

Executive Summary

In June 2018, the Academic Program Review Committee conducted a site visit and document review of the University of Victoria School of Child and Youth Care. The review committee consisted of Ben Anderson-Nathe, Chair (Portland State University, USA); Judy Finlay (Ryerson University); and Helga Thorson (University of Victoria). This report summarizes our main findings and includes recommendations for the SCYC to consider as it moves forward. The Executive Summary provides a high level overview of these findings, relative to Program Quality; People; Resources; Future Directions; and Questions from SCYC.

Quality of the Academic Program, Student Experience, and Research

The School of Child and Youth Care is unquestionably a strong academic program. It offers multiple degrees (undergraduate and graduate), is among a small handful of graduate programs nationally in the field, and offers robust curricula. The curricula reflect the SCYC's commitment to Indigenizing and decolonizing Child and Youth Care, and although this commitment is not yet evenly infused into every corner of the curriculum, SCYC is a leader in its efforts to date. The undergraduate curriculum is broad, with several specializations, multiple delivery options, and students entering the degree program at various points (both first-time University students and transfer diploma students). Over the years, this breadth has stretched the SCYC Faculty and staff capacity to the breaking point and facilitated uneven familiarity with or investment in the undergraduate curriculum on the part of many Faculty. On the graduate side, Faculty supervision responsibilities far outpace those in other units at the University, graduate students take longer to graduate than in many other units, and the program will benefit from careful reconsideration of the core values or principles underlying the masters curriculum.

The review committee met with students in the undergraduate, masters, and doctoral programs. From these meetings and review of the documents submitted in the self-study, it is clear that SCYC students are being well prepared for their fields of practice, are engaged in their studies, and speak highly of the programs. They seek additional contact with full-time instructors and deeper affiliation with the SCYC, but they also speak highly of the relationships they cultivate. The student experience is enhanced across all three programs by the SCYC's commitment to Indigenizing and decolonizing curricula, which is closely aligned with the University's core strategic directions. Further, the SCYC curricula are offered in multiple delivery platforms to enhance student accessibility and engagement. Further resources are required to implement additional student supports – particularly for distance, Indigenous, and other racialized and minoritized students.

The research portfolio across the SCYC is robust and impressive. Nationally and internationally recognized scholars are producing funded and unfunded research at levels that are astounding given the additional resource constraints faced by Faculty in the School. Still, additional research funding investments are needed to support graduate students in both the masters and doctoral programs.

These challenges are not unique to SCYC. They are, in the view of the committee, the result of under-resourcing. With adequate Faculty personnel, the SCYC can have sufficient space to engage critical processes of curriculum renewal and realignment, enhanced student success, and

ongoing research productivity. Without additional resource, however, it is unrealistic to assume such work can take place effectively.

People

The School of Child and Youth Care is sorely under-resourced. In recent years, the School has gone through significant personnel transitions, with several retirements and many new hires. This has brought an infusion of new energy and new perspectives; many people in the School speak of it as a culture change, toward increased collaboration and investment in the life of the School. Nevertheless, with an impending transition in Director, staff and Faculty across SCYC commented that these shifts may be precarious without careful tending and shepherding over the coming years. The committee supports the School in its request for additional personnel resources, both in terms of staff and direct instruction (including support for practicum coordination and oversight).

Resources

By all indications, SCYC manages its limited resources well. The review committee has found no areas of fiscal redundancy where we could legitimately recommend redirection of resources. On the contrary, the School makes commitments to its field, to the University, and to students through instruction and research that more than justify additional investment. Without such infusion of additional resources, the SCYC is unlikely to be able to sustain the recent gains in morale, to conduct the necessary and timely renewal of its curricula, and to stabilize the masters program in terms of supervision requirements and timelines toward completion.

Future Directions

The SCYC is poised to lead our field in terms of Indigenized and decolonized curricula in Child and Youth Care. Over several hires and other personnel transitions, the capacity on the Faculty has increased significantly in recent years, and the will appears to exist to move the program in this direction. Coupling this focus on Indigenous knowledge and emphasis, the committee recommends that the SCYC also prioritize racialized and other minoritized communities in its commitment to decolonizing praxis in Child and Youth Care. The School is already in close alignment with the University's goals and priorities in this regard; it merits elevated attention for these successes.

Questions from SCYC

The review committee recognizes the complexities embedded in the series of questions asked by SCYC. We recommend that before moving into conversations about curriculum restructuring (undergraduate) or stabilization (graduate), the School engage in a values-based decision making exercise to clarify what values the Faculty want to serve as the foundation of the School's curricula. Identifying central values will then provide a framework within which to evaluate other decisions related to resource allocation, curricular alignment and investment, curriculum delivery, and even fundamentals related to course content. Resources are required to better stabilize and support professional staff, recruit and retain sufficient Faculty to move the School's initiatives forward, and provide the necessary supports for maximum student success.

Alignment with University’s Strategic Framework and Other Plans

The School of Child and Youth Care is in clear alignment with the University’s Vision, which is to “be the Canadian Research university that best integrates outstanding scholarship, engaged learning and real-life involvement to contribute to a better future for people and the planet” (*A Strategic Framework for the University of Victoria: 2018-2023*, p. 2). The School is a campus leader in several categories of the newly-released *Strategic Framework*, in particular in its research and teaching excellence, demonstrated through a variety of recent faculty awards, its dedication to reconciliation and respect regarding Indigenous students, faculty, and communities, and its commitment to engage both locally and globally. Historically, the department has shown itself to be an innovator in instructional pedagogies through its early development of online courses, and its innovation continues to evolve as seen through the commitment to include land-based teaching in the near future. What comes to light above all else, is the School’s alignment with the values that inform UVic’s vision: “excellence in all our endeavours,” “ethical and intellectual integrity,” freedom of inquiry and freedom of speech,” and “equity, diversity and inclusion” (p. 2).

