

In making public the results of the external review of our Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS), I want to acknowledge the ongoing commitment to excellence demonstrated by the faculty and staff as this review highlights both achievements and opportunities for growth.

The external reviewers identified numerous strengths within FSS that affirm the Faculty's contributions to our university. The review report notes the engaged senior leadership team and their dedication to curriculum modernization. It also recognizes the effectiveness of the research support team within the dean's office and the well-functioning student support center.

It is gratifying to see recognition of the Faculty's success in building meaningful community partnerships. These collaborations enhance our research impact and create valuable learning opportunities for students. The reviewers also praised the Faculty's data-informed approach to decision-making, especially in crucial areas like enrollment planning and student services.

The review committee's widespread positive feedback about the recently established Indigenous Studies Department further validates the importance of this initiative as part of McMaster's ongoing commitment to Indigenous education and scholarship.

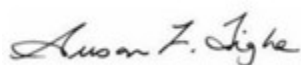
While celebrating these strengths, the review also identified areas where additional support will help the Faculty strengthen its impact. These include recommendations for enhancing support for interdisciplinary work and strategic planning to sustain our recent research successes within the current financial climate.

The insights presented in this review, gathered through extensive consultation with faculty, staff, students, and external partners during Fall 2024, will provide valuable guidance for the Faculty's future planning and development.

I am grateful to the review committee members, which included representation from the University of Saskatchewan, Carleton University, University of Alberta, and McMaster University. Their thorough and thoughtful evaluation will help shape the Faculty of Social Sciences' future direction and contribute to McMaster's ongoing academic excellence.

The Office of the Provost is committed to working closely with the dean and other Faculty leaders to carefully review the recommendations and develop a thoughtful action plan.

Sincerely,



Susan Tighe
Provost and Vice-President (Academic)

External Review Report

Faculty of Social Sciences

McMaster University

March 2025

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1. Executive Summary

Preamble

An external review of the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) at McMaster University was undertaken in the Fall of 2024. The review team was provided with key framing documents including the McMaster Institutional Priorities and Strategic Goals Report, the Faculty of Social Sciences Self-Study in advance of the onsite visit. The onsite visit consisted of two full days meeting with McMaster University community stakeholder groups including FSS students (undergraduate, graduate), administrative support staff, directors and department chairs, and senior leadership from the Dean's and Provost's office, respectively. This report was submitted in February 2025.

Strengths

The review team noted many strengths within FSS. These included:

- Strong support amongst chairs and directors, faculty, staff and students for the Dean and staff in the Dean's office;
- A commitment to and support for ensuring operational excellence within FSS and its constituent units;
- A commitment to modernizing curriculum, including providing careers information in every introductory course;
- A strong research support team within the Dean's office; and,
- An effective student support centre within FSS.

Areas for Enhancement

The review team identified several areas that could be enhanced, including:

- Maintaining a focus on the Faculty's core mission, especially interdisciplinarity, equity & inclusion;
- Identifying the core staff supports required in the Dean's office, given the centralized/decentralized mix at the university;
- Increasing supports for students in interdisciplinary programs, alongside efforts to support interdisciplinarity more broadly;
- Undertake planning on how best to maintain recent research successes in the face of budgetary constraints;
- Consider conducting a space audit, given post-pandemic changes in space use, as part of a wider assessment of post-pandemic challenges; and,

- Ensuring the Dean's involvement in advancement activities, especially in the face of budgetary challenges.

List of Recommendations

Mission and Mandate:

1. Identify how best to ensure that interdisciplinarity, equity and diversity, and engaging with the global community are provided the attention required so as to avoid them being overlooked.
2. Ensure to the greatest extent possible that budget cuts do not diminish existing strengths within FSS.
3. The attention, energy and resources devoted to Wilson College need to be balanced with competing priorities in FSS.
4. All departments should be encouraged to invest in Teaching Stream faculty hires to create balance in complement and predictability in program sustainability.

Teaching and Academic Programs:

5. Maintain regular curricular reviews to ensure that programs prioritize core courses over electives.
6. We would encourage the development of standards metrics to determine when and where additional faculty hires (and perhaps staff hires as well) occur, to maintain transparency of decision-making for when the budget situation improves.
7. Consider additional FTE capacity to build out the accessibility and accommodations office given the increasing number and complexities of students with accommodations and accessibility needs. If additional capacity isn't available, look at renewing or revising the current processes.
8. Create transparent and explicit governance regulations to address the "back door" pathway of students going into FSS only to transfer to FoS.
9. Examine if a BA in Psychology has a viable post-degree pathway (jobs, graduate schools) for the students who transfer from PNB into Psychology due to low grades in PNB. If there is no post-degree pathway, consider changing or dropping the BA in Psychology. Potentially work with FoS to consider a process to reduce the number of low grades.
10. Examine University wide elective choices to understand why students appear to be less likely to choose FSS electives and consider if / how other faculties might have changed their degree requirements to make FSS courses less desirable.
11. Revisit with the Provost's Office concerns around FSS students' ability to live in on-campus housing.

12. Explore potential to examine residency requirements of graduate students given the cost and lack of housing in the greater Hamilton-Wentworth area.
13. Address concerns from students that are currently in interdisciplinary programs (Social Psychology and Health, Aging and Society) that lack a “home” (relative to the disciplinary programs) which impacts their sense of belonging to FSS and access to student awards, supports, and student groups. Potentially create an anchor department /unit (recognizing that multiple departments contribute to the interdisciplinary nature of the program) to provide similar supports as the disciplinary programs.
14. Revisit efforts to provide micro-credentials in FSS which also includes determining who has academic authority over micro-credentials.
15. Share learnings / lessons from the McPherson Centre to help departments optimize their online course offerings.
16. In an effort to improve the quality of teaching at FSS, engage in a wider conversation around what options could be provided (in addition to the standard teaching evaluations) to provide feedback to instructors. Particular attention could be provided to pre-tenure faculty and those seeking promotion as this is often a crucial part of their teaching dossiers.
17. Communicate and promote heavily the Careers and Experiential Education Office (CEEO) given the important and impactful nature of their work.
18. Provide more transparent communication and documentation with respect to how student clubs and activities are supported.
19. Consider the sustainability of maintaining both the one-year major research paper master's programs and traditional two-year thesis-based master's programs.
20. Review the claw-back policy whereby students get a portion of their funding reduced if they are successful in external funding competitions.
21. Create a graduate student engagement survey to hear from them in an effort to better address their concerns.
22. Implement additional onboarding services and orientation sessions for new graduate students to ease their transition to graduate school.

