February 14, 2019

I am very pleased to circulate the Final Report of the Team Reviewing the Faculty of Humanities. I am grateful for the thoughtful work of the three reviewers, Lesley Cormack, Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Alberta; Michael Milde, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Western University; and Christina Sinding, School of Social Work, McMaster University. I want to thank all of you who took time out of your busy schedules to participate in the review, and for helping them to better understand the Faculty from diverse perspectives.

I have been sharing both the Final Report and the document prepared for the reviewers, The Faculty of Humanities Turns 50, with potential Dean candidates and with the members of the search committee. Both reports have assisted the search committee in its work, as I had hoped they would. And I am certain the reports will assist the new Dean and all of you in thinking about the path ahead.

I particularly appreciated that the reviewers focused on next steps, offering a number of suggestions on how the next Dean can build on the work that has been done in the Faculty. The report should not be seen as a blueprint, but rather as a prompt for further discussion and reflection within the Faculty.

In making this document available to you, I would echo the conclusions of the reviewers: “The Faculty of Humanities has come a long way in the past five years. Financially, it is now in a much more sustainable position. This is to be commended, and it allows the opportunity for the next Dean to focus on the fundamental activities of the Faculty – teaching and research.”

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The reviewers would like to start this report by thanking the Provost for the invitation to review McMaster’s Faculty of Humanities. We would also like to thank all the people who took the time to speak with us, or to share their written comments. We base our report on the interviews we held during our two-day visit, and on the written materials that we received from the Faculty, and from various individual faculty members.

PREAMBLE AND OVERVIEW OF LAST FIVE YEARS

We begin this review by acknowledging the shaping effects of fiscal constraint: shaping the work and experiences of faculty members and staff for many years now, and also shaping this review, in that many conversations and much of our commentary here focus on the Faculty’s fiscal situation, its consequences and remedies over the past five years.

At this point, it is clear that the Faculty’s most pressing financial issues have been addressed. As well, the Provost has expressed a commitment to Humanities in the form of a continuing line of support that means the significant turnaround achieved at the Faculty level will not be undermined. While threats persist, the Faculty does have a new opportunity to chart its future.

McMaster has what might be called a “pure” Faculty of Humanities. By this we mean that it does not include any notionally “career” oriented disciplines such as business, accounting or economics. Like many similarly constituted, similarly situated, Faculties across North America it has faced a serious period of adjustment/decline since the economic crisis of 2007/8. Enrolments in core disciplines such as English and History have declined, often dramatically. Because of the nature of the public university funding formulas, which track student traffic flows, there has been a corresponding loss of income, followed by pressure to constrain and retrench expenditures. At McMaster, this trend coincided with the introduction of a Responsibility Centered Management budget model that made the Faculty responsible for the vast majority of its costs just at the moment when revenue was in sharp decline. The result was a sizable and growing deficit (then projected to be $5 million on a total budget of approximately $24 million).

The University mitigated the full effects of the new budget model, but the Faculty had to adjust to its new reality. The current dean, Ken Cruikshank, was appointed with a clear mandate to manage the fiscal challenge. As his first steps, he implemented a hiring freeze, and a plan to
reduce the faculty complement through attrition in order to re-balance the professor/student ratio. Because Faculties of Humanities, McMaster’s included, devote the vast majority of their budgets to salaries and student support, any cuts or constraints were bound to have a major effect on people. It does not take long for a constrained environment to affect morale, and there are indications that morale has been, and continues to be an issue.

At this time, it is clear that the Faculty’s fortunes have seen a dramatic turnaround. At the end of Dean Cruikshank’s tenure, the Faculty is now realizing small and growing surpluses (albeit with a continuing line of support from the Provost). Financially, the Faculty is in better shape than many of its peers across North America. From our perspective, and from the standpoints of many of the people with whom we spoke, the Dean and his team are to be commended on their efforts. We consistently heard praise for the Dean’s commitment to transparency with regard to fiscal matters: a crucial element in getting Faculty leadership, faculty and staff to support required cuts and adjustments. The Faculty has taken the essential steps toward a significant turnaround.

