



The Office of the Provost and Vice President Academic
Response to the Senate Task Force on Interdisciplinary Programs
May 2015

To the Ryerson University Senate:

Enclosed is my official response to the 12 recommendations made by the Senate Task Force on Interdisciplinary Programs in December 2013. It was a requirement of Senate that I respond to the task force's recommendations by the end of winter term 2015.

The scale and magnitude of the recommendations are of no slight consequence. Senate's willingness to undertake such a substantial review speaks to the commitment of the university's academic community to position Ryerson in a forward-looking and strengthened direction. I thank all of the task force members for their contributions and to the many who offered their insight on the opportunities and challenges presented to us in strengthening interdisciplinarity.

To guide me in my consideration of the task force's recommendations, in October 2014, I constituted a joint committee made up of representation from the university's administration and the Ryerson Faculty Association. The task force's recommendations have immense operational implications – especially as they relate to the collective agreement between the university and the faculty association; as such, it was critical to assess the recommendations in this light if we are to move forward in a meaningful and concrete way.

The joint committee submitted its report to my office in April 2015 and I have used that report as the foundation for the responses detailed below. I thank the joint committee for its thoughtful work and consultations with community members.

Bringing these recommendations to fruition will be a significant milestone in the advancement of Ryerson's academic plan, *Our Time to Lead*. The plan articulates not only an explicit strategy for greater interdisciplinarity, but collaboration and knowledge sharing beyond traditional boundaries infuses the entire plan. I hope our collective efforts will result in strengthened programs at the undergraduate, graduate and certificate levels, and engaged, cross-appointed faculty members, all supporting our vision to become Canada's leading comprehensive innovation university.

Sincerely,

Mohamed Lachemi
Provost and Vice President Academic

Responses to the Senate Task Force on Interdisciplinary Programs

Recommendation 1

“State, as a matter of general principle, that the University will treat all programs equally and equitably in terms of resource allocation, administrative support, and governance requirements.”

a) In response to this recommendation, the university affirms its commitment to the principle that all programs be treated equitably in terms of resource allocation, administrative support, and governance requirements. Equitable treatment may not always mean equal treatment, as a strict definition of equality would disadvantage some programs, but such differences must be based on special program circumstances, not on whether a program is discipline-based or interdisciplinary.

b) To apply this principle in an effective manner, it is proposed that directors of interdisciplinary programs develop faculty staffing plans – if at all possible for at least a three year time span – which they submit to their relevant dean of record, who will in turn negotiate faculty releases with the other deans involved. This model will ensure greater stability for interdisciplinary programs by allowing for a common understanding across all departments and schools concerning the allocation of faculty members to teach in interdisciplinary programs. It will also relieve the pressure on directors of interdisciplinary programs to annually negotiate the release of faculty members to teach in their program.

Recommendation 2

“Hire interdisciplinary scholars to teach in interdisciplinary programs, with faculty acquisition plans for multidisciplinary programs equitably recognized in the university’s hiring process.”

In addressing this recommendation it must be recognized that interdisciplinary graduate programs, especially at the doctoral level, are relatively few in number and small in size when compared with their disciplinary counterparts. If we were to regularly utilize specially structured interdisciplinary hires, we would therefore run the risk of making our hiring processes overly narrow in their reach.

Nevertheless, there may be cases where it is most effective if a new position is explicitly structured to include an interdisciplinary component. This has already occurred on at least one occasion. In special circumstances, this option will continue to be considered by the vice-provost, faculty affairs.

Recommendation 3

“In the calculation of the faculty complement necessary to deliver approved programs, refrain from “double-counting” faculty as being fully available to a department/school and its programs and, at the same time, to inter- or multidisciplinary programs.”

The University Planning Office (UPO) does not double count faculty resources and will continue to refrain from doing so. However, the UPO is only one decision-maker in the allocation of faculty to teaching assignments. To address this recommendation, the UPO will work with directors of interdisciplinary programs and deans of record to develop a matrix of interdisciplinary positions based on past hires. This matrix will refer not to individual faculty members, but to the total faculty complement. The UPO will provide both deans of record and directors of interdisciplinary programs a history of the hiring related to their programs. Deans of record and directors of interdisciplinary

programs will then consult their own records to provide appropriate elaboration and detail. This joint effort should make it possible to accurately document the faculty complement that has already been allocated to each interdisciplinary program. It will also help streamline the generation of faculty staffing plans referred to in response to Recommendation 1.

