

Fass response to the “External Review of Arts and Social Sciences”. Winter 2025.

Summary of Review Report

A full reproduction of the review’s detailed recommendations is provided in *Table One* at the end of this response. Overall, the reviewers note “significant efforts undertaken over the past four years in establishing a new Faculty, implementing new organizational and support structures, the investment in faculty hiring across several departments and academic units, the development of new academic programming, and the management of undergraduate and graduate degrees”. Further, the report also states that “FASS – across all its departments, programs, and disciplines – presents a strong record of active and supported research. The consistent growth of internal and external funding is one indicator of research capacity, productivity, impact, and recognition at the national and international level. As evidenced in the self-study, and from speaking with various stakeholders working to support faculty in their research endeavors, there is a strong culture and expectation of scholarly activity, grant applications, and productivity in its various forms of knowledge creation, translation, and dissemination”. In a more critical vein, the reviewers also highlight concerns around student recruitment, donor engagement and fund-raising success, centralized scheduling processes, and budget matters including both internal Faculty and wider campus processes and decisions, leadership succession planning, faculty mentoring and engagement, relations between units and campuses, as well as overall communication and the apparent absence of a clear strategic vision for the Faculty.

Overview of the Response

This response is structured as a general treatment of three general areas of note raised in the review (budget, strategic planning and vision, and Faculty culture or “developing a culture of collaboration”). We appreciate the many positive observations in the report, but for the most part will not reiterate them here. The document concludes with a table of specific recommendations from the report and our intended actions in response.

Budget

The reviewer’s note:

Some serious thought needs to be given also to the reliance on international students to address the current fiscal crisis. On this note, the existing tuition allocation model was presented as a problem in need of immediate resolution. The intricacies and realities of the current (and historic) arrangement appear to be poorly understood, which presents an opportunity for better communications to overcome the prevailing deficit argument that is paralysing strategic decision- making, necessary change, and response. (p.14)

The reviewers’ attention to the impact of the budget model and recent shortfalls in projected revenues is particularly appreciated. FASS receives the smallest per student FTE contribution from the provincial grant of all the UBC Okanagan Faculties and is the Faculty most dependent on its share of direct student tuition, and thus the most susceptible to fluctuations in enrolments –especially international enrolments.

Faculty budgets are primarily dedicated to staffing (i.e. continuing faculty salary lines and administrative staffing costs), with most other expenses covered through various mechanisms in the campus budget. On the Okanagan campus currently just over half of domestic tuitions and just under 1/3th of international tuitions are retained by the Faculties, with the lion's share of the international tuitions going into the Excellence Fund, and then redistributed to various initiatives (some at the Faculty level). For FASS recent shortfalls in international student enrollments have transformed what appeared to be a small ongoing surplus to a small operating deficit (beginning FY24), resulting in significant pressure to curtail spending. Not only has the budget pressure disrupted current Faculty operations, it is potentially crippling to our responses to the review. Because the overwhelming majority of our costs are fixed, short term solutions to the fall in international tuitions have been extremely disruptive in particular areas – e.g. the number of teaching assistantships -- and have caused considerable concern amongst colleagues.

The budget situation has a direct impact on the FASS – Student Recruiting relationship that the reviewers also note, though this is not an issue specific to FASS. Consequently, the Dean's office has been taking direct action to try to increase recruitment in lieu of changes in the central recruiting strategies that are demonstrably falling short of FASS expectations and requirements. The situation adds tension to the relationship with the development office as well, with alternative sources of revenue (or their absence) coming increasingly into focus. FASS welcomes efforts to deal with the root causes of the tensions between FASS and these central units from any quarter. Mediation, however, may not be the solution, as the tensions in the relationships are not a result of interpersonal style or personality differences, but rather immediately consequential economic pressures. To this point budget issues have been treated as “made in FASS” problems while our attempts to act are also viewed as problematic by centrally funded support units (like Student Recruiting). From our perspective, many of the fiscal challenges we face are the result of structural issues resident primarily in the overarching campus budget and budget model.

