REVIEW OF THE COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES, UBC OKANAGAN. APRIL 2008

SCOPE

The terms of reference that were provided to the review team before the visit were very general, and included four areas:

- resources and milestones for graduate expansion
- an evaluation of COGS processes for maintaining standards
- the working of oversight processes
- the relationship of COGS with other academic units

From the beginning of the review team's site visit, it was clear that the issues that needed attention most urgently were those related to the authority and autonomy of COGS and its relationship with the units in which the graduate programs are offered at UBC O, together with the processes that had been developed to oversee and administer those programs. This report will therefore focus on those questions related to these central issues, but we will also offer thoughts and advice on a number of issues that impinge on these.

BACKGROUND

Graduate programs are new at UBC O and the processes and cultures related to research intensive activities needs to mature. Currently FTE graduate enrolment is 197 with 2010 projection set at 500 graduate students. Tension remains between UBC V policies and UBC O policies and jurisdictions, for example, transfer of credits and scholarship competitions. These tensions are exacerbated by a lack of full parallelism between UBC V and UBC O: there are separate and equivalent Senates, but UBC V has a Faculty of Graduate Studies whereas UBC O has a College of Graduate Studies. The term "College" has a number of implications which may work against the unit, but it was chosen for a variety of reasons in preference to "Faculty", "School", or "Office". In the greater UBC system, most of the disciplinary faculties are separate on the two campuses, but the Faculty of Engineering is a "bridging faculty" with a presence on both campuses. At UBC V, graduate degrees are granted on the authority of the Faculty of Graduate Studies but at UBC O that authority may derive from the authority of the line faculties (see below).

Tensions also exist between a general desire, both centrally and within the units, to develop graduate programs and the difficulties of coping with the necessary impact on resources, particularly related to the workload of both academic and support staff.

A third source of tension is the historical development of UBC O, at least in part, from Okanagan University College which did not originally have a strong foundation in research and graduate studies, being primarily an undergraduate teaching institution, with the result that UBC O inherited staff members from the outset who did not have experience in a research intensive culture or in graduate student supervision. In contrast, the campus has made a strong effort in its new hires to emphasize the importance of research and the supervision of graduate students. One result of this tension continues in

the institution in defining a system of approval of individual academic staff for graduate teaching and supervision, to ensure the quality of these important activities.

The reviewers were very impressed that UBC O was able to put a system to handle graduate students and graduate programs that worked and worked very quickly to get a wide range of graduate programs up and running.

At the same time, because the systems were put in place quickly, the campus has experienced a number of problems with the administration of graduate programs that can be attributed to the "growing pains" of scaling up from a few students to relatively large numbers in a short period of time. Some of the issues are related to the development of the Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies (IGS) program that was initially intended to serve as a general umbrella for the full scope of graduate areas, but that may now require some rethinking as its role develops (see below). There are also issues related to questions of authority and autonomy for the delivery and administration of graduate programs and the granting of graduate degrees, which will be one focus of this report.

PIVOTAL ISSUES

The university has not yet delivered a clear articulation of the role it expects a graduate studies unit to play in fulfilling the mission of the university. Prior to any discussions of "how to" the discussions of "what services" and "who is responsible" need to be articulated. The context for a discussion of the role of graduate studies centers on core objectives, including:

To facilitate an excellent educational experience for students
To maintain the integrity of programs and degrees
To facilitate the research agenda of the university.

Recommendation 1: The University, through Senate, must articulate clearly the objectives of a graduate studies in fulfilling the University mandate.

The outstanding issues of name of the unit and degree granting authority derive directly from the authority given to the unit from the Senate. These two issues were raised frequently in our discussions and clarity on this is imperative.

Recommendation 2: The University, through the Senate at UBC O, must articulate clearly where the ultimate authority and responsibility for graduate studies at this campus of the university resides. We recommend that the authority for graduate programs on the Okanagan campus reside with a Graduate Studies unit.

The naming of the Graduate Studies unit, i.e., as a Faculty or College or Office, reflects the role that Senate expects the unit to perform and the choice of name sends a clear signal to the university community both at Okanagan and at UBC overall. The College designation, as currently defined, is not workable. The definition of College could be tightened up to reflect the authorities and responsibilities of the unit but in the context of

the UBC-V campus, which uses the term Faculty, the term College may be seen as subsidiary to the Faculty of Graduate Studies on the Vancouver campus. It may carry different connotations for different people and should be replaced to avoid further confusion.

