

This is the final report of the Vice President Research's Working Group on Research Centres and its purpose is to make recommendations about how to maximize the value of centres to the university's mission. The working group was formed following discussions with Deans and Research Centre Directors who identified a number of challenges to the integration of the centres into the academic mission of the university. In developing its recommendations, the working group conducted consultations within the university community and examined how research centres operate at UVic and at other universities.

## Use of terms in this document

- Research entity – A “research entity” is liberally defined as a research organization made up of a group of faculty members who collaborate on an area of research and who benefit from the university's official recognition of that collaboration (e.g. institute, centre, group etc.)
- Research training – A process of both formal and informal interaction between faculty and students, or between faculty, that is intended to increase research knowledge and skills
- Academic unit – a recognized academic department, school, division or faculty
- Research Centre's constituency – the line academic unit/s from which a research centre primarily draws its membership of faculty and students

## Executive summary

- In response to the identification by Deans and Centre Directors of a number of challenges to the integration of research centres into the academic mission of the university, and to perform the seven year review of the policies on research centres, a Working Group was established by the Vice President Research to consider these matters. The overall objective of the working group was to make recommendations on how research centres and academic units can better work together to promote effective relationships between the educational and research missions of the University.
- The Working Group gathered information about the policy and operations of both UVic research centres, and those from other universities, as well as what would constitute the profile of a research centre in a research-intensive university. A full consultation process included the university executive, deans, centre directors, research centre members, research centre administrators, research centre Advisory Council members, faculty members, undergraduate and graduate students. All of this information was reviewed and used by the working group in making its findings and recommendations.

- The findings resulted in recommendations with respect to: organizational structure; strategic planning; communications; graduate research training; fiscal sustainability; and policy revision. The key recommendation with respect to the current Senate and Board policies for approved research centres and groups is that the University should consider a more flexible and distributed system of responsibility for research centres and other types of research groups (formal and informal), and a wider array of mechanisms to recognize and sanction the work of groups of researchers at the appropriate reporting level of the institution.

## Background

The University of Victoria is recognized both internally and externally as a “research-intensive” institution. This designation has become all the more relevant in view of our goal to expand research-based graduate education and the recent decision by the province to differentiate universities into those that are expected to conduct research and those that are not<sup>1</sup>.

Being a research intensive university carries with it the expectation that robust mechanisms exist to support an environment which fosters research excellence. Beyond the requisite need for high quality research facilities and infrastructure (e.g. laboratories, computing, library etc.), research services (ethics review, grants administration etc.), and direct support programs (e.g. grantscrafting, seed grants), the university has also provided opportunities for faculty and students to participate in interdisciplinary research through the establishment of Board Approved Research Centres and Groups (research entities). It should be noted that, historically, very few research “groups” have sought approval, thus the bulk of this working group report is focused on research centres. Virtually all research-intensive universities have mechanisms to create and support high profile research entities and they have proven invaluable as vehicles for developing research excellence within and between institutions. Beyond the value research entities provide to support researchers within the university, their visibility and institutional recognition open doors for greater external recognition and support for their work. With an ever increasing emphasis on interdisciplinary and inter-institutional research programs by funding agencies, research entities have gained an even greater importance in Canada and internationally.

## The Status Quo

Currently, there are seventeen research centres at UVic, each with a unique interdisciplinary focus and history. Beyond differences in their substantive areas of research interest, the centres vary with respect to parameters such as:

- fit and involvement with graduate and undergraduate academic programs;
- the sources and availability of resources such as funding and space;
- number of members and the intensity of their involvement;

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<sup>1</sup> British Columbia University Act, revised 2008

- research productivity and profile;
- sense of ownership, perception of added value, and level of support by constituent academic departments;
- degree of interdisciplinarity.

Given the fact that all centres are expected under university policies to cut across the vertical administrative structures of Faculties, Schools, and Departments, it is no surprise that they experience varying degrees of tension over everything from resource allocation (e.g. funding and space) to academic accountability and attribution for their members' research. Given the importance of research centres for meeting the goal of the university to enhance its reputation as a research-intensive institution, and based on consultations with Deans and Centre Directors held in the fall of 2007, the Vice President Research determined that it was timely to conduct a review of the policies, practices, and procedures governing their establishment and support. This special review was seen as an opportunity to recommend ways to enhance the integration and collaboration of centres and academic units, particularly in light of the university's enhanced emphasis on research intensiveness and graduate education.

