



FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN Cyclical Program Review

MDes Design for Health (DHEA), School of Graduate Studies

GENERAL INFORMATION	
Period of Cyclical Review:	July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2024
Dean, SGS:	Ashok Mathur
Program Review Team:	Michelle Wyndham-West and Michele Mastroeni (Team Leads), Jules Goss, Kate Sellen
External Reviewers:	Joseph Ferenbok, University of Toronto Karim Keshavjee, University of Toronto

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE MDES DESIGN FOR HEALTH CYCLICAL PROGRAM REVIEW

Timeline:

- Program Review team and Workplan established September/October 2023
- Collection of perspectives and experiences: October 2023-March 2024
- SWOC Analysis: February to May 2024
- Data analysis: January 2024-June 2024
- Selection of external reviewers: March 2024
- External review was conducted March 18-19, 2025 with external reviewers meeting faculty, students, alumni, administrators and conducting classroom observation

Key stakeholders:

- VPAP office
- Dean and Graduate Program Director (GPD)
- Students
- Alumni
- Faculty

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Groups and individuals met during visit:

- Academic leaders including Dean of graduate studies and GPD
- Faculty representatives (2 professors)
- Students and alumni, moderated by an Office of the VPAP facilitator
- Meeting with recruitment representatives
- Administrative Staff
- Lunch with GPD and faculty representatives

The program's strengths:

- Mission-driven curriculum
- A core of committed faculty
- Opportunities for students to engage in real-world, equity-focused projects
- Impactful capstone work
- Conceptually strong curriculum, aligning well with OCAD U's strategic priorities.

Challenges/Opportunities:

- Limited program visibility
- A compressed capstone timeline
- Inconsistent instructional alignment
- Faculty capacity constraints
- Unclear strategic positioning
- Students report varying experiences with feedback and design method instruction, particularly those without prior design training.

Reviewer recommendations in five key areas:

1. Strategic leadership and structural capacity
 - a. Noting the limited ability of GPD under 0.4 FTE role to provide academic leadership, support faculty, mentor students, and guide program strategically
2. Recruitment and Visibility
 - a. Addressing internal factors such as lack of clear program identity and value proposition, outdated promotional materials, absence of unifying vision, limited external visibility of achievements, inconsistent marketing efforts
3. Student preparation and support
 - a. Noted inconsistent student backgrounds
 - b. Noted limited onboarding to establish expectations for graduate level work
 - c. Noted need for more student support structures
4. Program Integration and Research Support
 - a. Noted that the program lacks strong connection to undergrad pipelines for new students, infrastructure for research, and administrative coordination for capstone projects, partnership and experiential learning
5. Strategic and Cultural Gaps

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- a. Noted lack of clear strategic vision
- b. Noted leadership and strategic planning gaps
- c. Noted shifting and under-resourced partnerships

Opportunities:

- Present a vision
- Targeted recruitment and marketing
- Renewed partnership and visibility
- Improved student support and onboarding

Scheduled Monitoring Reports and Next Cyclical Program Review:

- Two monitoring reports are scheduled (Spring 2028 and Spring 2030)
- The next Cyclical Program Review is scheduled to begin in Summer 2031

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Recommendation	Proposed Follow-up	Responsibility for Leading Follow-up, and Other Stakeholders	Timeline for Addressing Recommendation
<p>1. Strengthen Strategic Leadership and Program Identity</p> <p>A. Clarify the program’s mission and vision to support coherent internal culture and external branding. Articulate and regularly revisit a shared mission and vision to guide program decisions, recruitment efforts, and internal culture. Ensure visibility among faculty, students, and external partners so learners can confidently describe the program’s values,</p>	<p>Based on a draft 2025-2028 strategic plan document, this developed vision can be a starting point from which a collective vision can be further iterated amongst faculty members and existing students and alumni. Part of the discussion will include the kind of professional the program seeks to attract as well as the kind of professional it wants to produce, with current discussions balancing the design vs the health care experience/focus of incoming students. Part of this effort will have to include a revitalization of faculty engagement with the vision of the program both</p>	<p>Graduate Program Director, Faculty representatives on change committee, then broader faculty team.</p>	<p>The program is currently being revisited in terms of its offerings (2025-2026). As part of this effort, course alignment and overall program objectives are being revisited, moving past the strategic document. An overall vision and re-coordination of the program will be completed before the fall term of 2027 for a new cohort to benefit from the changes.</p>

