

School of Public Policy Unit Review

Summary Report

Context:

A comprehensive review of faculties/academic units is scheduled every 5-7 years. The review for the School of Public Policy (SPP) occurred during the 2021-22 academic year. Following a self-assessment exercise, a site visit was conducted by an external review team. Following the site visit, the review team prepared a written report containing their findings and recommendations. This Summary Report includes general comments and recommendations from the review team and responses.

Site Visit:

April 12-13, 2022

Names and Affiliations of Reviewers:

Loleen Berdahl, University of Saskatchewan and University of Regina
Bryce Tingle, University of Calgary
Lori Turnbull, Dalhousie University

General Comments of the Unit Review Team

The review team is grateful for the opportunity to visit the School of Public Policy (SPP) at the University of Calgary and make recommendations that are meant to help the School in its strategic planning, structural review exercise, and curriculum reform.

The SPP plays a significant role in public policy both in Alberta and in the broader policy community in Canada. Its faculty and research associates have made impressive contributions to public policy research across many sectors and jurisdictions. The SPP focuses on impact and strives to have influence in policy discourse and decisions. Its networks and connections with policymakers help to ensure that faculty research lands on the desks of decision-makers and that it has the potential for influence.

This focus on policy impact creates something of an existential crisis for the SPP in the broader academic context and in the University of Calgary setting. To be specific, it is not entirely clear whether the SPP is first and foremost an academic unit or a think tank. This question, combined with the fact that the SPP relies on academic appointments from other units to populate itself, makes for difficult relationships between the SPP and other units.

There is a clear need to resolve questions of governance and collegiality and to improve workplace culture so that faculty, staff, and students experience a safe and welcoming environment in which they are productive and valued.

During our site visit, we had the pleasure of consulting with a number of individuals and groups who play a key role either within the School or as partners and/or stakeholders. These include:

- ii'ntaa'poh'to'p Circle of Indigenous Scholars
- Indigenous Elders
- Teri Balser, Provost and Vice-President (Academic)
- Christine Johns, Senior Director, Program Innovation and Planning
- Peter MacKinnon, Executive Director at SPP
- SPP unit leads
- Scientific directors and directors of APOCs
- MPP and SEDV program directors and staff
- Operational leaders and partners
- Deans on the Board of Management
- Current and former students from SPP (MPP and SEDV)
- Staff (MaPS and AUPE)
- SPP faculty members
- SPP research associates and assistants
- Research/Executive fellows

The review team report is structured around key recommendations that stem from what was learned during the site visit and after taking a close read of the documents that were provided by the Provost's office.

Review Team Recommendations

Structure and Governance

1. The School of Public Policy should be embedded in the Faculty of Law and the Executive Director should report directly to the Dean of the Faculty of Law.

Response:

The University is aware of the challenges that have resulted from the School being located outside of a Faculty administrative structure. However, it is also understood that SPP's autonomy is key to its excellence and ongoing success. The University is committed to maintaining that autonomy, while ensuring sustainability and operational efficiency. Several

alternative governance models exist that also meet these goals and are currently being explored.

2. The university needs to position SPP to adopt a more secure and sustainable funding model.

Response:

The University is currently reviewing the funding model for the School of Public Policy including the exploration of alternative revenue sources.

Staffing and Personnel

3. The University and the SPP leadership must address critical challenges with workplace culture.

Response:

The School of Public Policy is aware of conflicts and tensions that have impacted the unit's organizational culture. We agree that the unit, and its leadership, have a critical obligation to provide a safe work environment that values and empowers its employees. It is also important to build a climate of civility, respect, and professionalism in order for the School to achieve its long-term potential. This is a foundational, collective responsibility held by every member of the School.

The work to shift our workplace culture has already begun. New leadership within the School has placed a priority on directly managing conflicts between its members, pursuing conversations that seek to mend old rifts and prevent new ones from emerging. These conversations are happening across individual members of the School, as well as across teams that must work together in order to succeed. Across the School, respectful and professional communication is a core expectation for all members of SPP.

There are also discrete actions to be pursued by the School. This will include working with the university's Human Resources department to identify relevant training and support for members of the School such as opportunities for "respect in the workplace", implicit-bias and collegial governance training. We will also call on HR for mediation supports should intractable conflicts occur within the School.

Finally, there are structural challenges that impact the School's culture. The School's heavy reliance on the unpredictable flow of grant and philanthropic funding creates insecurity for many staff. Our Research Associates, for example, experience the stress of this job instability. We will seek to identify funding models and hiring structures that offer more continuity and security for staff.

4. SPP should ensure its team is diverse and inclusive.

Response:

The issues of equity, diversity, inclusion, anti-racism, reconciliation, and decolonization need to be central for every Canadian organization, including the School of Public Policy. We agree that SPP has ongoing work to do in these areas. The diversity referred to in this recommendation must include not just physical and cultural diversity, but also diversity in worldviews, experiences, and thought. To achieve this, the School of Public Policy commits to such a journey.

