

**FOR
RECOMMENDATION**

PUBLIC

OPEN SESSION

TO: UTM Academic Affairs Committee

SPONSOR: Professor William A. Gough, Interim Vice-Principal Academic & Dean
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PRESENTER: Professor Bryan Stewart, Vice-Dean, Academic Programs
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DATE: December 23, 2024, for January 8, 2025

AGENDA ITEM: 3

ITEM IDENTIFICATION:

Program Closure: Major in Exceptionality in Human Learning, UTM

JURISDICTIONAL INFORMATION:

The UTM Academic Affairs Committee is responsible for recommending for approval by the Committee for Academic Policy and Programs, both new undergraduate programs within an existing degree, and the closure of such programs.

GOVERNANCE PATH:

1. **UTM Academic Affairs Committee [For Recommendation] (January 8, 2025)**
2. Committee on Academic Policy and Programs [For Approval] (February 13, 2025)

PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN:

No previous action taken.

HIGHLIGHTS:

The Department of Psychology at UTM proposed to close the Major program in Exceptionality in Human Learning (EHL), following a previous suspension of program admissions in 2019 after a review of the program's relevance and academic value. The EHL Major and the Psychology Major have significant overlap, with minimal differentiation between the two programs. Both share most courses, with only 2.0 credits distinguishing them. The decision to close the EHL Major addresses this overlap while preserving the integrity of the more intensive EHL Specialist program, which will remain available, providing students with a more focused and comprehensive education in this area.

The closure of the EHL Major will positively impact the department by eliminating program overlap and improving the clarity and focus of the academic offerings. As of 2022, no active students remain in the EHL Major, and admissions had already been suspended in 2019. The department has four inactive students who could potentially return to complete the program. These students will be allowed to finish their degree requirements, and all necessary courses will continue to be offered. Future students interested in the themes covered by the EHL Major will be directed toward the EHL Specialist or the closely related Psychology Major programs.

The department has engaged in substantial consultation with faculty, relevant departments, and divisional curriculum committees since 2013. This proposal has received broad support. Consultations with the Biology and Anthropology departments confirm that the closure will not significantly affect their course enrollments. Both departments have only a minimal number of courses listed as options for EHL students, and neither anticipates any disruption to their offerings. No staff or faculty will be affected by the closure.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

There are no financial implications to the campus operating budget.

RECOMMENDATION:

Be it Recommended,

THAT the Closure of the Major in Exceptionality in Human Learning, UTM, as detailed in the proposal dated November 28, 2024, be approved, effective May 1, 2025.

DOCUMENTATION PROVIDED:

Closure of an Existing Program or Program Structure (Graduate or Undergraduate) (Major in Exceptionality in Human Learning)

University of Toronto Proposal:

Closure of an Existing Program or Program Structure (Graduate or Undergraduate)

Closure proposed; please specify precisely what is being closed: i.e., field, certificate, option within a program (e.g., specialist, part-time option), entire program or degree.	Major in Exceptionality in Human Learning (ERMAJ1883)
Department/unit if applicable:	Psychology
Faculty/academic division:	University of Toronto Mississauga
Department/unit contact:	Brett Beston Associate Chair - Undergraduate, Psychology brett.beston@utoronto.ca
Faculty/academic division contact:	Bryan Stewart Vice -Dean, Academic Programs vdacademicprog.utm@utoronto.ca Ferzeen Sammy Manager, Academic Programs, Reviews, and Quality Assurance ferzeen.sammy@utoronto.ca
Date when admissions were administratively suspended:	May 1, 2019
Effective date of full closure of program: i.e., date by which students currently in the program are expected to graduate.	May 1, 2025
Version date: please change as you edit this proposal.	November 28, 2024

Framework for UTQAP closures:

UTQAP processes support a structured approach for creating, reflecting on, assessing, and developing plans to change and improve academic programs and units in the context of institutional and divisional commitments and priorities.

