric Factors:** The MHS/MN-GEN programs have been delivered online since they began, a key factor in providing access to graduate education to working healthcare and nursing professionals. Through a combination of multimedia resources, interactive modules, and case studies, students can access high-quality education anytime, anywhere, without compromising their professional or personal commitments. These programs have students enrolled from across the country from both rural and urban settings, which helps to further enrich the diversity of the student body. The programs support a strong commitment to interdisciplinarity, and a genuine appreciation and respect for the diversity of students. The program enrolls a high volume of students and yet maintains a ratio of approximately 18 students per instructor in each individual course. This is commendable. It is worth noting here that maintaining manageable class sizes, especially in a context in where there are no teaching assistants, is essential to preserve.

**Communication and Reputation Building:** Core faculty are leading experts in their respective fields and are supported to develop their own research programs, including through teaching release. Junior faculty are not expected to take on administrative roles within the programs or the Faculty, enabling them to devote the necessary time and space to building and launching their research programs. Efforts are made to promote stability in faculty member's teaching assignments, such that they do not experience continuous turnover in the courses they are expected to teach (when this happens, it can be very detrimental to a faculty member's research program). Faculty members themselves have created specific initiatives to support and mentor one another in their academic career progression, such as an early career researchers' group. All sessional faculty have a PhD, many who have taught in the programs for many years and engage in their own research as well.

Opportunities for program improvement are suggested below.

**Administrative and Support Services:**

- Administrative, support, and learning design services have not kept pace with student enrollment growth.
- The advisor-to-student ratio is unsustainable, leading to delays and compromised service. Hire additional graduate advisors to improve the advisor-to-student ratio.
- Streamline administrative processes and improve IT infrastructure for online learning.

**Curriculum and Course Content and Delivery:**

- Course revision schedules have been interrupted, leading to the need to add currency to course content
- Consider the development of flexible course templates and incorporate open educational practices.
- Consider additional focus areas, courses and a potential doctoral program to meet future needs
- With the large numbers of sessional instructors in addition to faculty members teaching courses, there is the opportunity to build more consistent quality in teaching and assessment across instructors.
- Continue to incorporate faculty research findings into course content.

**Communication and Reputation Building:**

- Increase the visibility of the programs through strategic communication is essential.
- Explore involving external partners in course activities
- Share faculty and student accomplishments internally and externally to enhance the programs' reputation.
- Increase connection with students through town halls and info sessions.
- Foster a sense of community in both courses and programs.

**Faculty Collaboration and Support:**

- Balancing staff-to-student ratios and managing faculty workload are ongoing challenges.
- There is a need for consistent mentorship and support for faculty members.
- Encourage cross-faculty collaboration and support for teaching and research.

**Scalability and Growth:**

- Address scalability and growth while maintaining quality.
- Balance faculty workload and support to sustain current and future growth.

External Reviewer recommendations are addressed in the Program Action Plan below.

### Program Action Plan for Implementation of Recommendations, Including Dean's Response:

|   | Recommendations (in order of priority for the program) | Proposed Action(s)  | Action Timeline (include specifics) | Measure of Success and Proposed Completion Date of Measure | Individual(s) Responsible for Leading the Action(s) (by role) | Responsibility for Resourcing Action(s) (if applicable; by role) | Dean's Response  |
|---|--|---|-------------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| 1 | Advocate for additional faculty and staff              | Fill all vacant faculty and staff positions related to MHS/MN-GEN |                                     | All positions filled                                       | Program Director/Faculty Manager/Dean                         | Dean   | <p>At an institutional level the Integrated Resource Plan was freezing vacant positions to address an ongoing structural deficit. The fiscal 2024/2025 permitted recruitment and we have recently made offers to fill two faculty positions. A third faculty position will be filled soon.</p> <p>Phased Approach to Administrative Team Restructuring is underway to increase and enhance student support. The restructuring will address the ratio of advisors to students outlined in the review. The details of this can't be released until approved with finance and Hr.</p> |