Research and Scholarly Activities:

23. Identify and articulate clearly the goals that relate to the vision of “strengthening [the] research culture.” This would mean developing measurable outcomes to assist in identifying whether the goals of strengthening the Faculty’s research culture have been met.

24. Maintain research support staff in FSS in the face of budgetary constraints to reinforce the importance of research success.
25. In the face of budget constraints, retain the policy whereby researchers are given teaching releases when successful in major research grant competitions.
26. Reconsider the policy of awarding small grants (\$5,000) to unsuccessful research grants applications.
27. If possible, provide greater post-award grant support especially for those winning larger grants (e.g., SSHRC Partnership Grant) and in the face of bureaucratic and process challenges centrally.
28. Attempt to link graduate funding offers to existing research grants by incentivizing the practice in some way.
29. Create incentives to encourage globally-linked and interdisciplinary research projects be considered given their strategic importance at both the University and Faculty levels.
30. Create a set of transparent principles to guide the establishment, support and dissolution of centers, institutes, labs and platforms.
31. Create a forum for centers, institutes, labs and platforms to meet on a regular basis. This forum could work to identify barriers to success and places where processes and procedures need to be created or changed.
32. Specific to Sustainable Archaeology, FSS could work with the provost's office and government relations to advocate for this center more broadly.
33. University leadership should consider addressing the difficulties of recruiting and retaining talented high-quality personnel (HQP) given the costs associated with high turnover.

Leadership and Administration:

34. We recommend that the Dean, in consultation with units in the Faculty, identify a set of priorities to guide possible upcoming and difficult budget discussions should cuts become necessary. Transparency regarding priorities would help to alleviate some of the anxiety linked to budget concerns.
35. SS should clarify and try to reduce its duplicate reporting lines for professional staff as some report to the Dean, a central office, a faculty-level HR lead, or all three. Consider, for example, eliminating the dual reporting relationship of the Associate Dean Graduate Studies to both the School of Graduate Studies and the Faculty Dean.
36. Additional time and potential resources be given to prioritize advancement efforts.
37. Initiate a faculty space audit or plan to understand what space is available and how it is being used.

38. Identify and evaluate where there are duplications of services between the faculty and “central” given the amount of tuition dollars that flow back to central from the faculties.
39. Maintain and potentially expand IT supports to provide the entire faculty with the support needed to do their work in support of teaching, learning and research.

Resources:

40. The Dean must prioritize advancement efforts and ensure that the Dean’s role is front and center leading this outward facing work.
41. An institutional space audit report or plan should be commissioned to understand what space is currently available, how it is being used, and where new investments in the renovation of existing spaces are best deployed.
42. Central administration should consider devolving services entirely back to the Faculty(ies) on campus to avoid duplication. Alternatively, the central support units should be reviewed to evaluate the impact and demand for the services they offer, and delivery times and satisfaction surveys should be administered to assess responsiveness and capacity.
43. The University should invert the budget cycle and have revenue centers set and approve budgets first with cost centers following thereafter. Or, more ideally, the entire institutional budgeting process should be realigned so the timelines for budgeting and reconciliation are the same for all units.
44. The administrative process in place to request access to FSS financial reserves be streamlined as much as possible to avoid bottlenecks and to be responsive to a fluid financial landscape for the faculty and McMaster broadly.
45. It is recommended that FSS IT team and the Data Analyst are maintained and resourced effectively to continue providing the entire faculty with the support needed to do their work in support of teaching, learning, and research.

2. Mission and Mandate

A review of the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) self-study (2019-2024) and McMaster's Institutional Priorities and Strategic Framework (2021-2025) reveals five areas of importance:

- Experiential learning and career guidance;
- Engagement with local and global communities;
- Equity, diversity and Indigenous strategies;
- Operational excellence; and,
- Interdisciplinarity.

Another major initiative that has been added, jointly with the Faculty of Humanities (FH), is the creation of Wilson College. FSS has made a concerted effort to elevate the importance of experiential learning, and career coaching and development for undergraduate students as innovative, “value-add” features to its academic programs. The faculty prioritizes community engagement with local and global communities, and has established a solid foundation supporting Indigenization and decolonization.

Through consultations with faculty stakeholders, there was widespread support for the new careers center that is focuses directly on FSS students, helping them to secure internships and in-program job experience. The fact that students are made aware of the center at an early stage in their program is a strength of the faculty. There were, however, some concerns about what seemed to be unequal access to the career center either as an issue of communication (e.g., not all students are aware) or a difference between students that are from department specific programs (e.g., Sociology) versus interdisciplinary programs with no designated unit “anchor” (e.g., Social Psychology).

The review committee received widespread positive feedback about and praise for the recently established Indigenous Studies department. The faculty viewed this academic unit as a real benefit given the innovative, community-focused pedagogical practices of its faculty, and its focus on outreach and engagement with Indigenous stakeholders on campus, regionally, and nationally. That said, concerns about faculty workload and potential burnout were surfaced, especially for newer colleagues, given the many service demands/commitments they take on.

The review committee heard comparatively less about institutional-wide and faculty-specific EDI initiatives and priorities. That said, a recently established position (Faculty Liaison, Accommodations) located in the FSS Dean's office that will help build out EDI-

projects and engage with faculty, staff, and students to inform priorities and timelines for outcomes.