For these reasons we call for a comprehensive review of the UBC Okanagan budget model, a reassessment of the distribution of the provincial grant between Faculties, and adjustments to the tuition allocation model. That model has centralized all but instructional expenses, exacerbating the uneven distribution of funds between Faculties from the provincial grant, and effectively subsidizing space intensive disciplines with tuitions from lecture-based programs, and research in disciplines with modest infrastructural demands. A quick assessment of the distribution of research funds through the VPRI administered “[Eminence Program](#)” operated with resources from international student fees is similarly skewed. While in some instances these patterns reflect overt campus strategies (e.g. the campus commitment to the TRC commitments), in others the strategic priorities are less clear. Indeed, one of the structural reasons for the challenges around space distribution (also raised by the reviewers) is that faculties do not pay for basic infrastructural costs associated with space and thus have no reason to limit their consumption of this pooled (i.e. common property) resource. Having Faculties retain a larger portion of tuitions (as is the case at UBCV) and then pay for operational costs for the space they use, would necessarily lead to Faculties rationalizing their space demands. At present the budget model obscures a non-trivial cross-subsidy to space intense disciplines and provides no incentives to steward or rationalize space. Not coincidentally such a change would more accurately reflect costs and revenues for

the arts, social science, and humanities programs currently under extraordinary pressure, and provide some fiscal space for productive strategic planning. While we appreciate the concerns of the reviewers regarding the “budget acumen” in the Faculty, the challenge is rather more the receptiveness of senior budget holders to actively adjust the budget model than the FASS capacity to understand the model.

Strategic Plan and Vision

The reviewers note that there are no publicly available strategic planning documents specific to the Faculty (FASS has a document, still in draft form, developed too late to be included in materials for the reviewers to read). The wider context for this is the strategic planning cycle at UBC and events leading up to the split of the previous Arts and Sciences Faculty (2018-2020), and the absence of leadership for the new Faculty until the actual split occurred (Acting Dean Traister appointed in July of 2020) and Dean Tomášková arrived in December of 2020. Circumstances arising from COVID and its ongoing aftermath were such that the decision to pursue a focused strategic planning process was paused until the later spring of 2024, when a one-day planning session was held to gather feedback from a widely representative group of Faculty leaders. This process was structured by the decision to embed the FASS plan into a template formed from the UBC Strategic Plan (in a draft form now), and was paused again as the new UBC President launched a “refresh” of that UBC plan shortly after. We made a decision to focus on the self-study and review process that commenced at the same time instead, with the intention of picking the formal planning process up following the review. While it may be premature to align directly under the current system-wide refresh or recent priority setting efforts by the DVC’s office, FASS level processes can be helpful internally and should inform these wider efforts as they unfold.

FASS does have a strategic direction, as is plainly evident in our actions, and recounted in the self-study and in the external review itself. To summarize these:

- 1) FASS colleagues and programs have been at the center of efforts to proactively participate in activities aimed at Indigenous – Settler reconciliation through the Indigenous Studies program, the Interior Salishan Languages programs, the revision of the BA to include relevant competencies, and a series of faculty and staff hires (primarily but not exclusively in Indigenous Studies). While the most fiscally impactful of these efforts – the Language programs – are as campus wide priority, FASS has contributed key faculty to the work.
- 2) FASS is demonstrably committed to interdisciplinarity through our leadership in the (re)development and operation of the IGS program, several of our undergraduate programs (e.g. Philosophy, Politics, and Economics; Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies; FASS contributions to the Bachelor of Sustainability), and the disciplinary diversity within three of four Departments.
- 3) FASS has an oversized presence in the community engagement space, with significant contributions to community engaged research through ICER, and a proactive and well-resourced clinical psychology program, both training students and supporting mental health and well-being interventions on campus and in the wider community, and a small but notable public policy presence through the Roger Watts Debates, the Roger Gale Symposium, the IK Barber Distinguished Speakers series, and a wide range of public facing Departmental events.

All of these efforts are understood and enacted within the Faculty in the context of a broad commitment to place – that is the Central Interior of British Columbia – nested in wider ecological and geo-political dynamics, and our commitment to service and the public good through teaching and research. The review does an excellent job of reflecting on these efforts.

While the strategic plan refresh currently underway at the system level has not yet concluded, and a similar campus-wide initiative is just getting underway under the auspices of the DVC, the FASS reviewers are clear that they believe a proactive approach at the Faculty level is required. As a result, and with all due caveats around budgetary conditions, we are now undertaking a strategic planning process to render more legible current priorities and accomplishments in the Faculty, as well as re-engaging faculty and staff in the proactive process to identify new opportunities within the Faculty, with colleagues across the campus, and in conjunction with the Vancouver campus.

