



Interdisciplinary Centre for Culture and Creativity

External Review Report

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Report of the Review Committee: Review of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Culture and Creativity (ICCC)

Overall Recommendation: We clearly and strongly recommend **continued Arts & Science College financial support for the ICCC**. As a Type “A” Centre, this is a unit embedded in a College and funded by the College. It has already accomplished a great deal, and with adequate support, it will continue to enable innovative work in the Humanities and Fine Arts for many years to come.

Current State of the ICCC

In its brief history, the ICCC has developed many valuable projects of research, community engagement and teaching, and has significant potential to make a larger impact if its mandate is re-focused. There is at present a lack of clarity regarding the main priorities of the ICCC. It appears to be attempting to do too many things for the size of its budget, and the management structure is in need of clarification. Learning from the successes and the challenges outlined in this report as identified from the many stakeholders we met with will enhance the potential of the ICCC.

Mandate

The ICCC has evolved to have a very broad mandate, including program delivery, community engagement, research funding, and occasionally general public relations events such as visiting speakers. Many of the stakeholders consulted expressed the opinion that the mandate is too broad for the available budget, and that fluidity of the mandate has caused problems with governance. The ICCC clearly needs to have more focus if it is to succeed. It cannot be all things to all stakeholders, and the finite resources will be best utilized when there are clearer criteria for allocation of priorities. This narrowing of the mandate will require making some difficult choices, but it will be very beneficial to the ICCC over time.

Leadership

Leadership is a concern in the current state of the ICCC, since the Centre has been without a director for a significant length of time. We discussed leadership with all of the previous Directors and we were able to get a sense of the challenges of this role. Several factors have made the ICCC a difficult unit to lead. Perhaps the most significant factor is that the Centre has an overly broad and fluid mandate. There was also concern that Directors were sometimes subject to inconsistent expectations and demands by decanal and senior administrative bodies. At times, the lines of responsibility and authority became unclear. The departure and non-replacement of the senior ASPA admin staff exacerbated this problem because there was no opportunity to transfer institutional memory to a potential new Director. In general, there is

something of a dilemma regarding leadership in the ICCC currently. The institution will benefit greatly from having a new Director with a strong vision for the Centre, but at the same time, it will be difficult to attract the right Director until the problems with mandate, focus and the governing structure are addressed.

Research, Creativity and Community Engagement

IIIC granting and fellowship initiatives have been successful in numerous ways, generating research projects, artistic production, and connections to various parts of the local and national community. Our conversations with recipients of grant funding from the ICCC were illuminating and inspiring. We learned that for faculty in Fine Arts in particular, ICCC funding has been crucial to artistic projects and collaborations that would not otherwise be possible, due to restrictions of other sources of funding. Since most Fine Arts projects are not eligible for SSHRC funding, ICCC resources are particularly valued, and even relatively small grants have enabled significant outputs. As for community engagement, several of the funded projects have done an excellent job of engaging with local Indigenous communities in particular. Some questions were raised about the criteria for funding certain projects, which seemed to have been driven by individual priorities rather than projects developed within a strategic framework for the ICCC. This illuminates the need for a clear mandate in order to help the Director consider requests that may not align with strategic priorities. There was also some question about whether it is worthwhile to expend ICCC resources upon projects with little connection to research. Some of the visiting speaker events, as an example, may have been more appropriately funded and managed by other units. At present, it seems that there is no clear rationale for whether a connection to research should be a necessary aspect of successful grant applications. The committee felt that projects, which are primarily public relations exercises for the university or college, should be funded and managed through other sources than the ICCC.

Programming

The ICCC was originally conceived as a home for interdisciplinary programs, with the idea that many of such programs would join and create a critical mass of interdisciplinary teaching and research units. To date, this has not happened in the way that was envisioned when the ICCC was created, though the three main programs in the Centre have done excellent work and have developed their course offerings in productive directions. The MFA program has been a great success and is now in the process of moving into the English Department. This is widely regarded as a positive development for the program. The Women's and Gender Studies (WGST) program has developed strong undergraduate offerings as well as an exciting new MA program, both of which are well subscribed. WGST has also added to its faculty complement with two joint appointments. The Digital Culture and New Media minor has developed innovative courses and has maintained a significant presence within the Department of Art and Art History. The committee saw significant opportunities for expansion of this program, with the possibility of reaching larger numbers of students.