Recommendation 3: The College of Graduate Studies should be renamed the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

The operational model of the graduate studies unit with appropriate designated authority can be defined operationally in several ways, including:

1. A strong central unit of graduate studies that has authority and resources to enact and enforce university-wide or campus-wide policies applicable to all graduate programs.
2. A more decentralized model in which the graduate studies unit performs defined oversight functions and faculties perform defined local functions.
3. A mixed model in which a central unit of graduate studies has authority and responsibility for all graduate programs, policies, and processes, but in which faculties are delegated authority and responsibility over specific processes.

Recommendation 4: Senate should unambiguously define the authority of the graduate studies unit at UBC O. The Graduate Studies unit can then assign authority for certain functions to Faculties.

For graduate studies policies to be integrated into the culture and processes at UBC O considerable interaction and buy-in from program coordinators and faculty in general will be needed. A council, chaired by the head of the graduate studies unit, with a mandate to develop and approve new policies and processes related to graduate matters can be very effective where the members of such a committee cover all disciplines and are directly involved with graduate matters.

Recommendation 5: Senate should approve a Graduate Studies Council, chaired by the head of the Graduate Studies unit (the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies), whose members would be graduate program coordinators plus one or more graduate student representatives. This council would be charged with approving policy and process issues related to graduate studies matters.

OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

UBCO has undergone tremendous growth and upheaval in a relatively short period of time. The graduate programs are largely in start up mode while the processes and policies are struggling to keep up. While it is clear that the past two years are anomalous, it is certainly time to reflect on processes that are flexible enough to accommodate growth and at the same time reflect the realities of managing resources in a small graduate community.

If UBC O is to be taken seriously as a graduate university, it needs to have campus-wide or university-wide quality assurance and overview of all of its graduate programs. Adopting a university-wide perspective will be difficult if some sectors cannot adopt a university-wide perspective. A faculty-centric view is at odds with the institutional aspirations of "thinking beyond boundaries." University-wide processes and policies are generally used where either efficiencies can be achieved or where arms length evaluation is required. Several university-wide processes were mentioned that require careful thought by Graduate Studies so that the processes are simple, transparent and adequately resourced, including admission process, program progress, supervisory committee management, convocation audit, and appeals.

GRADUATE PROGRAM SUPPORT SERVICES

CENTRAL SERVICES

Admission: efficient admission processes that support the decisions to accept or to reject applications in timely manner at the department level, including central processing of GPA calculations and fraud detection.

Program Progress: many interventions are required during the course of individual programs including, leaves of absence, dismissal, program changes, and convocation audits. Each of these requires clarity and consistency in the application of policy and documentation.

Scholarship competitions: the end-to-end processing of scholarship competitions including vetting of applications for completion, managing selection committees, and notifying applicants.

Theses and Defences: The completion of theses and the completion of oral defences are the cornerstone of research intensive degrees in Canada. As such, much of the reputation of the entire university resides on the quality of these outcomes. University wide thesis format regulations are needed to ensure that the print quality of the thesis product represents the university at a high level, especially when scanned and /or bound. Consequently a minimal set of specific thesis formatting guidelines are needed to ensure consistency and competency. These guidelines should be concise and flexible. The process for holding Masters and PhD defences should be very clearly articulated and managed at the university level.

Appeals: The Graduate Studies office is often the only place graduate students can turn for resolution of difficulties related to their programs and interactions within departments and faculties. Resolution may be informal and take place at a low level, or it may follow a formal process within the University's judiciary structure. In either case, there should be a source for advice for a graduate student with concerns, and the formation of an ombudsperson office would be ideal.

Recommendation 6: The Graduate Studies unit should develop immediately policies and protocols for efficient and effective management of processes related to these central services.

Program Reviews: An arms-length body is needed to provide objective reviews for new programs, reviews of existing programs, and modifications of university graduate programs. A Program Committee composed of graduate program coordinators or other delegates can be used instead of the current Senate curriculum committee, which deals with mainly undergraduate issues. Alternatively, graduate members could be added to or designated for the Senate Curriculum committee to review all university programs. Workload may become a factor in the Senate committee as graduate programs continue to be brought on board. It should not be necessary to have two separate reviews beyond the Faculty level before Senate approval.

Recommendation 7: A small Program Committee of Graduate Studies (or perhaps a sub-committee of Senate), chaired by the Dean of the Graduate Studies unit (Faculty) should be established with representation across the teaching faculties to conduct reviews of new graduate programs, of graduate program modifications, and of established graduate programs at appropriate intervals. The recommendations of this committee will be presented to Faculty Council for approval before presentation to Senate.

