

## **SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY UNIT REVIEW**

### **Summary Report**

The Site Visit of the Unit Review Team to the School of Public Policy took place March 9-10, 2015. The Unit Review Team consisted of:

Dr. Chad Gaffield, Professor, Department of History, University of Ottawa  
Dr. Christopher Manfredi, Professor, Department of Political Science, McGill University  
Dr. Mark Rom, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University  
Dr. Ann Calvert, Professor, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary

Following the Site Visit the Unit Review Team prepared a written report containing comments and recommendations. The School of Public Policy subsequently circulated the report within The School and consulted widely in preparing the responses to the recommendations. General comments and the recommendations from the Review Team and The School's responses follow.

### **General Comments of the Unit Review Team**

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The Unit Review is taking place at a critical transition point in the life of the University of Calgary School of Public Policy (SPP). The founding Director is stepping down, a number of key researchers are approaching retirement, and a new strategic plan is being created. These factors will cast into bold relief the strengths and challenges of the School's structure and governance, sustainability, and its role in the institution, the community and the country.

The formation of the University of Calgary School of Public Policy established an important institutional resource. The School has largely met its early goals to become an influential unit that visibly links academic work and public service. The SPP occupies attractive, well-appointed facilities at the Downtown Campus, a location chosen specifically for its proximity to the business community of Calgary.

The School has attracted remarkable external support and has moved quickly to design and grow its degree and executive programs, outreach and research programs, and to recruit high profile professors, fellows and research associates. Across all groups we interviewed, there was strong support for the School's purpose and direction – its interdisciplinary aspirations, the structure and size of programs, effective teaching and excellent post-program opportunities for students. Students, in particular, placed a high value on the program's effectiveness in meeting their academic and career goals: they have achieved good employment situations and speak highly of the opportunities afforded by their connection with the School.

In its relatively short 7-year existence, the SPP's prolific research output and prominence in the media and the national academic sphere have contributed to a high level of visibility for both

the SPP and its resident scholars. Operationally, the SPP has also been successful in building a functioning unit with highly effective administrative, program and research support. In our view, the faculty, researchers and staff who work in the School are committed and capable professionals with clearly defined responsibilities.

The School has seen extraordinary success in fund development. The acquisition of \$60M in the last five years is a tribute to the community's appreciation of the value of the School as well as the high public regard for its founding director and lead researchers.

### **Faculty Response**

The Executive Committee of The School endorses the responses provided below to the observations and recommendations of the Reviewers.

The School agrees that it has largely met its goals for the first five years. Since the launch in May 2009, The School has achieved most of the goals set out in the 2008 Strategic Plan. Of note, it has established a strong MPP program (and combined JD/MPP and MBA/MPP programs) with over 75 graduated in the first three years of operation of the MPP program, it has produced 173 publications and held 297 outreach events with a total attendance of over 19 thousand.

This success is based on five key elements:

- High quality teaching programs. The School engages outstanding faculty and speakers to participate in academic and professional development programs, including internationally known thought leaders.
- Well-grounded, timely and accessible policy research. The School is part of a major research university and the academic rigor and independence gives its work and recommendations credibility in the policy world.
- Broadly engaged. The School is not content to publish research and let it sit on a shelf. The School deliberately draws senior leaders from government, business and the broader community, as well as the interested public, into its work.
- Comprehensive perspective. The School tackles a broad range of policy questions that are relevant locally, nationally, and globally. The School confronts complex policy challenges in context, and prepares students for making decisions in many circumstances and jurisdictions.
- Ambitious. Making the School of Public Policy a top ranked institute in North America aligns well with the University of Calgary "Eyes High" plan. The School's market research bears out this choice of ambition.

