

CONTRIBUTION TO IARP

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Although the following comments are primarily my own, I believe that they would largely be shared by many members of my department and indeed by other mainstream departments in the Liberal Arts, nominally a core element in university education at UW. Below my comments on the various questions are printed in bold. But first, three general points.

First, any academic proposals to address the following questions *must* be assessed not only in terms of their academic value, but also in terms of fiscal accountability. It is already the case that UW has allowed expansions to occur that are more expensive to operate than the revenue generated (e.g., from tuition and allocation of the provincial grant proportional to undergraduate enrolment). A university can afford a certain degree of subsidization across programs, but an excessive amount (as at UW?) undermines our core teaching and research functions and is unfair to students and secondarily to faculty.

Second, and related to academic integrity and fiscal accountability, interdisciplinary programs should be primarily constituted out of existing departments and faculty, wherever possible. This allows for fewer additional faculty needed to mount the program, is more likely to ensure the availability of a sufficient number of faculty to mount a legitimate program, and also means that interdisciplinarity (i.e., representation from diverse departments) is maintained. This has been the model followed in science, but not in the areas where interdisciplinary programs have morphed into autonomous programs and even departments, weakening the overall academic integrity of the university. So whatever new program initiatives are recommended in the IARP report, procedures to ensure optimal use of existing resources should be included.

Third, and perhaps most important, UW must allow for considerable direction of academic initiatives from bottom-up sources (i.e., from faculty members and departments), both of which should properly drive the overall teaching and research agenda of the university. Excessive top-down influence is prone to catastrophic mistakes (e.g., misguided and perhaps erroneous limits to what research is valued and adequately resourced) and is prone to a rigidity that simply does not allow the degree of flexibility demanded in a university environment. For example, the recent strategic research plan of October 2015 gave no attention whatsoever to immigration and refugees, now a major concern of Canada and other nations. Yet there are faculty in Psychology and other disciplines with expertise and research programs on just this topic, something we could now take advantage of given sufficient attention and resources, and might even merit an allocation of a Canada Research Chair.

1) **STRATEGIC COMMITMENT:** Historically, students have come to university directly from high school. Demographic projections suggest that the number of students entering UWinnipeg directly from high school will decline over the medium-term. This suggests that we must explore alternate pathways into UWinnipeg.

PACE, ELP and the Collegiate are important entry points for students at a variety of life stages into UWinnipeg.

Our Community Learning programs also represent a pathway by exposing school-age children from families that have been historically underrepresented in post-secondary institutions to University.

HOW DO WE ACHIEVE THIS?

What are some ways that these existing pathways can be strengthened?

What opportunities exist for creating links between our community learning programs and our core mission?

Are there new pathways we can create that enhance access and provide a continuum of supports for traditionally under-represented learners? What would this entail?

There are alternative approaches to compensate for fewer students in the traditional cohorts including: do more to ensure the success of students who register so that they continue beyond first year, right-size UW so that its complement and capacity are more in line with its government revenue, and take better advantage of the capacity of existing faculty members to contribute to emerging programs rather than allow unnecessary and expensive expansion of every new program. With respect to success, academic preparedness is generally a strong predictor of first year success, and first year success is a good predictor of later retention. One rationale for the fall reading week is that it can allow first year students an opportunity to adjust to university demands. If taken advantage of, it also allows faculty time to offer marginal students opportunities to overcome modest weaknesses (e.g., short quizzes that could allow for diagnostic assessments and motivate students to take advantage of remedial programs offered by departments or other UW units).

Obtain evidence that the investment in PACE, ELP, and the Collegiate actually result in increased enrolments that warrant the expense of these programs. Include in this calculation lost tuition revenues for university departments from course credit being granted to courses not taught by instructors qualified to teach at the university level, including so-called dual credit courses in the Collegiate.

With respect to Community Learning programs, there is again an untested assumption that modest activities by UW in this area can accomplish what institutions with far better funding and a much longer timeframe (e.g., public schools) are in a much better position to achieve. Some of the current activities of UW appear to better serve a political agenda than the actual needs of our students and our institution, and indeed even of the school-age children. A more appropriate alternative could be to have university students and faculty visiting schools to stimulate interest in further education and coming to UW. For example, in my son's grade 8 class at Grant Park, science students from UM supervised the students

dissecting a pig's brain, which had a memorable effect as one might imagine. Another economical approach would be to ensure that under-represented students (schools?) are well-represented in the High School Enrichment program that has operated so successfully for many years. Finally, relevant researchers can be pilot testing programs and advising government on ways to better prepare students from under-represented populations for university.

