

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the course of our two-day site visit, we were pleased to meet with a range of faculty, staff and students affiliated with the Unit. We met with several administrators, including the Dean of Education, program advisors of each stream within the Unit, a group of PEA and CUPE staff, the practicum coordinator for the counselling psychology program and two groups of students representing a cross-section of programs. We reviewed the Unit's Self Study Document, various institutional strategic plans, the Unit's Enhanced Planning Tools report (2019), a variety of program brochures and faculty curriculum vitae.

We were challenged to appreciate all of the nuances and complexities of this Unit's offerings and acknowledge that our observations and recommendations are naturally limited. Our approach was to listen to as many perspectives as possible and generate a report that may be useful for the future planning of the Unit. This executive summary and following report are organized around the following categories, as per the Procedures for Academic Program Reviews (VP Academic and Provost, 2015): quality, people, resources, future and other.

The quality of academic programs offered through the Unit across educational psychology, leadership studies and counselling psychology was noteworthy – they are innovative and relevant to professional practice, and appeal to a diverse student body. The vast majority of programs are offered at the graduate level (MEd, MA, PhD by 'special arrangement,' Certificates, Diploma) with some undergraduate course offerings, including the undergraduate Student Success Series. Program updating is ongoing, ensuring alignment with the state-of-the field in the Unit's three respective disciplinary areas. Programs are offered via a cohort model with options for part time study.

The Unit is home to several program success stories that have emerged via the intersection of faculty expertise and community need, but the sustainability of such initiatives has been, and is, currently challenged. The Unit has been faced with an unanticipated reduction in faculty, and was in the midst of a 'targeted' search in the counselling psychology area at the time of our site visit. Programs have been suspended until an appropriate faculty compliment can be re-established, and limited resources have forced the issue of the need for strategic long-term planning.

The Unit shows clear strength in responding to diversity through creating a welcoming space for international students, engaging in 'targeted' faculty searches and developing programs with and for communities (e.g., the Indigenous Community Counselling Psychology program). Staff and faculty are well respected and integral to the effective functioning of the Unit and the students we had the good fortune to meet all expressed overall appreciation for their learning experiences. Across courses and programs within the Unit, experiential learning, combined with a commitment to diversity and social justice, was evident. The Chair also noted that the mental health and wellbeing of faculty, staff and students is an important, ongoing consideration. The only concerns noted were that students wanted more access to courses across Unit programs, and

that that the calibre of sessional instruction was, at times, disappointing, relative to that of regular faculty.

The University is apparently in a “no growth” phase, yet the Unit is positioning itself to develop yet another (undergraduate) program to generate enough Equivalent Enrolments Taught (EETs) to sustain their high quality, intensive professional graduate programs. Although UVic positions itself as a research-intensive university, not all of its units enjoy the benefit of systemic support to engage in and sustain this kind of activity. The University needs to recognize the unique community-engaged, experiential learning and scholarship that appears to be the flagship of this Unit, while faculty seek innovative ways to increase their research activity.

The wellbeing of staff, faculty and students is important to the Unit, the Chair and the Dean. Inevitably, the current reduction in faculty complement is a main stressor for the Unit, especially given its emphasis on a ‘targeted’ search in a very demanding, intensive program area. Communication between the Dean and Unit Chair could be improved to increase understanding of the Unit’s unique program offerings and mandates, opportunities, challenges and constraints. Relationship building with the VP Research may also be fruitful, especially if the Unit wishes to expand its research activity in innovative ways.

Aside from the current challenges of being engaged in a ‘targeted’ faculty search, and imminent concerns about having to suspend programs and perhaps losing program accreditation of the counselling psychology program, members of the Unit are generally optimistic and want to do what it can to remain viable into the future. An upcoming retreat will provide a venue for genuine discussion about what a more cohesive Unit identity might ‘look’ like, identify opportunities for cross-collaboration in teaching and research between the Unit’s three diverse areas and generate realistic short-, medium- and long-term goals, particularly given the current fiscal climate of reduced funding for graduate programs across the University. Using available resources to align Unit activities (i.e., program development, research activity) with current University priorities and strategic plans will be important. We are grateful for the candor and diverse range of perspectives that were shared with us during our brief site-visit.