Indeed, the Board policy that has governed the establishment and review of centres has changed little since it was first established in 1988. While this policy and other associated policies regarding centre directors have served the university reasonably well, they were developed at a time when the world of research was very different. The research environment has rapidly evolved over the last decade from a system largely based on individual researcher excellence with relatively little emphasis on inter-disciplinary work, to one of encouraging interdisciplinary group collaboration (e.g. research centres), to the creation of national and international networks (e.g. NCEs), to the establishment of major platforms for discovery (e.g. NEPTUNE, proteomics) that involve multiple institutions and sectors. Over the past decade, the university has taken full advantage of an unprecedented expansion of federal and provincial research funding programs, with its annual income from research tripling to \$106M in 2007. It is within the evolving context of how research is supported and the increased intensity of research at the university that the current review is conducted.

## Working Group Mandate

The Vice President Research established the working group in November 2007, with the following mandate: *The overall goal of the working group is to make recommendations on how research centres and academic units can work to promote effective relationships between the educational and research missions of the University. More specifically, the initial objectives are to:*

- *explore ways to increase operational and structural complementarities between research centres and academic units, and propose mechanisms for addressing any problems that may arise between members of the two groups;*
- *examine the nature and extent of factors that serve as barriers/facilitators for interdisciplinary graduate student engagements with research centres and make recommendations for enhancing this engagement;*

- *review models for providing core funding support for research centres and make recommendations for options to maximize the ability of research centres to fulfill their mandates;*
- *examine the ways research centres and academic units provide synergies and “win-wins” for each other and make recommendations for how these could be applied more widely;*
- *review current Board policies and make recommendations that are intended to improve the working relationship between research centres and academic units in ways that support the University’s strategic priorities.*

## **Membership**

The working group was chaired by the Vice President Research and consisted of four deans (Mike Miller, Andrew Rippin, Mary Ellen Purkis, Peter Keller) four centre directors (Ian MacPherson, Richard King, Peter Wild, Elaine Gallagher), and was supported by the Executive Assistant to the Vice President Research, Cecilia Freeman-Ward.

## **Process**

The working group met five times, beginning in November 2007. As a first step, the Executive Assistant to the Vice President Research produced a comparison of Canadian university policies on the establishment and review of research centres, and a summary review of UVic Centres comparing funding, space, teaching release, number of members, graduate student involvement, number of personnel, structure, and governance.

As a second step, the Executive Assistant was requested to interview all centre directors and deans with respect to the current status of research centre/faculty relationships, in order to determine what is working, and what is not in the relationship.

The issues thus defined were used by the working group to create sets of questions keyed to various constituencies for the consultation process. The constituencies consulted were: senior administration; deans, research chairs, research centre members, research centre administrators, research centre Advisory Council members, faculty members, undergraduate and graduate students.

All of the above information was reviewed and used by the working group in making its findings and recommendations.

## **Findings**

### ***External Review of Research Entities at Other Institutions***

The working group undertook a review of how research entities were organized and supported at other institutions. The Universities surveyed were: Carleton, Guelph, McMaster, Memorial, New Brunswick, Ottawa, Regina, Royal Roads, Saskatchewan, Simon Fraser, and Western Ontario. UBC was reviewing its policy. Some of the key findings include:

