

# BC University College Research Conference: "Exploring Research Issues and Options"

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University College of the Fraser Valley

## Summary

The conference opened with a poster session where enthusiastic students and faculty described individual research projects and described the impact such experience had on their undergraduate education, particularly in gaining employment and entrance into graduate school. This was followed by a series of faculty presentations from the departments of Criminology, Kinesiology, Biology and Marketing. These focussed on the success various faculty had achieved in acquiring funding from 'non-traditional' sources and a range of creative solutions to real or perceived barriers to conducting research. Non-traditional funding sources included government agencies (other than the SSHRC, CIHR and NSERC), professional associations, the United Nations, the World Health Organization, private companies and unions). The presentations also emphasized the success that these faculty members have had in integrating teaching and research in the classroom. The positive influence of such activities was clearly demonstrated by the student poster presenters. There was considerable evidence given to suggest that being active participants in research improved student employment opportunities and the ability to attend graduate school. UCFV has tracked their graduates and estimate that they have placed graduates in over fifty different graduate schools around the world.

Although there was some discussion about the 'barriers' to conducting research at UC's, more attention was paid to removing dis-incentives and attracting non-traditional funding opportunities. One of the speakers mentioned the importance of creating 'clusters' of activity to build 'critical mass' to foster collaboration amongst faculty and disciplines at smaller institutions. It was observed that a great deal of the success in these research

initiatives was due to exemplary individual students and faculty. It was also recognized that the attraction and retention of both students and faculty was positively impacted by research and scholarly activity.

Dr. Yvon Dandurand (UCFV, Criminology) summarized his views on thinking differently about research with the acronym TRICKS. He spoke of the importance of the institution and researchers to embrace Trust, Relevance, Infrastructure, Collaboration, Knowledge Assets and Synergy. As for involving outside partnerships he re-worked this to incorporate Timeliness, Responsiveness, Incentives, Competitiveness, Knowledge development and Students.

Dr. Emlyn Jessop from the U of Calgary expressed his high regard for the type of research activities and level of student involvement. He was a strong proponent of mentorship initiatives and suggested that there are opportunities for faculty to become involved as co-supervisors of graduate students, adjunct members of university departments or government institutes and partners with the private sector or non-government organizations. He also touched on the importance of flexibility in arriving at creative solutions to the diverse individual, departmental and institutional needs.

UCFV Criminology department gave a series of excellent talks that demonstrated the departments' commitment to teaching and research. Students in the department take a research course in second, third and fourth year. The students work in teams that are often interdisciplinary. Dr. Greg Anderson (UCFV - Kinesiology) has been collaborating with the criminology department to look at physical abilities required by police officers. Dr. Anderson talked about how the research was interdisciplinary, involved students and was built on partnerships to share resources, expertise, clientele and access. The partners they have developed include the Municipal Police Dept., JIBC, Association of Police Chiefs, RCMP, Ontario Police Academy and the Netherlands Police. The research initiated at the local level has spun off many research projects that have built upon the

original research. The partnerships created in the first research project still exist and provide support for the department and students in many ways.

## Issues

Throughout the conference presenters identified a variety of research-related issues faced by faculty summarized as:

- Some departments lack federal funding opportunities (collaboration with established universities)
- Often difficult to disseminate results
- Lack of time for research
- Lack of incentives for faculty to be (or remain) involved
- Lack of support
- Scholarly activity in some institutions is ill-defined
- Professional development time is all at the same time not spread out throughout the year
- Lack of research space
- Lack of admin support
- Under-grad and graduate student availability

## Suggestions

Suggestions from presenters for faculty and students participating in research:

- Inter-disciplinary research works very well in small institutions ♦ Have student involvement
- Create partnerships to share resources, expertise, clientele and access
- Create partnerships to create opportunity
- Look for non-traditional funding, look for organizations who need to know the answer
- Shift the research focus slightly to where the opportunities are

- Universitys can fill research gaps that traditional universities don't fill, if we are flexible
- Always over deliver
- Build trust with those you are doing research with and for
- Cultivate relationships with larger institutions, become an adjunct professor, supervise grad students
- Cultivate relationships with government labs and ministries, become an adjunct researcher
- Cultivate relationships with the private sector.
- Develop grant funded research related student course projects.
- Identify need for research in the community
- Look at your research options: basic vs. applied; individual vs. collaborative; grant vs. contract; internal vs. external

## TRICKS

### Trust

- Build Trust, start with a \$200 research project not a \$2 million one
- Trust is why agencies come to Universities, because of our integrity, professionalism. Otherwise they would go to a consultant.
- Building trust means recognizing that outside agencies are different from academia. Find creative ways of merging both.