Operationalizing interdisciplinarity was noted as a challenge for some areas of the Faculty. Certainly there are strengths within individual departments with faculty members engaging creatively and impactfully in interdisciplinary teaching and research activities. However, McMaster's highly decentralized structure may be creating, unintentionally, barriers to do more. For example, the Faculty of Humanities has established more joint programs with faculties other than FSS suggesting a possible disincentive for more enhanced collaboration.

Some undergraduate students enrolled in FSS interdisciplinary programs noted they felt as though they lacked an "academic home" since they were not directly anchored to an established department. At the graduate level, there exists a potential missed opportunity to create a faculty wide, cohorted professional development class for all PhD students rather than maintaining department-specific professional development classes which are time and resource intensive, and may have small enrolments year-over-year. The Dean's proposal to create a School for interdisciplinary programs could provide greater support by co-locating similarly focused units and researchers.

A major strength of FSS was its commitment to operational excellence. The Dean has sponsored key initiatives to prioritize consolidation of processes to the faculty-level, automation and standardization (where possible) of administrative functions, enhanced communication and decision-making, transparency in resource allocation within the faculty, and a spirit of continuous improvement (e.g., the Six Sigma project).

Two pressing challenges for FSS are Wilson College and budget constraints. Conversations frequently focused on worries about institutional tuition shortfalls due to the reduction of international study permits given the changes in IRCC policies. While this is a sector-wide reality unfolding in real-time, stakeholders did express worries that revenue shortfalls could hurt growth within the faculty leading to program suspensions or cuts. Budget challenges were also cited as possible barriers to interdisciplinarity as departments might be too worried about their own programs to risk creating new programs.

While Wilson College has the potential to be transformative for FSS and FH, offering student-centered learning and leadership opportunities, its separate mandate could create, unintentionally, perceived competition with FSS and FH for increasingly scarce resources. Simply stated, it is important that the FSS's investments in Wilson College balance the needs of both units – Wilson College and FSS.

3. Teaching and Academic Programs

Faculty members in the FSS have a standard assigned teaching load of four courses per academic year (i.e. two and two structure). The self-study report cites faculty concerns about the increasing administrative burden of teaching and how that is consuming significant time and energy that goes beyond the normal expectations of teaching a standard course. Department heads and FSS administrative support staff also expressed concerns regarding this administrative burden when meeting with the committee, noting that these tasks encroach on research capacity and service commitments.

FSS reliance on sessionals/contract instructors was incentivized by the University's previous budget model to schedule extra course offerings in the spring/summer intersession term. Departments planned for these courses knowing that they would receive tuition revenue that would offset the hiring expense tied to sessionals/contract instructors. Some of these classes were not core FSS student program progression requirements; rather, they were meeting student demand from non-FSS students who needed FSS courses as electives.

In response to the 2019 FSS review report, the faculty is now actively working to reduce its sessional teaching. These efforts have resulted in the development of guiding criteria to identify the optimal and contingent use of sessionals/contract instructors in the delivery of undergraduate course offerings, including to help cover temporary needs when faculty are away on leave (e.g., research, parental, health-related) and when expertise not present in the existing faculty complement is required to enhance student learning opportunities.

FSS has made important investments in faculty complement renewal since 2019 in both the tenure and teaching faculty streams. That said, the self-study report cites a recent decline in tenured faculty of roughly five full-time positions. There is a modest increase in the teaching stream complement. FSS teaching stream faculty members are assigned seven courses or 21 credit units of teaching each year. Teaching stream faculty are encouraged to conduct research that, commendably, can be discipline-focused and not restricted to the study of teaching and learning as is the practice at some peer-institutions. Given the value and importance of teaching stream faculty in the effective and consistent delivery of undergraduate offerings, all departments should be encouraged to invest in this stream to create balance in complement and predictability in program sustainability. Those programs with the largest enrolments (e.g., Economics, Political Science, Social

Work), have made these investments to meet student demand in their respective disciplines.

While there has been renewal in complement, course offerings have continued to increase so there hasn't been a leveling out of workload for faculty members thus compounding concerns of burnout. The Dean explained that with the expectation of departments to engage in curricular reviews, there is also an opportunity to consider more intentionally what courses need to be prioritized for offer and how electives can be scheduled more strategically thus bringing workload and student program progression needs into better alignment. It is strongly recommended this exercise is completed to ensure course offerings focus on program progression milestones and degree requirements as a priority over electives.

Efforts to continue complement renewal have been put on hold given the University's financial forecast. While regrettable, some tenure-track searches have been retracted to reign in ongoing and future base budget commitments. This is not to say that all hiring is frozen as the Dean indicated the faculty is still considering Contractually Limited Hires (CLAs), which meet program delivery needs with greater flexibility long-term. CLAs can also be converted to permanent faculty appointments after six years thus providing career pathways for these colleagues and the ability for departments to retain exceptional instructors (budget permitting). We would encourage the development of standards metrics to determine when and where additional faculty hires (and perhaps staff hires as well) occur, to maintain transparency of decision-making for when the budget situation provides an opportunity to begin hiring again.

FSS administrative leadership described the existence of a "pandemic hangover" among some faculty members who appear disengaged from campus life and students. These colleagues are not consistently present in their offices or the wider department. They engage with students as much as is required and no more. They don't fully participate in collegial processes such as program curricular renewal and are generally withdrawn from campus life. Some department heads have tried to reach out to these members to better understand the situation and have heard that these colleagues feel overwhelmed by their workload. The burden of non-teaching administration is a growing concern for the professoriate broadly with increasing student needs for accommodation among other unique considerations. That said, faculty have to manage McMaster's processes that include the McMaster Missed Student Absence Form and Missed Academic Term Work requests and require individual instructors to manage and submit. While this doesn't

count as administrative work per se, it draws down faculty instruction time to manage on a case-by-case basis for every student who requests such consideration. The FSS Dean has responded creatively by establishing a full-time dedicated staff position – Accessibility and Accommodation Officer – to support faculty with these requirements. This officer interfaces directly with the central student accommodation office and has been extremely effective in supporting faculty. Given the immediate and positive impact of this role in FSS, investing additional FTE capacity to build out this function is recommended given the trajectory of increasing student accommodations and learning complexities across the post-secondary sector. If additional investments are not possible, reviewing these administrative processes for student accommodations and missed work should be a priority to consider if these forms are indeed necessary and if there is a better approach to meeting student needs while balancing faculty instructional time and capacity.