By way of providing some context for responses of The School to the specific observations and recommendations by the Reviewers it is useful to note the following actions already set out in the current Strategic Plan for the School:

- Continue to strengthen the career development and placement activities for MPP students.
- Consider adding specialized streams of study to the MPP program.
- Develop and implement certificate, diploma and 'laddered' MPP programs for delivery in Edmonton and possibly other capital cities.
- Expand professional programs, particularly in areas such as Extractive Resource Governance. Obtain approval to grant a non-credit certificate from UCalgary for these programs.
- Develop and implement a strategy to continually engage alumni involving such things as an SPP Homecoming Dinner to recognize an important contributor to the growth of public policy in Canada, a standalone event for alumni, scholarship holders and scholarship donors, and a forum featuring the best capstone papers prepared that year.
- Continue to take every opportunity to maximize impact by producing well-grounded academic work and engaging directly with leaders in the policy-making, corporate, professional and non-profit worlds.
- Expand efforts to measure the impact of the research in academic and policy circles.
- Leverage work to produce even more accessible products based on research, with the aim of preserving and extending impact.
- Revisit the School's publication backlist with the aim of producing more annual or biennial publications on critical issues that evolve over time.
- Complement media engagement with targeted and direct dissemination tools and social media, starting with improving information management in The School.
- Re-brand SPP Research Papers, the School's key publication series, to a title like SPP Policy Review, to emphasize it is an on-line journal subject to the highest standards of review,
- Clarify that the Research Director, with assistance from Area and Program directors, oversees editorial decisions, and keep and publish summary statistics about the editorial process.
- Appoint an external editorial advisory board, made up of highly regarded scholars with editorial experience, to review the editorial practices of the School annually.
- Work with the University of Calgary to review and update The School's guidelines for research integrity and transparency, including a framework for disclosing major sources of funding.
- Formally communicate The School's policy of open access to all research publications of the School and commit to making raw data public, unless The School's collection or access to the data is subject to a confidentiality agreement or concern.
- Develop and expand international partnerships to increase the reach and impact of the School.

## Challenges, Recommendations and Responses

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The Review Team made a number of key recommendations, which are listed below, and followed by the response of the School of Public Policy, based on consultation within the unit.

### **A. GENERAL CHALLENGES**

The Review Team noted that The School currently faces a number of key challenges:

- A.1.1. Succession issues associated with the replacement of the Director of the School and key professors in leading roles at The School;
- A.1.2. Difficulties with interdisciplinary pursuits within the University structure of departments, faculties and hiring practices and programs that favor single administrative identities for new appointees;
- A.1.3. Limited integration of the academic and research aspects of The School;
- A.1.4. An inadequate amount of physical space for all of the important activities of teaching, research and community service that are critical to continued success;
- A.1.5. The high reliance on external funding (particularly, donor funding) combined with a more challenging economic environment; and
- A.1.6. A very sparse international student presence.

### **Faculty Response**

- A.1.1. A search is currently underway for a new Director. Other leaders at The School remain in place, providing a strong foundation moving forward. As well, Dr. Mintz will continue have a role in the School with his appointment as the President's Fellow in Public Policy. Succession planning has been underway for several years and will continue as an important element of good governance.
- A.1.2. Challenges with interdisciplinary pursuits are not new or unique to The School. Enhancing these pursuits requires attention by the entire University community and this is one of the key priorities in the UCalgary Academic Plan. In general, The School has an excellent record in terms of both interdisciplinary research and education.
- A.1.3. We agree that there should be more integration of the academic and research aspects of The School and we are implementing a number of initiatives to achieve this objective. Included are regular sessions for students and researchers to meet and mingle and researchers to engage students in the various research programs and projects.
- A.1.4. The School is currently working with the University to assess space requirements and alternatives.
- A.1.5. With regard to international student presence, we disagree that the gap is as large as portrayed by the external reviewers. International students have comprised approximately 10% of the students in our MPP program, compared to about 20% in comparable programs. While the focus will remain on developing

policy capacity for Canadian governments, business and various community organizations, it is recognized that having a larger international student enrollment does add to the overall experience and perspectives of students in the MPP program. Current initiatives are expected to bring the percentage of international enrollment up to the University of Calgary goals.