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<p>competencies, and impact</p>	<p>at the vision level but also at the level of curriculum offerings through collaborative discussions, in order to create a coherence that has been lacking.</p>		
<p>B. Expand the Graduate Program Director role to include strategic leadership, curriculum oversight, and external engagement. This person should actively teach, advise, and champion the program's vision.</p>	<p>These roles are already part of the GPD position, though under new curriculum assessment this may be enhanced. Further administrative supports are also recommended.</p>	<p>GPD Dean of Grad Studies</p>	<p>The role of the GPD for Fall 2025-Summer 2026 has already changed, with one GPD currently assigned to three programs. However, this role has become more strategic, while maintaining some of the day to day touchpoints with students and faculty. Summer 2027 revisit the role of GPD to see if individual programs assignments will be resumed by GPDs or if a new system is put in place.</p>
<p>C. Establish an Ongoing Curriculum Review and Quality Process Implement a regular process for assessing program-level learning outcomes, gathering student and faculty feedback, and refining courses. This process should be led by the Program</p>	<p>The DHEA program committee meets every two months and can formally incorporate a curriculum review process into this existing structure once a year. Traditionally such discussions are held in April of every year but this can be formalized with curriculum revision work taking place over the summer months in order to meet curriculum change process</p>	<p>GPD, Program Committee faculty members</p>	<p>With the program change, the new KPIs can be determined alongside the final program changes by Summer 2027 in order to begin assessments for the 2027-2028 academic year.</p>

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<p><i>Director and Program Committee.</i></p>	<p>benchmarks in governance processes which happen from September to April.</p> <p>Possible more in-depth approach with development of new KPIs and metrics which could then be reported on by faculty, and deeper cyclical reviews every 2-3 years based on these.</p>		
<p>2. Cultivate Program Culture and Cohesive Learning Environment.</p> <p>A. Introduce a Core Seminar or “Home Room” Structure Create a recurring seminar course that students participate in throughout multiple semesters. This "home room" model would provide academic continuity, consistent advising, capstone preparation, and reflective integration across diverse course experiences. It could also be linked to high-impact, community-based projects that allow students to apply skills beyond the classroom.</p> <p>B. Promote Collaborative Teaching and Faculty Development</p>	<p>While a “home room” structure might be beneficial for the DHEA program, creating an extra course structure may be confusing and potentially lead to “spent credits” for teaching if there is to be some degree of supervision. Alternatively, faculty coordination across courses could be the solution, with key faculty meetings during the academic year in order to offer the consistency and integration that seem to be the root of the request. However, part of this would require permission to invite and coordinate with sessional instructors to the table, to ensure that we have cross-course coordination.</p> <p>Encourage monthly faculty learning circles to increase faculty cohesion and sharing. An annual DHEA retreat is also suggested.</p>	<p>Graduate Program Director, faculty and instructors in the program</p> <p>Learning circles and DHEA retreat – GPD to organize</p>	<p>This cross-faculty coordination will begin in the Fall 2026 term under the current program structure, however it will deepen in Fall 2027 with the program changes and the curricular changes that accompany this, alongside clarified content in the courses.</p> <p>Late Summer pre-Fall of 2026, GPD will organize an initial learning circle/orientation</p>

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<p><i>Encourage co-taught courses where instructors with complementary expertise collaboratively design and deliver learning experiences. Facilitate monthly faculty learning exchanges (workshops or roundtables) to align pedagogical practices, strengthen interdisciplinary teaching approaches, and share innovations in experiential and studio-based learning.</i></p>	<p>However, practice is moving away from co-taught courses, though splitting credits (i.e. not simultaneous) may be considered.</p>	<p>Credit splitting: Dean of Graduate Studies with consultation of GPD.</p>	<p>for faculty to begin the coordination process. This will be followed at the end of the Fall term for the beginning of Winter 2027, and continue every term. The Annual Retreat can be planned by the GPD for end of May 2027.</p>
<p>C. Support peer-led learning and student-driven initiatives <i>Formally recognize co-curricular activities and adopt a facilitative pedagogy that encourages autonomy, initiative, and collaboration among students. Provide structured support for peer-led workshops, project-based learning initiatives, and interdisciplinary collaborations that allow students to develop professional identities and leadership skills. Recognize and celebrate co-curricular and</i></p>	<p>Consider recognition of student-led activities and community impact initiatives for some type of credit, and explore cross-program initiatives for possible synergies.</p>	<p>GPD to initiate. Small faculty committee across DHEA, INCD, and SFI programs</p>	<p>October to November 2026, initial discussions to be held amongst GPD and instructors as to what possible projects and activities may be available, and what parameters might be set. This could then be expressed to students in Winter 2027 to facilitate initial exploration of ideas and the “how” of uptake and operationalization. Pre-Fall 2027, with the changes in program scheduled, would revisit and</p>