Despite the successes of these programs, questions remain about why other interdisciplinary programs have not chosen to join the ICCC. Members of one other interdisciplinary program indicated that they did not see any particular value to joining the ICCC, especially since the

future of the Centre seemed somewhat tenuous at that time. From the perspective of other interdisciplinary program leaders, there was a risk to join, with no clearly articulated benefits. We sympathize with their concerns, as we could not see direct benefits other than potentially some administrative supports. This lack of buy-in from other interdisciplinary programs may be simply a perception issue that could be addressed by a new Director who could “sell” membership in the ICCC as a benefit to other interdisciplinary programs. If only a selection of the Colleges’ interdisciplinary programs are managed within the ICCC, its role in relation to programming becomes unclear.

Governance Structure and Budgeting

The questions presented by the ICCC’s broad and somewhat fluid mandate are also present in the current governance structure of the Centre. The Director’s role in relation to programming was not entirely clear to us. The Management Committee includes the program directors, which puts them in a potential conflict of interest position when adjudicating funding applications that may involve their own programs. Even if the program directors declare a conflict of interest and remove themselves from the decision on whether to fund their program activities, there remains information asymmetry with other interdisciplinary programs, which may not be aware of the funding and are not represented on the committee. The governance structure as currently constituted does not adequately reflect the differences between the Programming branch of the ICCC and the Research, Creativity and Community Engagement branch. There are also questions about who directs and approves the budget and even where the funding comes from. Some faculty believe the funding is being approved annually by PCIP, which is not the case.

Visibility

While the ICCC’s research and community engagement funding has been valuable for many faculty, students and community members, the Centre nonetheless suffers from a lack of visibility. The fact that the number of applications for the ICCC grants has been declining over time is an indication that more work needs to be done to increase the visibility of these opportunities. The loss of physical space dedicated to the ICCC has also been a significant factor in its lack of visibility. Without a physical home, it is difficult to create a public identity and to provide a venue for collaboration. Having physical space is also an important factor in recruiting a Director.

Recommendations for consideration by ICCC, Arts and Science and the University

Recommendation 1: The Mandate of the ICCC be focused to more effectively utilize the resources available.

As mentioned above, the mandate of the ICCC is too broad for the resources available and this makes it hard to coordinate. We believe that the mandate needs to be simplified and clarified so that the Centre has a core identity that can be communicated, both internally and externally. We offer two scenarios for how the mandate of the ICCC could be better focused. Scenario A is simpler but in some ways more radical; it advocates the removal of the programming mandate from the ICCC in order to enable focus on research/creation. Scenario B maintains the double nature of the ICCC as an institute that facilitates both research/creation and educational programming.

We prefer Scenario A because we feel it has a higher chance of success given its simplicity and greater focus. Scenario B is more convoluted and will involve significantly more administrative complexity. One projected long-term challenge of Scenario B is the difficulty of managing the transition of programs out of the ICCC once the incubation stage is concluded.

SCENARIO A. FOCUSED MANDATE TO SUPPORT RESEARCH, SCHOLARLY AND ARTISTIC WORK (RSAW)

This option narrows the mandate of the ICCC so that it supports only research, scholarship and creative activities. This would mean that the programs currently supported would be gracefully transitioned to other homes.

Rationale

The ICCC was originally conceived as a place to build capacity through the connection of teaching and research and to create a structure to promote interdisciplinary programming and research collaboration. Initially the anchor to this Centre was the WGST who were a model of interdisciplinarity. Soon, two additional programs - New Media and the MFA - found a home in the Centre. These programs were incubated and shepherded with the administrative and financial support of the Centre and with program directors championing their respective programs.

What is telling is that no new programs have joined the ICCC since inception. This was through no fault of the administrative staff. It was a direct result of a mandate that is too all encompassing and under-resourced to have an ability to grow new programs.

