

# **The Administrative Organization of Graduate Studies at UBC Okanagan**

Discussion Paper

Okanagan Senate Academic Policy Committee

March 3, 2009

## **Background**

The development and delivery of graduate programs were new activities to UBC Okanagan when it opened in 2005, given Okanagan University College's previous focus on undergraduate teaching. As often happened during the planning phase, transition teams took the initiative to imagine doing things differently – where it made sense – at UBC Okanagan. Creating a College of Graduate Studies (CoGS) was seen as the optimal arrangement at the time. The “college” nomenclature evoked a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach to graduate programming while leaving behind any statutory or conceptual complications associated with the “faculty” construct. The current CoGS was established by the Interim Academic Governing Body and the Board of Governors and began operations with the rest of the campus in 2005.

## **Questions about Division of Responsibility and Authority**

While much progress in establishing and offering graduate programs was made in a very short time, some natural conflicts soon arose between the faculties and CoGS. Under s. 40 of the University Act, RSBC 1996, c. 468, a set of powers and duties are assigned to faculties. Because colleges are not defined in the Act, a college has only the powers and duties assigned to it by the University. A faculty may choose to delegate some of its statutory powers to a college, or it may choose to retain those powers itself. Some faculties reached agreement on arrangements for shared responsibility very quickly, while other faculties determined that they preferred to retain some faculty powers. CoGS quickly found itself in an inconsistent and often impractical situation.

It bears noting here that, had UBC Okanagan established a Faculty of Graduate Studies in the first instance, only some of the ambiguity would have been resolved. Rather than asking whether the College ought to have any of the powers of a faculty (because a faculty is automatically granted powers under the Act), the question would have become how to divide those powers between the graduate studies unit and the disciplinary faculties.

## **CoGS External Review**

In late 2007, the Provost established a UBC Okanagan internal task force to review the College of Graduate Studies. Given the difficulty the task force was having coming to a resolution, the Provost initiated an external review of CoGS that was conducted in April 2008. External reviewers were Dr. Mark Dale, then the Dean of Graduate Studies & Research at the University of Alberta, and Dr. Carolyn Watters, Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies at Dalhousie University. In the external review report, the reviewers noticed a lack of parallelism between the Vancouver campus (with its Faculty of Graduate Studies) and UBC Okanagan (with its CoGS) and noted that the term “College” had “...a number of

implications that may work against the unit.” The report also identified several sources of tension, including a lack of clarity about the authority and responsibility of the graduate studies unit relative to that of the faculties. It was recommended that UBC Okanagan, through its Senate, unambiguously define (among other things) the authority of the graduate studies unit at UBC Okanagan. Reviewers also recommended that the College be converted to a faculty.

In October 2008, the internal task force was asked to respond to the recommendations proposed by external reviewers. The Provost thereafter forwarded the recommendations of the task force to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. A majority of the task force supported the recommendation that CoGS be recast as a faculty and recommended that a committee of the Senate guide the transformation of the College. At the time, the Provost envisioned a special or ad hoc committee to undertake this work. After further discussion at the October 8, 2008 meeting of the Senate, it was determined that the Academic Policy Committee was best placed under its terms of reference to accept this task. The Committee was asked to report back to the Senate with its own recommendations prior to the May 2009 meeting of the Senate.

### ***Academic Policy Committee Process***

Early in its deliberations, the Academic Policy Committee took the decision to temporarily set aside the question of an appropriate name and unit classification for graduate studies. The Committee was mindful of the fact that both an external review of CoGS and the majority of the UBC Okanagan task force had recommended that the unit be reclassified as a faculty, but decided to approach the issue from a structural perspective.

Accordingly, the Committee decided to develop a list of the functions required throughout the life cycle of graduate programs and student enrolment in those programs and to determine where each function ought to reside at UBC Okanagan. The list of functions has evolved through discussion into the “Areas of Responsibility” table that appears later in this report.