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<p><i>extracurricular contributions as essential components of the graduate learning experience.</i></p> <p>D. Improve Cross-Unit Coordination for Recruitment and Visibility <i>Clarify and streamline collaboration between faculty, the GPD, and central communications to ensure effective, targeted outreach. Update and align promotional materials and web presence to reflect the program's strengths and mission.</i></p>	<p>The GPD has begun to take a more direct role with the Marketing & Communications and Graduate Admissions office regarding messaging, web-content and the visibility of faculty research. This could perhaps be made into an annual effort, though the challenge is finding the messaging that is both consistent, targeted and agreeable to faculty. Possibility of a program(s) sub-committee for marketing purposes will be raised.</p> <p>In addition, the program will consider ways of leveraging the networks and disciplinary knowledge of teaching faculty in developing an overall marketing strategy. Faculty research will be highlighted and promoted where appropriate to further enhance the material available for marketing purposes in the broader sector or discipline area.</p>	<p>GPD, Marketing & Communication, Admissions, Faculty teaching in the program</p>	<p>determine how each of these steps might be implemented.</p> <p>May 2026, touch base with Marketing and Communications and graduate admissions to begin new efforts for branding, messaging and heightening the visibility of faculty research. Establish regular touchpoints with M&C (once or twice a year) at dates that best correspond to Marketing's timing.</p> <p>Starting in May 2026, conversations about leveraging faculty strengths in the marketing processes will be incorporated into faculty meetings. If enough faculty uptake is available, a sub-committee for marketing can be struck for Fall 2027, once planned program changes have been implemented.</p>
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<p>3. Enhance Curriculum Integration and Pedagogical Innovation</p> <p>A. Strengthen Curriculum Interconnections Build more explicit bridges between courses to support scaffolded learning and introduce capstone preparation earlier. Establish thematic threads to reduce curricular fragmentation.</p>	<p>The overall program is under revision and potential change, with a high probability that it will switch to an Major Research Project (MRP) for the final work. This will therefore require a reconsideration of how courses prepare students for the MRP such as revamped Research Methods, systems thinking, and other courses providing design thinking/tools.</p>	<p>GPD and Program Committee</p>	<p>On-going, with major changes to program to be delivered Fall 2027, including switchover to MRP and resulting cascade of course changes</p>
<p>B. Expand Instruction in Design Methods and Studio Feedback Enhance teaching in design methods, especially for students without design backgrounds. Prioritize participatory and action-oriented design research and increase opportunities for formative feedback in studios.</p>	<p>Currently, a working committee of faculty across the three MDes programs are looking at making curricular changes that include the development of a common Research Methods course to ensure a standard for design methods being taught in the three programs as well as space for comparative discussion on the different approaches that the three program specialties may require.</p>	<p>GPD and Program Committee</p>	<p>On-going, with major changes to program to be delivered Fall 2027</p>
<p>C. Formalize peer knowledge exchange To foster interdisciplinary collaboration and peer teaching. Develop structures for students to share skills and organize</p>	<p>This is already built into Colloquium Courses 1 and 2 and students receive academic credit for both courses. Furthermore, course revisions will allow for greater interdisciplinary collaboration across the three MDes programs.</p>		<p>No formal action planned</p>

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<p>co-curricular activities that could be eligible for academic recognition.</p> <p>D. Reimagine the Capstone Experience Redesign the capstone process to span two semesters or include a preparatory phase. Emphasize autonomy, iterative design, and earlier engagement with stakeholders and ethics. Consider collaborative capstone models.</p>	<p>This is already built into the Colloquium Courses 1 and 2 and the Project Proposal and Prep course. Furthermore, the program is currently being evaluated to determine if a shift to a Major Research Project (MRP) as a final component would be most suitable. If this potential change is accepted, it would for 2027. This would both increase the program’s chance of external funding for student projects under the Tri-council, as well as decrease the “taught course” resources, allowing for potentially more individual supervision, and engagement/learning across students as they share their MRP both within DHEA and other graduate programs.</p>		<p>No formal action planned. (See 3.A above.)</p>
<p>4. Expand External and Community Engagement A. Strengthen Cross-Sector and Cross-Institutional Partnerships Appoint a liaison or faculty member to reestablish relationships with healthcare partners. Leverage programs like the Ontario Visiting Scholars Program to bring in guest experts from</p>	<p>DHEA program committee will look to appointing an “ambassador” for the program. In the meantime, a cross-program database of past connections with stakeholders would be useful to create institutional memory and help faculty determine who are regular contributors to the program via community connections, and also indicate where there may be gaps.</p>	<p>GPD and DHEA faculty</p>	<p>In Winter 2026 (February to March) a spreadsheet will be shared with faculty to members to begin populating a database of community contacts. These will be updated annually for the program.</p>

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<p>health, policy, and digital innovation</p> <p>B. Expand the Adjunct and Alumni Mentor Network Recruit experienced alumni and industry professionals to contribute as instructors and mentors. Provide opportunities for alumni to support capstone supervision or offer career mentorship.</p>	<p>The DHEA program committee can canvas alumni both in the DHEA program and Strategic Foresight and Innovation programs for both willingness and complementarity to teaching.</p>	<p>GPD and DHEA faculty</p>	<p>A DHEA ambassador can be discussed in the Spring of 2026 with the faculty committee, though realistic actions in this regard will not begin until after Fall 2027, once the program has been revamped. Tentative time for program ambassador Spring 2028</p> <p>Fall 2026-Fall 2027, this will be conducted as needed to fill any sessional positions.</p> <p>Furthermore, the efforts in Winter 2026 to build a database of community contacts will aid in this. From Fall 2027 onwards, an annual outreach program to alumni and recent graduates can be attempted, led by a DHEA faculty member and possibly supported by a graduate student for communications.</p>
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