An important concern raised across several meetings was falling registrations after first year among students admitted to FSS who transfer their major to the Faculty of Science (FoS). It is estimated that 15% of FSS students do this as the GPA entrance requirements are lower for FSS programs (81-81%) compared to those for Science (88-89%). When admitted to FSS, these students “shadow” first year science requirements to facilitate their faculty transfer requests in second year. This “backdoor” pathway has been flagged by FSS and conversations are ongoing with leadership in Science to stem this practice. The committee was advised that FSS is exploring whether a computer marker could be created to flag pre-emptively those students whose course registrations include the science gateway courses in first year to provide an intervention window. While plausibly effective, a more transparent and explicit recommendation would be for the FSS to establish a governance approved program regulation explicitly preventing this so that students, faculty, and advising staff know such transfers will not be automatically approved, thus effectively closing this admissions’ loophole.

The movement of students between FSS and FoS is not entirely one-directional. The committee was advised that students also transfer from FoS to FSS when they fail out of the Psychology, Neuroscience, and Behaviour program (PNB), and register into the BA Psychology program, which was described as a degree program with fewer post-graduate career opportunities. The committee was advised that when these PNB students fail out of their first year, their academic records are negatively impacted making it impossible for them to remain in Science. As such, the off-ramp to FSS is one of few available pathways for them to complete a credential in the field of psychology, but one with few professional pathways post-graduation. If students are not prepared for the rigor

of PNB, it is advisable for FSS and FoS to identify where these shortcomings are and to adjust admission requirements to ensure students have the preparatory background needed to be academically successful. Also, if the BA Psych degree is indeed a “dead-end” program, FSS should consider suspending it and redirecting the resources it currently requires for delivery to an alternative exit pathway. Lastly, and recognizing this would fall to the authority of the FoS, a grade-forgiveness pathway should be considered so that students who are not successful in PNB can regain their academic standing to move into another program within Science rather than off-ramping to a program they did not want just to earn a degree.

The self-study report describes the fluctuations experienced in course registrations over the past several years. Concerns relating to these trends were discussed with the review committee across several meetings. After a registration peak in 2020-21, enrolments have consistently dropped, although this is more notable in some programs over others. Efforts to inquire into the reasons behind the drop suggest that student choice from outside of FSS programs are impacting enrolments and that it is not entirely clear why FSS electives have become less popular. A systematic review of these trends is recommended to identify what drivers may be impacting these elective choices, including possible program changes in other faculties that have removed them as requirements.

The committee was also informed of another factor impacting enrolments that appears, on the surface, to be punitive towards students interested in pursuing a social science education at McMaster. This relates to a residence rule focusing on GPA. We recognize that guaranteeing residence spots for incoming students is a challenge across the sector; however, at McMaster, priority is given to students with the highest entrance/academic GPAs. Entrance/academic GPAs are set by program/faculty specific admission regulations. Faculties with higher entrance requirements (e.g., Science, Engineering) will admit a greater number of students with residence priority given the higher GPA requirements. Because FSS (and Faculty of Humanities, as well) have lower GPA admission requirements, students declaring programs in these Faculties are a lower priority for residence spots thus disincentivizing students to pursue studies in these disciplines if it means their chances of securing a spot in residence is less likely. It is recommended that the University revisit this policy and change/rescind it to create greater equity among students who wish to study at McMaster and live in residence, and notably those in FSS programs. If such a change is implemented, tracking possible upswings in registrations related to it would be insightful.

FSS values interdisciplinary teaching, learning, and research and has worked strategically to build and sustain degree programs, certificates, and minors reflecting its importance. There is a respectful understanding among department heads that to be truly interdisciplinary and to do it well requires time and resources; it is a “long-game.” Two interdisciplinary programs—Social Psychology and Health, Aging, and Society—are among the most subscribed within the faculty, reflecting positive student demand and curricular delivery. We recommend that greater focus be devoted to the student-experience within these programs. We heard from interdisciplinary undergraduate students that while they are extremely positive about their programs, they lack a sense of belonging and community given the absence of an affiliation with a specific department. The interdisciplinary structure also means that they don’t have access to the same student awards, student groups, and supports that disciplinary-department students do. It is recommended that FSS consider how it can establish an “anchor” for these students in at least one department that contributes to the delivery of an interdisciplinary program recognizing that these programs pull expertise from across the entire faculty. This “anchor” could help bridge this desire to have community as an important and lasting element of the student experience. It would also ensure these high achieving students were being considered for student awards and scholarships to the same degree.

Undergraduate Curriculum Renewal

The Dean is to be commended for his efforts to engage department heads and faculty members in faculty-wide curricular renewal. Often a daunting and resisted task, establishing a culture within FSS that initiate annual curricular reviews ensures programs are responsive to student and sector demands, and that they maintain high standards for quality and as such remain competitive among peer institutions. As would be expected, not all faculty members universally participate; but a critical mass appear to. The review process factors in year-over-year enrolments, course offerings, faculty complement, and student program progression and needs. Further, these regular exercises help to identify registration bottlenecks that can be addressed before they become more challenging issues to manage. The Dean also encourages departments to look for inter-faculty opportunities that elevate interdisciplinary teaching and learning, including sub-degree minors.

Faculty were described as appreciating the opportunity to be creative and collaborative and contributing to that “long-game” strategic vision for FSS. Importantly, the review

process is not focused on what new offerings can be established; rather, there was an emphasis of repurposing what was already approved by updating, repackaging, and rebranding existing programs thus enhancing them and ensuring they remain current. One notable example is the Department of Economics creating an option to accelerate the completion of their existing four-year honours program in a compressed three-year timeframe. Department heads also remarked that this work is possible in large part because it is evidence-based, which helps them make strategic decisions on program revision and delivery with greater confidence. It is important to recognize that academic department managers play an important role supporting these reviews and contributing to their successful outcomes.