## **B. SUCCESSION PLANNING, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

### **Recommendation B.1:**

Focus on continuity and continuous improvement rather than any radical change in the key research and education pillars, at least for the next five years.

#### **Response:**

The School agrees that the focus should be on continuity and continuous improvement.

### **Recommendation B.2:**

Enhance communications, decision-making transparency and cohesion, especially between the academic program and research divisions. While the number of meetings must not be multiplied needlessly, internal governance and management structures must be effectively operationalized to ensure that the talent of all SPP staff is appropriately tapped and recognized.

#### **Response:**

The School agrees and is implementing a number of changes to address these issues, including:

- Regular meetings of all operations staff to improve understandings of processes, improve coordination and add efficiencies
- More frequent staff meetings and staff events to promote communication and engagement
- The scheduling of numerous events, beginning at the start of each term and at regular intervals throughout the year, to bring researchers and students together to better inform students of the research activities at The School, provide students with more research mentors (including Fellows and faculty members in the various Faculties on main campus) and provide opportunities for students to more actively participate in the research activities of The School
- The implementation of a budget committee to better coordinate information and decisions across academic, research and outreach that have budgetary implications
- A request that capstone supervisors encourage students to reach out to the large pool of faculty on main campus and School of Public Policy Fellows for advice on their research projects and on accessing networks of researchers and potential employers

- Investigation of the possibility of providing more financial assistance for our students through means other than graduate assistantships in order to incentivize and support integration of the academic and research activities

**Recommendation B.3:**

Increase mentoring and professional development.

**Response:**

The initiatives outlined immediately above will make substantial contributions towards the goal of increasing mentoring. The School is also scheduling more professional development days (currently these focus on Ethics, Business Etiquette, career development, and various workshops focused on development and application of tools for public policy analysis). Further, The School has recently added a career specialist to implement an ambitious internship, career development and placement program.

**Recommendation B.4:**

Review the ways in which The School formally and informally interacts with the rest of campus, especially the three partner faculties and including such things as revising the membership of management committees.

**Response:**

The School proposes that the Director meet regularly with the Deans of the partner faculties and other Deans of faculties where there is a significant policy interface. The School will also undertake to ensure the many events of the School are more widely advertised across the University and explore the possibility of having more of the events on main campus. It is also proposed that this important but complex issue be the focus of a special Management Board meeting to consider appointment, on a rotating basis, of an additional Dean to the Board and to generally explore ways of encouraging more two-way communication and collaboration.

**Recommendation B.5:**

Enhance relations with the larger society by better pan-Canadian and international representation, for example, by including key members of the University of Calgary Board of Governors as well as external members with close ties to the three partner faculties.

**Response:**

The School does have extensive pan-Canadian and international reach and advice through the appointment of Fellows and members of its Advisory Council. Members of the Board of Governors would not sit as members of the Management Board of The School given conflict of interest with their role on the Board.

**Recommendation B6:**

Ensure there are structured and robust on-boarding activities for the new Director and other senior management team members.

**Response:**

The School will work with the Executive Leadership Team and Human Resources to ensure that the new Director (and any other senior management team members) will have access to on-boarding activities. The School's Interim Director, Academic Director, Research Director and Program Directors, along with operating Staff, will work with the new Director to provide a smooth transition within The School.

**C. INTERDISCIPLINARITY, RESEARCH AND STAFFING****Recommendation C.1:**

Address the fragile sustainability associated with the current model where The School has few permanent (tenure track) academic staff and is primarily reliant on academic staff seconded from participating Faculties; examine the possibility of establishing clearly identified joint tenure track appointments and ensure there are adequate policies to recognize public policy research for the purposes of tenure, promotion and other forms of professional development and reward.

**Response:**

Significant work undertaken over the past year on developing new hiring models for the School. Implementation has begun with one of the objectives of addressing the sustainability issue.

**Recommendation C.2:**

Establish an editorial board composed of both members of The School and leading figures from Canada and beyond to achieve greater scholarly recognition of the applied research published by The School.