### **Prime Objectives**

Based on the principles articulated in the University’s Academic Plan (see [http://web.ubc.ca/okanagan/dvc/\\_shared/assets/academic-plan956.pdf](http://web.ubc.ca/okanagan/dvc/_shared/assets/academic-plan956.pdf)), the Committee recommends that any administrative structure for graduate programming at UBC Okanagan meet the following objectives:

1. Responds to the needs of students and ensures high quality learning outcomes as a primary driver;
2. Seeks efficiencies and eliminates redundancies;
3. Places areas of responsibility and authority where they are best positioned;
4. Adheres to existing policies and procedures that are UBC system-wide (e.g., Board policies, collective agreements, etc.);
5. Minimizes potential for conflict among various administrative offices across campus; and
6. Is easy to understand and negotiate.

### **Basic Structure: A Shared Responsibility Model**

As the Committee considered the list of functions, a shared responsibility model emerged as opposed to placing exclusive responsibility for the identified functions / tasks with Graduate Studies or existing faculties. This model divided functions into two main categories-- administrative, service, and oversight functions and purely academic, learning, and research functions. Infused throughout are issues of

financial and human resources that are essential for supporting these functions, but these were considered secondary to the extent that no policies or rules are violated. An essential component of the shared responsibility model is that there be mutual accountability where appropriate, and well-defined mechanisms for conflict resolution. The Committee envisioned the two primary function categories as being associated with Graduate Studies and existing faculties, respectively. It was important that neither entity should be allowed to dominate the administrative relationship, but each should have control over its functions as defined within the overall mandate.

In some cases, an area of responsibility will clearly reside in one entity or another, whereas in other areas of responsibility there will need to be clear communication (at a minimum) and effective collaboration to ensure robust outcomes, in keeping with the objectives listed above that derived from Senate's mandate over academic issues.

### Recommended Assignment of Areas of Responsibility

GRADUATE STUDIES	FACULTIES
<i>Student Recruitment and Admissions</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Promote Graduate Studies programs for UBC Okanagan</li> <li>▪ Maintain web page for general information regarding application and admission standards</li> <li>▪ Receive, screen, sort, and process applications (follow up with missing items; forward materials to programs; maintain files; track progress; remind program advisors of deadlines and deliverables)</li> <li>▪ Ensure general policies and regulations are adhered to (TOEFL criteria, GPA calculations, transcript interpretation, assessment of credentials, fraud detection)</li> <li>▪ Manage fee payments</li> <li>▪ Send letters of decline to non-admitted students (a copy of each letter would be sent to the discipline faculty dean and to the primary supervisor)</li> <li>▪ Manage appeals/exception requests/extraordinary circumstances (in collaboration with the discipline faculty dean)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop promotional materials for programs</li> <li>▪ Advertise and market programs</li> <li>▪ Outreach efforts to attract best students</li> <li>▪ Review applications and make decisions regarding preferred candidates for admission</li> <li>▪ Quality assessment, prerequisite assessment, evaluation of referee letters, etc., as well as general due diligence (e.g., phone interviews of foreign candidates to check language skills)</li> <li>▪ Report back to Graduate Studies regarding decisions (after confirmation from GS, communicate with admitted students)</li> <li>▪ Maintain contact with admitted students and forward information kits (e.g., "Surviving Grad School")</li> </ul>