What has made the difference on the fiscal side? Two elements stand out. The first of these is the McMaster English Language Development (MELD) program. Members of the Faculty’s Department of Linguistics and Languages run this program. They have capitalized on the current demand for advanced English language training from international students (particularly students from China). This sophisticated program offers intensive English language training and acculturation as a way of preparing students for post-secondary studies in Canada. A particular feature of the program is that its graduates are guaranteed admission to McMaster. Currently the program takes in around 400 students. Given that students are paying international fees (approximately $24,000), the revenue available to the Faculty is substantial, even accounting for the costs related to a teaching intensive program that relies on relatively small group interactions. Our understanding is that MELD provides something on the order of one-sixth of the Faculty’s budget. To put this in perspective, this program has, by itself, drastically reduced the budget deficit – and this after only four years. Truly a remarkable achievement. We will consider the possibilities and possible limitations, risks and unintended negative consequences of this program in a subsequent section.

The other element that has served to improve the Faculty’s fortunes has been the notable growth of specific programs. Both Philosophy and Communications Studies and Multimedia have grown their program enrolments. Several departments have also demonstrated healthy increases in course enrolments (Simpson Units, as these are called at McMaster) and/or service teaching. The leader on this score is the Department of Classics, which has more than doubled its Simpson units count since 2011-12. Such gains show that even in the current climate, it is possible for units in the Humanities to capitalize on demand for specific skills, topics or approaches.

However, it would seem that the opportunities are not evenly distributed. The gains in some quarters have been counterbalanced by continuing losses in program and course enrolments in English, History and the School of Arts. Overall, undergraduate program enrolments are down somewhat; Master’s enrolments are also down; and PhD enrolments are relatively flat, though they vary year over year.
This bare description of the numbers does not adequately convey the disruptive effect of the shift in student flows on the various departments. Student numbers have dropped quickly in some areas and risen quickly in others. The ability of the Faculty to adjust to these changes is limited by the usual structural factors – in constrained circumstances, it is not possible to add resources to departments, even those that are growing. Moreover, contrariwise, there are few ways to move teaching resources out of departments that are experiencing contraction (other than attrition through retirements or unplanned departures). Inevitably, some units are left under-resourced and over-burdened. Others, including the largest departments in the Faculty, are left experiencing a decline, which, despite their best efforts at developing innovative curriculum, they cannot seem to stem. Both of these can be debilitating in different ways.

To date, the Faculty of Humanities has managed its complement reduction through attrition without notable loss of program capacity, though there are stresses and strains in certain sectors. Given significant recent improvements in the Faculty’s budget situation, it is now possible for some of the departments to make hires – our understanding is that searches are underway. It will however take some time for these additional resources to come on stream. There is evidence to suggest that the extended period of constraint may have created a pent-up demand such that the current gains feel meagre, and late in arriving. Managing expectations will certainly be an ongoing challenge for the new Dean. There will also have to be a clear message that the Faculty’s improved fortunes do not mean a return to “business as usual”.

Despite these challenging conditions, the Faculty has scored some notable successes, in addition to its return to fiscal health. For example, it is important to highlight the improvement in retention and graduation rates, which is a crucial component of overall enrolment management. This area deserves further attention since the Faculty benefits from retaining its students in obvious ways. It was not clear what might have contributed to improvements in this indicator. Exploring the factors that have supported improvements in retention and bolstering them where possible is merited.

Also worthy of attention are a variety of research initiatives and successes. The Institute for Ethics in Policy Innovation, which is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation and the ARIEAL Institute, which conducts research associated with the MELD program, are clear headliners. They also seem to represent the lion’s share of the research dollars in the Faculty. There is also evidence that Tri-Council funding is improving in the current round.

At the same time, we would signal that the research agenda of the Faculty did not figure as prominently in our review process as it might have. There was comparatively little time set aside for this topic in the schedule, and in our conversations with faculty, Department Chairs, Graduate Chairs and others, we heard relatively little about developments in research. What we heard was: McMaster is generally known as a medical/health sciences powerhouse, and that research outside this area is accorded less attention and prestige. We also heard that, although there have been some successful partnership projects, as well as a long history of research excellence in sole researcher projects, support for research could be more robust, and barriers to collaboration across faculties still exist.
We advance these observations with appropriate caution, being aware of the limitations that are inherent to our relatively brief review process. Nevertheless, it would seem appropriate for the next Dean to a) consider what steps might be taken to raise the profile of Humanities research within the Faculty and the university, b) find a way to enhance the position of Research Support Facilitator and c) engage with the Provost around ways of fostering cross-campus research initiatives.

NEXT STEPS

Now that the most pressing financial issues have been addressed, the Faculty, under the guidance of a new dean, will need to develop plans for the future. While they will need to continue to support and sustain the programs and policies that have brought them to this financial equilibrium, success in the long term must also rely on the intrinsic work of the Faculty.