This renewed strategic planning process commenced with a series of Faculty-wide discussions in April and May 2025 framed by the draft plan developed from preliminary discussions in the spring of 2024. These meetings were intended to frame goals and strategies for the Faculty, in the context of the wider UBC system. Conversations were informed by four basic commitments: 1) a commitment to place-based thinking which finds expression in concern for teaching and research that is relevant to our communities and the wider national, global, and geo-political contexts in which we are all embedded; 2) a commitment to robust disciplinary foundations and a fulsome scope of programs in the Arts and Social Sciences for our students, and 3) interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary, trans-disciplinary approaches to knowledge generation facilitated by partnerships in the Faculty, University, region, Province, Canada, and beyond; and 4) a commitment to student and community engagement across the teaching, learning, and research spaces, with particular concern for Indigenous-settler reconciliation, a robust and healthy civil society, global citizenship, and ecological sustainability.

Faculty culture: developing a “culture of collaboration”

Current budget conditions have exacerbated pre-existing tensions and created new ones in FASS¹. The strategic planning process provides opportunities to re-articulate the FASS commitment to providing access to diverse disciplinary knowledge, research and training, as well as fostering a culture of collaboration in teaching and learning, research, and community engagement. Such collaborations operate within departments, within the Faculty, across campus, across the UBC system, with institutional partners in the wider post-secondary sector, and through other partnerships informed by a common goal of enhancing civil society and the public interest.

¹ Note, one key tension raised in the report, that between the Dean’s office and some colleagues in EPP, predates the current Dean stretching well back over the last decade. We welcome opportunities for productive dialogue, and re-iterate our basic commitment to a diverse and inclusive faculty serving the similarly diverse communities of the Central Interior and British Columbia.

FASS also welcomes renewed conversations with central units (i.e. enrolment services/scheduling, student recruiting, and development) to better respond to the key challenges we face. A wider culture of accountability is paramount in renewing these key partnerships.

In addition to seeking better budget conditions at the campus level, it is clear that some of the recent internal budget cuts driven by deficits projected due to revenue shortfalls should be revisited by the leadership team. We agree that departments and their Heads must have greater agency within Faculty-wide processes. Finally, and fundamentally, fostering a successful integration of new and recent appointees – including both mentorship and ensuring their opportunities to weigh in on Faculty priorities – is vital. COVID has transformed governance processes in their most fundamental forms, moving almost all governance related meetings to virtual settings. A more strategic and effective approach to relationship building through face-to-face interactions at departmental, Faculty, and campus levels is required; FASS is strongly in support of such efforts, and will be taking a proactive stance going forward.

We are also encouraged by elements of the UBC plan refresh that highlight the mutually beneficial and generative potential of better inter-campus collaborations at all levels. Research collaborations are already supported to a degree and have been taken up in various way; more and better student-oriented initiatives would be timely. For example, both recruitment and retention on the Okanagan campus are sensitive to processes unfolding primarily in Vancouver; greater dialogue between campuses would be helpful in mitigating unintended consequences in the Okanagan. Likewise, the development of structured pathways for students into the more specialized professional and graduate programming available on the Vancouver campus has tremendous potential for UBC Okanagan undergraduates (and, not coincidentally, the communities from which these students come). In the FASS spaces law and public policy are most obvious, as are all the relevant disciplinary graduate programs. A system-wide framework for supporting the required inter-campus conversations to create structured partnerships would be potentially transformative.