**Response:**

A top priority for the new Research Director at The School is the establishment of an editorial Board and it is expected to be in place within one year.

**Recommendation C.3:**

Pursue the objective of bringing active federal and provincial public servants into The School on a temporary basis to enrich its research and teaching functions.

**Response:**

The School is very enthusiastic about this recommendation and will investigate programs that would allow the attraction of active federal and provincial public servants.

**Recommendation C.4:**

Use 'projects' rather than 'programs' in describing the research categories currently employed.

**Response:**

The School believes this recommendation came out of an incomplete understanding by the Reviewers. Under the existing categorization used by The School, a 'program' covers an area (such as 'The Urban Policy Program') that would typically involve numerous different research projects, educational elements and /or outreach. Further, the basic external funding model involves funding for programs, with decisions about the projects or other elements of those programs made internally and independent of the program funding. In summary, The School does not accept the recommendation by the Reviewers to move from a 'program' to a 'projects' model.

**D. STUDENT EXPERIENCE****Recommendation D.1:**

Consider expanding international outreach, especially in areas such as Extractive Resource Governance.

**Response:**

The School is currently expanding this outreach through the Extractive Resource Governance Program. A new Certificate program has been approved and is being marketed in numerous countries. Further, as part of these efforts, The School is working with Mexico and several other countries to attract significant numbers of international students to the Master of Public Policy (MPP) program. These students would receive significant funding from their home government. In general, in the absence of external funding, such as the external funding that which would follow the students under these types of initiatives, an increase in the number of international students is financially challenging. Unlike the situation at virtually all large universities offering an MPP, the program at UCalgary is a full cost recovery program. In order to be competitive this means that The School must raise considerable scholarship funding to provide an offset to the high tuition (of approximately \$31k per year). Most other programs would have much lower tuition fees combined with centrally funded scholarships and graduate research and teaching assistantships that would more than offset the tuition and living costs.

**Recommendation D.2:**

Consider expanding enrollment, especially for international students (subject to financial viability).

**Response:**

See the response above and the relevant components of the Strategic Plan (summarized on pp 3-4 above). This includes the consideration of adding specialized streams of study to the

MPP program and developing and implementing certificate, diploma and 'laddered' MPP programs for delivery in Edmonton and possibly other capital cities.

**Recommendation D.3:**

More connection of the Capstone element with policy networks or research activity in The School.

**Response:**

Starting with the next incoming cohort (which begins in August 2015), seminars will be organized by the Director of the MPP program to allow researchers in the School to have conversations with the students about the research underway, possible capstone project topics and opportunities to participate in research activities in The School.

**Recommendation D.4:**

Consider adding more prerequisites and / or preparation courses to assist students without a background in economic analysis.

**Response:**

The School will investigate the possibility of adding tutorials for those students without a background in economic analysis.

**Recommendation D.5:**

Improve the linkages for students between the academic program elements and the applied public policy research elements of The School.

**Response:**

This is an excellent recommendation and, as noted under 3.2 above, The School is initiating changes to implement it.

**E. OTHER ISSUES**

**Recommendation E.1:**

The School has now reached serious physical space constraints at the Downtown Campus. In order to continue to grow this requires immediate attention.

**Response:**

The School is working with senior administration to deal with this issue.

## Summary

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The School of Public Policy, only six years old, has made tremendous progress in a short period of time to become one of the top schools of its kind in Canada. It has achieved this objective by pursuing excellence in teaching and research programs, including dissemination of its research. It helps contribute to the University of Calgary's goal to be one of the top Canadian universities as well as provide a unique opportunity for many scholars associated with the School to share their ideas with a broad public.

The School's journey is far from over. Using its recent past as a springboard, it has an opportunity to expand its role at the University working with other faculties to make the University of Calgary an outstanding global centre of policy analysis in Canada. Its aggressive development plan will create Canada's pre-eminent School of Public Policy in the coming years. The School will continue to work with the University to address the challenges and issues identified.