As noted above, the programs (which may or may not be pathways) need to be evaluated to see whether they actually achieve their supposed objectives commensurate with their cost. If not, perhaps some of them should be discontinued. With respect to our core mission, university teaching and research, one approach would be to support community activities by faculty who are actually researching and teaching about relevant domains. In psychology, for example, researchers who study reading and dyslexia could be supported in efforts to study the phenomena in disadvantaged students. Similarly, a faculty member in Education studies the development of mathematical abilities in school-age children. Such activities undoubtedly exist in other departments. And if departments were given the resources, even more could be accomplished by, for example, departmental supports for student research in the community (i.e., experiential learning). Whatever new "pathways" are considered, it is important that they can be demonstrated to achieve their objectives. There is much evidence for the null and even negative effects of untested community programs that are expected to work. Finally, our direct supports should primarily be focussed at the university level. An objective study of our excessive attrition from first to second year, for example, would almost certainly show that it is students from disadvantaged backgrounds and school systems who are much more at risk of failure. Here too we need to be realistic about what we can achieve and empirically evaluate the success of programs.

2) **STRATEGIC COMMITMENT:** UWinnipeg believes that there is no substitute for face-to-face instruction in a classroom setting, and this will remain our predominant method of delivering a high quality educational experience. However, we must also adapt to our changing environment and develop a response by incorporating technology and experiential learning in ways that expand student learning opportunities.

HOW DO WE ACHIEVE THIS?

How could we effectively incorporate online and experiential learning into the pedagogical practice of faculty?

What kinds of new or enhanced pedagogical supports would faculty require to increase their willingness to use online and experiential modes of learning? What resources would be required?

With respect to experiential learning, departments already engage in a certain amount of this by virtue of their normal teaching and research. Any department that trains students in empirical research, for example, will have labs, research assistants, supervised theses, and other experiential opportunities. We need better recognition of these contributions, especially with respect to undergraduate students, and to emphasize the value of such experiences that are so closely tied to the teaching and research functions of the university. The Psychology department actually had in the past more courses with labs that allow experiential learning. Unfortunately, a marked decrease in teaching capacity has necessitated the dropping of many such labs over the years.

For more applied and other types of experiential learning, departments require sufficient resources if such opportunities are to be successful, by which I mean provide a true integration of student academic and work experiences. It is very easy to find student placements, especially non-paying ones, but much more of a challenge to ensure that there are academic benefits of such placements. This requires much the same commitment from faculty as theses and is not readily achieved simply by having administrative support for experiential learning in the community. As a concrete example of the need for appropriate resources, Psychology surveyed its students about interest in work placement experiences, and the response was very positive. We also had a student question relevant organizations about their interest in such student placements and again the response was positive. But it would be a real challenge and probably impossible at present to do this for our large number of students and ensure an experience with academic integrity, especially given our 25-35 thesis students who are already supervised without recognition.

With respect to on-line learning, caution is required. There is some evidence that UW students are not enamoured of on-line courses. For the on-line courses offered through our Lockhart classroom theatre, for example, it is my impression from web-advisor that the in-class section tends to fill up first and only later do students opt for the on-line section. At least some on-line courses have also had less success, as indicated by withdrawals and other indicators. Moreover, the fundamental idea of on-line courses (i.e., off-campus courses) may be inconsistent with and undermine our image as a small, personal institution where faculty know and interact with students. And anything that reduces student success may exacerbate the problem of possible enrolment declines (see items 1 and 11).

It would also seem reasonable and prudent to determine empirically whether there is actually a substantive market for such courses before investing much time and money in their promotion. Previous efforts at distance education (e.g., offerings in various Manitoban towns) were, I believe, ultimately not successful, which perhaps could have been anticipated given more complete and data-driven planning.

3) STRATEGIC COMMITMENT: UWinnipeg has made a strong commitment to sustainability and indigenization and aims to create an environment that embodies these values. Sustainability is a lens applied to all practices and processes to guide University activities (academic and operational) increasingly towards supporting the revitalization and resilience of ecosystems and communities. Indigenization, in part, refers to our recognition that we must do more to include indigenous peoples, perspectives, and knowledge in every aspect of the academy. One of our strategic priorities as we move forward is to ensure that there is a shared understanding of what indigenization means at UWinnipeg. Both sustainability and indigenization cut across all academic departments and student support units.

HOW DO WE ACHIEVE THIS?