Supervision: There is general agreement that high quality graduate programs rely on high quality supervision, which is based on experience, at least in part, and on remaining current with research and scholarship in the appropriate field. In the context of a small university it may not be necessary to implement a rigorous third-party membership process. That is, it may be appropriate to develop clear guidelines and to assign the responsibility for interpreting the guidelines for supervision, teaching of graduate courses to departmental chairs or deans. The Graduate Studies unit, which has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that students are well supervised, would be responsible for establishing a signing authority process for such delegation and to monitor its success.

Recommendation 8: Individuals are routinely evaluated at the Faculty or Departmental level for eligibility to supervise graduate students and to teach graduate courses.

ADDITIONAL SERVICES

Web Presence: The Graduate Studies unit should designate a staff member to maintain a high quality web site as the main information source for staff, faculty, and students. Such a site would be used by prospective students and enrolled students and would include forms, processes, and handbooks, etc.

Recommendation 9: A dedicated and "branded" Graduate Studies web site be designed and maintained through the Graduate Studies unit on a continuing basis.

Skill Development: students, faculty and staff can benefit from centrally administered skill development opportunities including, mentoring and supervision, grant writing, time management, thesis writing, and workshops related to specific topics.

Recruitment: the preparation of university wide brochures and branding for graduate programs at the university.

MILESTONES TO MEASURE SUCCESS

The university and the graduate studies unit need to develop the metrics to be used to measure success in graduate programs at UBC O. These measures can include:

Time to completion by degree type
Average funding
Completion rate
Supervisory capacity utilization
Graduate student publication/conference/creative activities

Recommendation 10: A set of graduate studies metrics and objectives should be set and reported to Faculty Council and to Senate annually.

RESOURCES

Although the current number of graduate students is relatively small they are spread across many programs and consequently most processes related to larger graduate populations apply. The current resources are simply not adequate. Each of the functions listed above requires at least a half time person to develop, execute, and maintain adequate processes. The advantage, however, is that the University will have the systems and expertise in place to provide appropriate service to a growing graduate population.

Recommendation 11: The university must allocate resources commensurate with expectations of services to be provided by a graduate studies unit.

INTERDISCIPLINARY GRADUATE STUDIES PROGRAMS

The IGS stream currently has several different functions. It was designed initially as a channel for true individual interdisciplinary graduate programs, with the idea that it would be a significant component of the distinctive offerings at UBC O. However, it is also used as an incubator for programs in both traditional and non-traditional areas that can or should evolve into stand-alone programs as they mature. At the same time, it is used by small units to provide access to graduate students both currently and in the long term, where the "critical mass" is not expected to develop to make an identifiable stand-alone program viable. These three roles are not incompatible but processes for managing all three functions should be established.

Recommendation 12: The IGS be explicitly described by its several functions, so that its multiple roles are clarified and understood by the whole community.

The IGS Applicant form seems to be currently designed for applicants who are either on campus or who are familiar with it.

Recommendation 13: The IGS application process and specifically the IGS form need to be revised to be more "friendly" to off-campus applicants.

There seems to be a potential conflict of interest in having the IGS administered directly by the Dean of Graduate Studies unit; this potential needs to be minimized or removed.

Recommendation 14: Administrative responsibility for the IGS should be delegated to a director not included in the graduate studies unit.

STUDENT FUNDING

One major issue for the continued growth of graduate programs at UBC O is financial support for students. This is a complex problem and we will not comment at great length, since most of the issues are obvious: more money is needed. We will comment about scholarships, however, because it is one area in which the relationship between the two UBC campuses needs clarification and rationalization. UBC O needs to be more involved with the overall UBC scholarship process, both for internal scholarships, such as the Killams, and for external scholarships such as those from NSERC and SSHRC. This will require some negotiation between the Graduate Studies Deans from the two campuses to develop systems that are truly fair and can support graduate growth and excellent at the Okanagan campus.

Recommendation 15: Processes need to be established to ensure that UBC O graduate students have access to internal and national scholarships equal to those for students at UBC V.

Recommendation 16: UBC O should establish membership on the UBC university wide scholarship competition committees.

CONCLUSION

There is much to be commended in the approach used at UBC O in the rapid initiation and growth of the graduate programs that are a central part of the campus mandate. There are a number of improvements that can be made, we feel, to solve some current issues and to avoid problems in the predicted scale up in the future. The chief recommendations are to make the current "College" into a fully functional Faculty, to clarify and streamline the administrative processes, to develop policies and procedures to deal with potential appeals, and to revise the current approach to the IGS program.