Table 1: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

Undergraduate Education and Student Learning	Actions	Timeline	Responsible office
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Provide better clarity with respect to how programs are shared/administered between FASS and the Faculty of Science. 	Comprehensive review of FASS/ FOS shared resources.	Underway and ongoing	Dean's office
	Review and reorganization of BA in Geography under FASS.	Ongoing - to be complete by Sept 2026	CCGS Head
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Re-examine the recent changes to the BA requirements to ensure that these core course requirements are more available in sufficient numbers for students to easily complete them. 	Collaborate with FCCS, CTL & Provost Office to revise the BA.	2025-26 curriculum cycle	Deans' and Provost offices, Faculty councils & Senate
	Ensure flexible and available course selection.	Ongoing	Dean's Office, AD Curriculum & AD Students
Graduate Education and Post-Doctoral Training	Actions	Timeline	Responsible office
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Consider new ways to promote the Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies program. 	Convene recruitment strategy conversation with IGS themes (and CoGS); part of the wider budget re-evaluation and deliberations.	No later than the 2026 recruitment cycle	AD R&GS, AD CoGS, IGS coordinator and IGS themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Encourage greater participation in existing programs and supervisory opportunities within and across UBC campuses. 	Explore collaborative avenues in conjunction with UBC strategic plan refresh; Greater collaboration from UBCV is welcome.	ASAP, with possible pilot initiatives for the 2026 or 2027 recruitment cycle	AD R&GS / AD SIP / CoGS
	Explore additional interdisciplinary program development involving FASS faculty.	Ongoing in the context of strategic planning consultations	FASS departments
Continuing and Professional Education	Actions	Timeline	Responsible office
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Explore opportunities for professional programs and/or micro-credentials. 	Invite departments and programs to make proposals.	Ongoing	Provost's office

Student Academic Experience and Support	Actions	Timeline	Responsible office
•Provide additional training experience for faculty serving as program advisors.	Articulate and enact strategy for closer collaboration and training between AD students, Academic Advising, and department advisors.	September 2025	Academic Advising, AD Students, Program Coordinators and Department Heads
•Develop a strategy for improving student retention in FASS.	Articulate and enact strategy for closer collaboration and training between AD students, Academic Advising, and department advisors, and OPAIR.	Ongoing	AD Students, OPAIR, VP Students, Academic Advising; Program Coordinators and Department Heads.
•Regularize the Faculty's joint project with Academic Advising.		Complete	AD Students & VP Students
Research, Scholarly, Creative and Professional Activity	Actions	Timeline	Responsible office
•Adopt and apply a flexible approach to the planning of teaching throughout the full calendar year to facilitate opportunities for greater research opportunities and success.	Investigate practices across campus and at UBC Vancouver; Explore a shared teaching related decision-making framework for FASS departments.	September 2025	Dean's office; Heads
•Diversify the Faculty's strategy beyond internal and Tri-Council Agency grant applications to broader, international opportunities to help support research and researchers.	Ensure information sharing between faculty members and ORS / VPRI.	Ongoing	ORS/VPRI ADR&GS
•Develop and implement a formal plan to ensure that diminishing international enrolments do not, in turn, diminish research opportunities, incentive, and momentum – particularly for early-career researchers who seem most affected by recent government and policy changes.	Consolidate and ensure equity in distribution of central research dedicated funds; part of the wider budget re-evaluation and deliberations.	Ongoing	Dean's office, Provost's Office, DVC, VPRI
Leadership and Administration	Actions	Timeline	Responsible office
•Identify academic strengths and collaborative opportunities through faculty engagement, followed by implementing pilot institutional support programs for promising initiatives. This approach should be coupled	Integrate into strategic planning initiative.	Immediately and ongoing, to conclude Fall 2025.	AD SIP

with updates to the merit and assessment criteria to properly recognize these collaborative efforts.	Convene inter-departmental merit review alignment conversation.	For the 2026 merit review cycle	Dean, Heads, and Departments
•Develop a strategic plan and an inclusive vision for FASS that employs a clear-eyed assessment of the current fiscal and political context, and the new realities of international recruitment.	Integrate into strategic planning initiative, but also dependent on wider budget related conversations.	Underway through May 2025, to conclude Fall of 2025	All FASS stakeholders
•Develop processes and procedures to manage succession in academic leadership in a timely way.	Re-organize (combine) AD R&GS and AD SIP portfolios. Articulate general processes.	Complete (to take effect January 2026) Ongoing	Dean Dean and Heads
•Review the division between the Associate Dean Undergraduate Students and the Associate Dean, Teaching, Learning and Curriculum, considering whether those responsibilities might be combined, with more administrative tasks delegated to staff.	Review	Ongoing – to be complete by Sept 2025	Dean’s office
•Explore opportunities for greater collaboration between the Kelowna and Vancouver campuses to enable UBC-O Psychology students to access a wider range of course offerings and address retention challenges.	Such collaborations have been touted as part of the system refresh, hence relevant more widely. Also relevant are mechanisms for Okanagan undergraduates to access UBC Vancouver professional programs.	ASAP, with possible pilot initiatives for the 2026 or 2027 recruitment cycle	Relevant Heads, AD R&GS / AD SIP / CoGS UBC senior leadership on both campuses
•Include increased funding for the clinical psychology program in the University’s government relations efforts.			Clinical Psych stakeholders and DVC’s office
•The Provost and the Principal should address the relationship between FASS’ Dean’s office and Recruitment. There is significant institutional risk in the lack of a coordinated recruitment strategy.	Convene conversation among relevant leadership.	In conjunction with the Strategic Planning process	Provost
•Develop strategic fund-raising priorities and support Departments’ community outreach initiatives.	Convene conversation among relevant leadership.	In conjunction with the Strategic Planning process	Dean’s office and Heads, Development