After its formation, the ICCC attracted a significant amount of baseline funding for grants and fellowships, which enabled a number of success stories in the RSAW realm. That is what we propose the College build on. This recommendation comes from the recognition of the

overwhelming number of positive and engaging examples shared with us where funding received through the ICCC fostered scholarly and artistic activities that were the impetus or seeds for further creative work or research that would not have been possible otherwise. The breadth and impact of these activities are less measurable and more anecdotal, which makes them even more important to protect.

We recognize that implementing of a change of this magnitude will require careful planning to ensure that the Centre's successes in the realms of both programming and RSAW are protected. We therefore recommend the following steps:

1. Discontinue the INCC courses offered on an ad hoc basis. Courses where historical enrollments have been steady would fold into the departments that make the most sense. A new home for interdisciplinary programs should be considered within the College of Arts & Science, but it needs to encompass all interdisciplinary programming, not a subset. (See additional recommendation number 3.)
2. Establish a 3-year transition plan synchronized with the review of the MA in WGST to allow for a careful and well-formulated exit for the WGST program from the ICCC. Ensure that WGST does not suffer from the move out of ICCC by adequately supporting it in its new home.
3. Establish the ICCC as a research/creation centre for the humanities and fine arts that has a clear research, creation, and community engaged focus. As part of this re-articulation of mission, definitions for what types of funding can be included in the ICCC should be re-visited and perhaps broadened. The stakeholders must come to consensus on what will have the most impact for the scholars/artists and other stakeholders in the Humanities and Fine arts, and they must make sure the language is as inclusive as possible but is focused enough so that it makes a difference. Supporting the facilitation of innovative and interdisciplinary research creation and community engaged scholarship should be at the centre of this discussion.
4. Ideally, the projects funded would all develop the research and creative capacity of the College in the area of the humanities and fine arts. This means that projects that raise the visibility of the College, but do not contribute to any faculty member's research/creation agenda, would be out of scope. Opportunities that are identified that have no direct tie to a specific faculty member's research or artistic work agenda should be directed to the Dean's office for consideration.
5. New Terms of Reference should be established that highlight the mandate and clearly delineate the membership of the committee, and an advisory board should be struck with the mandate of vetting applications to the ICCC Fund.
6. The Director, who would receive a negotiated teaching reduction, would be the Chair of a Research and Community Engagement Committee. The RCEC should be made up of representatives from all of the appropriate disciplines. A new position description should be developed for the Director that focuses on activities designed to educate the departments and interdisciplinary programs on the funding and to promote the activities of the Centre (see below). This would include celebrating and measuring to the extent possible the impacts of this funding.

7. The Associate Director position should not be replaced and the funds for that position should be re-directed into the ICCC funding pool. The focused nature of the centre in this scenario should reduce the need for administrative supports. The existing ASPA 1 coordinator position should be repositioned as an Assistant Director and utilized to provide supports to the Director for managing and reporting the funding requests.
8. Physical space is required to house the Director and administrative support personnel. (See below). The Centre should be clearly branded as the ICCC space and should be visible to faculty.

SCENARIO B. FACILITATING INNOVATION AND INTERDISCIPLINARITY

The second scenario involves keeping the dual nature of the ICCC so that it supports both research/creation and educational programs concurrently, focusing on the facilitation of innovative and interdisciplinary activities. In this scenario, the ICCC would serve a transformative role supporting new research/creation projects and new interdisciplinary program development. ICCC support would a) support the development of research/creation and programs, and b) facilitate the transition of those programs within an agreed-upon time-period to allow other research/creation and programs to be supported. In this sense, the ICCC would become a facilitator of research and teaching, not a long-term management solution for programs without a home.

In this scenario, the management structure would need to be designed to separate research/creation decisions from programming decisions. We therefore recommend:

- There be a Programming Committee (PC) to support the programs run by the ICCC and mentor new programs. This Committee would advise, but not decide on which programs housed by the ICCC in order to keep a separation between the formative/supportive function and the critical/budget function.
- There be a Research and Community Engagement Committee (RCEC) to advise the director on research/creation award programs and adjudicate those decisions. This RCEC membership would consist of previous grant holders and would be representative of the breadth of disciplines supported.

