

APPENDIX 3

Report of the *ad hoc*, Interdisciplinarity Advisory Committee, March, 2006

The Provost organized a committee of 13 selected faculty members to discuss options for administrative structures for the support and development of interdisciplinary activities at UBC. The committee met 5 times between Dec, 05 and Feb, 06. Two student representatives, one from the Graduate Student Society and one from the Alma Mater Society, joined the committee for our last 2 meetings. While our objective dealt with interdisciplinarity in general, we were also charged with the task of making recommendations about the organization of the Faculty of Graduate Studies, which currently carries out two major functions: 1) the oversight of graduate student programs and awarding of graduate degrees at UBC, and 2) the administration of a number of interdisciplinary research Centers, Institutes and Schools and their associated graduate programs. This report uses the terms “interdisciplinary” and “interdisciplinarity” in the broadest possible way, encompassing all multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary activities. This report provides 5 recommendations, all of which were unanimously approved by the committee.

Recommendation #1. The Faculty of Graduate Studies should be dedicated to the development and support of high quality graduate programs at UBC.

This recommendation removes the administration of interdisciplinary units and their associated graduate programs from the Faculty of Graduate Studies, but the committee believes that this separation must not leave the interdisciplinary units without an institutional home with a strong leader and advocate, to ensure the continuity of the existing FOGS units as well as to foster the development of interdisciplinary research and teaching across campus (see recommendation 2). The separation will allow the Faculty of Graduate Studies to more effectively address some of the concerns raised by the recent review, and the decision will facilitate the search for the new Dean of Graduate Studies by clarifying the nature of the position. Finally, the separation of the interdisciplinary units from Graduate Studies will make it easier to develop undergraduate courses and programs that incorporate interdisciplinary research and teaching, a process that the committee accepted as being important both to enhancing the success and fostering the growth of interdisciplinarity at UBC.

Recommendation #2: An administrative unit, called the Office of Interdisciplinary Studies (OIS), should be formed under the direction of a new Vice-President of Interdisciplinary Studies (VP-I).

We recognized the extraordinary success achieved within Graduate Studies at forming and fostering interdisciplinary Institutes and Centres. We believe this has been the result of having strong champions for interdisciplinarity with the authority and latitude to seek and develop new programs. This long-standing environment has been a catalyst for faculty whose interests lie between the disciplines in departments and Faculties. In addition the structure has allowed recognition of the value of interdisciplinary activities on the part of faculty members in ways not found in disciplines. There are also a multitude of interdisciplinary activities that are not administered through Graduate Studies. Examples include the AMPEL, the Michael Smith Laboratory, the teaching programs in health sciences disciplines, and many others. These latter programs and units are currently under varied academic and administrative structures, and while many have been very successful, we believe they could provide far more benefit to the campus with a strong voice supporting their activities.

Thus it seemed to the committee that we are presented with a possibly unique opportunity to create an academic forum that will serve three functions: 1) maintaining and supporting the existing Institutes and Centres and their associated graduate programs that have been reporting through FOGS; 2) putting in place a strong and effective voice for the interdisciplinary units and activities that currently exist and are not in FOGS; 3) “embedding” in the administrative structure of the university the idea that interdisciplinarity is sufficiently valued that it should have the opportunity to compete equally for resources within the institution.

We discussed at some length what sort of office and director would serve this task best. It seemed evident that the scope of activities we expected from the director was not dissimilar to those of a Dean, since it would include considering research, graduate instruction and undergraduate instruction. While it would be possible to create a Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, we rejected this option because it would imply that interdisciplinarity exists only in this Faculty and not at many locations within UBC. We thus propose that an independent office be created supporting interdisciplinary activities. The key attribute we identified for this office was the need to have a voice at the highest possible decision making levels in the university structure. This is in part because the current scope of interdisciplinary activities is broad and includes both research and learning activities, but also because we see significant possibilities for growth. Therefore planning for support of interdisciplinarity must be at the core of decision making in the administrative structure. After some

consideration we decided that these attributes would be best, and probably only, served by an office with a director at the level of a University Vice-President. Thus we propose creating an Office of Interdisciplinary Studies (OIS) under the direction of a Vice-President-Interdisciplinarity.

We recognize that our recommendation is dramatic and the creation of a Vice-President as the leader the Office of Interdisciplinary Studies would be a bold move. Our rationale for such a development is as follows. First and foremost, it is a statement of commitment to interdisciplinarity. It is a statement that the intrinsic values in the process and outcome of interdisciplinary research and learning are worthy of resources and continuing organizational influence. It is recognition that interdisciplinarity is a state of affairs that does not fit into any single academic or organizational structure that currently exists. It is recognition that the cause and purpose of the administrative structure overseeing interdisciplinarity is to support and enrich all of the activities of every part of the university wherever possible and that there are important opportunities and potential for new growth in interdisciplinary programs. It is recognition that interdisciplinary activity competes with discipline-based activities for the most valuable of resources: time, space, faculty slots and student program FTEs. Finally, the proposal recognises that since interdisciplinary research is invariably new, and without historical supports, it needs support from the highest level of the university. Thus the administrative structure needs to be embedded at the core of the university's organization chart.