- Research centres at other universities may be department-, Faculty-, or university-based, and usually build on an area of exceptional research strength or are linked to the strategic development of the university. The University of Saskatchewan takes this further, including incorporation among the options for structure. Some differentiate between centres and institutes, with centre research in the same field as academic programming, and institutes being a high-profile part of the University's mission. Institutes are normally based on a consortium model.
- The criteria for the establishment of a research centre include: collaborative/interdisciplinary research; research training; knowledge transfer; community outreach; external partnership building; fundraising; making contributions to the overall mission of the university that are either not possible or not well accommodated within existing academic structures; establishing new areas of activity related to the university's strategic direction and priorities; offering non-credit or credit courses/programs.
- The authority to establish centres differs depending on the complexity of the structure: the models include establishment by the Senate and Board; President; Provost and Vice President Research; Vice President Research only. Most centres are subject to review – either after three or five years.
- A governance structure must be defined at the time of application. The most common model is a constituency-based management board and/or an external advisory board. Only two universities specifically required decanal representation. A number of universities have established committees connected to the academic planning process which have oversight authority for research centres.
- Centres most commonly report to the Vice President Research or related Dean/Chair, although some may report to the Provost if there is a natural connection.
- Directors are most commonly appointed from within the faculty ranks. Only one university (Ottawa) limited service to two terms.
- Generally, resourcing is a mix of university and external monies. Any call on university funding must be fully justified. Three universities have a policy that centres must be self-supporting. One university limits its contributions solely to infrastructure.

## **Attributes of a successful research centre (entity) in a research-intensive university**

In addition to reviewing other Canadian institutions, the working group also examined the literature to better understand what contributed to the success of research entities and a composite profile emerged from the analysis. A successful research centre:

- creates research excellence by building on areas of exceptional interdisciplinary research strength, sets a strong research agenda, and builds teams around critical research issues
- clearly contributes to the University's strategic educational and research missions and supports synergies between research and teaching/learning
- has the support of the multiple academic units from which it draws its members and students and those units have a sense of ownership and pride in the centre
- has critical mass with fully-engaged and active membership that contribute to the mission of the centre<sup>2</sup>
- has a sound business plan and budget that is adequate to support the work of the centre and to ensure its sustainability for the period of approval.<sup>3</sup>
- has an active program of research training for students particularly at the graduate level
- builds networks of scholars, links to other similar research institutions at the national and international levels, and attracts external public and private research partners
- has porous boundaries between it and its communities and is responsive to the needs of those communities
- helps attract and retain faculty and students
- mobilizes knowledge through appropriate mechanisms including publications, influencing policy, public outreach and lay materials, performances and exhibitions, commercialization, etc.
- enhances the reputation and recognition of its members, the affiliated academic units, and the University through the quality of its work.

### ***Internal Review of Research Centres and their Organization at UVic***

An internal review of our research centres based upon annual and five-year review reports, budgets, and other existing documents revealed the following:

- For historical reasons, the funding levels of research centres vary widely and this has significant implications for their operations and success. Four centres are largely funded by endowments: Addictions; Global Studies; Religion and Society; and Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions. Of the base-funded centres, Asia Pacific (which also has some endowment funding for its chairs), Forest Biology, and Aging are funded at levels close to or above \$200K. Four centres receive base funding of less than \$50K (Integrated Energy Systems; Advanced

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<sup>2</sup> One review of research entities concluded that at least 10-15 faculty members should be actively engaged in a Research Centre

<sup>3</sup> On an ongoing basis funds are primarily expected to come from sources such as endowments, research overhead, research grants and contracts, and development funds. University base and one-time funding normally constitute a small portion of a centre's operating funds.

Materials, Biomedical Research, and Automation and Communications). Three centres have no base University funding, although they may receive variable amounts in non-recurring from the VPR/Deans/Chair: Cooperative Studies; Youth and Society; Health Promotions. With the exception of Advanced Materials, all centres have three or more FTE staff (includes Directors), though most are not paid for through base university funding.

- Space allocations for centres vary widely, with some having significant dedicated space (e.g. COAG, CFGS, CSRS), and others being fully distributed among members' departments with little or no space specifically dedicated to the centre (e.g. CAMTEC).
- The quantity and quality of faculty engagement in the work of the centres varies. A critical mass of active faculty is important for a centre to flourish. While there is no concrete minimum number, a review of other universities and the literature would suggest that an active centre should normally have 10-15 active faculty members. Some centres support lots of interaction and have a number of shared activities that engage faculty and students, others do not. One centre, Global Studies, draws most of its membership from non-faculty and few regular faculty members are involved with its work. A challenge identified in our review is that a number of centres do not have an obvious way to account for their active members. For example, long lists of names of individuals with an interest in a centre do not necessarily translate into a qualitatively significant level of involvement.
- Interdisciplinarity is part of the mandate of research centres, but it varies widely. To demonstrate this variability from each end of the spectrum, in one case a centre is largely confined to a single department (Forest Biology), while two are distributed centres involving multiple academic units and other university partners (Addictions; Climate Solutions) and a host of disciplines.
- Research training is a part of the research centre mandate, but the involvement of graduate students with the work of centres and the fit of centres with existing graduate programs varies considerably. A number of centres reported having 5 or fewer graduate students involved, while others (despite not having clear linkages to a specific graduate program) supported a significant graduate student presence (e.g. IESVic; Aging). Global Studies does not consider engagement with academic training to be germane to its mission<sup>4</sup>, but does facilitate the hiring