The School is firmly embedded in the *UVic Strategic Research Plan 2016-2021* as well as the *Faculty of Human and Social Development Strategic Research Plan 2017-2022*. The School’s research extends locally and globally and is based in principles of social justice and community-engaged research. The school is a leader in the integration of research with teaching and learning. The School’s initiatives also align well with the University’s *Indigenous Plan 2017-2022* and its five cedar strands and *The UVic International Plan: Making a World of Difference (2017-2022)*. Attempts to recruit and support Indigenous students, hire Indigenous faculty, and engage in community-engaged research grounded in Indigenous methodologies and values have been highly successful. With 50 Indigenous students in its undergraduate program and a growing number of Indigenous students submitting graduate program applications, the School of Child and Youth Care is a campus leader in its recruitment of Indigenous students. Similarly, the School has seen an increase in the number of international applicants to both its undergraduate and graduate programs. Through memoranda of understanding with universities in Denmark and Germany, the School is able to engage in international research and teaching initiatives. Students also have ample opportunity to apply for international practicum placements.

Yet, it is important to note that the School of Child and Youth Care’s outstanding campus leadership, particular in the areas of attracting Indigenous and “racialized” students, also comes with some concerns. Given that the faculty members only teach 40% of the program EETS, there is a huge reliance on sessional instructors to cover courses. Since sessional instructors are not expected to supervise students, the graduate supervision falls on the teaching and research faculty—which puts a severe strain on supervisory capacity. In general, SCY’s faculty have a higher than average supervisory load than most faculty across campus. Given student and faculty demographics, a high proportion of the time-consuming, high-energy processes of relationship building fall on Indigenous and racialized faculty members, thus creating an uneven distribution of workload amongst the School’s faculty.

Culture Change and Curricular Alignment

The review panel met with Faculty across various programs in SCYC, and across the board heard appreciation for the culture change among SCYC faculty over the past several years. Many commented that they know more about one another's work than they have in the past, that their relationships are less politicized than they have previously been, and that recent new hires have brought new energy and contributed to a program that is increasingly diverse (demographically, epistemologically, pedagogically). As a result, many Faculty reported feeling committed to renewal and new energy across the programs.

Still, the review panel heard repeatedly from Faculty and students that this culture change has not yet led to evenly distributed Faculty investment in SCYC curriculum or curricular alignment, which both remain shaky.

Despite ongoing progress, Faculty investment in the graduate program is higher and more evenly shared than in the undergraduate curriculum. Faculty members and directors reported that Faculty have greater knowledge of and investment in the masters and doctoral programs than the undergraduate. Further, the review panel noted ambivalence across SCYC about the core values of the undergraduate curriculum in particular. As the curriculum has become increasingly complex with multiple concentrations and delivery options, and as faculty investment has ebbed and flowed over time, the central overarching learning outcomes and values of the curriculum have become increasingly unclear.

This has contributed to undergraduate courses being more likely to be taught by Sessionals, to Faculty not adequately understand the undergraduate curriculum or its complexities, and for the commitment to decolonizing the curriculum to be unevenly shared (even across multiple sections of the same course). The review panel's meeting with the undergraduate program revealed that Faculty across SCYC are in general not terribly familiar with the complexities of the undergraduate curriculum, which also contributes to redundancies and gaps in curricular content, assessments, and texts. The practicum and other student support components of the program are also stretched beyond reason, leaving students with inadequate guidance and support in spite of Faculty and staff with the best intentions and insufficient time. These concerns also emerged during our meeting with undergraduate students; while they appreciate the robustness of their individual courses and the flexibility of delivery options, they also noted redundancy across courses, limited access to Faculty, and challenges related to communication from the SCYC to undergraduate students.

On the graduate side, the review panel notes greater expressed accountability and investment from Faculty. Most Faculty the panel interviewed spoke about enjoying their supervision work with students, saying it was particularly enriching when students' scholarly work overlapped with their own. Students affirmed this perception, offering feedback like, "Everybody [Faculty] knew what I was doing and showed up to support me." Students commented on the quality of their coursework and appreciated the variety of delivery methods for their courses. The most consistent critique offered from students included questions about the ultimate goal of the curriculum: is it meant to emphasize academic preparation, to provide a pathway to Registered Clinical Councillor designation, or some combination of the two? To this end, students

mentioned that they wanted increased emphasis on practical skills in the curriculum, having received an impression that Faculty expect incoming Master's students to have more CYC experience than is common for many to actually have.

Perhaps the most significant challenge the review panel identified in the graduate curriculum relates to the size of the program and students' timelines to completion. The magnitude of the Master's program in particular creates an unmanageable workload for SCYC Faculty. The program admits around 13 students per year, and these students often take as many as four years to complete the degree. The review panel heard consistently that students tend to "stall out" after completing coursework, often for two or more years. These delays are often attributed to challenges outside the coursework or requirements of the thesis: funding concerns, inadequate support for students with accommodations, Indigenous, and other minoritized students; and need for greater access to faculty research projects. The supervisory burden on Faculty is disproportionate compared to other similar workloads across UVic graduate programs, and the Faculty is at a breaking point.