Strategic planning
Most pressing is the development of a strategic plan. This plan should be developed in a collegial and collaborative manner and should include consideration of new programs, research directions, student distribution (both undergraduate and graduate) and issues of equity, diversity and inclusion. It is clear that Leadership has not been a successful connecting theme, largely because there has been relatively little buy-in. However, the impetus was a good one. Finding a small number of values and themes that the majority of the faculty, staff and students could identify with and work towards would be an excellent contribution to success for the next five years.

New programs
Part of the success of the past 5 years can be attributed to the introduction and success of both MELD and JPPL. Particularly, the new program in Justice, Political Philosophy and Law stands as an excellent example of the creation of a program that respects and promotes the core values of the Faculty of Humanities while at the same time attracting students. If the Faculty could develop one or two more such programs, this would be a huge benefit to Humanities, as well as promoting the very real contributions that the study of the humanities can bring to our students and our society. There might be an opportunity to develop a program like JPPL that is attached to one of the centres or institutes, for example, the Centre for Community Engaged Narrative Arts, which would allow for greater connections and reciprocal learning with the local arts community. Another opportunity might involve engagement with the Socrates project. Students do not know much about the Socrates project; perhaps there is a way to collaborate with this project to create curriculum attractive to many students.

The Integrated Business and Humanities program has also proven to be an attractive collaboration. We suggest that the Faculty consider whether there might be other professional-infused minors that might be attractive to students and provide good relations across Faculties at McMaster.
Program Management
We noted a number of things that the Faculty will want to consider concerning undergraduate programs as it moves forward.

1. There was some discussion in the self-study report concerning the possibility of direct entry for students into majors. We do not know whether this would be successful, but urge the Faculty to examine it as a possible recruitment tool.

2. As noted above, we suggest that the Faculty examine retention rates and if possible find best practices to increase such rates further.

3. The Faculty has done well in attracting “Simpson Units” – it will have to prepare for the possibility that other Faculties will look to increase their own take of these numbers, because of the effects of the RCM budget model.

4. The Faculty should consider ways to encourage students to include courses from other Faculties in their programs, and ways that students might do double majors both within and among Faculties.

5. MELD has been a major contributor to the Faculty’s financial turnaround – the achievement is phenomenal. The Faculty brief indicates that the program will reach its maximum capacity at 400 students. The Faculty will need to live within the parameters associated with that size. It should be noted that the program also faces certain risks. The most obvious of these is that it draws primarily from the Chinese market, which has been developing strongly for the last decade. However, this market may prove unpredictable – political changes can lead to a dramatically reduced stream of candidates. Diversification of the student pool would be one way to address this possibility.

Graduate students
While PhD numbers have held steady over the past few years, the Faculty needs to continue to monitor and pay attention to the needs of graduate students in humanities. Particularly in the Humanities, the majority of PhD graduates will not be moving into an academic job, which means that humanities programs need to work conscientiously on the development of alternative skills and paths. Studies show that graduate students who know from the outset of their degrees that they may follow a variety of different paths are happier with the experience of their degrees and more successful when they graduate. The Faculty of Humanities has been aware of this already. We urge them to take this to the next level in the next five years.

There appear to be some concerns with communication with the School of Graduate Studies, not an uncommon issue in Universities, but one of which to be aware. Several students found it very difficult to get answers to questions or to get errors corrected.

Research
The Faculty of Humanities has a very strong record of research productivity, but it relies on some very large grants to maintain the overall strength. We believe that the Faculty needs to work to change the culture concerning applying for grants. Grants must be seen as an important part of the research landscape, which also fund graduate students, and increasingly allow and encourage interdisciplinary and inter-institution engagement. Given the existence of a number of Humanities research centres and institutes, there is an opportunity to leverage their resources to
develop more interdisciplinary and partnership-type research projects. One of the challenges for such a small Faculty is the lack of research support available. We applaud the Faculty for supporting the position of Research Support Facilitator, as well as an associate dean of graduate studies and research.

The Associate Dean, Graduate Studies and Research and the Research Support Facilitator offered a number of recommendations for strengthening research infrastructure in the Faculty and enabling faculty members’ research programs. All of these merit consideration by the new Dean and the Provost. For example, it appears that each year promising collaborative projects do not translate into completed applications to external funders. The Dean should examine the potential for a relatively modest investment in additional staff working alongside the Research Support Facilitator to achieve more funding applications per year from the Faculty.