<b><i>Student Financial Assistance</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop and administer all financial aid instruments (scholarships, fellowships, grants, loans) that are open to all graduate students and are NOT employment related:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. instruction in process</li> <li>2. vetting of applications for competition</li> <li>3. creating and managing the selection committees</li> <li>4. notifying applicants</li> <li>5. liaison function with UBC Vancouver's Faculty of Graduate Studies                   <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. allocation of applicants for UBCO in major competitions</li> <li>b. monitoring UBC-wide opportunities</li> </ol> </li> </ol> </li> <li>▪ Liaise and coordinate with programs regarding discipline specific opportunities, especially as regards government requirements/limitations on scholarships</li> <li>▪ Develop accommodations for students at financial risk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Endowment development</li> <li>▪ Develop program-specific guidelines on overall financial packages for students (for competitiveness)</li> <li>▪ Manage TA/RA opportunities in collaboration with Faculty Dean's Office (maintain strict adherence to work-related guidelines and union regulations, etc.) with reports to GS</li> </ul>
<b><i>Student Progress Within Programs</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Student Orientation, i.e. "Welcome to Grad School"</li> <li>▪ Workshops (Communication of University processes, etc.)</li> <li>▪ Maintain files on student milestones (master checklist with supplementary forms and signatures) and appropriate sanctions</li> <li>▪ Approve and track "leave of absence" requests in collaboration with Programs</li> <li>▪ Administer withdrawal/dismissal requests</li> <li>▪ Management of appeals (exemptions from the rules; resolution of conflicts relating to program; grades)</li> <li>▪ Management of academic misconduct cases of students</li> <li>▪ Ombudsperson services</li> <li>▪ Approve committee membership and maintain files on internal and external appointments (and eligibilities)</li> <li>▪ Convocation audits</li> <li>▪ Foster and develop Graduate Culture &amp; Community across faculties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Student Orientation – Welcome to the Program and to the Department/Unit</li> <li>▪ Workshops (TA training, Research protocols, Getting a Job, Professionalization)</li> <li>▪ Develop mechanisms to keep track of student progress and to conduct effective advising (e.g., completion of course requirements, meeting critical timelines)</li> <li>▪ Develop infrastructure to support student research</li> <li>▪ In collaboration with Faculty Dean's Office, provide adequate office and laboratory space</li> <li>▪ Initiate withdrawal/dismissal requests</li> <li>▪ Approve and appoint faculty members to committees following GS regulations</li> <li>▪ Recommend external examiners to Graduate Studies for approval</li> <li>▪ Recommend students to the Senate for graduation</li> <li>▪ Foster and develop Graduate Culture &amp; Community within the faculty</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Final approval and uploading of thesis/abstracts into National Archives of Canada</li> <li>▪ Track and maintain contact with alumni, perhaps through Alumni Relations</li> </ul>	
<b><i>Program Development</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Facilitate proposal development</li> <li>▪ Provide interim proposal review and feedback</li> <li>▪ Evaluate final program proposals for completeness and adherence to UBC Okanagan regulations and standards</li> <li>▪ Provide consultation to the Faculty regarding program viability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Undertake thorough “market” analysis regarding need and viability of the proposed program</li> <li>▪ Undertake realistic assessment of faculty strengths and overall prospects for delivering a robust graduate experience for students</li> <li>▪ Consult with Faculty Dean’s Office</li> <li>▪ Develop a comprehensive proposal including 5-year growth model and realistic budget projections, as well as Education Plan that demonstrates feasibility of graduate program</li> <li>▪ Coordinate with GS during program development</li> <li>▪ Secure consultation reports</li> <li>▪ Forward “final” proposals to Faculty-level Curriculum Committee and to GS for evaluation, feedback, and/or support</li> <li>▪ Forward approved proposal to Faculty Council and to Dean’s Office for discussion and consideration</li> <li>▪ Faculty to deliver final proposal to Senate Curriculum Committee</li> <li>▪ NOTE: for new-to-UBC proposals, there is also a government (AVED) process, which should move in parallel but NOT in advance of internal approvals.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Program Administration</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Propose Guidelines, Rules, and Regulations that govern Graduate Programs at UBC Okanagan</li> <li>▪ Develop standardized metrics to track quality and effectiveness of UBC O graduate programs</li> <li>▪ Develop annual reporting requirements for programs</li> <li>▪ Maintain data base on student placements after graduation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Monitor and track effectiveness of various elements of the program</li> <li>▪ Develop strategies for best learning outcomes, student satisfaction, short time to completion, and retention</li> <li>▪ Monitor and ensure quality outcomes for every student by conducting student satisfaction surveys and by performing annual assessments of student progress (in conjunction with supervisors)</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Coordinate periodic program reviews (e.g., 5 years) in collaboration with the Faculty Deans and the Provost (should involve external review team)</li> <li>▪ Make recommendations to Senate regarding discontinuance of programs that do not perform to standard</li> <li>▪ Recommend to Senate requirements and expectations regarding: (1) faculty member participation in graduate education; (2) general make-up of various committees (e.g., supervisory, examination; defence); (3) minimum standards for 'satisfactory student progress'; (4) format of programs (e.g., research vs. course-based); (5) format of comprehensive examinations; (6) format of thesis defences; (7) format of written theses; scheduling and announcing of defences, UBC-wide formatting and standards for thesis</li> <li>▪ Maintain files of program procedures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop procedures for program delivery including: operational procedures of committees, qualifications of external examiners as well as how they can participate i.e. in person, via telephone; expense reimbursements</li> </ul>
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## Recommended Unit Classification

