



2020-2021 External Review: Main Findings & Recommendations Highlights

Introduction

As part of the University of Toronto's regular cycle of quality assurance, the Provost commissioned a review of OISE in 2020-2021.

The process began in the fall of 2020 with the development of a self-study and community consultation including discussions at OISE Council, Deans and Chairs, departmental and other meetings. The self-study report was completed and submitted to the Provost in February 2021. The University appointed three external reviewers¹ who, due to the ongoing pandemic and related travel restrictions, conducted a virtual review visit from March 22-26, 2021, which included meetings with senior University officials, Deans and Chairs, program coordinators, senior staff, student and alumni representatives, as well as with faculty and staff.

The review report represents a thoughtful review of the challenges and opportunities facing OISE including focused and constructive suggestions for moving forward. The issues and suggestions identified in the report were discussed by OISE Deans and Chairs committee, and presented to OISE Council as its first meeting in the Fall term of 2021. Over the course of the summer, and in consultation with OISE's senior academic leadership, the Dean's Office started developing an administrative response to the review. Both the external review report and the decanal response to the review will be publicly available and will move through the University's governance process in the fall of 2021.

This document includes highlights of main findings and recommendations identified during the external review that will need to be considered within the upcoming planning process and related consultations.

Key Recommendations from the External Review

1. Rebalance faculty and student numbers as soon as possible and ensure that faculty hired into contingent roles and new tracks are integrated into the Institute's culture.
2. Grow and leverage the Institute's expertise in social justice topics such as Indigenous Studies programming and research, and serve as the University resource in this area.
3. Continue to rely on a decentralized budget model that incentivizes departments to be innovative while paying attention to the need for departments to cooperate on teaching and course-taking to break down artificial curricular boundaries that don't benefit students.
4. Develop an OISE advancement strategy and infrastructure to build the Institute's endowment, particularly with regard to student financial support.
5. Grow what is universally-recognized as a very valuable Research Office.

¹ Prof. Robert Floden, Dean, College of Education, Michigan State University; Prof. Christopher Morpew, Dean, School of Education, Johns Hopkins University; and Prof. Jennifer Tupper, Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta

Mission, Partnerships & Societal Impact

Main findings

- OISE has had, and continues to have, a commitment to excellence in teaching and research, as well as a commitment to improving education locally, nationally, and globally. The extremely high rankings of OISE in national and international comparisons are built in part on the long history of leadership in education research. Dean Jones's tenure (2015-2021) has had a positive impact for the Institute in this regard.
- OISE has been, and continues to be, the campus leader in programming and research on issues of social justice, diversity and Indigenous studies. OISE's history in this regard gives it a head start toward establishing a collaborative offering with other U of T divisions, something that would be beneficial to the Institute and University.
- OISE's strong reputation locally, nationally and internationally is due in part to its past and present outreach, community engaged scholarship, relationship with key educational stakeholders within and beyond the province, quality of the research undertaken by OISE faculty members, creative knowledge mobilization activities, and the types and varieties of graduate programs accessed by domestic and international students.

Recommendations

- When a new Dean is hired, it would be appropriate to undertake a new round of strategic planning to continue to look for ways to increase revenue, to consider the proper mix of tenure stream, teaching, and sessional faculty while maintaining strength in research and teaching, and to consider ways to expand collaboration with other U of T campuses and divisions.
- The University could benefit from centralizing resources and expertise in the area of social justice, diversity and Indigenous studies to create the highest quality programs. The Provost and next Dean should meet to discuss how both can invest given the opportunity.
- For OISE to strengthen its societal impact, focused and strategic faculty renewal must be prioritized. Further, advancement presents tremendous opportunities in this respect through such initiatives as endowed research chairs, supporting post-doctoral fellowships, funding for specific Centre initiatives, and international collaborations in key focus areas.

Academic Programs

Main Findings

- As the only all-graduate faculty of education and one of the world's leading research centers on education, teacher education graduates should emerge from OISE (and U of T) with a different set of skills and experiences than graduates from other Ontario and Canadian education schools. Beyond teacher education, students in other OISE programs described "artificial curricular boundaries" (e.g., research versus clinical) that get in the way of research-to-practice outcomes.

Recommendations

- OISE should develop a task force or another mechanism that includes students and faculty to confront these issues (i.e., increase course-sharing and research-sharing opportunities across programs, including teacher education) and identify ways that programs can allow and encourage students to take a broad set of coursework and engage with topics and methods outside their traditional programs.

Research

Main Findings

- As a very research-intensive faculty, there is no question that OISE prioritizes research excellence and its position in national and international rankings reflects this. It was evident that OISE employs an ‘excellence’ based approach to research that emerges from faculty members, rather than from the Dean’s Office.

Recommendations

- With the appointment of a new Dean, it is an opportune time for OISE to more aggressively profile research successes, and to advance a systems approach in considering and reflecting on the current structures and how they might be adapted within existing human and financial resources to further strengthen the research (especially Indigenous-focused research) and scholarly excellence of OISE locally, nationally and globally.

Resources

Main Findings

- “Rebalancing” the Institute’s faculty:student ratio is a significant challenge in creating the capacity to meet OISE’s academic goals. This rebalancing is underway and with prioritizing faculty renewal, OISE faculty complement would return to past levels.
- OISE’s decentralized budget model has empowered the departments to make strategic financial decisions in order to advance priority areas, better steward resources from one year to the next, and use carry forward funds to hire faculty members. The stability, predictability, and transparency of the budget model was highlighted.

Recommendations

- The Institute and University should find innovative ways to fund tenure-stream positions (e.g., using department reserves), better integration of teaching-stream faculty into fabric of the Institute, expanding teaching opportunities for doctoral students, and raising funds for student scholarship support, which is the Institute’s greatest financial need.
- There were some challenges identified with the new budget model, particularly its effects on the ability for faculty members to engage in inter-departmental teaching. This could be addressed by ensuring that mechanisms for teaching across departments are accounted for by making adjustments / refinements to the budget model.

Advancement

Main Findings

- The area of advancement represents tremendous opportunities for growth within OISE especially in light of their outstanding reputation, innovative research, and large alumni base.

Recommendations

- This should be a priority for a new Dean, who, in the context of establishing key priorities through a new strategic academic plan, ensures there is alignment with advancement priorities. Some areas for consideration include increased student financial support, more support for Indigenous initiatives across the Faculty, and resources to advance Black studies in education.