The review committee learned through its consultations that efforts to establish micro-credentials in FSS have been hampered by administrative complications and delays. We learned that the Vice-Provost Learning (VPL) portfolio has been leading institutional efforts to launch a micro-credentials office; progress has been slow, however, thus delaying development of these offerings and creating frustration among proponents wishing to move proposals forward. If there is a bottleneck with a central supporting office, it is recommended that attention is focused on identifying what the causes are and to help mitigate and resolve them. FSS departments expressed that these delays and lack of response to proposals are limiting learning opportunities for non-traditional students. Further, there are lost opportunities to build admissions pathways to degree programs by using micro-credentials to stack and ladder credits for advanced standing. Another recommendation would be a review to establish academic authority over these credentials and whose office has jurisdiction to approve, promote, and deliver them. Clarifying such authority lines will be important as these types of programs are a potential new area for revenue generation.

The committee had productive conversations with department heads on available supports for faculty teaching. Through the INSPIRE office, there exists funding to develop effective online offerings, which faculty have used to create programs such as Sociology's three-year online BA. That said, expanding these supports would be welcome. Department heads recognize that online offerings with large enrolments offer short term gains in tuition revenue, but the question surfaced about "what are we really doing?" In other words, faculty teaching these large sections want to do it well and want students to have positive learning experiences in an online modality. But faculty want to understand and learn best practices for this format of teaching, which includes knowing how to implement them and how to effectively use supporting technologies that enhance the student experience. If the

Vice Provost Learning portfolio offers these resources – through the McPherson Centre – it is recommended that they are more effectively and regularly promoted/offered. Currently, faculty find accessing these supports/resources "clunky," which discourages professional development and enhancement in teaching practices. Overall, clearer pathways of communication and engagement with the VPL is desired and it is recommended that attention be focused on these. If not, the overall effectiveness of the office and its supports are likely to be questioned.

Department heads also discussed how the university currently evaluates the quality of teaching. Like every post-secondary in the sector, professors administer (where enrolment thresholds permit) student evaluations at the end of a course. The problems with these are well understood; the qualitative feedback they provide is tenuous at best. Peer-evaluations of teaching are more impactful and meaningful but can be challenging to undertake given workload demands, especially in small academic departments when there are few colleagues to undertake this additional responsibility. One idea that surfaced was to consider asking recent FSS graduates to provide evaluative feedback on their degree-program experience; the challenge here was an inability to access alumni databases, with the central University Relations Office cited as a barrier. Recognizing this is a challenge for all faculties and universities, it is recommended to engage in wider conversations across FSS on what options could be considered to provide important and effective evaluative feedback on teaching and course content. For pre-tenure faculty and those pursuing promotion, this formative information is an important component of their teaching dossiers.

Careers and Experiential Education Office (CEEEO)

The FSS Careers and Experiential Education Office (CEEEO) provides outstanding value to the student experience for all FSS programs. Led by a coordinator, recruitment manager, and six staff members, the CEEEO is centralized within the Faculty and works closely with departments to ensure undergraduate students can apply for a placement opportunity during their studies. The CEEEO ensures that all first-year FSS courses have a career unit built into their curricula so that students are made aware of the office and the opportunities that it provides. There are also preparatory courses students are required to take prior to starting a placement so as to learn essential professional development skills that are needed and expected by employers in the workplace.

We heard that the goal of the office is to “break down the linear way of thinking” that many students may have where they believe that must select a program major that has an identifiable job/career at its end. Instead, the work experiences and preparatory training offered through the CEEO teaches students that careers “zigzag” and that that is *okay*. Students have the opportunity through their placements to learn about different employment pathways and how they can promote and apply the transferable skills acquired through their SocSci studies and training. Students receive a transcript notation for their placements making their work experience an explicit part of their academic record, which is invaluable when applying for jobs post-graduation. Students also receive in-course career guidance and work with two dedicated CEEO staff members who actively find placements for students and oversee the administrative steps required to set everything up.

The success of the CEEO has been outstanding since its inception. FSS and the CEEO administrators and staff described the unexpected “positive spill-over” from the placements. Specifically, it was noted FSS has learned a great deal about the job market from students when they complete their placements and return to their studies. This provides invaluable FSS-specific student data and professional/career outcomes that are not available anywhere else at McMaster. Further, the CEEO provides a strong recruitment rationale for students and their parents by offering a clear link between a FSS education and the employability of FSS graduates in the workforce. This is, to the review committee's knowledge, the only faculty-centred coordinated work integrated learning office providing career training for social science students anywhere in the country. It is strongly recommended that this be heavily promoted by FSS and McMaster as a value-added feature for student recruitment and retention. The CEEO represents the gold standard that other post-secondary institutions in Canada should look to for inspiration and guidance in supporting undergraduate education in the social sciences.

Undergraduate Student Experience

The review team met with a cross-section of undergraduate students and discussed with them their experiences in programs, student groups and activities, wayfinding on campus, access to supports and services, and overall satisfaction with being a FSS community member. Overall, the feedback was very positive. The students all spoke highly of their programs, their positive learning experiences with professors, and satisfaction with the quality of education they were receiving. The students did raise some concerns about

department-level student groups accessing funds from the faculty-level student association, and how difficult it was to secure funding for local events even at the smallest scale. The Social Sciences Society has direct access to the Dean's office and oversight over a student-activity budget, yet it seems as though there is tension between this group and department level groups, which unfortunately stifles attempts to hold activities aimed at enhancing student belonging and engagement. It is recommended that a more transparent approach to supporting and approving student-led activities across FSS is considered to ensure equity of access to resources and funding opportunities.

The students expressed an appreciation for the student accessibility office and services it offers, and several noted that they had used these resources during their studies.

