



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF ARTS & SCIENCE

12 March 2014

Professor Sioban Nelson
Vice-Provost Academic Programs
University of Toronto

Re: External Review of the Faculty of Arts & Science

Dear Sioban,

Following the external review of the Faculty of Arts & Science, I am pleased to provide you with my administrative response to the review.

The reviewers visited the Faculty in October 2013, during which time they met with students, faculty and staff, academic administrators within the Faculty as well as senior University administrators and cognate deans. The reviewers commented that their discussions were lively, and “people felt comfortable being frank and open.” It was clear in my discussions with the reviewers, that they considered the Arts & Science community to be justifiably proud of the accomplishments of our outstanding faculty, staff and students.

I am grateful to the reviewers for their thoughtful analysis of the Faculty in their Report. They presented their findings in relation to undergraduate and graduate education, research, planning, organization and resources, our relationships with other University units and our social impact.¹ They were impressed by the Faculty-wide deep appreciation of the importance of and commitment to upholding the highest standards of excellence in research and teaching. They praised our units’ engagement in undergraduate curricular renewal which has supported enhanced breadth and the exploration of new subjects. Describing Arts & Science as a “teaching and research powerhouse,” the reviewers were struck by our dedication, ingenuity, and entrepreneurial spirit. They noted the strengths of our colleges and their importance in advising and supporting our students. The reviewers concluded that “there is no question about the overall excellence of the Faculty of Arts & Science at the University” and that we have “excellent faculty, staff, and students that are energetically committed to conducting world-class research and scholarship.”

The Report was received in December and circulated to the Arts & Science community. In January, the Faculty senior leadership embarked upon two rounds of consultations with Arts & Science Council, the Council of Chairs, Principals & Academic Directors (CPAD), the Coalition of Arts & Science Directors (CASD), administrative groups, student representatives, and with other members of the University. We first had a general discussion regarding the Report and its recommendations. We then followed with a second round of discussion, focusing on the draft contents of an administrative response to the Report.

Before proceeding to discuss their specific recommendations, the reviewers acknowledged two factors that frame the context for their Report: the “extreme budgetary constraints at the University and within the Faculty”, and, the “complexity and extreme decentralization of the organizational structure.” We

¹ The Report, Self-Study, administrative response, and related documents, are posted at <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/main/about/reports/review>

agree that our financial situation is deeply challenging given the misalignment between our revenues and expenses. With regards to the former, our provincial per-student grant has not increased in value for the past 20 years, even to offset inflation. Undergraduate domestic tuition fees are also closely regulated. Within the Faculty, these past five years we have had to make difficult strategic choices to contain costs and raise revenue. We implemented a careful approach to enrolment planning, an undergraduate program fee, expenditure controls, and strategic resource allocation mechanisms for hiring of teaching staff so that we could avoid a hiring freeze. The Faculty's organizational structure echoes that of the University as a whole which displays a decentralized structure. Arts & Science departments, extra-departmental units (EDUs), and colleges help us to manage both the breadth of our scholarly interests as well as to create homes for our faculty and students.

The reviewers have provided a thoughtful report, highlighting our strengths and challenges as well as recommending opportunities where we might further improve our Faculty across a spectrum of issues. This administrative response has been informed by the discussions and consultations we have engaged in to date in the Faculty as outlined above. Although not mentioned specifically by the reviewers, as part of our Self-Study process and our consultations identified areas that we will continue to work on, for example, regularly reviewing questions of equity as it relates to our professoriate and staff.

We have structured our response to align with the review's Terms of Reference, commenting on academic planning, and priorities last, as this section is informed by our Faculty's discussions of the reviewers' insights and recommendations related to teaching, research, internal organization and finances.

The Faculty's commitment to excellence in undergraduate and graduate teaching

Undergraduate

- *The reviewers noted that large undergraduate classes are a challenge for all public universities and they strongly recommended a plan to improve student learning and student experience in the Faculty's large lecture courses.*

Within Arts & Science we have aimed to ensure that classes with large enrolments are taught by our best teaching staff and are accompanied by smaller group tutorials and/or labs in order to maximize students' learning opportunities. We also offer an array of smaller-scale experiences. During our initial consultations this term, we have heard from students that classes that include a tutorial or lab section, as well as our smaller class opportunities, do in fact create a more engaging experience for them.