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<sup>4</sup> Submission from Dr. Rod Dobell to the working group

of a small number of students for its various projects. Some centres have a natural alignment with existing academic departments that offer degrees (e.g. Forest Biology, CAPI), while others do not (e.g. CARBC; Aging). Most centres offer some form of seminars, workshops, lectures, etc as graduate student enrichment.

- Although mandated by policy, 12 of the 17 centres do not have a dean on their executive or equivalent committee and most do not have any form of active communication with their constituent academic units such as reporting at faculty or departmental meetings.

### ***Findings from the Consultations across the University***

Consultations were held with a number of stakeholders at UVic including, senior administration; deans, research chairs, research centre members, research centre administrators and staff, research centre Advisory Council members, faculty not involved with research centres, and undergraduate and graduate students.

A number of observations were made by the respondents:

- It was felt by a number of research centre directors and members that the role of research centres is not fully acknowledged within the University or Faculty-based strategic plans, which leads to doubts about support by senior administration and their academic constituencies. The reporting line to the Vice President Research is generally seen as the correct one, but has been described as “responsibility without resources” and as being disconnected from the regular line authority of Deans and Chairs. Research centres are mentioned only twice (in objective 20) in the current university strategic plan, although they are expected as part of their mandates to make direct contributions to the following major strategic objectives: attraction and recruitment of students; graduate research training; attraction of talented new faculty; integration of teaching and research; promoting a research culture; providing community for faculty and students; experiential learning and community engagement; internationalization; focus on issues of national and global importance; involvement in interdisciplinary research areas; mobilization of research knowledge. This leads to a perception that the role and contributions of research centres are not understood or supported at senior levels within the institution.
- Academic unit/centre relationships are most positive when centre research is aligned with academic offerings; if not, relationships are more likely to be described as negative. When both the academic unit(s) and centre focus on the same subject areas, the win-wins are easier to come by, easier to recognize, and centre activity is seen as complementary rather than competitive. In this situation,

the centre director will often have strong informal relationships with their relevant deans. Where a positive relationship does not exist, concerns are expressed about competition, fiscal and personnel drain, internal politics, and issues with faculty involvement and evaluation.

- Both the “raison d’etre” and “value-add” of centres were defined differently at the detail level by deans and centre directors. Both parties agree, at the conceptual level that, to add value to the university’s research mission, a centre must provide an environment where the research outcomes it produces are more than the sum of its parts. A research centre should not simply be a place where researchers do what they would have done otherwise; the fact that they come together should permit programs of research that would otherwise not be feasible. At the detail level, the “value-add” of research centres to Faculties is to a great extent seen through the lens of the deans’ responsibility for academic programming at the undergraduate and graduate level. Thus, deans recognize that centres are intended to: enrich teaching (through seminars, summer institutes, niche courses); foster interdisciplinarity; mentor young faculty and build community; provide financial contributions to Faculty activities and graduate students; participate in civic engagement; and build reputation. Most deans believe that these types of contributions are the sine qua non for the establishment and continuation of research centres. Deans and department chairs that have little communication with research centres are more likely to question the value-add to the research mission of the university and have concerns about the attribution of research productivity to the research centres.

The research centre directors see it differently, through the lens of research, which they view as their primary *raison d’etre*. Thus, they identify the following additional “value-add” to Faculties: attraction of funding for capital assets and Chairs (e.g. the phytotron, large equipment, Aging chair); securing large grants (CFI; SSHRC/NSERC); providing leverage for equipment grants; library donations; creating data-mining opportunities for young faculty; external network access; external research training opportunities; visibility and influence with sectors important to the Faculties; visiting fellowships; internships for students; and attracting top faculty (including some cost-sharing for new appointments). Centres also recognize Faculty contributions: space; cost-sharing; teaching relief; and support for major grant and Chair applications.

