Faculty of Education
Principles and Processes for Identifying and Nurturing Interdepartmental Initiatives
Version May 4, 2011

There are areas in the Faculty of Education where expertise and innovation are distributed across borders, and where there is the potential to harness and coordinate efforts in ways that: (1) identify and build on strengths and priorities; (2) mobilize expertise across borders; (3) create synergies across initiatives; (4) optimize visibility of research and programs; (5) create pathways for potential scholars and students who might wish to engage with us in that area; and (6) allow for prioritizing and creating sustainable and efficient use of human and financial resources. This document identifies infrastructure and processes designed to identify high priority themes, and to nurture development and coordination of activities in those areas.

Identifying High Priority Themes
Candidates for “high” priority themes can emerge in several ways. For example, it might be that the Faculty is called upon by external stakeholders (community members; alumni; organizations; potential donors), or be spurred by external events (e.g., policy changes or initiatives from Provincial Ministries) to consider taking up a theme as a Faculty priority. Strategic planning priorities also might be proposed at the university level to which our Faculty has the potential to contribute (e.g., Place and Promise commitments). There will also be times when potential thematic areas emerge from the “grass roots,” when members of the Faculty from across units are clearly passionate about particular thematic areas. In all these cases, we need processes that we can use to set priorities and determine how we should invest resources in current and potential initiatives, particularly when they involve the development of graduate or undergraduate programs.

One challenge, given limited resources, will be deciding how new initiatives fit within the landscape of Faculty activity, with Faculty priorities and needs, and with developments in other quarters. For example, if there is a critical mass of people who wish to add a sequence of undergraduate and graduate programs in a new, high priority thematic area, then attention has to be paid to how “adding” new initiatives can happen in a sustainable way, particularly in relation to the investment of human resources across current and potential pursuits. Further, in a high priority area, it is common for related initiatives to spring up in several locations across the Faculty at the same time. So, we also need robust ways for sharing ideas about initiatives when expertise is distributed across borders in early, formative stages, so that we can take advantage of potential synergies and ensure resources are deployed in an effective, coordinated and sustainable manner.

Processes
When initiatives in a high priority thematic area are being identified, particularly when there is strong potential that expertise in that area is distributed across the Faculty, the following principles and processes should be applied.

1. Units should bring forward ideas in formative stages to other units (through DAC; through GCAC; through more informal channels) to share information about potential priorities and initiatives being developed, and to make sure there are opportunities to identify cases where a coordinated approach will be needed.
2. In cases where multiple, potentially connected initiatives are emerging simultaneously across the Faculty around a given theme, particularly when initiatives involve the development of courses or programs and resource investments (including human resources), the Dean may request development of a coordinated vision of the interconnection between Departmentally- and Faculty-based activities as part of proposal review and approval processes.

3. An open meeting should be called, chaired by the relevant Associate Dean(s), during which members of the Faculty have an opportunity to describe: (a) what that theme means to them; (b) current activities; and (c) imagined directions.

4. Follow-up meetings might be facilitated as needed, led by the relevant Associate Dean, in which faculty and students can share and generate ideas about where/how to establish formalized efforts in the area (e.g., research networks; programmatic initiatives).

5. Should there be continued interest in developing formalized activities in an area where expertise spans borders (e.g., research networks; programs at the undergraduate or graduate level), then an inclusive group of interested faculty should be identified (the “Initiative Group”) who should be involved/consulted through the process of developing an overarching plan and any specific proposals within that. Membership on the Initiative Group should be broadly inclusive of individuals in the Faculty who have interest or expertise in the area, and may change over time. Potential partners or individuals with related expertise from across campus or across institutions may also be invited to participate. The role of the Initiative Group is to provide a space where all individuals with related expertise and interests can share ideas, learn about each other’s activities, identify possible connections, partnerships and collaborations, and support efforts to create a coherent and coordinated approach to addressing a thematic area.

To aid the Initiative Group in thinking through possible directions, a request can be made first for resources to support a collaborative planning effort (e.g., staff support; support from a GAA), following clearly identified criteria (see below).