|   | <b>Recommendations (in order of priority for the program)</b>                      | <b>Proposed Action(s)</b>  | <b>Action Timeline (include specifics)</b>  | <b>Measure of Success and Proposed Completion Date of Measure</b>                                  | <b>Individual(s) Responsible for Leading the Action(s) (by role)</b>       | <b>Responsibility for Resourcing Action(s) (if applicable; by role)</b> | <b>Dean's Response</b>  |
|---|--|--|---|--|--|---|---|
| 2 | Provide in-course information about what students can expect from instructors      | Information added to MHS/MN-GEN course template  | September 2025  | Information provided   | Assoc Dean:<br>Teaching & Learning<br>Program Director<br>Curriculum Lead  | Associate Dean<br>Teaching & Learning                                   | In agreement.   |
| 3 | Increase guidance from academic advisors   | Produce journey map<br>Produce interactive tool for students   | Jan-May 2025:<br>work with UR to produce journey map<br>May2025-April 2026:continue to work with UR to produce interactive tool | May 2025<br><br>May 2026   | Program Director<br>Curriculum Lead<br>APO-Advising                        | Dean FHD  | The Program Director and Faculty Manager have kicked off this project working with University Relations Director responsible for student services. This project is on schedule to meet the timeline outline here. |
| 4 | Improve channels of communication between course leaders, instructors and students | Revise information in MHS/MN-GEN course template<br><br>Consider alternate methods for improving channels of communication | June 2025<br>Program retreat will consider info to be revised and develop a plan for additional communication                   | January 2026 revised info in the template<br><br>Sept 2025 elements of plan begin to be rolled out | Assoc Dean :<br>Teaching & Learning<br>Program Director<br>Curriculum Lead | Dean, FHD   | In agreement.   |

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| 5 | Centralize mentorship at the faculty level             | Participate in FHD mentorship program     | June 2025 mentorship program model refined<br><br>Sep 2025 /Jan 2026 model implemented | FHD Mentorship program in place                            | Dean FHD MHS/MN-GEN faculty                                   |  | In agreement. IN the Fall of 2024 a kick off meeting was held to introduce Academic CAREer Mentoring Program (A-CAMP) to define clear objectives and goals for the mentoring program, aligning them with the institution's mission and strategic priorities. These goals and objectives outline what the program aims to achieve and how it will benefit both mentors and mentees. A framework was also introduced. The Dean will continue to work towards creating a mentoring culture, supporting career development and skill development through the program. A committee will be formed to support this work and achieve the milestones outlined in this action plan. |
| 6 | Identify program targets for                           | Work with Office of the Registrar and FHD | September 2025 to begin after  | Targets developed by                                       | Program Director  |  | In agreement.  |

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|---|---|--|--|---|--|---|------------------------|
|   | retention and graduation                                      | Administrative APO to determine an accurate representation of current state  | implementation of the FGS Admission system   | program advisory committee after considering current state- May 2026  |  |   |                        |
| 7 | Increase course offerings                                     | Additional course offerings are not considered at this time.<br>Curriculum review is on-going.<br>The focus is on revising all existing courses. | Revise 3 courses- January 2026<br><br>Develop plan for curriculum review- January 2026<br><br>Develop plan to revise additional courses- October 2025<br>Continue regular course leader updates to courses | Number of existing courses revised.<br><br>Curriculum review plan is operational- May 2026<br><br>With a revision schedule of 2-3 courses per year, it will take up to 7 years to completely revise the program | Curriculum Lead  |   | In agreement.          |

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|----|--|---|---|---|--|---|--|
| 8  | Ensure that all sessional instructors understand and apply flexibility in students' life circumstances | Emphasize in sessional instructor orientation<br><br>And on-going in instructor teleconferences | New instructor orientation -May 2025 and ongoing<br><br>1 instructor meeting/ month - ongoing | Students will be supported and life circumstances accommodated as appropriate | Program Director<br><br>MHS/MN-GEN faculty as Course Leaders           |   | In agreement.  |
| 9  | Differentiate the MHS and MN-GEN programs  | This is not a priority for the program. It has been discussed and discussion continues.         | Continue discussion at regular program retreats   | Determination made  | Assoc Dean:<br>Teaching & Learning Curriculum Lead<br>Program Director |   | In agreement. Our short-term plan is to celebrate the 25-year anniversary of the MHS program and target allied health professional conferences to target enrolment growth. We have a working plan initiated with University Relations. |
| 10 | Develop a program nursing philosophy   | This is not a priority for the program.   | This recommendation will be revisited at the program retreat in Fall 2025                     | Determination made  | Curriculum Lead/Program Director                                       |   | In agreement.  |