The University of Toronto (U of T), in its *Statement of Institutional Purpose* (1992), articulates its mission as a commitment "to being an internationally significant research

university, with undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs of excellent quality." Thus "quality assurance through assessment of new program proposals and review of academic programs and units in which they reside is a priority for the University...:

The quality of the scholarship of the faculty, and the degree to which that scholarship is brought to bear in teaching are the foundations of academic excellence. More generally, all of the factors that contribute to collegial and scholarly life —academic and administrative complement, research and scholarly activity, infrastructure, governance, etc.—bear on the quality of academic programs and the broad educational experience of students. ([*Policy for Approval and Review of Academic Programs and Units*](#) (2010))

The University's approach to quality assurance is built on two primary indicators of academic excellence: the quality of the scholarship and research of faculty; and the success with which that scholarship and research is brought to bear on the achievement of Degree Level Expectations.

These indicators are assessed by determining how our scholarship, research and programs compare to those of our international peer institutions and how well our programs meet their Degree Level Expectations.

Program and Program Structure Closure

Proposals for program closures are vehicles of academic change. The University of Toronto views the closing of academic activities as a normal and positive part of quality assurance and program evolution. There are a number of possible reasons for closing a program including low enrolment, a changing disciplinary landscape and poor quality of the academic program. These reasons may be articulated in external review reports or may be identified by members of the University community.

This template (last updated by the Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs on May 28, 2024) aligns with UTQAP requirements and will help to ensure that all evaluation criteria established by the Quality Council are addressed in bringing forward a proposal. Divisions may have additional requirements that should be integrated into the proposal.

Steps	Dates
Decanal sign-off	November 20, 2024
VPAP sign-off	November 28, 2024
Faculty/divisional council (closure of program structures; freestanding minors; fields; concentrations; category 1 certificates; etc.)	January 8, 2025
AP&P (closure of undergraduate specialists; majors; diplomas)	February 13, 2025
Academic Board (closure of degree; graduate program; joint program)	Not applicable
Executive Committee of Governing Council (confirmation of approval of degree, grad program, joint program closures)	Not applicable
Inclusion in annual report to Quality Council	July 2025

1 Executive Summary

Please provide a brief summary of the closure being proposed.

The Department of Psychology at UTM is proposing the permanent closure of the Exceptionality in Human Learning (EHL) Major Program (ERMAJ1883). This decision follows previous actions in 2013 to reduce enrollment and subsequently suspend admissions in 2019 after a thorough review of the program's relevance and academic value. The closure aims to eliminate redundancy in the department's offerings, ensuring students receive a more specialized and focused education through the remaining programs.

Academic Rationale: The EHL Major and the Psychology Major have significant overlap, with minimal differentiation between the two programs. Both share most courses, with only 2.0 credits distinguishing them. The decision to close the EHL Major addresses this overlap while preserving the integrity of the more intensive EHL Specialist program. The EHL Specialist will remain available, providing students with a more focused and comprehensive education in this area.

Impact on Divisional and Other Programs: The closure of the EHL Major will positively impact the department by eliminating program overlap and improving the clarity and focus of the academic offerings. The EHL Specialist program will remain active, ensuring that students interested in this field can pursue a more comprehensive and specialized curriculum.

Impact on Students: As of 2022, no active students remain in the EHL Major, and admissions had already been suspended in 2019. The department has four inactive students who could potentially return to complete the program. These students will be allowed to finish their degree requirements, and all necessary courses will continue to be offered.

Future students interested in the themes covered by the EHL Major will be directed toward the EHL Specialist or the closely related Psychology Major programs.

Consultation: The department has engaged in substantial consultation with faculty, relevant departments, and divisional curriculum committees since 2013. This proposal has received broad support.

Consultations with the Biology and Anthropology departments confirm that the closure will not significantly affect their course enrollments. Both departments have only a minimal number of courses listed as options for EHL students, and neither anticipates any disruption to their offerings.

In conclusion, the closure of the EHL Major eliminates program redundancy, enhances the clarity and specialization of the department's offerings, and maintains the academic integrity of the Exceptionality in Human Learning field through the EHL Specialist program.