Figure 1. Relationship between the Initiative Group and the Working Group

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1 Initiatives within a coherent, overarching plan may be diverse. They may be departmentally-based, interdepartmental, and/or cooperative with other programs or institutions; they may focus on research and developing research networks; they may connect research to informal learning and/or programmatic initiatives at the undergraduate or graduate level; etc.
6. If it is determined by the Dean (in consultation with the community and DAC) that there are generative possibilities that should be pursued in a more formalized, coordinated way (e.g., for research networks; for programmatic initiatives), then a Working Group with designated representatives from participating Departments will be formed (see Figure 1):

   a. An Associate Dean will be designated as the person to whom the Working Group will report, and will be responsible for providing guidance and support through the planning process and in putting forward the plan and any associated proposals;

   b. Terms of reference will be developed for the Working Group by that Associate Dean, in consultation with unit heads and the Dean;

   c. The Working Group should create an overarching plan that sketches the landscape of current and potential directions in the area (and interconnections), and situates any specific proposals within that landscape;

   d. As a key part of its processes, Working Group members should take a Faculty-wide perspective, as part of which they should both represent their units and listen to voices from across the Faculty community. The Working Group must create opportunities to consult openly and transparently with the Initiative Group and relevant others as the plan and any proposals are developed;

   e. Proposals put forward will need to align with principles/criteria identified below, and be consonant with the Faculty’s Strategic Planning processes and priorities;

   f. In particular, attention must be paid to resource implications for both new and current initiatives (see below).

7. Through the development process, at formative stages, the Dean must be consulted in relation to a proposal’s connection with the Faculty’s strategic priorities and resource implications. The Dean may delegate responsibility for this review to the relevant Associate Dean(s).

8. In formative stages, as the overarching plan and specific proposals are developed, consultations should also take place with each Department/unit, with the DAC, and as relevant, with the Faculty community. Regular opportunities for consultation and reporting should be built into the agendas of department- and Faculty-level meetings, as relevant.
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9. Any specific initiatives that emerge in the context of an overarching proposal will need to move through typical approval processes. For example, proposals for a new Centre or Institute need to be considered following the Faculty’s guidelines. Curriculum proposals need to be considered and approved following typical curriculum approval processes (i.e., for undergraduate or graduate program/courses). In all cases, specific proposals should be put forward in the context of and in reference to the overarching, coordinated plan.

Criteria for Receiving Developmental Support
Support will be provided to nurture the development of an overarching vision/overarching plan in a thematic area, if the following conditions are met:

- The theme is connected to Faculty and/or University strategic priorities;
- There is a critical mass of expertise associated with the theme, within and/or across Faculty units, in ways with potential to cross borders (e.g., across UBC; with community; with international scholars);
- There are clearly defined needs for resources to support the development of a plan (e.g., articulated needs for seed funding or GAA/GRA support).

If a formalized Working Group is established to develop the plan and specific proposals within it, then similar resources will also be made available to that group, as required.

Criteria for Reviewing Proposals
Overarching plans and more specific proposals should meet the following criteria:

- Processes used in the development of the proposal must have been inclusive, and respectful of relevant expertise as distributed across the Faculty;
- There must be a strong research-base underlying the overall plan, and priority should be given to assembling and nurturing research networks, as well as incubating and mobilizing research in the thematic area. All activities within the proposal must be grounded in scholarship, and linked to a critical mass of research expertise;
- Plans and proposals must establish why the thematic area should be a high priority (e.g., linked to our strengths/priorities/unique niche; addressing a critical societal need; essential to advancing knowledge and research; a clear demand for any programmatic initiatives);
- There should be a coherence and vision behind the constellation of activities proposed. Synergies and relationships between activities, particularly between research expertise and programs, should be apparent;
- It should be clear how “pathways” will be constructed and made visible for potential students, across any undergraduate and/or graduate initiatives, formal and/or informal;
- Opportunities for collaboration should have been explored. It should be clear how initiatives relate to or connect with similar or complementary initiatives in other locations (within the Faculty, across UBC, with other institutions).
A description of budget and analysis of available and requested resources (human, financial, space) must be provided. Critical is provision of an analysis of how new initiatives will be sustainable (considering human, financial, space resources) and whether/how other current initiatives will be affected (e.g., how impacts on current programmatic commitments by redirecting faculty time will be offset; how funds provided by an external source will allow for hiring so that there is increased capacity to offer something new without affecting other programs; etc.). In assessing the impact on human resources, both faculty and staff workload and commitments need to be considered.