We recognize that this doubles the numbers of committees, but it does allow the committees to focus on separate and therefore clearer mandates. The PC also becomes more of a supportive and facilitating group that is not in a conflict of interest situation where they are both adjudicating the distribution of funds and advocating for programs and fields that need funds.

More importantly, if the ICCC is to facilitate new programs it needs to have a mechanism in place to support transitioning or terminating programs that have incubated for a certain period. If the ICCC moves to an incubator role, it will need to be very clear at the outset about the limits of the support offered. Research/creation projects and programs need to know that the ICCC provides laddering support and that this support needs to include succession planning from the start.

What would facilitating innovative programming look like? Here is one potential example.

- A group of faculty members believe there is a societal need for a Data Studies programme that brings philosophy, digital humanities and computer science together in order to prepare students for the breadth “big data” jobs emerging in an interdisciplinary and responsible fashion.
- The faculty champions prepare a proposal in consultation with the Director/Associate Director. That proposal is to start with two new team-taught courses (one in Philosophy and one in Computer Science) that would gauge uptake and provide a context for the faculty to collaborate. The proposal has a budget request that goes to the Programming Committee for advice. The Director decides to move forward with this proposal and weaves it into the annual budget for the Dean’s review.
- The Dean and Director negotiate a budget that partly redirects funding from a programme being transferred out of the ICCC and partly with new funding.
- After the courses show a need, the proposal is extended to develop a certificate in Data Studies.
- That proposal is again taken to the PC, then budgeted, and then approved by the Dean or her designate. The proposal is to run the certificate for long enough to graduate 4 cohorts, at the end of which the units involved need to decide whether to take it over or not.

If the College wants a model that includes facilitated educational programming experiments then it needs to also make clear that funding for any one experiment will end just as funding for a research project ends. No one should expect ongoing support from the ICCC or the Centre won’t be able to support new experiments.

The ICCC needs to also stop providing management to activities that do not fit elsewhere. We recognize that sometimes there are opportunities that crop up that can be aligned with the mandate, but these opportunities should never be undertaken unless they fit the incubation model. In other words, projects like courses should not be taken on unless it is understood that the ICCC will facilitate them to the point where they can find an appropriate home or terminate them gracefully in order to support the next project.

If the College needs a unit that manages programmes that do not fit elsewhere then it should create an Office of Interdisciplinary Studies attached to the Dean’s office and be clear about what that is.

Recommendation 2: Clearly define budget reporting and decision making.

Whatever the focus of the ICCC, a clear statement of budget reporting and decision-making should be developed. The current Terms of Reference document includes a statement about the Management Committee advising the Director on budgetary decisions. This is not prescriptive enough. We recommend that budget responsibility be clearly described along these lines:

- It is the responsibility of the Associate Director (or Assistant Director, as the case may be) to manage the budget under the direction of the Director.
- It is the responsibility of the management committees to advise the Director on the annual budget.
- The Director, with advice from the committees and support from the Associate Director, prepares the annual budget for approval of the Dean of the College or his/her designate.
- The Dean makes the final decision on the annual budget developed for him/her prepared by the Director and Associate Director.

What is important, if the ICCC is to effectively facilitate new projects (either research, creative, or educational) is that program directors be freed to manage their programs and not be involved in the management of the whole.

Recommendation 3: Establish a centralized home for interdisciplinary programming

Independent of what happens to ICCC there is a need for flexible ways to support interdisciplinary programs that do not fit into departments. Thought should be given to how the College can organize to facilitate and encourage innovation in curricular programming.

Recommendation 4: Provide support to those who administer innovative and interdisciplinary programs

Directors of new programs should be provided with course assignment reductions or other support, especially in the formative years of new programs. If teaching release is impossible due to demands of small programs (something we heard repeatedly), then release from other administrative duties should be negotiable. A deeper problem identified was that in some programs it is becoming normal for faculty to teach extra courses every year with no recognition.