What approaches would be most effective in promoting indigenization in our teaching and research?
 What approaches would be most effective in promoting sustainability in our teaching and research?
 What role could individual faculty members, departments, and other units play in addressing our commitment to sustainability and indigenization?
 How can these values be embodied in the physical space on campus?

The idea of sustainability as a core element cutting across all units in the university appears strange and somewhat contrived to me. Certainly there are practical things we should consider with respect to the physical operation of the university (e.g., recycling, alternative energy sources) and there are definitely areas or sub-area specializations within UW (e.g., environmental studies, attitude change in Psychology) that could address sustainability as an academic topic, but I fail to see how English, various foreign languages taught at UW, and diverse other departments could address sustainability without seriously compromising their academic mission, for example, by offering a questionable course on the writings of environmentalists. As with some other initiatives at UW, this one seems more political than anything when applied too broadly as a major goal of the university.

With respect to indigenization, it will certainly be important to “ensure that there is a shared understanding of what indigenization means” given the Indigenous requirement that we have already adopted. My suspicion is that it means different things to different people and that many in the academic community do not fully appreciate what indigenization entails for its proponents, as reflected, for example, in methods texts that manifest considerable antipathy to traditional academic scholarship, perhaps especially the sciences.

It also remains to be seen what the implications of the proposed requirement will be and UW might want to prepare for some unintended consequences. For example, I remain skeptical that our current offerings are sufficient to meet the demand. Moreover, the requirement will certainly result in a large-scale redistribution of students across departments and courses. Some departments, especially smaller ones, not offering indigenous courses could experience large declines in enrolments and even departments offering indigenous courses could see large shifts away from other courses that might be core to their program. Possible responses to avoid or correct such contingencies should be developed, ideally prior to such outcomes.

4) **STRATEGIC COMMITMENT:** UWinnipeg acknowledges that particular attention must be paid to supporting faculty early in their careers. Additionally, UWinnipeg has committed to developing new supports and identifying, sharing, and reinforcing best practices that enable faculty to achieve success in teaching and research. Throughout this process, we must be mindful that teaching excellence and research are not dichotomous. Research, scholarly, and creative activities strengthen our capacity to provide high quality teaching to our students.

HOW DO WE ACHIEVE THIS?

What kinds of support do new faculty members at UWinnipeg require early in their teaching careers?

What kinds of support do new faculty members at UWinnipeg require early in their research careers?

What is required to implement these supports? Who should implement them?

UW does a reasonable job of supporting new faculty, especially with initial course releases and good start-up funding where needed. It is also generally the case now that many new faculty arrive with much research and even some teaching experience, facilitating the adjustment to full-time academic status and obviating the need for excessive supports.

I am more cautious than some about overly ambitious and perhaps unnecessary supplementary services directed at supporting faculty in their teaching and research. For example, money that would go to hire non-academic staff to provide such supports might better be spent on direct support to faculty through more internal funding, additional .5 course releases for active researchers not externally funded or for faculty to develop new courses, and the like. On the research side, such initiatives are especially helpful to faculty whose research does not require major external funding or who have lost their external funding in challenging times. And the fact that universities with greater support from the granting agencies have a larger staff in the research office has multiple interpretations. It could mean more staff lead to more funding or the reverse, that more funding leads to more staff, or even that simply being a more research intensive institution leads both to more research staff and more funding.

5) **STRATEGIC COMMITMENT:** UWinnipeg recognizes the value of growing our research capacity and continuing to improve our degree of teaching excellence.

HOW DO WE ACHIEVE THIS?

How can the institution better support faculty in pursuing research funding, including tri-council grants?
How can the institution better support faculty in pursuing teaching excellence throughout their careers?
What is the role of graduate students and graduate programs in growing our research capacity?
What specific supports do faculty need to assist them in successfully completing research activities while continuing to grow as educators? Who should deliver these supports?

Some overlap here with other sections (see 5 and 9). I find the repeated suggestion of “supports” here and elsewhere somewhat disconcerting given the implication of perhaps adding non-academic staff at some cost to the academic side. Generally, faculty members are quite capable of carrying out and developing their research and teaching functions, and funds might produce better outcomes if applied directly to researchers and teachers as mentioned elsewhere (e.g., additional course releases, internal funding). Careful cost-benefit analyses should be done before diverting funds from the academic side to the administrative side, and if implemented, benefits should be monitored.

It should also be acknowledged that there are some tensions between research and teaching. For example, external grants provide releases that reduce teaching capacity, sometimes markedly so (e.g., equivalent to 2-3 additional faculty members), which can contribute to larger classes or more dependence on contract academic staff.

