



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE  
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

## ***Towards Framing an Academic Plan***

OISE's Planning Process

Working Draft May 19, 2017

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## INTRODUCTION

As we move closer to a draft academic plan that will offer our shared vision, priorities and implementation plans for achieving them, this brief report suggests overarching themes to further focus our work, and to assist us in framing how we organize our efforts going forward. These are the themes or foci that have received the most attention throughout the planning process to date. Most important, they are *interdependent and overlapping*. We invite your feedback regarding these themes and their descriptions. As well, as part of your feedback to this report, it is certainly not too early for you to suggest a few major priorities that might be considered under the themes. Feel free to refer to the *What we've Heard* document linked below for some ideas. In the meantime, the next steps towards drafting our academic plan include:

- Refining the over-arching themes as a result of your input to this document;
- Developing an overarching organizational “promise”, a vision that depicts a long term aspiration that will guide our important work; and
- Identifying “commitments” under each theme that will include a list of short, medium, and long-term strategic initiatives that will move us forward, and help us achieve our vision.

At this stage, it is critical to increase our focus to achieve successful and sustainable impact. Therefore, directing our energies towards things that matter most will be critical. This is why your response to this draft is so important.

## FOCUSING THEMES

As evident in the [\*What we've Heard so Far: OISE's Academic Planning Process\*](#) document, the number and quality of bold, compelling and practical notions about how to refresh and reset our purposes and pathway forward that emerged from the first phase of the planning process was nothing less than remarkable. We should all be encouraged by the high level of creative engagement in the process shown by the participation of faculty, staff, students and alumni along with many thoughtful contributions made by external partners.

In carefully reviewing all of these ideas, six major focusing themes emerged: *Building our Community; Indigenization; Wellbeing & Mental Health; Equity, Diversity and Accessibility; Transformative Pedagogical Innovation; and Scholarship-driven Local, National and International Collaboration.*

As mentioned above, these thematic areas of focus overlap and are interdependent. They also permeate all aspects of our work including the two foundational building blocks of our Institute:

- 1) The quality of graduate education and student experience; and
- 2) Excellence in research and scholarship

## BUILDING OUR COMMUNITY: LEARNING AND LEADING FROM WITHIN

Our ability to foster and enable education excellence for others begins with our own development as an organization. Our academic planning process has been designed to change some of what we do and how we do it together. We need to ensure a culture of respect within OISE regardless of roles and responsibilities. We aspire to lead the world in helping others with innovative technologically-driven flexible learning so we must embrace and retool what we do within our own programming. We are committed to a more equitable society, and equitable and respectful relationships within the Institute should be our hallmark. We assist others with a more modern approach to learning innovation and, in turn, we should become the leading *learning organization* in Canada, an adaptive place that thrives on reflective practice, and learning from our ongoing individual and collective experience. Given that our success rests with those we educate and graduate, we must commit to a high quality experience for all of our students. Further, we aspire to be a leader in mental health and wellbeing and therefore,

creating effective wellness strategies within the Institute is vital. We aspire to be a leader in Indigenization recognizing that there are no shortcuts regarding confronting our own colonizing behaviors and structures, as we become more intentional about creating an OISE that is a truly welcoming gathering place and space that also serves as a model of environmental sustainability. Building on current relationships, we can seek new partnerships with other departments at the University to further our research and teaching priorities. We need to ensure that we are financially stable by making the best use of traditional resources and generating new sources of revenue. We must develop the capacity to track our progress towards our goals in an effective and transparent manner.

## COMMITMENT TO INDIGENIZATION

Commitment to Indigenization, understanding and learning what it means, how to intentionally support Indigenous learners and how to support systematic decolonization of educational and research practices and structures is clearly and broadly supported as a major priority going forward. The final report of the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission \(TRC\)](#) identifies key challenges for Canada, including hard truths that need to be acknowledged to move towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. The Commission notes the devastating consequences of the residential school program, a colonizing travesty that was committed in the name of “education”. At the same time, OISE, needs to come to grips with our own history as a Canadian educational institution, including the effects of both past and ongoing practices that, by omission or commission, have contributed to the entrenchment of anti-Indigenous biases regarding academic disciplines, curricula, and pedagogical and professional practices such as the assessment, recruitment and retention of students, staff and faculty. Going forward, we need to increase the scope and visibility of our research and scholarship that focuses on the many “calls to action” arising from the TRC, and we need new strategies for applying such research to teacher education, policy formation, and community building both within and beyond OISE. As part of our commitment to assisting other educational institutions and communities, we need to focus on strengthening our capacity through gathering of additional human and financial resources, and through new and creative collaborations.

## EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

We are members of a remarkably diverse community with respect to culture, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, language, citizenship/immigration status, family/marital status, ability, age and socio-economic status. There is strong support for the idea that OISE’s historical commitment to social justice should permeate and drive all of our work. This means that all of our endeavours related to research, teaching, professional practice, policy, organizational behaviour and resources must be informed by issues related to diversity, equity and accessibility. We have much to offer others on the subject of awareness and actions regarding the devastating effects of inequity, homogeneity and barriers to access. This focus also demands that we continue to commit to a wide range of urban partnerships in education, the arts, social services, the law, the environment and technology to ensure equitable access to success in all facets of our communities.

## WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health difficulties, from the earliest years through adulthood are widely understood to be among the biggest challenges to healthy human development. OISE, with our high level of expertise and external partnerships, especially with educational institutions as a key nexus for improving mental health and well-being, is well-positioned to play an important leadership role in addressing the myriad of problems of a non-system. Timely and effective access to mental health supports is hindered by gaps in resources and poor coordination of the resources that exist. Approximately 1.2 million, or 1 in 5, Canadian children and youth has a mental health challenge—less than 20 percent will receive appropriate treatment. Compounding this situation is that reducing the prevalence of mental health challenges in children and youth requires policy, practice, and research to recognize the dynamic interplay among individual risk factors and the ecology of the home, school, and communities in which children and youth develop. OISE’s research, clinical and training assets collectively focus on how early life intra-individual characteristics, the home and school environments, and society can intersect to

promote healthy outcomes for individuals along with social and economic progress for neighborhoods, communities and the nation at large. Finally, our work needs to be informed by a broader *wellbeing* lens that explores other determinants of health including such things as the environment, income and social cohesion, and their impact on mental, physical and spiritual health.

#### TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATION

In order to play a leadership role in studying, understanding and assisting others in improving pedagogy at all levels of education, our work needs to be informed by an understanding of “diverse ways of knowing” moving well beyond narrower notions of what should be learned, and how it can be learned. Exploring arts-based, Indigenous methodologies and other non-traditional and transformative approaches to pedagogy is vital to our role in enabling important “understandings” for our learners, including new and experienced teachers and other educators and trainers. Additionally, conducting research-based investigations of pedagogies and employing new and emerging technologies in ways that may be socially or educationally transformative should be another hallmark of our pedagogical leadership. Taken together, this approach will ensure that OISE and its graduates are leaders in pedagogical innovation and education excellence. In addition, there is an interest in developing new, innovative EdD programs that will address professional needs of a broad range of educational practitioners.

#### SCHOLARSHIP-DRIVEN LOCAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

We need to take advantage of our highly-regarded research and scholarship expertise, and our emerging capability in innovative domestic and international professional learning programming and consulting know-how. Collaboration was one of the key themes emerging from our academic planning consultations. There are important roles that OISE can and should play in collaboration with local, national and international partners and communities. Further, strengthening OISE’s international dimension is viewed as an important priority. New international partnerships will provide an important foundation for recruiting new international students, providing new opportunities for our domestic students to obtain international experience, facilitating collaborative international research initiatives, and supporting the development of curriculum that includes international/global perspectives. Becoming a world leader in utilizing research results to improve practice, impact on policy development and point the way for improving the research communications process should be a hallmark of our work. We have heard from several key education and government partners that they want us to continue becoming the very best we can be as collaborative partners providing research knowledge, ideas and solutions in concert with other researchers, practitioners and decision-makers to improve education practice and policy development.

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These six themes received considerable attention in our academic planning consultations. As illustrated by the following figure, these themes are overlapping and interdependent. Taken together, the themes are intended to provide the foundation for the development of our academic plan as we develop priorities under each along with unit level complementary actions going forward.



## MOVING FORWARD WITH YOUR HELP

As we noted, we will move to develop a draft academic plan complete with vision and mission statements and clear notions of how we move forward. The most compelling and relevant priorities will take the form of short, medium and long term actions as we move to develop implementation plans. Some initiatives will take time because of their complexity, but we will aim to provide a task analysis with progress markers to guide us. Other initiatives can be acted upon more quickly and we will be clear about the “what, who, how and when”. Our goal is to provide you with a draft academic plan as well as a more detailed implementation plan within the next few months.

In the meantime, once again, *we need your feedback*. Do these themes and their descriptions make sense to you? What would be your two or three major priorities for us to consider under each theme?

We have much more to do as we continue the task of developing a blueprint for our future. With the ongoing participation and creative thinking evidenced so far, we can be confident that a bold and relevant renewal is well underway. I look forward to your feedback on this report.

Take care,

Glen

Glen A. Jones

*Professor and Dean*