The OIS will provide an institutional home for the existing FOGS Interdisciplinary Institutes, Programs and Centers and their associated graduate programs, as well as fostering the development of interdisciplinary research and teaching across campus. Thus interdisciplinary Institutes and Centers that are not associated with existing Faculties would become associated with the OIS. With time some units might decide to move into arrangements with a Faculty or Faculties, where their Directors would report to Deans. Furthermore OIS will become the focal point for promoting interdisciplinarity activities more broadly. As new units are formed, either through initiatives from within OIS or from initiatives started within Faculties, OIS will provide the voice for these ideas in the central administration. Thus OIS will support activities that exist outside, as well as within, disciplinary Faculties, depending on the specific needs and objectives of each interdisciplinary unit. OIS will also be charged with taking a leadership role in the support and development of interdisciplinary undergraduate courses and programs, which will necessarily be in collaboration with the various Faculties. This activity should include the development of undergraduate majors or minor programs, such as the undergraduate program in Women's Studies, a program that is housed within the Faculty of Arts and staffed

largely by faculty who are jointly appointed in the Centre for Research in Women's Studies and Gender Relations and in the Faculty of Arts or the Faculty of Education.

The Goals and Responsibilities of the VP-I would be:

1. Oversee the creation and operation of Interdisciplinary Institutes, Centres, Programs and Laboratories and where appropriate their associated graduate programs. Directors of these units would report to the VP-I and the VP-I will be responsible for organizing procedures to ensure effective promotion and tenure decisions and student programs and the graduate and undergraduate levels where appropriate. Creation of new units could be initiated by the VP-I, or from other units through the VP-I office. This implies that the VP-I would have F-slot and budget management authority, which as usual, would be subject to approvals of the Provost, and the office would be responsible for promotion and tenure of faculty appointed within OIS units.
2. Act as a facilitator for the activities of units, students and faculty to promote current and new initiatives in interdisciplinary investigation (both learning and research).
3. Act as a spokesperson and leader in generating resources within and from outside the university for interdisciplinary activities and programs (both learning and research).
4. Develop and support interdisciplinary undergraduate and graduate programs through seminar/lecture and workshop and community engagement programs and through active engagement with other academic units.
5. Work with other units in the university at all academic levels to integrate the activities of interdisciplinary programs and research with other activities in the university.

Recommendation #3: With regard to fostering interdisciplinarity across campus, the committee recommends that all existing Faculties appoint an Associate Dean of Interdisciplinary Studies (AD-I), who would coordinate interdisciplinary activities within their Faculty and would also meet regularly with the other AD-Is at an Interdisciplinary Council chaired by the VP-I.

The following statement, taken from a web page of the Provost of Harvard University, elegantly summarizes the nature of the relationship between interdisciplinary and disciplinary activities at a university. (http://www.provost.harvard.edu/policies_guidelines/centers_statement.php)

“Within universities, basic disciplines tend to be represented by departments. Disciplines and their departments change or dissolve very slowly. Universities have evolved myriad organizational forms to facilitate work on problems or in fields that are not adequately treated by discipline-based departments. At Harvard, we tend to call such forms centers or programs or, less commonly, institutes. Universities need both the stable foundations that departments and schools provide and flexible organizational forms that can be launched and grown, shrunk and eliminated or absorbed, or crystallized into more permanent forms, depending on the ebb and flow of intellectual opportunity and change. When centers are appropriately designed, ably led, regularly reviewed, and carefully integrated with a school's core mission, they can make essential and powerful contributions to Harvard's academic life, as many of them have. On the other hand, as the Deans have recently discussed, centers can also create serious administrative, fiscal, and intellectual problems for the faculties and the University.”

It is clear that these issues apply at UBC, and it is equally clear that we need a mechanism to deal with the tensions that will develop between OIS and the Faculties. If the Office of Interdisciplinary Studies is to effectively meet its responsibility of fostering the development of interdisciplinary activities at UBC, there must be a mechanism to deal with these tensions, one that will integrate various initiatives across campus. This would be the key role of the Interdisciplinary Council. The council would foster the development of interdisciplinary centers and programs, both in research and teaching, as well as facilitate the movement of faculty members between disciplinary Faculties and Interdisciplinary institutes and centers that exist within OIS.

Recommendation #4. The committee recommends that a new committee be struck to study and evaluate policies and procedures for the promotion and tenure of faculty who hold appointments in interdisciplinary units or whose research and teaching have a strong interdisciplinary component.

We discussed the idea that the evaluation of faculty for promotion and tenure may be biased against individuals who choose to do interdisciplinary research. The concern is that by doing interdisciplinary research, individuals may need to develop expertise in several fields, and they may disseminate their work in publications that are outside those used by disciplinary researchers or may involve activities and products that are directed to a non-academic audience. Thus, there is a possibility that interdisciplinary faculty may be at a disadvantage relative to faculty who work in a single discipline because the system for evaluating research productivity may be biased towards of disciplinary research. This recommendation suggests that the university as a whole needs to consider this issue and if

necessary make recommendations that will ensure that there is no bias against interdisciplinary faculty in promotion/tenure decisions. This issue is totally separate from the administrative organization of the unit(s) that provides an institutional home for interdisciplinary centers. It requires a separate committee because it deals with issues that are negotiated under the BC Labour Code between the university and the faculty association, namely the terms of appointment of faculty. The work of such a committee would be invaluable to the operation of the OIS. However this work is essential regardless of the ultimate organization structure for administering interdisciplinary units.

Recommendation #5: This report should be circulated widely across campus before the Provost acts on these recommendations.

This ad hoc committee has met in private with limited input from members of the university community (in the form of written statements in response to the report, "Complementing Disciplinarity and Serving Society: Options for Academic Growth") and no outside feedback on our recommendations. We cannot emphasize too strongly that it is crucial for our recommendations to be circulated widely and discussed at all levels in the university community before any of our recommendations are implemented.

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