The reviewers suggested that we consider technological supports that could be put in place to further enhance our students' learning experience. This year's Advancing Teaching and Learning in Arts & Science (ATLAS) initiatives are expected to generate new opportunities to deploy technologies in creative ways, and to permit greater levels of engagement in and outside of the classroom. These past two years, we have supported Massive Open Online Course (MOOCs) pilots which may suggest new technologies that can support student learning in large classes. The reviewers also suggested that we record our large classes and make these available to students. We will work with teaching staff that are eager to have their class recorded, and undertake a pilot project to make these recordings available online for a selection courses in the 2014-15 academic year. The pilots will be evaluated and considered as part of our planning for large enrolment courses.

The Vice-Dean, Teaching & Learning will develop a plan to support our teaching staff and further enhance student learning in large lecture classes. The plan will be informed by specific disciplinary

pedagogies and perspectives within our academic units, as well as research into large class pedagogy in general.

We are also considering a broader analysis of all our first year offerings including a review of the balance between large and small classes. First year offerings and experiences include our First Year Learning Communities, First Year Seminars (199s), College Ones, and Big Ideas. As the Big Ideas courses and the One programs expansion were just recently launched the appropriate time for such an analysis will need to be considered.

- *The reviewers suggested the Faculty explore the possibility of offering guidance in future career preparation and work opportunities for students.*

This academic year we launched our STEP Forward initiative whose aim is to guide students through reflective thinking about their professional goals and choices, and prepare and support them in selecting programs at university, planning for their future careers, and forming connections with mentors among alumni, teaching staff, career advisors, and more senior students. Key aims of STEP Forward include making explicit the importance of connecting academic knowledge and skills to personal values and growth while actively integrating such personal development skills with academic knowledge, critical thinking and the actualization of professional skills. Our first call for STEP Forward proposals in the fall of 2013 resulted in 55 proposals from our academic units and colleges. We will evaluate the success of these pilot projects and will consider funding them on an ongoing basis. As part STEP Forward we are also considering how to best provide support in the Dean's Office for our academic units which wish to offer more professional experiences for students. In discussions with the Arts & Science community, we heard of the benefits of the variety of options currently available for our students including service learning, experiential learning, and internships. A small percentage of our students also participate in the Professional Year Experience program, administered by the Faculty of Applied Science & Engineering. During our consultations, we heard that such a program might be desirable for the Arts & Science community, as would a more prominent emphasis on the possibilities and benefits of research experiences within the Faculty. We will explore such possibilities in discussion with our academic units.

Graduate

- *The reviewers recommended that enrolment growth be aligned with professional master's programs to enhance employment opportunities for graduates.*

Arts & Science offers a broad array of doctoral-stream masters and PhD programs as well as professional master's programs. Three new professional masters programs in high demand areas were proposed and approved during 2008-13, and two departments are currently developing proposals. This past year the Dean's Office has ramped up its ability to provide financial modelling and advice for units who wish to propose professional masters programs.

We also are working to promote a broader, multi-faceted strategy to support the academic and non-academic professional development of our students outside of programs. Students in our doctoral stream masters and PhD programs have expressed greater interest in having more opportunities facilitated by their academic units to explore disciplinary, non-academic career opportunities. This term we have initiated a process to gather information about the current activities of our units in this area, with the aim of sharing best practices. We will also explore the potential to partner with the School of Graduate Studies and Career Services.