Graduate Education and Graduate Student Experience

Every FSS department offers a graduate program, with one-year Master's program (MA) options that include a major research paper (MRP). This option is attractive for students looking to gain additional post-graduate training and research experience but in a more compressed timeline than the thesis-based program option, which typically takes two or more years to complete. That said, the one-year MA program options were described as being robust enough that they do not create barriers for students wishing to pursue a Doctoral degree.

The FSS and the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) partner to provide professional development opportunities and career preparation skills training for graduate students, which mirror peer institutional efforts across Canada. Times to completion for Master's students are consistent at two to three years for thesis-based programs. For Doctoral programs, the average is five years, which is very respectable for social science programs. The question of sustainability was raised in our consultations and whether it makes sense to offer all of these program options going forward. It is recommended that FSS, in collaboration with the departments, consider the need to maintain both one-year MRP Master's *and* the traditional two-year thesis-based Master's programs. If the MRP provides robust training for its graduates on a more compressed timeline without barriers to pursuing a PhD post-graduation, it might be worthwhile to consider suspending the two-year option as it will draw down resources both financially and in supervisory capacity among faculty to maintain both streams in every unit.

The review committee was briefed on the dual reporting structure the Associate Dean Graduate has with both the FSS Dean *and* the SGS Dean. This structure was also discussed by the SGS review team in their recently completed report available through the Provost's Office. Dual reporting lines are discouraged in sector best practices as they can create confusion and conflict should there be a divergence in supervisor priorities and timelines. Following the SGS report recommendations, we also encourage McMaster to consider eliminating the dual reporting structure and to establish internal SGS Associate Deans who can work collaboratively with faculty Associate Deans Graduate across the university. This would enable faculty Associate Deans to focus more specifically on their disciplinary programs and local needs while the SGS Associate Deans can support graduate regulations, policies, and governance approval pathways/committees that crosscut all graduate programs at McMaster. It will also eliminate any possible collision points between the Deans of each respective faculty.

Graduate student funding was discussed with the review committee as was the recent Teaching Assistant strike at McMaster. A major driver in the labour dispute, as raised by the union, was the competitiveness of student funding packages, which is not within the scope of the employment relationship or the collective agreement. McMaster offers strong funding packages for eligible graduate students; however, some peer institutions in Ontario have recently introduced a fifth year of doctoral funding at up to \$40,000/yr, which is impacting recruitment efforts to attract top tier applicants. As the cost of living continues to rise across the country and the expense of graduate education similarly increases, the entire sector will need to consider what is sustainable for institutional budgets and equitable across programs. This is not an easily solved problem but something universities will need to engage in meaningful discussions to consider. The lack of sector-wide data on graduate funding could be adding to the problem in that individual universities are never quite certain of the level of funding offered to graduate students by other universities and rely on anecdotes; the sharing of information might avoid this "race to the top."

One action item within the scope of McMaster and SGS is to revisit the "claw-back" policy recently instituted that affects students who are successful in external funding competitions (e.g., Tri-Council) and who also hold major awards internal to the university (e.g., Harry Lyman Hooker Fellowship). The review committee met with current graduate students who noted this policy hurts them financially by preventing them from concurrently holding major awards. Effectively, this places a cap on the maximum amount of funding that they can hold and serves to disincentivize them to apply for

external funding if they already hold a major internal McMaster scholarship. Should this be an unintended outcome of the policy, McMaster's Tri-Agency envelope will be impacted with fewer student awards as there is no net-benefit for them to apply other than prestige. In a world of increasing costs, we recommend that FSS/SGS revisit this policy, including consulting with graduate student on the impact of the policy.

The review committee also learned from graduate students how much they value the supervisor-supervisee mentoring relationship, and the collaborative support they receive from their supervisory committees. This reflects a healthy and respectful culture of supervision and mentorship among faculty members, which is important to recognize. Because of this appreciation, students remarked that they would like to see even more engagement with their respective departments' faculty members; however, some noted this has been a challenge in certain instances when faculty are not regularly on campus nor present at events (e.g., colloquia, celebrations). This unevenness in faculty engagement does impact the student cohort, particularly for graduate student trainees, and the feeling of departmental cohesion and community.

Graduate students seem to have a solid awareness of the supports available to them at McMaster and spoke of decent wayfinding resources when they needed to access them. There was feedback on improving the flow of information to students more generally citing that email is not a useful medium. One suggestion was to have staff and administrators visit students in person whether in classes/seminars or at other graduate student-specific events to share information and engage in in-person conversations. Another suggestion was to distribute an engagement satisfaction survey to ask students directly what is working, what is not, and to solicit suggestions for new modes of interaction and information-sharing. If FSS/SGS has not circulated a graduate student engagement survey recently, it is recommended that now is the time to do so. Students also requested FSS/SGS consider offering more robust onboarding and orientation resources for new students that would help foster community and a cohort effect.

4. Research and Scholarly Activities

The Faculty can point to several successes in research. For one, it boasts a significant number of research chairs (15) given its overall research faculty complement. Every pre-tenure research faculty member also now holds a SSHRC Insight or Insight Development Grant as the result of a focused effort to provide effective research grant support to this cohort. In 2023/24, over 134 research grants with a FSS member as principal investigator were active. FSS has had a SSHRC success rate above the national standard for multiple years and has enjoyed growth in overall Tri-Council funding. And over 32 research centres, networks and platforms are found in FSS. These are undoubtedly important elements in the Faculty's efforts to "strengthen its research culture," a goal underscored in the self-study.

As noted above, the FSS wishes to "strengthen its research culture." Absent in the self-study are first, any specific understanding of the perceived weakness in this area and, relatedly, any metrics for assessing how well it is faring in reaching its goal. We recommend laying out clearly the need in this area (e.g., increase the number of grants held by FSS faculty? Increase the overall amount of research funding coming into FSS? Increase the number of graduate students included as co-authors in peer-reviewed publications prior to graduation?) and then identify appropriate metrics for tracking overall success. Such an exercise would help focus efforts and increase the potential for success and, moreover, help to ensure that research-focused faculty clearly understand what is being asked of them.

