

April 22, 2025

Professor Nicholas Rule  
Vice-Provost, Academic Programs  
Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs  
Division of the Vice-President & Provost  
University of Toronto

**Interim Monitoring Report: 2020-21 UTQAP Review of the Department of Biological Sciences and its Programs**

Dear Professor Rule,

Thank you for your office's letter dated July 10, 2024, requesting our interim monitoring report for the 2020-21 UTQAP review of the Department of Biological Sciences and its programs, and the administrative response to the review, which were presented to the Committee on Academic Policy and Programs (AP&P) on October 26, 2021.

**The status of the implementation of plans outlined in the Dean's administrative response:**

I am pleased to report that progress has been made toward implementing the recommendations from the review, and new initiatives have been undertaken, as described below.

Action	Timeline	Status as of April 2025
Revisions to departmental governance document to: 1) recognize the contributions of teaching-stream faculty in the area of pedagogical research as integral to the department; and 2) make explicit that this entails access to full support and resources for teaching-stream led student research.	Short term [6 months] - to be completed in Fall 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work on the governance document recognizing the contributions teaching stream faculty is still in progress.</li> </ul> <p>Actual actions taken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Department has provided support to teaching stream faculty in pedagogical and biological research carried out by undergraduate students. The level of support provided to teaching stream faculty research has been the same as that provided to tenure stream faculty.</li> <li>Teaching stream pedagogical and biological research contributions have been recognized in PTR evaluations.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching stream faculty holding Tri-Agency research grants have been granted teaching relief.</li> <li>• Teaching stream faculty have developed pedagogical mentorship programs in the Department for all faculty, highlighting their leadership. These initiatives include: <p>(1) Group-Based Peer Mentoring Program for Teaching in Biological Sciences - department-wide group discussion sessions for teaching-relevant mentoring. Sessions began in August 2023.</p> <p>(2) Department-wide and inter-departmental professional learning communities promoting student-centered, inclusive teaching practices while fostering social connectivity and belonging for faculty - this is an ongoing collaboration involving the Departments of Biological Sciences, Computer &amp; Mathematical Sciences, Health &amp; Society, and Physical &amp; Environmental Sciences.</p> </li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching stream faculty were part of the leading team that developed the Department's proposed PhD program in Interdisciplinary and Applied Biology.</li> <li>• A laboratory has been assigned for teaching stream research projects carried out by undergraduate students.</li> <li>• The Department has been providing financial support for undergraduate research supervised by teaching stream faculty.</li> <li>• A teaching stream faculty in the Department, Professor A. Ashok, has been appointed Special Advisor on Teaching Stream Faculty Success, highlighting the value of teaching stream faculty at UTSC, as well as in the Department of Biological Sciences.</li> </ul>
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Introduce a new Specialist (Cooperative) program in Conservation and Biodiversity	Short to medium term [6 months to 1 year] - anticipated start date is Fall 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Specialist (Co-op) program was launched in September 2022. Currently, all the Department's Major and Specialist programs offer a co-op option.</li> </ul>
Expansion of course-based undergraduate research experiences (CUREs).	Medium to long term [1 to 5 years]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BIOB97H3: Bio-CURE: Course-based Undergraduate Research in Biological Sciences is a new course launched in the 2024-25 academic year aimed at addressing inequalities in access to research-based learning across the Department's undergraduate population. This course supports student learning, skill development, and career progression for students across all the Biological Sciences programs.</li> <li>30 students were enrolled in the Fall 2024 offering, and 20 students were enrolled in the Winter 2025 offering.</li> </ul>
Development of a more comprehensive staff hiring plan as part of the next departmental academic plan.	Medium to long term [2 to 3 years] - to be completed by Spring 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Since the last cyclical review, the Department has undergone a reorganization that resulted in the hiring of a Manager, Operations and Finance. It has also hired a Financial Administrator, a Course Coordinator, a Laboratory Coordinator, and an additional Laboratory Technician to support increased enrolment in undergraduate courses.</li> <li>The Department is in the process of hiring a Course Administrator and a Research Lab Technician. Budget and space constraints, as well as rapid undergraduate enrolment growth continue to present challenges to creating a more comprehensive staff hiring plan.</li> </ul>
Introduce a new PhD in Interdisciplinary and Applied Biology	Medium to long term [2 to 3 years] - earliest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The proposal for the PhD in Interdisciplinary and Applied Biology has been in development over the last couple of years. A site visit is planned for May 2025, during</li> </ul>

	anticipated start date is Fall 2023	<p>which external reviewers will assess the proposed program against leading international programs in the field, identify areas for improvement, and highlight any innovative aspects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on the outcome of the external review and the subsequent governance process, this new program, if approved, could launch as early as Fall 2027, with the program being advertised to students as early as Fall 2026.</li> <li>• Starting enrollment will be 5. As the program develops in subsequent years, administrative support will be requested to complement the growth of the program.</li> </ul>
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**The status of any additional items discussed at the AP&P meeting as captured in the FAR/IP:**

- The Department had proposed new course based undergraduate research experiences which were expected to launch in 2023-24 and that work continued in formalizing aspects related to those new offerings.

As mentioned earlier in this interim monitoring report, the Department of Biological Sciences launched a new course, BIOB97H3: Bio-CURE (Course-based Undergraduate Research in Biological Sciences), earlier this academic year. The two offerings of this course, one in Fall 2024 and one in Winter 2025, have resulted in a total enrollment of 50 students.

- Frequency of offerings in the co-op program in relation to students' graduation

Apart from the Minor in Biology, all the Department's Major and Specialist programs now have a Co-op option. To accommodate students' placement periods and ensure that students can complete the Co-op options in four years, the Department has increased the frequency of course offerings to twice or three times a year. A pre-program embedded academic advisor for the 1<sup>st</sup> year is now part of the Department's student support team.

**The status of any projects supported by "Program Innovation Funding" provided by the VPAP:**

Professors Aarthi Ashok and Emily Bell were co-applicants on the Learning and Education Advancement Fund (LEAF) grant, titled "Bio-CURE: Removing Barriers to Undergraduate Student Research Engagement through a Course-based Undergraduate Research Experiences (CURE) in Biological Sciences." This grant was awarded on May 3, 2023, providing \$10,000 per year for 3 years. This funding is intended to develop CURE lab experiences.

**Findings of assessments of program effectiveness, conducted as outlined in the self-study:**

Not applicable.

This interim monitoring report was developed in consultation with the Chair of the Department of Biological Sciences, the Director of the Arts & Science Co-op Office, as well as relevant colleagues in my office. The Dean's Office has monitored the implementation of review recommendations through ongoing meetings with the Chair of the Department.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'J. Fields', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Professor Jessica Fields  
Acting Vice-Principal Academic & Dean

Cc: Mauricio Terebiznik, Chair, Department of Biological Sciences