Recommendation 4

“Ensure – irrespective of the place of primary appointment – that calculations of FTE faculty requirements for inter- or multidisciplinary programs are done in exactly the same way as for programs based in a department/school; and that this calculation is part of the formal approval process undertaken by senate on the recommendation of its Academic Standards Committee, or of the Yeates School of Graduate Studies Council if the program in question is at the graduate level.”

The matrix of interdisciplinary hires outlined in response to the recommendation above will identify the faculty complement already allocated to each interdisciplinary program. Once this matrix is created, it will be continually updated, making it possible to ensure that future calculations of FTE faculty requirements are conducted in the same way for interdisciplinary programs as for programs based in a department or school. Guidelines also need to be generated to establish when an undergraduate interdisciplinary program falls under the auspices of the dean’s office or is treated as a separate department or school with its own faculty and separate space facilities.

Recommendation 5

“Work with the Ryerson Faculty Association (RFA) to develop clear and transparent mechanisms to:

- a) Guide the hiring process when faculty will be appointed to a department/school but expected to teach in, and contribute to, an inter- or multidisciplinary program. This guidance should address such things as the creation of the job ad and the formation of an appropriate hiring committee (DHC).**
- b) Ensure that faculty – particularly probationary faculty – are not disadvantaged when some or all of their service responsibilities are rendered to inter- and multidisciplinary programs and/or when their research is interdisciplinary in nature.**
- c) Monitor and negotiate changes to, teaching assignments specified in letters of appointment. This could include assignments for fixed periods of time.**
- d) Balance faculty wishes with respect to graduate and interdisciplinary teaching with needs of approved undergraduate programs based in the department/school to which the faculty member is appointed.**
- e) Facilitate team-teaching, where that is seen as necessary to the success of the program. This could include establishing policy for team-teaching assignments as a common unit of faculty teaching load.”**

In relation to sub-recommendation (a), the current ad hoc arrangement between the RFA and the university administration is working well and there is no overriding pressure to change this arrangement in the current round of bargaining.

In addressing sub-recommendation (b), the following is proposed:

1. Ensuring that the training of deans, chairs and directors, Departmental Hiring Committees (DHCs), Departmental Evaluation Committees (DECs) and Faculty Tenure Committees (FTCs) all contain a section on interdisciplinary hiring and evaluation with respect to teaching, SRC and service;
2. Ensuring that, at the new faculty orientation, new interdisciplinary hires are informed of the importance of self-advocacy, of ensuring that in their annual reports they always highlight the fact that they are interdisciplinary scholars whose workload (teaching, SRC and service) reflects the interdisciplinary nature of their appointment;
3. The VPFA sends out a letter annually to the DECs evaluating probationary faculty members hired as interdisciplinary scholars to remind the DECs of this fact; and
4. The VPFA sends out a letter to those FTCs and Faculty Promotion Committees (FPCs) evaluating (for tenure and promotion) faculty members hired as interdisciplinary scholars.

With respect to (c), it is proposed that the VPFA and the RFA monitor, and negotiate changes to, teaching assignments specified in letters of appointment. A dean, chair/director or a faculty member may propose changes, but it is the VPFA who has to approve those changes and the VPFA will inform the RFA president of any such changes and both will ensure that the changes do not violate the rights of the faculty member in terms of the collective agreement.

With respect to (d), the university agrees with the task force's stress on the importance of balancing the faculty wishes with respect to graduate and interdisciplinary teaching with needs of approved undergraduate programs based in the department or school to which the faculty member is appointed. It is proposed that, in each department, all undergraduate and graduate interdisciplinary courses taught by faculty members should be in the "basket" of all courses available for teaching.

With respect to (e), there is a need to distinguish between team teaching (two or more faculty together in the classroom delivering content at the same time) and shared teaching (two or more faculty delivering a portion of a given course, but not in the classroom at the same time and not responsible for the whole course). There is a cost attached to team teaching, but there are situations where it is warranted and there is value to team teaching and in those cases it should be encouraged. This ought to be looked at on a case-by-case basis and requires approval by the dean.

Recommendation 6

"Define "dean of record" in senate policy, and codify the responsibilities and powers of the position."

The dean of record position is already defined in general terms in Policy 45: "Dean of Record is a Dean named by the Provost and given decanal authority over an interdisciplinary program." This current language is sufficient as a broad definition, though any minor inconsistencies that may exist in the remainder of Policy 45 which pertain to this position should be corrected.

At the same time, from now on deans of record, including inter-faculty deans of record, must be understood to have the authority on an equal footing with other deans to negotiate relevant resources. This includes the allocation of space, teaching faculty, and teaching assistants (TAs), graduate assistants (GAs) and research assistants (RAs) in interdisciplinary programs.