- Deans, chairs, and centre directors generally indicated that academic unit/centre communications are not regularized, but dependent on informal contact and “passive” reading of newsletters etc. Although the university’s policy calls for a dean to serve on the Executive Committee or equivalent of the centre, this has not occurred with any consistency. Deans have advised that they are little

inclined toward another committee, and would prefer to find another way to communicate with centre directors. Some deans prefer not to have any level of responsibility for a centre that is not part of their line responsibilities, though others would welcome more engagement. Some centre directors want to keep Faculty politics out of their centres. Most deans and directors simply weren't aware of the requirement for decanal involvement with centre governance. There was little evidence of any form of regular formal communication between research centres and their constituent academic units. On an informal level, some of the centres reported that they have excellent relationships and communication with their relevant deans, and see little need for formal linkages; this was not the case across the board.

- Centre administrators advised that Centres have inconsistent access to University services. Aside from their relationships with Financial Services, centres feel they have the worst of both worlds. As University units, they are subject to regulation (eg. They must use expensive University suppliers), despite having little or no base budget. At the same time, because many centre employees are grant-funded, they have no access to human resource services, and enjoy the lowest possible level of benefits. These are simply examples: the problem here is lack of stability and sustainability for the normal administrative requirements of centres. Centres lose valuable employees to more stable line positions; valuable research dollars are spent on infrastructure; and centre directors spend an inordinate amount of time chasing funding rather than executing higher level academic functions.
- Deans, chairs, directors, and centre directors and members reported having experienced difficulties during the process around promotion, merit and tenure for integrating information about centre-related activities of faculty members. Each has their concerns and questions. Issues include: whether or not centre directors should have input into the process and at what level; how the contribution of centre directors to administration is taken into account; teaching release for centre activity and its concomitant problems for the department and Faculty; the unfairly raised bar for research given teaching release; the reasons behind advice to young faculty to avoid research centre involvement if they wish to be successful as an academic; the questions as to whether the current Framework policy hits the right balance.
- Centres reported that graduate student training and engagement is variable; the centres feel this is attributable to the horizontal/vertical organizational issue facing centres and their constituent academic units. Most of the centres are involved with at least some graduate students, although it is felt by both sides that more could be done. At the moment, centres support graduate student research training through events such as symposia; experiential placements in

centre projects and with centre partners; and fellowships. For some, the requirement for interdisciplinary students to have a departmental home limits the scope of centre involvement. They are unsure as to how the new structure for interdisciplinary programs will assist, but hope that it will increase opportunities for greater engagement with graduate students. A significant challenge is faced by centres that are not clearly aligned with educational programming and degrees closely aligned with their mission (e.g. Aging). These challenges of offering interdisciplinary graduate programs are not unique to research centres as they are imbedded in the way the university organizes itself at the programmatic level. Despite significant interest from academic units and research centres to collaborate on interdisciplinary graduate programs, mechanisms to do so have been lacking. The recently approved Health Education and Research Council (HERC) model may provide a way to address this issue in the future. As noted earlier, one centre (Global Studies) does not consider it has a responsibility for supporting graduate training or academic programs more generally.

- A number of Centre directors and members felt strongly about lack of resourcing by the University, which was seen as lack of commitment to their existence. There was general support for resourcing being connected to productivity. This, of course, refers to funding, infrastructure, and operations. As stated earlier, the sources and level of funding and space allocated for research centres are variable largely due to historical factors. Some centres are far more attractive to external funders than others. Some centres lack the basic infrastructure required to raise funding. Some external funders are reluctant to fund centre operations where the university has made no prior or any financial commitment at all. Fundraising activities take a disproportionate amount of research director time. Research funding ends up being redirected to infrastructure and operations.