Research Support

Within the Dean's office, three staff members – one being a part-time contract position – provide research support along with the Associate Dean Research. We heard from FSS faculty members that this team is central to research success in the Faculty and ought to be protected in the face of budgetary pressures. The ability to award teaching release – one course per major grant – also is undeniably important as faculty members noted to us that time was the core resource required for sustained and successful research activity. It is strongly recommended that this policy be protected to the greatest extent possible in the face of financial pressures. Visible and concrete support for research that is provided in this manner would also go some distance towards reinforcing a research culture in FSS faculty. The policy of awarding small grants (\$5,000) to unsuccessful research grants applications could be eliminated in the face of budgetary constraints as such bridge funding to enhance/improve a previously submitted proposal is not always successful. Further these funds could be redirected towards securing teaching release for faculty who are successful in their submissions for multi-year funding.

The review team heard that greater post-award administrative support is required, especially as grants increase in their dollar value and as the number of collaborators involved in the project increases. Researchers are better prepared to undertake the research project than they are to hire and supervise staff, and navigate the multiple processes and policies involved in these requirements.

Like many SSHRC dominated faculties, linking graduate funding offers to existing grants – something more often done in Engineering and Science Faculties – has been limited historically. It is recommended that the Dean consider incentives for doing so, including research assistant top-ups for those who do so or limiting teaching release to those who employ their research grants to be linked to graduate student entrance funding offers.

Similarly, it is recommended that incentives to encourage globally-linked and interdisciplinary research projects be considered given their strategic importance at both the University and Faculty levels.

Centres, Institutes, Labs and Platforms

FSS has 32 research centers, institutes, labs, and platforms. The size and scale among them, however, vary considerably. Sustainable Archaeology is the largest research facility with the most expansive physical footprint whereas other centers and institutes comprise one or two faculty members that, outwardly facing, might appear large but, in reality, are extremely lean in terms of their overall operations and capacity. These research entities are, for the most part, structured to be cost neutral. They are not uniformly organized to engage in student experiential learning opportunities, meaning that some do offer training opportunities and some do not. The Gilbrea Center has a highly successful undergraduate research program where up to 12 students at a time can gain experience in a research environment working with faculty on project-specific initiatives. This is a clever and strategic way to retain those top undergraduate students and encourage them to apply for future graduate studies in the center. The faculty is also looking to organize a visiting internship structure using MITACS funding, which is promising.

It is recommended that the Dean consider developing a set of principles to guide the establishment, maintenance and dissolution of these organizations within the Faculty. Such a policy would ensure clarity of expectations regarding their role in advancing the

strategic plan and potentially avoid some of the concerns and frustration that was shared with us regarding the decision to dissolve the SPARK center. It is our understanding that these organizations submit 5-year budget plans, but these alone may not provide the guidance and common understanding of their specific role in advancing the overall Faculty strategy.

Directors noted in their meeting with the review team that it was one of few times that they had had an opportunity to meet to speak about their respective operations and priorities. They responded positively to the ability to interact and noted they would welcome the chance to meet more regularly to highlight accomplishments, share ideas, and problem-solve the similar challenges they face within FSS. It is recommended the Dean consider establishing a forum – either formal or ad hoc – for directors to meet on an ongoing basis, perhaps one overseen by the Associate Dean Research or through the establishment of a Faculty-wide research committee.

Directors explained to the review committee that the biggest barrier to the regular functioning of all facilities, centers, labs, and platforms was institutional bureaucracy. Bureaucracy was described as “impossible” to work within and that it bogs down operations and stifles innovation. The university’s organizational model makes working with the central units more difficult than it needs to be. A specific example of this was the handling and approval of service contracts. That said, those interfaces at the faculty level are more flexible and afford directors greater autonomy to operate more responsively at the local level. This working relationship with the Dean and the Faculty administrative support staff is greatly appreciated and valued. To ease the bureaucratic bottlenecks and frustration, it is recommended that FSS work through the Provost’s office and other central leadership to identify where processes and procedures are causing problems and pain points and to consider, collaboratively, how these processes and procedures could be improved and streamlined so that researchers can focus their energy on innovation and outputs rather than struggling in an ecosystem that bogs down progress unnecessarily.

The Sustainable Archaeology’s business model was structured to be self-sustaining on contracts with the provincial government given its capacity to be a regulated repository for archaeological collections. In principle, the plan should work; however, it has been plagued by bureaucratic structures and processes both internally and externally. Greater advocacy from McMaster’s central Government Relations office is absolutely necessary to help work through this bureaucracy to ensure the facility can be sustainable and that its business plan can be effectively executed. It is recommended that FSS work with the

Provost's office and Government Relations to encourage this advocacy. It is perplexing why this hasn't already been initiated given the faculty has been in this liminal state for more than a decade.

Directors described the difficulties of recruiting and retaining talented high-quality personnel (HQP) given the demands for their skill sets in the private sector and the low salary caps within universities generally due to contracts and collective agreements. Turnover is expensive both in terms of lost knowledge and time, but also efforts to stabilize the constant revolving door of hiring, training, and off boarding when HQP leave. This is a problem that reaches beyond FSS, and as such, we recommend that the university leadership consider how best to address the issue given the large and yet often invisible costs associated with it.

5. Leadership and Administration

This is a clear strength of FSS. The review team was impressed at how supportive and positive so many people spoke of the Faculty's leadership across all levels (e.g., department chairs, associate deans, deans, staff). People felt like the decision-making processes were clearly communicated. They also appreciated the addition of a data analyst within the Dean's office to assist in better understanding things like enrolment patterns across specific programs over time. Stakeholders also spoke positively about the level of engagement by the Dean in all facets of the faculty's day-to-day functions. The Dean meets regularly with all parts of the faculty and as someone commented, he is 'quietly hands on,' referring to the fact that the Dean is directly involved in a lot of the decisions and activities but not in a dominating capacity.