2 Academic Rationale

- Discuss the academic rationale for the closure including alignment with the unit's academic plan and connection to any previous reviews.
- Discuss any resource implications.

We are dedicated to offering a high-quality education to our top students while also accommodating a large number of students interested in psychology. The Department of Psychology provides a range of programs, including one Minor, two Majors, and three Specialist programs. These cover diverse areas within psychology, spanning the life sciences (e.g., neurobiology, health psychology, genetics of behaviour), social sciences (e.g., personality, social behaviour), and cognitive science (e.g., perception, cognition, language, and communication), offering both comprehensive and specialized tracks.

Our "Exceptionality in Human Learning" (EHL) programs were designed to provide students with a comprehensive academic foundation in issues related to individuals with disabilities or those who are gifted. These programs attract students who may later pursue advanced studies or careers in psychology, special education, rehabilitation, social work, group home management, or adult retraining. Additionally, the EHL programs appeal to those interested in areas like hearing or visual impairment, learning disabilities, developmental delays, physical disabilities, or the broader psychological, sociological, and biological aspects of exceptional individuals, particularly as these issues intersect with public policy. The EHL Specialist program was first introduced in 2003-2004, followed by the EHL Major in 2004-2005.

In 2013, the Psychology department conducted extensive consultations during faculty and curriculum meetings to assess the effectiveness of its programs. The consensus was

that students who did not meet the criteria for Specialist programs should be enrolled in two distinct Major Programs of Study (POSTs) or one Major and two Minor POSTs, ensuring a more diverse academic experience.

A review of the EHL and Psychology Major programs revealed significant overlap, with only a minimal difference between them. This overlap failed to distinguish the programs meaningfully and did not sufficiently expose students to the scholarly foundations of topics concerning individuals with disabilities or giftedness.

Despite the lack of distinction between programs, pursuing a double Major in these two programs was the strategy of most EHL Majors in 2013. In our review of students registered in the EHL Major, we found that students either did not qualify for the Specialist or decided to take the majority of their courses in psychology while opting out of the more senior research labs and seminar courses required of Specialists. This was clearly not the intent behind the EHL Major when it was introduced. The consensus was that students who did not meet the criteria for Specialist programs should be enrolled in two distinct Major Programs of Study (POSTs) or one Major and two Minor POSTs, ensuring a more diverse academic experience.

It was determined that closing the EHL Major was the best approach to reduce redundancy while maintaining a specialized focus through the EHL Specialist program. To minimize student impact, the department chose a gradual phase-out rather than an immediate closure, raising admission standards to match those of the EHL Specialist program (effective 2014-2015) and advising interested students accordingly.

During the department's 2018-19 UTQAP review, this approach was confirmed. Following consultation on the closure decision, reviewers noted, 'The Reviewers agree with the decision to remove the Major in Exceptionality and continue to offer the Specialist degree. This is a very specialized area within the broader discipline of Psychology, but one for which the Department has expertise.'

In May 2019, enrollment in the EHL Major was officially suspended, with active students permitted to complete their requirements. As of this academic year, no active students remain in the EHL Major program.

3 Impact of Closure on Divisional and Other Programs/Units

- Discuss the impact on the nature and quality of the division's program of study
- Discuss the impact of closure on other units including inter-divisional and inter-institutional agreements/contracts.

The closure of the Exceptionality in Human Learning (EHL) Major is expected to have a positive impact on the overall quality of the division's program of study. By streamlining

offerings and reducing program redundancy, the department can better focus on maintaining the rigor and distinctiveness of its other academic tracks, particularly the EHL Specialist program, which will continue to be available.

The overlap between the EHL Major and the broader Psychology Major created a lack of clear differentiation between these programs, limiting the depth and specialization students could experience. Closing the EHL Major allows the department to direct resources toward the EHL Specialist program ensuring that students pursuing Exceptionality in Human Learning Specialist will receive a more comprehensive and specialized academic experience.