Similar tensions exist with respect to undergraduate and graduate programs. The disparity in class sizes has been mentioned elsewhere and graduate programs may exacerbate that problem. That is, graduate courses may have much smaller enrolments, yet count equivalent for teaching load to large undergraduate classes. And large undergraduate classes also put added burdens on faculty with respect to their research.

6) **STRATEGIC COMMITMENT:** UWinnipeg takes pride in its diverse campus environment where people from all walks of life (e.g., international students, mature students, indigenous students, new Canadians, students with disabilities, etc.) feel welcome on campus and are supported to achieve their full potential.

HOW DO WE ACHIEVE THIS?

How can UWinnipeg promote and enhance an institutional culture of respect and belonging?

How can we create spaces for learning, socializing, studying and reflecting that contribute to such a culture?

What gaps currently exist in the services offered to students? What work needs to be done to address these gaps?

With respect to diversity, one important objective of UW should be the fostering of a common identity as a member of the UW academic community. There is a risk, for example, that separation of students by distinct individual identities might make it less likely that students will identify with their academic disciplines and with UW as an academic institution. Promoting a dual identity with both an umbrella identity (e.g., UW student, science student) and an individual identity (e.g., indigenous person, Muslim, ...) can do much to foster positive inter-group relations and even academic success.

7) STRATEGIC COMMITMENT: UWinnipeg has a strong history of intersectoral research based on partnerships between departments, other post-secondary institutions, and external organizations. We are committed to maintaining and cultivating these partnerships.

HOW DO WE ACHIEVE THIS?

How can we build internal opportunities for dialogue and collaboration between UWinnipeg faculty members?

How can we build opportunities for dialogue and collaboration between UWinnipeg faculty members and external organizations?

How could individual faculty members, academic departments, and other university units play a role in cultivating these partnerships?

I would question the claim that we have a strong history of such interactions and would argue that the fracturing of a unified Faculty of Arts and Sciences into five faculties (plus a quasi-faculty, the Global College) has lessened such opportunities. There are few programs, for example, cutting across Faculties, Biopsychology being the only one I can think of right now.

One way to promote such interactions is by monitoring programs to ensure that they take advantage of all existing departments and programs. This can be done by Academic Planning, Senate Curriculum Committee, Deans, and the Academic Vice President. And ideological barriers to such cooperation need also to be minimized. Some departments, for example, may have an antipathy to empirical research that hampers cooperative research efforts.

Perhaps especially important is that hiring be done in such a way as to maximize the likelihood that hiring in a program with overlap in an existing department results in a good fit with the latter. Rather than having Global College hire a Political Scientist, for example, it would likely be more constructive for Political Science in consultation with the Global College to undertake primary responsibility for hiring. Similar principles might apply to other interdisciplinary or applied programs that hire faculty in diverse departments.

It is also a prerequisite to the development of such interactions that Faculty members have sufficient time for such pursuits. Unfortunately, some departments have such high teaching loads (e.g., large class sizes) and research demands (e.g., due to external funding) that it can be a challenge to find the time and energy to develop interactions with scholars in other departments, form centres or institutes, and the like.

Another idea would be to develop mechanisms for faculty members with common research interests to get to know about each other's interests and to interact in various ways. Internal talks, for example, might be advertised more widely. At one time there was a faculty-wide discussion board (listserv) by which information and dialogue could occur. We no longer have such a facility.

8) **STRATEGIC COMMITMENT:** The work of the library is integral in supporting faculty research and teaching, enhancing student experience and success, and mobilizing knowledge and research.

HOW DO WE ACHIEVE THIS?

In what ways can the capacity of the library be strengthened so that it better supports research, collaboration, teaching, and learning?

What is the role of the library in the mobilization of research?

With apologies to the Library and its staff, I have no time to add anything here other than the obvious need for books, journals, and knowledgeable staff.

9) **STRATEGIC COMMITMENT:** Teaching and research are interconnected and both contribute to the core success of UWinnipeg. We are committed to developing ways to understand, define, and measure success in both of these areas.

HOW DO WE ACHIEVE THIS?

How should we define and measure research success at the University of Winnipeg?

How should we define and measure teaching success at the University of Winnipeg?

With respect to teaching, it must first be acknowledged that teaching at UW tends to be very good to excellent. Indeed the average rating across many courses over many years was about 4.0 on a five-point scale (1 = Unsatisfactory, 2 = Satisfactory, 3 = Good, 4 = Very Good, 5 = Excellent).

