

FROM A SHEER NUMBERS PERSPECTIVE, WESTERN'S GRADUATE PROGRAM IN HEALTH & REHABILITATION SCIENCES – WHICH WAS LAUNCHED IN 2006 – HAS BEEN A SUCCESS. IT'S ONE OF THE LARGEST PROGRAMS OF ITS KIND IN CANADA, OFFERING BOTH MASTER'S AND DOCTORAL PROGRAMS, AND REGULARLY FEATURES AN INCOMING CLASS THAT INCLUDES SOME OF THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST IN THE COUNTRY.

Program chair Andrew Johnson, though, points to a different measure in explaining the success of the program. The interdisciplinary and diverse learning environment provided to students, Johnson says, is something not readily available elsewhere.

"Over the course of a day, a student could conceivably sit in a class with a professor of Occupational Therapy, move to a symposium where Physical Therapy research is being presented, and then close out the day by collaborating with people from Communication Sciences and Disorders," Johnson said. "So it's an unusually rich graduate experience."

The graduate program as it stands today grew out of an already successful doctoral program in rehabilitation sciences. But there were benefits in re-conceptualizing that program seven years ago. For one, the offerings were expanded. Students today can enter into nine different streams or fields of study, each of which is an area of strength within the faculty.

The result is that students have the opportunity to work with not only other students who span a wide range of backgrounds and interests, but faculty as well. That's an aspect Adam Day (pictured opposite) has embraced since he became one of the first master's students in the program back in 2006.

"That's probably the program's biggest strength," said Day, now a PhD student in the rehabilitation sciences stream. "The ability to work closely with a very diverse faculty with different skill sets and research programs and knowledge bases that you can draw from and really contextualize new perspectives on health."



But there are other benefits to the current Health & Rehabilitation Sciences program as it exists today. Perhaps most notable is the two-year master's option, which Johnson says has been very well received by students.

"It gives us an entry-level graduate program for students coming out of their undergraduate degrees that may not be particularly interested in clinical studies but want to do research at the master's level," Johnson said. "That's a fairly substantial advantage over having a program that is PhD only."

Graduates from the master's program have gone on to work in a wide variety of health-related fields, both within the government and at not-for-profit organizations. A few of the early PhD graduates, meanwhile, have already secured teaching jobs, including Trish Tucker, now an assistant professor in Western's School of Occupational Therapy.

In keeping with the program's broad view of health, Day's research is focused on creating and fostering healthy relationships between humans and nature and the natural environment to promote health and wellness. He's currently looking at opportunities both within the academic world and in the community.

Whichever route he takes, Day says he believes Western's Graduate Program in Health & Rehabilitation Sciences has prepared him for whatever lies next.

"It's a wonderful platform from which you can extend yourself into new areas and new categories and new professional relationships that you never would have known beforehand," he said. "That's one of the benefits of the program... exposure to opportunities and the impact that you could have."

EDUCATION WITH IMPACT

by Todd Devlin