The perception on the part of centre directors is that, if the University approves, through Senate and Board, the establishment of research centres, it should demonstrate that commitment through a reasonable level of base funding, not just in-kind contributions; if the centre does not provide a return on investment, the funding should be partially or wholly withdrawn. Others expressed the view that centres should be largely responsible for supporting their operations through external funding, including from overheads whenever possible. The budget available through the VPR for supporting research centres had been essentially unchanged over the past decade, making investment in most centres dependent on the availability of one-time funds. Deans do contribute resources to some research centres (one-time funds; access to space and facilities), but this is highly variable and most deans do not consider themselves as having a responsibility for research centres. One issue that was raised by respondents is

that current policies on overhead and indirect funding distribution is not supportive of the financial realities of research centres.

- A number of respondents felt that policy should be revised to include more rigorous criteria for Centre review. The current policy for the establishment and review of centres has a grass-roots approach to the establishment of centres and reflects a one-size-fits-all approach, which is belied by the different models in existence. The criteria for establishment are not directly linked to the qualities of the research-intensive university, particularly the research/teaching linkage, and some of the respondents indicated that they believed that the review procedure lacks rigour. The policy on the duties and responsibilities of centre directors was deemed to be better, but would need to be revised to reflect the values and criteria in a revised centres policy. Some held the view that certain centres were little more than expanded research programs for a small number of researchers and that they should not have the designation of being a university research centre.
- Students generally find research centres to be valuable sources of research training and financial support. The student respondents were clear and forceful on the subject of the enrichment to their academic program provided by centres. Some noted that the centres had been what drew them to UVic. They agreed with the deans and centre directors that more centre participation in research training should be encouraged.
- Through the course of the consultations it became apparent that there is a “parallel universe” where groups of researchers have formed various types of research entities that are not officially recognized or sanctioned by the university. Some of these entities call themselves centres, societies, institutes etc and in at least one case, a group has formally incorporated themselves without the university’s knowledge. Many of these groups portray themselves in ways that would suggest they are recognized by the university when they are not. While the working group did not examine this matter in detail, it does raise questions about the impact these groups could have on the university’s reputation and the need to consider other ways to recognize their existence and provide a level of quality control and sanction.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Introduction***

The fundamental purposes and character of a “research-intensive” university are to be found in its commitment to: building excellence in research; research training for students; creating

synergy between research and teaching/learning; having the freedom to set agendas; seeking partnerships as enrichments to the research process; maintaining porous boundaries; and being open to chance and serendipity in research.

Research centres, with their ability to build interdisciplinary teams around issues vital to society, to provide infrastructure to support such teams, to be at the nexus of the university and its various communities, to be responsive and flexible, to provide enrichment to the teaching curriculum, to afford students research training and funding, to bring public and private partners into the mix, and to attract the best and brightest in academe, should be integral to a research-intensive university. It is important to ensure their health, and to integrate them fully into the organization.

***WG Mandate #1: Explore ways to increase operational and structural complementarities between research centres and academic units, and propose mechanisms for addressing any problems that may arise between members of the two groups.***

***WG Mandate #4: Examine the ways research centres and academic units provide synergies and “win-wins” for each other and make recommendations for how these could be applied more widely.***

In our view, these two mandates are simply facets of the same question: how can we integrate the work of centres and academic units for maximum mutual benefit? We believe the answer is through structure, planning, and communication.

**We recommend the following:**

- **Structure –provide greater diversity in the official sanctioning and recognition processes of research entities while continuing a strong approach to quality control and accountability**

There are a number of measures that can be undertaken relatively quickly, such as improved planning, communication, and policy, to improve the relationships between research centres and academic units in ways that enhance the educational and research mission of the university. But it is our view that short term measures, while helpful, cannot correct the underlying organizational problem. If UVic wishes to fulfill its aspiration to be one of Canada’s top research-intensive universities, more fundamental changes are called for to the way we create and support the research environment through research entities. *The University should consider a more flexible and distributed system of responsibility for research centres and other types of research groups (formal and informal), and a wider array of mechanisms to recognize and sanction the work of groups of researchers at the appropriate reporting level of the institution.* The currently “monolithic” approval process with a single point of accountability to the Vice President Research should be revised to have quality control and approval mechanisms at the department, faculty, and university levels.

