

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of Psychology at the University of Victoria is an exceptionally strong unit, in terms of its productivity, initiative, creativity, collegial governance, and overall esprit de corps. The Department's researchers are highly productive, successful in obtaining external funding, and are the recipients of numerous awards and honours recognizing excellence in research (see Table 16 of the self study report). The excellence of the undergraduate teaching done by the Department's research and teaching faculty is reflected in the number of teaching awards they have accrued in recent years (see Table 17 in the self-study report).

Psychology is home to several large graduate and undergraduate programs. We were impressed with the overall level of satisfaction expressed by students in this program. Our principal concern regarding the quality of the graduate programs is the relatively low levels of funding currently available to graduate students. It is below national norms, and as Victoria has a higher cost of living than the cities of some other comparable universities, grad students are likely having difficulty making ends meet. Similarly, we think that the department is critically short of TA funds. Clearly, one way to offset the increase in enrollment described below, and to increase funding for graduate students, is to give instructors more TA support and allow them to then give written assignments and exams.

Despite the overall levels of satisfaction with the program, it is clear that the Department's undergraduate teaching capacity is being stretched to the breaking point by recent large increases in demand and enrolment. The unit provides almost a third of the instruction in the Faculty of Social Science, with only 21% of the budgeted faculty. Moreover, Table 12 in self study documents the loss of 2 FTE since 2010/11, with a steady increase in EET's during the same time period, and without increase in other forms of support, such as TA hours. This increase in enrolments is anomalous compared to sister institutions in BC and nationally. The Department and Administration will need to discuss how to manage this increase in demand. It will require either enhanced resources (i.e. more faculty positions) or cutting back enrolments in some way.

One response to the increase in enrollments has been to increase class sizes, which is a defacto increase in workload for faculty, given that other forms of support have not increased. In addition to increased workload, large class sizes are undesirable on other grounds. Many instructors reported having to make changes to their pedagogical style and to having to lower their standards for assignments and papers as a way to deal in increased student numbers. The third pillar of UVic's Strategic Framework focuses on the need to Intensify Dynamic Learning at UVic, which includes a greater focus on experiential learning. The success of Psychology in attracting an increasing number of students is having a detrimental impact on the learning environment, despite the hard work of faculty, sessionals and graduate students. Third year classes of over 150 students do not allow for the kind of dynamic learning UVic wishes to be known for, and large classes make experiential learning practically impossible. Large classes and limited TA and faculty resources force faculty to cut back on written assignments and rely on multi-choice tests, which undermines the department's capacity to strengthen dynamic learning and student engagement in the department.

A second response to the increase in enrollments has been to try to fill student demand using sessional lecturers. We note that Psychology has the highest use of sessional instructors in the Faculty and has a chronic reliance on EMF. This is an unnecessarily precarious and stressful means of managing what appears to be an ongoing situation. Teaching resources in the Department need to be regularized and stabilized.

We were very impressed by the Department's efforts to revamp the curriculum and to emphasize diversity, especially indigenous issues and scholarship, and LGBTQ+ perspectives. The reviewers feel that the UVic Department is in a leadership position on this matter, and were encouraged to hear that the members of the Department are strongly behind these initiatives (noting that there is, of course, a spectrum of opinion within the department about how best to approach these topics). We also note that Indigenization and the Department's plans to increase diversity will require resources.

The focus on Indigenous issues is congruent with all of the strategies that make up the fourth pillar of the Strategic Framework, to foster respect and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. The Psychology department has clearly taken this issue to heart, and is doing more to move forward on this element of the Strategic Framework than many other units on campus.

Objective markers of research success clearly situate the Department of Psychology at University of Victoria in the top tier of Canadian departments. One of the strengths that differentiates UVic from its regional competitors is that UVic is a nationally-ranked research-oriented university that can uniquely offer students exposure to leading edge scholarship, and experiential learning in an active research setting. This key differentiator is imperilled by the high teaching load (4 courses per year) carried by research faculty. The teaching assignment at comparable universities is 3 courses per year; even *within* UVic, the teaching load in Psychology seems inequitable. This puts psychology researchers at a competitive disadvantage. Psychology researchers compete directly for TriCouncil funds with UVic colleagues in the other Life Sciences and other universities, and yet at UVic, Psychology researchers have normal teaching loads that are 25-50% heavier than in those other units.

It is clear that the Psychology Department very much advances the second pillar of the Strategic Framework, Advancing Research Excellence and Impact. However, if the university wants the department to continue to serve as a centre of research strength on campus, it will need to take both Strategy 2.3 and 2.4 of this pillar very seriously. With regard to Strategy 2.3 the university will need to invest in the existing research strength in Psychology, so that it can be maintained and further developed. It will also need to provide resources in order to support the diverse and talented community of researchers in the department.

In summary, the Department of Psychology is an excellent, highly functional department on all dimensions. The capacity of the department has been severely challenged with the recent increase in undergraduate enrolment. The department will either need an increase in resources or to be allowed to reduce enrolments in order to sustain teaching quality and research productivity.