**Faculty Structure**

Humanities is a Faculty with a number of quite small departments. This increases the administrative burden on each department (fewer faculty to choose from for chairs or committee work) and makes it more difficult for collaborations or joint degrees. We would encourage the next dean to look at the options of merging some departments, not as a cost saving measure, but to allow sharing of administrative resources and potential program developments. For example, at other universities, History and Classics are a single department. Likewise, French is often grouped with other languages. These particular combinations might not suit the McMaster context and any mergers would need to be done collegially, but could be a significant benefit to the programs themselves.

Interdisciplinary programs, such as GSFR, are difficult to support where budget models reduce incentives or create barriers to cooperation. We heard, for example, that students in this program face challenges taking courses, or finding supervisors, in non-Humanities disciplines. For programs like this to be sustained, countervailing inducements to the budget model need to be put on the table. Integrating with other smaller interdisciplinary programs to consolidate resources and offer a robust interdisciplinary program and research institute under a wider thematic umbrella might also be a way forward.

**LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION**

Several issues surfaced during our visit on campus. Concerns raised about:

1. **Morale.** The financial realities of the past five years have left some serious morale issues in their wake. Some programs worry about disappearing. Many faculty and instructors find themselves doing more work with fewer resources. The work of student advising, graduate supervision, and curricular change (including responding to issues of decolonization and other significant issues for the academy) fall disproportionately to some instructors and not others. There is concern that a 15 unit teaching load is too high (and higher than other parts of campus)
and that the ‘point system’ (where teaching release is accorded for graduate supervision) is not fair or equitable.

One solution that should be considered is to reduce the size of graduate programs. We heard from several faculty members that graduate programs should keep expanding, or at least not decline in numbers, because of budget constraints. Yet the Provost confirmed that except in quite rare programs, the costs of a graduate student’s education exceeds (and often far exceeds) associated revenues to the University.

Graduate students are essential to the intellectual life of the University. However, to the extent that departments are admitting graduate students who are less capable academically in order to respond to budgetary challenges, this is a practice that should cease. Even where the applicant pool is strong, Departments with large graduate programs could discuss with the Dean the merits of admitting only the most promising graduate (and especially PhD) students to address workload burden and free up faculty members’ time and energy for research.

2. **Transparency**: There was much support for the work the present Dean has done to make the budget and decision-making more transparent and the next dean would need to both continue and expand this. While the budget information was seen as transparent, a number of faculty and staff felt that other decisions made at the Faculty level were not well understood or communicated. For example, reasons and processes behind TA allocations, class sizes, graduate supervisory loads, staff support, service loads, teaching loads, and teaching releases decisions were not uniformly understood. Part of this came from a concern with the five half course teaching load, combined with release for graduate and other activities. While the system has merits, there was clearly concern about equity and transparency.

3. **EDI**. This is clearly a pressing issue, both for McMaster and for the PSE more generally. As faculty members and students noted, equity and diversity are longstanding intellectual projects of the Humanities as well as projects of representation and social transformation. We heard that undergraduate and graduate students are eager to engage critically with these themes, and faculty are responding with courses that are well subscribed and lively. Yet some perceive that departments’ capacities adequately to respond to student interest, and to effectively mentor, are hampered by their composition. McMaster's Associate Vice-President Equity and Inclusion, Arig al Shaibah, confirmed the perception among several faculty members who attended the Town Hall that racialized professors are underrepresented, noting that there has been less success in relation to racialized professors (relative to other equity-seeking groups) in closing the gap between who could be participating in teaching and research in the Faculty of Humanities and who is. EDI is an area that needs institutional leadership, as the Provost affirmed; Humanities cannot tackle it alone. That said, this should be on the radar of any new dean, and should affect decisions about hiring, program development, committee structures and participation, supervisory loads and support.

4. **Communication**. This is one of the most intractable problems for universities, how to communicate effectively. We heard that departments felt siloed, that the Humanities was siloed from the rest of the University, that students didn’t know about events across the Faculty, etc. We have no suggestions, but just note this as an issue.
CONCLUSION
The Faculty of Humanities has come a long way in the past five years. Financially, it is now in a much more sustainable position. This is to be commended, and it allows the opportunity for the next Dean to focus on the fundamental activities of the Faculty – teaching and research. A new strategic plan that will help departments and programs envisage new opportunities will be a significant first step, followed by some real attention to administrative support for Faculty-wide initiatives. Attention will need to be paid to transparency, equity, diversity and inclusion. We believe the Faculty can survive and thrive in this future, but everyone will need to be focussed on creative and possible solutions.