Because this amended view of the role of deans of record could have major ramifications, it is important to look closely at how a dean of record is selected for inter-faculty interdisciplinary programs. In identifying who should play this role in undergraduate programs, close attention will need to be given to the issue of which dean is best able to perform the extended functions now being considered.

Recommendation 7

“Identify specific policies that should be revised in order to improve the operation of inter/multidisciplinary programs, and their relationships with discipline-based schools/departments and programs.”

Based on the schedule for reviewing all senate policies, the appropriate parties will be asked to ensure that, as a matter of course, an interdisciplinary lens is consciously applied to every existing policy that is up for review and to every new policy that is created and being voted on at senate.

Recommendation 8

“Develop mechanisms to ensure that the courses offered by disciplinary programs provide a sufficient number of seats for the students of inter- and multidisciplinary programs who require the course.”

There are two different, but closely related, cases this recommendation seems to be referring to.

The first case is a course that appears in an interdisciplinary program’s curriculum either as a core requirement or as one of a small group of core electives. In this case, every attempt should be made by the teaching department to set aside a requisite number of seats for students in the interdisciplinary program. In many cases, this will require improved communication between deans and between deans and chairs and directors. The provost will address this aspect of the task force’s recommendation through informal consultation with the relevant parties, including deans, chairs and directors of departments and schools, and deans of record and directors of interdisciplinary programs.

The second case is a course that appears in an interdisciplinary program’s core curriculum as part of a large elective grouping. This case is part of the broader issue of student access to electives, a central concern of the curriculum renewal project currently being undertaken under the oversight of the vice provost academic. As senate considers possible changes to the existing curricular template, there will be ongoing deliberations on the general issue of student access to electives, with a range of possible incentives and types of oversight likely to be discussed in the months ahead. Any solutions implemented as a result of these deliberations will improve access to electives (including access to core electives) for students in interdisciplinary programs as well as for all other students.

Recommendation 9

“Develop consistent policy pertaining to space and support staff allocation for interdisciplinary programs (both graduate and undergraduate). Space and/or staff could be shared with departments/schools, but this shouldn’t be dependent upon the academic appointment of the graduate program director (GPD), and should require consultation between the program council and the department/school council. Recognize formally that space and support staff are prerequisites for engaging students and developing a sense of community. Common student space for graduate programs, in particular, needs to be a high priority.”

The provost will ensure that administrative guidelines on the allocation of space for students in interdisciplinary programs are generated and adhered to.

Recommendation 10

“Promote linkages between multi- and interdisciplinary programs and appropriate research centres or institutes.”

When Policy 144, which deals with research centres and institutes, comes to senate for its regular review, the updated policy should incorporate a specific section on interdisciplinary centres and how they are integrated in both interdisciplinary and discipline based programs. In the interim, the vice-president, research and innovation, and the dean of graduate studies will be asked to work together to promote both formal and informal links between interdisciplinary programs and centres and institutes.

Recommendation 11

“Develop policy regarding the support of graduate students through GA/RA allocation, and to ensure that the funds follow the students. Consider policy that allocates GA funding to multidisciplinary programs to enable offers of admission supported by appropriate funding, consistent with norms across universities.”

Being able to provide opportunities for employment as GAs and TAs is less a matter of funding dollars being available, and more a matter of discipline-based departments and schools often choosing to give priority consideration to students in their own programs. To provide equitable opportunities to students in graduate interdisciplinary programs, a rethinking of this practice is required, along with a renewed emphasis on considering students’ qualifications irrespective of the program in which they are enrolled. Attitudinal shifts such as this are difficult to manage. As a university we need to recognize the difficulties created for graduate students when practices such as this are followed. In practical terms, new guidelines will be established which stress the transparency of the decision-making process in posting and widely communicating available positions to potential applicants. In addition, administrative processes will be amended to ensure a timely communication system, overseen by deans of record, which maximizes the ability of directors of interdisciplinary programs to include such employment opportunities in their offers to applicants, while ensuring that the processes put in place respect the CUPE agreement.

Recommendation 12

“It may be necessary to create an academic leadership position at a relatively high level, and to assign to that position specific responsibility for inter- and multidisciplinary programs (certificate, undergraduate, graduate) and research.”

The creation of a new high-level administrative position overseeing interdisciplinary issues is not the most effective means of dealing with the challenges highlighted in the task force report. The proposed solutions outlined in response to the previous recommendations require the creation and/or formalization of administrative processes that span departmental and faculty lines of authority. Instead of creating a new permanent administrative position, one-time funding for a half-time staff position, for the duration of a single year, will be provided to coordinate these new university-wide processes.