- *The reviewers suggested the monitoring of the time taken for students to complete their degrees.*

Time-to-completion (TTC) for our graduate programs is monitored and discussed in depth during individual graduate program reviews. The Faculty's tri-campus average TTC for our programs and by sector compares favourably to our international comparators. However, annual TTC across the sectors has gradually increased over the past 4 years and data show increasing numbers of students enrolled in years 6-9. Although TTC is often discipline-specific, we have begun a more in-depth analysis and conversation with Arts & Science chairs, directors, and graduate coordinators regarding curricular planning and alignment, supervisory practices, and student advising enhancements to decrease time to candidacy and completion. The Vice-Dean, Graduate Education & Program Reviews launched a 'PhD Time to Completion' Consultation and Review process. Phase I involved analysis of enrolment, program, CGPSS, and other data, completion of an environment scan of best practices related to TTC at other universities, and consultation with Faculty tri-campus program stakeholders. Presentations have been made to academic administrators, the Graduate Advisory Committee (GAC), the Graduate Curriculum Committee, and Council. These presentations have resulted in lively and serious discussion of TTC issues. Several units have brought forward their program-specific information for discussion with their faculty and graduate students. We are developing a clearer understanding of the factors affecting TTC. We will be working with the Graduate Advisory Committee in 2014 to: develop a process for a formative review of unit-level TTC and identify areas needing improvement; identify potential IT and other Arts & Science support needed to assist program-level monitoring of students; and, develop a TTC best practices document based on our own and other universities' experiences.

- *The reviewers recommended enhancing the training of teaching assistants (TAs) and improving mechanisms for feedback on their teaching performance.*

The University's Faculty and teaching assistants share a common interest in ensuring the effectiveness of undergraduate teaching. During our consultations we heard that graduate students consider the existing university offerings such as the Faculty's expanded Writing Instruction for Teaching Assistants (WIT), and the University's Teaching Assistants' Training Program (TATP) and English Language and Writing Support (ELWS), to be helpful. We are proud that the A&S WIT program has recently been awarded the University's Northrop Frye Award in recognition of its achievements in linking teaching and research. Chairs and directors whose units are participating in the program praised its effectiveness. We will ensure we can respond to all Arts & Science academic units that are interested in participating in WIT. We will work with the University's Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation, the School of Graduate Studies, and our academic units to ensure that opportunities for general training are well known.

Graduate students also expressed a desire for more discipline-focused guidance around what is expected of them. This is a priority we share; we have been working with our teaching and learning committees in consultation with the Teaching Assistants' Training Program to identify ways to provide TAs with student feedback on their teaching. TA appointments and responsibilities in Arts & Science vary significantly by course, making standardized TA evaluations unfeasible. However, the online course evaluation framework allows instructors to select questions about TAs and tutorials or laboratories. We have drafted a recommendation that units include these questions on course evaluations wherever possible and that they administer paper evaluations of TAs where online evaluation is not possible, and will be consulting on this proposal with faculty, staff and students. Several departments already provide course-specific training for TAs. For example, Physics has begun to offer TA training that consists of weekly sessions in which TAs get an overview and practice with the equipment used in the upcoming practicals. In addition, each year the Department runs a 'microteaching' workshop for new graduate students.

The University is working on ways to consider how to provide guidance and support to graduate students and academic divisions with respect to TA training and feedback mechanisms.

- *The reviewers raised the issue of funding for domestic and visa graduate students.*

Our ability to attract more high quality graduate students depends on the continued academic excellence of our programs, improvements to the student experience, and the competitiveness of our funding packages.

With regard to the funding, we know one of the most effective strategies for attracting high quality graduate domestic students is to be explicit in our offer letters with respect to the funding that will be available to them. Our units' ability to compete with institutions offering more generous funding packages continues to be a central concern and priority. In 2012-13, we piloted a top-up funding program aimed at helping units attract their top domestic candidates. The Dean's Office worked with many units to put together competitive multi-year packages, with several including a sixth year of funding. The pilot program was successful based on the number of applicants accepting our offers. We are continuing the program for the current admissions cycle. The one-time-only MTCU funds distributed to FAS to help our units attract top tier domestic graduate students for fall 2014 was a welcome source of additional recruitment funds for this admissions cycle.

The provincial government's focus on expanding domestic student growth and lack of funding for international students, has limited our ability to admit international graduate students. In this context, any increase in funding for international graduate students may result from endowed international scholarships, or an increase in international students arriving with their own support. Given the strong consensus on the need to grow our international PhD enrolment, as a Faculty we have also committed to include international PhD students in the allocation of the Provost's PhD Enhancement Fund (PPEF) matching program, which provides an excellent opportunity to leverage support from benefactors. We will continue our advocacy to the government for international graduate student funding.