•Assess staffing in clinical training program and ensure sufficient human resources and manage shortfall in supervisory capacity arising from study leaves.	Articulate new staffing strategy and identify required resources.	Fall 2025	Dean and Head
People, Environment and Culture	Actions	Timeline	Responsible office
•Undertake a collective project of priority-setting that would have the added, and much needed, benefit of community-building within the Faculty.	Convene intra and inter departmental meetings to feed ideas into the Strategic planning process.	Underway, to conclude Fall of 2025	AD SIP
•Develop a staged on-boarding program for new faculty.	Develop a six-month program integrating existing resources with face-to-face workshops.	Ongoing	Dean's office, HR
•The Provost's Office, in partnership with Human Resources, should develop and implement a structured mediation process to address and resolve the broken relationship between the Dean's Office and the Department of Economics, Philosophy and Political Science and restore effective academic governance.	Convene relevant conversations.	Ongoing and in conjunction with the Strategic Planning process.	Provost's office, HR
Community Engagement	Actions	Timeline	Responsible office
•Highlight more explicitly the work being done in this space by faculty members in FASS, particularly as it helps to strengthen learning experiences and opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students, as well as building and strengthening relationships with local, provincial, national and international partners.		In conjunction with the Strategic Planning process.	Dean's office
Support for the University's and Campus Strategic Plan	Actions	Timeline	Responsible office
•Align more clearly and explicitly with existing UBC and UBC-O strategic plans, as a mechanism for reflection (and action) on priorities, direction, culture and identity. (See section above)		Ongoing, in conjunction with the Strategic Planning process.	Dean's office, AD SIP
•Seize the opportunity for greater responsibility and accountability, striving to		Ongoing, in conjunction with	All

position FASS more concretely at the center of university planning and operations.		the Strategic Planning process.	
Physical Infrastructure	Actions	Timeline	Responsible office
•Develop a principled approach to space allocation, one which privileges flexibility and proximity.	Review space planning and allocation processes.	In conjunction with a rationalized campus space allocation process	UBCO Strategic Space Committee in collaboration with the Dean's Office, Heads and FASS Space Committee
•Implement a strategy on shared space, on-campus and remote work expectations, and particularly unused office space to optimize available rooms.	Review space planning and allocation processes.	In conjunction with a rationalized campus space allocation process	UBCO Strategic Space Committee in collaboration with the Dean's Office, Heads and FASS Space Committee
•Prioritize student needs in all deliberations around space and space needs.	Review space planning and allocation processes.	In conjunction with a rationalized campus space allocation process	UBCO Strategic Space Committee in collaboration with the Dean's Office, Heads and FASS Space Committee
Financial Planning and Resources	Actions	Timeline	Responsible office
•Invest the required \$1M per annum as base-funding to support the institution's Indigenous Language Fluency programs.		In conjunction with campus budget measures	DVC and Provost
•Support Deans to develop their financial acumen.		See comments in the budget section above	
•Adopt a more transparent budget planning process that empowers all responsible stakeholders, namely department heads, and which ultimately serves the Faculty's diverse needs.	Explore a shared teaching related decision-making framework for FASS departments.	See budget section above	Dean's office and Heads
•Incentivize innovative revenue-generation efforts.		ongoing	Provost's Office