A further general observation is that excessive dependence on contract faculty threatens our reputation for teaching excellence given the generally lesser experience and availability of such instructors. And excessively large classes in some departments, exacerbated by overly small classes in other programs, similarly constitute a major challenge to successful teaching. There should be a fair allocation of teaching resources to students in different faculties and departments, otherwise some students benefit at the expense of others despite paying equivalent amounts for their courses.

There is much dissatisfaction with the current means of evaluating teaching. When the current dichotomous evaluation (Unsatisfactory, Satisfactory) was introduced, there was a commitment to adopt as well a developmental instrument more akin to our previous measure. The development and use of such an instrument should be pursued, perhaps especially for new faculty members. With respect to the current scale, it is also problematic that no central body monitors the CCIs to ensure that grade inflation is not happening in some departments. And some universities have monitored grades more carefully, finding at one university, for example, that Education students do better in their education courses than in their Liberal Arts courses, suggesting some disparity in teaching standards.

I also think that it would be helpful to adopt a more graded scale for the universal evaluations; that is, use something like the five-point scale above rather than the dichotomous scale currently in use. Faculty and the administration should be striving for and monitoring more than just Satisfactory teaching if we are really committed to excellent instruction.

With respect to evaluation of research, it must primarily rest with departments and programs, although it would be good if some central and representative body were to ensure that research expectations were comparable across disciplines. That is, it may not be the case that all academic units are being held to the same rigorous standards.

10) **STRATEGIC COMMITMENT:** UWinnipeg faculty produce knowledge that influences policy, advances research, supports communities, and strengthens the workforce. We are committed to the idea of knowledge mobilization and must explore opportunities and resources that will move our research even further into the public domain.

HOW DO WE ACHIEVE THIS?

What are some ways that UWinnipeg can ensure that research is responsive to and applied within the public domain?

What kind of opportunities might UWinnipeg develop that would facilitate partnerships between the institution and the broader community to influence policy and reach a wider audience?

What role could individual faculty members, academic departments, and other university units play in advancing knowledge mobilization?

The primary way that UW Faculty and those at other primarily undergraduate institutions can influence society is through our graduates. Thousands of students carry into their future lives the knowledge, experience, and skills ideally fostered by their education here. Other more immediate efforts at knowledge mobilization would pale by comparison to the impact of our many graduates.

Another major way that UW Faculty can and do spread knowledge to communities is through the many communications they generate, both written and spoken. Journal articles and conference presentations benefit societies by providing an opportunity for media to read and write about developments in our disciplines and for practitioners in the community with the requisite expertise to also be exposed to those contemporary developments. Ideas are similarly disseminated by presentations to the wider community, interviews or thought pieces for local and broader media outlets, and diverse other means of communication.

Actual involvement with non-university elements in the conduct and application of academic research and theory is best done by individual researchers, and recognized by the university if done well (i.e., if consistent with commitment to truth, academic integrity, and other scholarly values). Faculty scholarly activities are so diverse and demands on Faculty time so intense that it is unwise to think that a central administrative body can play much of a role in constructive community interactions, other than providing mechanisms to support individual efforts of merit (e.g., internal grants, course releases) and recognition of those efforts.

11) **STRATEGIC COMMITMENT:** UWinnipeg remains committed to providing high quality undergraduate and graduate education with a focus on the liberal arts. In pursuit of this aim, UWinnipeg needs a vocabulary and a means to name and evaluate student outcomes, impact, and success.

HOW DO WE ACHIEVE THIS?

What are some specific ways to measure “successful graduates” that reflect our belief in the value of a liberal arts education and the specific mission of our institution?

A first step would be to determine whether or not UW is in fact still committed to the Liberal Arts and Sciences, a claim that increasingly does not ring true. One simple way would be to identify the departments that constitute the Liberal Arts (itself probably a controversial task these days) and determine whether emerging programs are built on those departments and students earn credits in those departments.

The easiest way to document student long-term outcomes would be to piggy-back on the fund-raising efforts of the Foundation. Current students are used to telephone graduates to ask for financial support and it would be simple to add a question or two about the occupation and satisfaction with UW of those graduates.

And it should be painfully obvious that students who are not retained from first to second year (retention) or do not graduate should generally be considered non-successes, even acknowledging that such statistics are in part influenced by transfers to other institutions. Yet UW has the lowest retention (70%) of all universities in Canada and has a well below-average graduation rate. To some extent these are problems for all MB institutions and suggest shortcomings in students coming to university. As an institution we should be fighting for the academic preparedness of high school graduates in the province.