When this is normalized in some units, it runs the risk of becoming a source of grievances and inter-departmental jealousy that undermines collegial governance.

Recommendation 5: Simplify the research/creation mandate to focus on community-engaged activities that develop capacity

There are too many different research and creative programs being supported, independent of the educational programming. The ICCC needs to focus on supporting only research and creative activities of faculty. That means not supporting outreach activities that do not build research capacity. Those should be left to the College's communications unit, or other outreach units. Specifically we believe the Director, once hired, should develop a new architecture that is:

- Simple and flexible. Instead of lots of programs, a small number can be adapted to different situations. They might be a) Small Grants, b) Fellowships, c) Community-Engagement Grants, and d) Research Capacity Development fund.
- Adaptable to new priorities from the College, University, Community, and Granting councils.
- Focused, in the first instance, on helping researchers and artists develop collaborations with community researchers that build trust and capacity.

In short, support fewer things better.

Recommendation 6: Develop the Director's position so that it is attractive to colleagues

Without a dynamic Director, the best-designed centre will become a sinecure. The ICCC desperately needs a Director (and an Associate/Assistant Director) who is engaged and willing to serve for a number of years to provide the stability that is needed, and to manage the transitions ahead. To that end we recommend,

- The development of a renewed mandate that provides prospective applicants to the Director position with a clear sense of what the opportunity is (and is not) and the opportunity for creativity. (See Recommendation 1)
- Define the term of the Director to be 5 years with one and only one renewal. The renewal would take place after a successful review.
- Provide the Director with the support to hire an Associate Director or Assistant Director at the ASPA 2 or 1 level.
- Allow the Director to sit on Chairs Council (and/or Interdisciplinary Chairs Council) so that there is alignment of the activities of the ICCC and the Faculty.

Recommendation 7: Increase the visibility of the ICCC both in the University and in the community

One of the responsibilities of a new Director should be to increase the visibility of the ICCC so that it enhances the reputation of the university and draws appropriate applications for funding opportunities. Our impression is that the ICCC is well known to some and not as well understood by others. Some of this is a mandate issue and some of it has to do with the lack of a Director capable of outreach. Some activities that should be undertaken early in the new Director's term include:

- The development of promotional materials that reflect the evolving mandate.
- The development of an internal communications strategy that involves visits to faculty meetings and public events.
- Likewise, the development of an external community outreach strategy designed to engage the appropriate arts and humanities partners.
- The creation of a clear and stable space associated with the ICCC. (See next recommendation.)

Recommendation 8: Provide the ICCC with a central and accessible space

To increase the accessibility of the ICCC and to raise its visibility we recommend that the Centre be provided with a coherent and convenient space. They should have a visible location that faculty pass regularly. Further, a coherent space will increase the ability of the staff/director to quickly interact and respond to opportunities. If there is to be a fellowship program, there should be an office for fellows.

Recommendation 9: Develop an advancement strategy to raise funds for centre-related activities

The funding of the ICCC is limited and ideally it could become a centre for disciplines across the College, but only with more funding. To achieve this in the current climate will mean seeking donors with a view to developing an endowment. We therefore recommend that the Director, in consultation with the Dean and University Relations, develop a strategy for fund raising. This strategy would include:

- Getting the ICCC prioritized for major gifts.

- Preparing a number of gift ideas from major to minor that include naming opportunities.
- Recognizing that a percentage of the Director's time will need to go to fundraising for it to be successful.
- Budgeting for fundraising.

Recommendation 10: Undertake a consultation around expanding the mandate to include the Social Sciences

The ICCC was set up to support the Humanities and Fine Arts, but inevitably has ended up supporting projects that cross into the Social Sciences. For that matter it is hard to sometimes tell the difference. Therefore the ICCC should, during the first 5 year term, after the graceful transition of WGST, undertake a consultation to see if ICCC can be expanded to include support for the social sciences. It should be understood that this would only happen in the event that further funding is secured (see above.)

Respectively submitted,

Reviewers:

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