We believe this work must begin with awareness and education. There are significant resources available to support this work, including University of Calgary workshops on Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI), the Indigenous Relations Training Program, and Anti-Discrimination/Racism Response Training (A.R.T.). There are also opportunities to work with and learn from other units at the university, exploring for example their unique responses to issues such as reconciliation and anti-black racism. We will pursue these opportunities to develop a comprehensive series of meaningful learning experiences for members of the School.

Awareness and education must be the starting point for long-term, structural change. We will work with our HR department to ensure that hiring practices reflect best EDI practices, encouraging a conscious effort to diversify the School. However, our work must extend beyond the actual hiring process to include attention to the practices and procedures that make diverse individuals feel welcome and safe in the organization. These practices are required to ensure those who reflect diversity have a strong voice and are not marginalized within dominant processes. To spark and guide this work we will revitalize the School's EDI committee, who will work closely with the School's leadership to move this commitment ahead.

5. The University should limit SPP faculty member secondments to tenured faculty.

Response:

The University is aware of the challenges that have resulted from some pre-tenure secondments and is committed to supporting Faculties members at all stages in their career. This recommendation will be further explored as part of the governance model review.

6. SPP should have a core of full-time faculty.

Response:

This recommendation will be further explored as part of the governance model review.

Programming

7. SPP should increase the priority of academic programming.

Response:

The review team referred to a “think tank versus academic unit” tension in the School and a culture that prioritizes research and external outreach above graduate training. It suggested that our educational programs were not positioned at the heart of the School’s work.

We believe there is both an obligation to deliver high-quality degree programs in SPP and the opportunity to become a national leader in developing the next generation of policy-makers in Canada. Achieving these goals will in fact place our programs at the core of what we do.

Work to revitalize and enhance our programs is underway. We have new Directors for both our Master of Public Policy (MPP) and Master of Science in Sustainable Energy Development (SEDV) programs. The SEDV curriculum has been updated and was implemented for the first time in May 2022. The MPP curriculum also needs to be updated and that process lies ahead. We are exploring further integration of learning experiences for students across both programs (e.g., joint workshops & discussions, merging capstone presentations).

It is also important to note that the School is now exploring new models to deliver and enhance our educational programs. These models include the creation of 4-course certificates in areas relevant to public policy, and an educational pathway that allows students to “stack” those certificates to complete our degree programs. Such a model has proven useful for other academic units, as it provides a mechanism to both diversify substantive areas taught within a School and the ability to offer more depth in particular areas. Work on such a model is in the early stages within the School.

8. SPP should update its Master of Public Policy (MPP) curriculum to balance economics with other dimensions of public policy training, including governance and inclusion.

Response:

The unit review expressed a concern that our MPP program was too heavily focused on economics and tax policy. This may have been true in the past, but we will deliberately examine the balance of topics in the MPP program as that program moves ahead. We will work with curriculum design specialists at the University of Calgary to examine the MPP curriculum, update it and broaden its substantive reach. We will also examine the nature of

MPP learning experiences to ensure the applied nature of governance and policy-making are core to the program. In the curriculum mapping process, it will also be important to consult with industry leaders to understand the knowledge, skills, and competencies that our graduates require. We are confident the combination of pedagogical guidance and industry reflections will allow us to offer a program that is a leader nationally.

9. SPP should ensure the MSc in Sustainable Energy Development (SEDV) program receives proper attention.

Response:

The SEDV program began as a cross-faculty initiative. It is now housed within the School of Public Policy. This fact demands that the School supports and sustains the program to ensure it is relevant and successful. We acknowledge that we must better integrate the SEDV program into the School. We make that commitment.

As mentioned previously, the recently updated SEDV curriculum was implemented as of May 2022. This provides an opportunity to alter our course sequencing and scheduling. It also provides opportunities to create new electives and seek new instructors. The School will continue to evolve these components of the program as implementation continues. Our exploration of a stackable certificate pathway to degrees will require these steps as well.

The topics germane to sustainable energy development are changing rapidly. Advances in hydrogen, biofuels, wind and solar power require regular updates to our degree program. The same may be said for changes to energy markets, regulatory frameworks, and environmental practices. The School must consult with industry leaders regularly to update degree content and ensure our graduates have the latest in knowledge and skills. We will regularly do so as the program evolves.

Spaces and Facilities

10. The University should identify opportunities to improve the physical connection between SPP and the main campus.

Response:

The University of Calgary has several of its faculties and academic units located off main campus including, the faculties of Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, and Continuing Education. We are committed to exploring this recommendation further with the School's leadership team.

Additional Comments and Concluding Review Team Remarks

The report focused on SPP's challenges. The review process brought to light numerous concerns and problems that require attention. Addressing these issues will require considerable effort from University and SPP leadership.

We believe this work should be done. We do see tremendous potential with the SPP. It has strong research, a focus on connecting research to policy and community, and many of the staff, faculty, and leadership voice commitment to the School.

The University of Calgary deserves a successful policy school, the team members working in the School of Public Policy deserve a positive work environment, and the SPP students deserve quality programs. We believe the recommendations in this report will assist in moving the School to a more positive position.