We are working with our units to ensure funding communications with our students are helpful. During our consultations we have learned that offer letters and annual letters could be clearer in terms of specifying their funding. Graduate students have also suggested that it would also be helpful to have a schedule outlining when various funding components are released (e.g. scholarships, TA pay, RA stipends).

This academic term, the Vice-Dean, Graduate Education & Program Reviews has mounted workshops, by disciplinary sector, for our graduate coordinators and chairs. We have provided a detailed breakdown of the funds available for graduate student recruitment to each Arts & Science unit offering graduate programs, including DEIF, FAS funds and restricted funds. This allows to chairs have the up-to-date information they need on the recruitment resources they have available to them. In other words, we have worked with our units to increase their "graduate financial literacy." We have also developed a series of workshops for Graduate Coordinators and Graduate Assistants designed to improve our application and success rates and have seen significant advances in some units.

Effectiveness in fostering a culture of excellence and achievement in research

- *The reviewers recommended an assessment of how the Faculty could best facilitate the development of large-scale faculty-wide research initiatives.*

Across our discussions there was recognition that faculty-wide research initiatives were valuable but needed to begin from the bottom-up with respect to faculty members' research strengths and interests.

The Vice-Dean, Research & Infrastructure will facilitate discussions with the chairs and directors to see if any cross-sectoral (humanities, social sciences, and sciences) initiatives can be identified and enabled. It may be that some of the existing funding opportunities (such as the University's Connaught Fund aimed at bringing together leading researchers from multiple disciplines) can be accessed. Our consultations have indicated that providing support to interdisciplinary working groups of faculty on topics they identify of interest would be helpful, as would enhancing our capacity to support faculty in thinking about these kinds of research opportunities.

- *The reviewers emphasized the importance of improved physical infrastructure and enhanced research space to support the Faculty's continued excellence.*

The reviewers were clear that for the Faculty "to remain competitive, especially in the sciences, there is an urgent need for new facilities." The physical spaces in which teaching, learning and research are carried out play an important role in shaping the quality of the overall academic experience for faculty, students and staff, as well as the impact of what can be accomplished. It is important that we undertake a number of infrastructure planning activities to ensure we are strongly positioned to seize future funding opportunities with governments and donors.

As a first step towards understanding our physical infrastructure, we expect that the comprehensive space benchmark study that Arts & Science Office of Infrastructure Planning, initiated last year will be complete in 2014-15. This information will serve to identify the space needs of users as well as opportunities for better utilization of our space, including consolidating departments that are currently spread across the St. George campus and providing state-of-art research facilities for multiple user groups. While this work is still in the planning phase, we are undertaking strategically targeted renovations, the largest of which is the teaching laboratory renovations in the Ramsay Wright building. We are pursuing federal and provincial research infrastructure grants to contribute funds to several Faculty facilities.

Effectiveness of internal organization and financial structure

- *The reviewers noted that by and large the Faculty's organization appears to be working well but noted that it will be critical for the Dean's office to communicate often and clearly with academic administrative leaders and the faculty at large to ensure that they not only understand the actions taken by the Dean but the context in which decisions are being made.*

Our faculty, staff, students, and academic administrators are clear that we need to have opportunities in place to listen to and engage our community. We have discussed how the Dean's Office can better interact with our academic administrators, undergraduate and graduate students. We have begun to convene smaller and more informal groupings of chairs and directors to discuss faculty-wide matters. We are considering how to change the format of our monthly CPAD meetings in order to allow more time for discussion and engagement at an earlier stage in the development of proposed Faculty initiatives. There may be other informal groupings as well. We will work to ensure that we make use of existing committees to discuss Faculty-wide issues. While dean, I will also initiate visits to academic units in order to meet directly with faculty, students, and staff.