As revealed by the review of other institutions, there may be more effective ways of organizing and recognizing the valuable contributions made by both our formal and informal groups of researchers. Groups of researchers who come together to address research questions of common interest should have a greater variety of opportunities to benefit from institutional “sanctioning” of their work, as this can be beneficial for participating in wider research networks and platforms as well as enhancing and expanding the research and training opportunities within the university. The current system of approved research centres is seen by many to be overly restrictive and out of step with new realities of collaborative research.

Concerns with the current model include:

- The bar for university recognition as an approved research centre/group is very high (e.g. must receive Senate and Board approval) and it discourages the formation of research entities
- Many groups of researchers are already operating as more or less informal “research entities”, but without any form of university sanction, recognition, or quality control mechanism that would add to their credibility internally and externally to the university
- With most of the university’s resource (funding, human resources, and facilities) allocation decisions and planning residing at the decanal/chair level, having all “official” research entities report to the VPR puts them outside the normal decision-making loop and discourages closer integration of research entity activities with academic units
- The VPR has a very limited budget to support research centres, which has not changed in any significant way over the past decade; this makes the establishment of new research centres extremely difficult.
- Much of the friction and many of the challenges faced by centres appear to result from the lack of connection, integration, and ownership by their constituent academic units (departments and faculties). While these issues could be dealt with to some degree through improved communication and more collaborative planning, having deans and chairs more directly engaged in the oversight and support of research entities would help build a greater sense of ownership into the system.

The Working Group recommends that the Vice President Research consult with centre directors, deans, chairs and the VPAC to develop a plan for a more robust system of providing university recognition and a quality control mechanism for a wider variety of research entities (this may be best accomplished through a working task force). This consultation would ideally be undertaken within the context of the Senate as it is Senate policies that govern research centres. Whatever system is recommended, the goal is to provide greater recognition and encouragement for groups of researchers to collaborate on interdisciplinary research and student training and to bring the responsibility and accountability to the most appropriate administrative level within the university. For example, a system similar to those identified at other universities could include:

- Groups of researchers who come together for specific projects or who wish to work together on their common research interests should be encouraged to do so. However, once the work of collaborating researchers evolves to the point where they wish to portray themselves as having some form of university sanction, they should seek approval to be recognized as a research entity.
- Research entities that are primarily made up of members either within or between departments inside a single Faculty could be approved by the Vice President Research on the recommendation of, and be accountable to, the dean or chair as appropriate. The creation and reviews of such entities could simply be reported to Senate and the Board for information.
- Research entities that are primarily constituted by members from a small number of Faculties (e.g. 2-3) could be approved and renewed by Senate on the advice of the VPR as is done now, but the primary accountability once the entity is established would be to the appropriate deans. This group of entities would most closely resemble the current designation of “approved research groups” in terms of their approval and oversight mechanisms.
- Centres formed by a consortium of universities or organizations (eg. PICS) or that cut across a larger number of Faculties (>3) would be approved by Senate and accountable to the Vice President Research. This group of entities would closely resemble the current designation of “approved research centres” in terms of their approval and oversight mechanisms.

Many other ways of organizing research entities were identified in the review and the new working group should examine which options would best serve the university. If there are modifications made to the current approach, a plan should be developed to evaluate current Research Centers and Groups and to transition them to the new organizational model over a reasonable period of time. Plans for revising the current system for recognizing research entities would be done with appropriate consultation and integrated with current Senate and Board process requirements for changing their policies.

- **Planning – formally include the research centres in the strategic planning processes of the University**

Centres have a stake in strategic planning. They contribute to twelve of the major objectives of the university’s Strategic Plan and to many of the faculty-level strategic plans. We recommend that the research centres be explicitly included in the University’s Strategic Plan, as part of a research-intensive university and that Faculty-level plan reflect the contributions of research centres.

Directors of research centres and the heads of their constituent academic units should consult each other with respect to the development of their strategic plan and/or objectives, so that the win-wins can be built in at an early stage. This consultation should include plans for research training, which is particularly important at the graduate level. These consultations can also include areas of concern, so that solutions can be worked out

together in a collaborative way. One approach that could be taken with existing research centres to get this process started is to have them work with their constituent academic units to develop strategic and business plans.