The elimination of redundant programs also enhances the clarity of the department's academic offerings, helping students make more informed decisions about their academic paths. This focus on high-quality, distinct programs will contribute to better student outcomes, a more streamlined curriculum, and a more efficient allocation of departmental resources.

Ultimately, the closure of the EHL Major will elevate the division's overall academic quality by prioritizing specialization and academic rigor, ensuring that students receive a more impactful and focused education.

4 Impact on Students

- Please provide the current enrolment showing breakdown by year of study in the program or program option being closed.

Table 1: Inactive Students

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Current enrolment	0	0	3	1

- Referring to the table above, discuss the impact on and accommodation of any students currently enrolled in the program.

Historically (2004-2013), admissions to EHL Major (<20 students per year) have been significantly lower than our Psychology Major stream (>200 students per year). Enrollment was further curtailed following our changes to admission requirements (2014), and suspending admissions to the program (2019).

In our review of those remaining in our program, we found four (4) inactive students who have yet to complete the EHL Major. Collectively these students have not been registered at U of T for 4 to 12 years. We have been able to directly contacted three of the four inactive students to inform them of the proposed closure and we have assured them that if they wish to resume their studies, we are committed to providing full

support to help them complete their EHL Major requirements should they choose to do so. The closure will not affect their ability to complete EHL Major program requirements, as all required courses will continue to be offered. Students previously interested in the EHL Major program can continue to pursue their interests through the EHL Specialist or the closely related Psychology Major programs. One inactive student no longer has a valid email or phone number on file and could not be contacted but if this person wished to resume their studies, they would be counselled appropriately.

Students will be informed of the program closure through multiple channels to ensure they are fully aware of this change. We have individually messaged all remaining students currently inactive in the Exceptionality in Human Learning (EHL) Major Program to provide direct information and to assure them that they retain the option to complete their studies. Additionally, a formal announcement of the closure will be posted on the Department of Psychology's website, outlining the rationale and impact on academic offerings. The Psychology Association of Undergraduate Students at Erindale (PAUSE) has also been consulted to help disseminate information through student networks and answer any questions students may have. This comprehensive approach aims to ensure that students have access to timely information and support as they plan their academic paths.

5 Consultation

- Discuss consultation with affected divisions, units, faculty and students.

No staff or faculty will be affected by the closure of the EHL Major.

Prior requests to curtail enrollment in the EHL Major, included substantial consultation (in 2013 and again in 2018) at departmental faculty and divisional curriculum meetings.

In advance of this proposal, the department was informed of the official request for closure (at departmental faculty meetings), to which the matter received broad support from all faculty members.

We also recognize that the EHL major includes a significant number of Biology and Anthropology courses. we contacted the heads of both departments for consultation. Both departments agreed that the program's closure would not significantly affect their courses, as few students from the EHL Major typically enrolled in relevant courses.

The Department of Anthropology noted that only a limited number of Anthropology courses were options for EHL students, primarily lower-level courses. As these courses are prerequisites for higher-level classes, the Department felt it was unlikely that EHL students enrolled in more advanced Anthropology courses. Therefore, the closure of the program is not expected to have a significant effect on the department.

The Department of Biology similarly expressed that the closure would have no substantial impact, as the program had very few students in recent years.

Both departments acknowledged the gradual implementation of the closure and concurred that it would not disrupt their offerings.

We have engaged in consultation with our undergraduate students through the Psychology Association of Undergraduate Students at Erindale (PAUSE) to inform them of the proposed closure of the Exceptionality in Human Learning (EHL) Major Program. PAUSE has been supportive, and no questions or concerns have been raised by its members at this time.

As part of the broad consultation process, the OVPAD consulted with the Faculty of Arts and Science and the University of Toronto Scarborough through both divisions' Dean's Offices on the proposed closure of the Exceptionality in Human Learning (EHL) Major Program. The Department of Psychology at UTSC indicated no concerns. Within the Faculty of Arts and Science (FAS), the Departments of Psychology, Ecology & Evolutionary Biology, Anthropology, and Cell & Systems Biology all confirmed that they had no questions or concerns regarding the proposal.