### Relevance

- Make yourself relevant to the funder, why is your research relevant and how will it help them.

### Infrastructure

- Create a research infrastructure and a research community

### Collaboration

- Collaborate within departments, between departments and with other research organizations

### Knowledge Assets

- Use your knowledge assets: faculty, students, information sources, databases you create

## Synergy

- Create a synergy between teaching and research

## TRICKS again

## Timeliness

- Use the BRITA model - Best Research in

## Time Available

- Need to be creative when determining the "best Research"

## Responsiveness

- Often possible to design your research in a way that allows it to be customized to agencies

## Incentives

- Provide incentives for research and at the least, remove barriers

## Competitiveness

- Competitiveness is everywhere, how are we going to be different?

## Knowledge Development

- Build knowledge through your research

## Students

- Students are part of our assets and funders often want our students. Show the funder how the student will be involved.

## Faculty Perceptions of Research in Four UC's

A significant portion of the afternoon discussion centred on the findings of a research paper authored by faculty at UCC titled "Faculty Perceptions of Research in Four UC's and Two Small Universities in Canada". This report makes for some very interesting reading and is available at

[http://www.ucfv.bc.ca/research/Research%20Conference/faculty\\_perceptions\\_of\\_research.htm](http://www.ucfv.bc.ca/research/Research%20Conference/faculty_perceptions_of_research.htm)

Although VIU declined to participate in the questionnaire/survey, which was the instrument used to solicit faculty perceptions, some of the findings are relevant to VIU faculty. From a list of 34 factors ranging from availability of secretarial support to academic freedom, the five most negative factors to conducting research and scholarship identified by UC faculty were;

1. time spent on non-teaching commitments,
2. time spent on teaching commitments,
3. research incentives provided by the university,
4. availability of library holdings,
5. availability of student research assistants.

Interestingly, these were the same top five factors identified by faculty at two small universities (Trent, Mt. Saint Vincent). The difference being that UC faculty ranked them as more acute barriers to success.

The paper addressed the positive role that the creation of a Research Office has had on the institution and faculty. This study also addressed faculty preferences for the distribution of their workloads with respect to teaching, research/scholarship and institutional service. On average, faculty surveyed at four UC's (OUC, UCC, UCFV and Kwantlen) would prefer to devote 50% of their workloads to teaching, 35% on research and 10% other, if given a choice. This compares with 42% and ~30% teaching distributions at small and large Canadian universities, respectively. There were large discrepancies between what faculty prefer as a workload distribution and what they perceive as their administrators preferences. Once again, this discrepancy was most acute for faculty at University Colleges. Average perception amongst UC faculty was that administrators would distribute workloads as 76% teaching 14% research and 10% other.

Although some inter-UC comparisons were analyzed, the interpretations are problematic since different sampling techniques were used at OUC and UCC than at UCFV and Kwantlen.

In the context of this paper, the authors cited several researchers who have studied the role of research and teaching at post-secondary institutions that are worth mentioning here. Tang and Chamberlain (1997) have shown that contrary to popular notions, faculty who are active researchers are more (not less) likely to receive teaching awards. Clark (1997) views the role of research as the integration of teaching and learning. He suggests that a 'commitment to discovery' allows critical thinking and professional development to guide learning. The UCC authors summarize four practical propositions outlined by Colbeck (1998) that could aid in the integration of teaching and research. The interested reader is directed to the references below.

The conference ended by thanking the host institution and suggesting agenda items for next years meeting to be hosted by Kwantlen UC. Hopefully, the timing of the conference in this series will be more conducive to greater faculty participation.

Clark, B.R. (1997) The modern integration of research activities with teaching and learning. Journal of Higher Education, 68, 241-255.

Colbeck, C.L. (1998). Merging in a seamless blend: How faculty integrate teaching and research. Journal of Higher Education, 69, 647-671.

Tang, T.L. and Chamberlain, M (1997). Attitudes toward research and teaching. Journal of Higher Education, 68, 212-227.