- *The reviewers raised the issue of 'terms of trade' on interdivisional teaching and the importance of its satisfactory resolution.*

Arts & Science is the biggest provider of interdivisional teaching services, currently offering support to several divisions and facing growing demand for cross-divisional teaching engagement from professional faculties. For the past academic year, senior members of the Dean's Office have been working with the

Provost's Office and the University's Planning & Budget Office, as well as with the leadership of our partner divisions, to put these arrangements on a rational footing so that the academic priorities of the participating divisions can be effectively addressed and financially sustained. Our aim is that a number of these arrangements will be in place for the 2015-16 academic year.

Campus relationships

- *The reviewers commented on the challenges inherent in the University's tri-campus model and large scope. They recommended continued focus on how best to leverage our tri-campus structure and cross-divisional strengths.*

Arts & Science collaborates extensively with the other campuses in order to take advantage of the University's tremendous breadth in research and teaching. The process of careful tri-campus planning, coordination, identification of principles for program development and collaboration has continued to evolve constructively. A key contributor to our communications is the Tri-campus Deans Committee, which meets every two to three weeks during the academic year to ensure the coordination of activities at the graduate level, as well as consultation and discussion on many other important academic policies and practices, such as those involving undergraduate issues, research, academic human resources, and student evaluation of courses.

Societal impact and outreach

- *The reviewers applauded the Faculty's commitment to community involvement, globalization, and conducting research of significant impact and recommend that we engage in peer bench-marking.*

Our commitment to globalization and community engagement is evident in our service-learning initiatives, International Course Modules, Research Opportunities, Research Excursions and study abroad programs. We also strive to ensure support and understanding from many audiences, including the public and government. In concert with our academic units, our Office of Communications will work over the course of the next academic year, to better record the activities and achievements of our faculty, staff, and students and to promote them within Faculty, University, and externally.

Academic planning and progress toward academic priorities

- *The reviewers suggested that the new dean should work to enhance communication across departments, colleges and EDUs in support of a common conversation about priorities and integrative planning.*

We engaged in Faculty-wide academic planning in 2009-10, and have followed with a Self-Study process in the 2012-13 academic year and into the fall of 2013. At this time, we are not proposing that we launch a Faculty-wide academic planning process over the next two years of my term as dean. Rather, we propose to identify specific Faculty-wide priorities on which we can focus our efforts.

Having consulted both within the Faculty and with the Provost on this way to move forward, this term I have initiated a discussion for us to consider a small number of priorities. Some of these have resulted from the recommendations of the reviewers, others have arisen through discussion in the Faculty. Examples of initiatives identified to date include the following:

- Comprehensively reviewing our large course learning environment with the aim of further enhancing student learning and the student experience.
- Assessing the experience of our international undergraduate students in order to improve the benefits they receive from the education we have to offer. This can include consideration of services and supports provided in tandem with our academic units, colleges, and the University.
- Enhancing the graduate student experience through continued improvements to our recruitment, to students' progress through their programs, and preparation for future careers.
- Strengthening the Faculty's information technology capacity, and the ability of Arts & Science to assist our academic units in meeting their IT needs.
- Unit-by-unit consultation: with the assistance of a "360 internal review" of a department's operations, developing a plan or a series of initiatives to help the given unit meet its academic aspirations.

These priorities will be further discussed and more fully developed as appropriate during 2014-15.

Summary

The Report and its recommendations have been discussed within the Arts & Science community these past three months and will certainly continue to generate discussion and provide guidance for the Faculty. The reviewers identified the Faculty's major challenges, along with our achievements.

Despite our accomplishments, we continue to face even greater financial constraints. Through our consultations, we have heard about the continued need to increase our faculty complement. This has been and will continue to be a challenge to do at the level required for Arts & Science. The provincial four-year tuition framework will result in decreased provincial funding for us. Even more significantly, the provincial government has changed its policy related to undergraduate arts and science program fees. These changes will have a substantial impact on our budget and, thus, on our ability to hire teaching staff, and deliver our academic programs.

Our administrative response highlights how we have begun the process of addressing the Report recommendations. We have also initiated a process for identification of a number of specific Faculty academic priorities that we will focus on over the short- to medium-term in order to build on our strengths, enhance our collaborations within the University, and advance our leadership in research and the academic experience of our students.

Sincerely,



David Cameron
Dean, Faculty of Arts & Science