As in many previous discussions about graduate studies, the “name” of the unit is not the pivotal issue, but the classification of unit within the academic-administrative organization of the campus and the University. It soon became clear from a functional perspective that there was a need for institutional consistency and fundamental standards and this, of necessity, required the centralization of common activities. At the same time, it was recognized that there would be a variety of different factors shaping graduate programs and practices that emanated from the disciplines within faculties. It was, moreover, recognized that under the *University Act*, those who actually delivered graduate programs were positioned with the faculties of the University.

## An Office of Graduate Studies

After having reflected on the various possibilities – faculty, college, school, and office among them – the Committee is of the opinion that an Office of Graduate Studies would both support the achievement of the above-mentioned objectives and reflect the division of responsibilities as imagined in the above table. The Committee recommends that an Office of Graduate Studies be established within the Office of the Provost, UBC Okanagan as part of the Office of Research. While such an office would not have the same relationship with the Senate as would a faculty, Senate would maintain its authority over the academic issues associated with graduate studies. Senate would need to approve the policies applicable to graduate students that fall under Senate jurisdiction.

By clarifying that students and academic programs reside within faculties, the Senate could resolve many of the conflicts generated by jurisdictional overlap. This clarification would not, however, eliminate altogether the possibility of conflict in areas of common interest and shared responsibility. The identification of mechanisms for conflict resolution remains critical for the success of any graduate studies unit. Initially, the Provost would attempt to resolve such conflicts based on the policies approved

by Senate; where a resolution is not attainable through this mechanism, the issue will be directed to the Academic Policy Committee of Senate for ultimate decision by Senate as a whole.

Rationale for recommending an Office of Graduate Studies:

- Faculties have powers and duties as outlined in section 40 of the *University Act*. In the history of UBC Okanagan, limited power has been transferred from the faculties to the College of Graduate Studies. This is not the case in Vancouver where there is a Faculty of Graduate Studies that shares responsibilities with the disciplinary faculties which often results in disagreements over who has responsibility for what. At this point, there are faculties that do not wish to transfer their powers to another agency.
- Faculty members would be appointed to only one faculty rather than having an appointment in two separate faculties, which would be the case if a Faculty of Graduate Studies were established. This could conflict with the spirit of the collective agreement since graduate students are often an integral part of research program;
- The office model ought to reduce conflict by avoiding colliding powers residing in faculties and in Graduate studies, which has occurred at several other universities with the formation of a Faculty of Graduate Studies.
- The external reviewers' recommendation to create a Faculty of Graduate Studies to parallel the structure at UBC Vancouver was not seen as a compelling rationale. It does not resolve the issues how to determine who performs what functions, nor does it articulate a conflict resolution process that ultimately includes Senate.
- Although a number of institutions have a Faculty of Graduate Studies, the Office of Graduate Studies model is also a fairly common arrangement across Canada.

### **Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies (IGS)**

There has been understandable reluctance in the past to locate an interdisciplinary program within a single faculty, as this would at first seem to defeat its purpose. Members felt that interdisciplinarity, however, is rooted in the academic approach to a student's program of study rather than in the administrative organization of the campus. The Committee is also of the opinion that all degree programs, including graduate degree programs, ought to reside within faculties. Since asking more than one faculty to serve as an IGS student's "home" risks confusion and jurisdictional conflicts of exactly the type that generated the entire graduate studies discussion, the Committee recommends that each IGS student be assigned a single academic home in the faculty of the student's primary supervisor. IGS students, like all graduate students would benefit from the centralized support services provided by the Office of Graduate Studies.

### **Next Steps**

The Academic Policy Committee will circulate this discussion paper and conduct consultation in March 2009, with the goal of finalizing its recommendations to Senate in April 2009. The Committee is hopeful that Senate will make its decision on the recommendations not later than May 2009.