## **Communications**

Research centres and their constituent academic units should maintain open lines of communication. This can be done on an informal (an occasional lunch) or formal basis (attending faculty meetings once each term to report on activities; explicitly incorporating constituent academic units into their advisory structures). It is important to note that there should be pre- and post-communications; the pre-communications around planning, the post-communications about what has been achieved in partnership with the constituent academic units. Each research centre should develop a communication plan that best suits its constituent academic units.

### ***Working Group Mandate #2: Examine the nature and extent of factors that serve as barriers/facilitators for interdisciplinary graduate student engagement with research centres and make recommendations for enhancing this engagement.***

Research training is just one part of the integration of research and teaching. Fully-realized integration also includes: channelling research results into the curriculum; joint support of new faculty appointments; joint offerings of seminars, workshops; class presentations of centre research; centre internships; appointments of fellows, etc. The recent approval by Senate of the Health Education and Research Council (HERC) provides a potential mechanism for formalizing interdisciplinary graduate programs between academic units and research centres that should provide for greater integration of research entities into graduate program delivery.

#### **We recommend the following:**

- The current expectation that all research centres are to support graduate and, where feasible, undergraduate research training should be retained and given even higher prominence in centre planning.
- Each research centre will consult with its constituent academic units and the Dean of Graduate Studies with respect to its involvement with, and responsibilities for, student research training. This plan should consider both existing academic unit-based graduate programs and explore opportunities for involvement with the development of new interdisciplinary programs under the new senate guidelines. This can take place as part of the planning process mentioned above.
- As part of that same planning process, the larger issue of the integration of research and teaching, with its constituent parts as described above, should be included.

- Reviews of research centres should make their involvement with integration of teaching and research, including research training, one of the key evaluation criteria.
- The university should build upon the HERC initiative and make it easier for academic units and research centres to work more closely together to offer interdisciplinary graduate research training programs.

***Working Group Mandate #3: Review models for providing core funding support for research centres and make recommendations for options to maximize the ability of research centres to fulfill their mandates.***

**We recommend the following:**

- The VPR, in consultation with centre directors and the heads of the appropriate academic units, conduct a comprehensive review of all research centre budgets and infrastructure allocations to:
  - identify the extent and nature of challenges to their continued fiscal viability;
  - consider changes to the way university resources are currently distributed to research centres to maximize their fiscal health;
  - where centres are deemed to be fiscally unsustainable, develop a realistic plan to either put them on a firmer footing or to wind them down.
  - Examine ways to better address space allocation challenges faced by research centres

We further recommend that the university address the distribution of funds to research centres in its research overheads policy in ways that provide greater incentives for centres to actively seek new sources of funding through contracts and grants.

***Working Group Mandate #5: Review current Board policies and make recommendations that are intended to improve the working relationship between research centres and academic units in ways that support the University's strategic priorities.***

Should the recommendations above be adopted, the relevant policies will undergo an extensive revision.

**We recommend the following:**

- **Change the approval process and diversify the reporting lines for research entities**

The University has a policy of only approving research centres and groups through the Senate and Board process with both of these levels of designation reporting directly to the

Vice President Research. Under the policy, an approved research group is essentially a step toward full centre status, though not all groups elect to go through this process. This one-size-fits-all approach doesn't mesh with the reality, which is more dynamic: the spectrum includes researchers coming together in informal groups (eg. Optics, European studies); in formal groups (Chemical/Structural biology); in informal research centres (Humanities computing), formal research centres (eg. Aging, etc.), and consortium centres (Addictions, PICS). This variability presents a confusing picture both inside and outside the University, and more importantly, may deprive some of these research enterprises of the recognition and support required to move ahead. As outlined above, a new working group should be established to examine options for a more diverse approach to the approval and support of research entities.

- **Adopt a more rigorous review procedure**
  - The evaluation process for centres should be revised to compare centre performance against the criteria set out earlier in this report for research centres within a research-intensive University. If a multi-level approach to approving and overseeing research entities is adopted, the evaluation procedures could be modified as required.
  - Five-year reviews of research centres should explicitly include input from the heads of their constituent academic units.
  
- **Revisit promotion, merit and tenure policy with respect to centre directors and members**
  - The promotion, merit, and tenure procedures should explicitly describe how the contributions of centre members and directors are to be considered as part of the faculty evaluation process.

Submitted for the consideration of the Senate Committee on Planning by the working group:

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