McMaster is a highly decentralized university. FSS has taken the initiative to bridge gaps in access and responsiveness to services and processes located in central service units by creating its own faculty-central processes, services, and supports. One of five priorities outlined by the faculty in its current strategic plan – Operational Excellence – has been driving change to create efficiencies in the way the faculty's administrative organization works and how faculty, staff, and students access and share resources/supports. A particularly successful program that was identified in our consultations was the Six Sigma program for staff. It creates a type of reward system focused on collaboration and joint problem-solving. The program has been well-received and is a successful team-building

exercise in addition to incentivizing support across units, consistency in process, and effective service levels. Staff spoke highly of the program.

Budget was top of mind in many conversations given the recent and amplifying issues across the post-secondary sector in Canada. That said, members of FSS felt the budgeting process the Dean has implemented is transparent, clear, and equitable balancing the diverse needs of all departments and programs. As one might imagine, budgetary concerns create anxiety as there are some departments with low enrolments that fear that they will bear the brunt of the budget challenges. The activity-based budget model makes finances relatively transparent. Resources that are allocated based on enrolment numbers, however, might mean a focus on enrolment at the expense of other priorities. This could lead to a situation where you have “have” departments (those with lots of students) and “have not” departments (those with fewer students). We recommend that the Dean, in consultation with units in the Faculty, identify a set of priorities to guide possible upcoming and difficult budget discussions should cuts become necessary. While the unwillingness to adopt an across-the-board approach to reducing costs is lauded, the uncertainty regarding how cuts will be determined can lead to unnecessary anxiety. Transparency regarding priorities would help to alleviate some of the anxiety linked to budget concerns.

Junior faculty are provided with significant support in the form of course releases during their probationary period, research administration support, as well as course releases for successful grant applications.

If there was any tension, it appeared to be limited between the staff that are externally focused (either outside of the faculty or outside of the university) versus staff that are internally focused (work on specific academic programs). The concern is that the dean and senior leadership are so focused on internally supporting the faculty that they might be missing out on opportunities for external connections, be it with other faculties in the university or other stakeholders outside of the university. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, there is a concern that the focus on the development of Wilson College, the leadership might be overly focused on it to the neglect of the other activities in the faculty.

One of the challenges between McMaster at the University level and at the Faculty level was the dual reporting lines (some more dotted than others) for many of administrative functions (mentioned earlier). This has the potential for confusion and inconsistency with respect to goal-setting and performance management. It also might be difficult to deliver on mandate with so many reporting lines. As such, we recommend that FSS work with

McMaster to create some standards around the reporting structure, which might include "lifting and shifting" everyone to the same centralized hub reporting structure.

6. Resources

Fundraising

FSS has a full-time dedicated team focusing on advancement and alumni relations. The Dean has attended the annual Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) conference for Deans and Directors, so there is a foundation to lead and build a culture of philanthropy within the Faculty. That said, discussions focused on tensions between inward facing time and external facing time engaging with donors and alumni. The Dean acknowledges the importance of this work yet knows more attention needs to be focused on it. Advancement support staff expressed a desire to place greater priority on this external engagement, especially given the increasing budget pressure on available resources and the faculty's fiscal forecast. Given these pressures, fundraising efforts will become increasingly important. Further, as McMaster's next campaign enters the public phase, building momentum with donors and alumni will help jump start FSS' efforts to contribute with a deliberate focus on its own priorities. It is recommended that the Dean prioritize advancement efforts and ensure that the Dean's role is front and center leading this outward facing work. Given the Dean's well respected and established rapport and reputation within the faculty, there is little risk to changing his focus to support this strategic work going forward. Furthermore, the Dean's excellent working relationships with department heads and faculty members will help encourage all members of the faculty to contribute to these fundraising efforts.

Space and Facilities

Space across campus is variable both in size and modernized infrastructure (e.g., IT, furniture). Access to the updated space is also variable. However, the volume of space was described as a bigger constraint meaning if larger spaces, like lecture halls, are required for increasingly larger classes, they just don't exist. The university, overall, is challenged in the availability of functional space. This creates frustration for faculty members particularly if they are assigned large-enrolment sections of courses and they are required to teach them in sub-standard spaces. FSS is piloting a hybrid teaching strategy to mitigate these challenges and the resulting feedback will provide important insights on the

success of the model. If McMaster does not have an institutional space audit report or plan, it is recommended one is commissioned as it will be important to understand what space is currently available, how it is being used, and where new investments in renovation of existing spaces are best deployed.

Discussions with graduate students provided additional insights on space constraints within the faculty. Many graduate students live off-campus yet the residency requirements for many programs dictate that they must be on campus for a specific period of time in their program (e.g., first two of four years of a PhD). There are few landing spots available for graduate students so while they may want to be present on campus and visible in their respective departments, office and desk space is unpredictable. Not having access to these spaces/infrastructure negatively impacts efforts to build community and comradery among graduate students. It also raises concerns about consequences, if any, if they do not meet this program requirement, which is increasingly difficult to mandate given how many students commute and live outside the greater Hamilton-Wentworth area. It is recommended that FSS departments investigate if the residence requirement among its graduate programs is still relevant. If it is not, removing it as a program regulation should be considered. If the regulation is still relevant and a mechanism to encourage graduate students to participate in department functions and community, finding space, even if shared, for students to occupy is essential.

Budgeting

McMaster uses a Responsibility Centre Management (RCM) budget model where revenue centers are responsible for the management and accounting of their resources in relation to the activities that generate revenue (e.g., teaching activity and tuition revenue). FSS receives 100% of its tuition revenue and then pays between 40-42% “tax” to support central support units and the services they provide. Consistently the review committee heard that this is a high price to pay to central support units for services that are difficult to access, inconsistent in their delivery, and frustrating to interact with. The faculty has resorted to creating its own equivalent roles and supports locally as a means to respond more quickly to the needs of faculty, students, and staff, and to ensure that what is being offered is tailored to FSS-specific requirements. This is clearly duplicative and expensive; yet the satisfaction with the local supports and services justifies the cost. It is recommended that central administration devolve these services entirely back to the Faculty(ies) on campus so as to avoid duplication. Alternatively, the central support units should be reviewed to evaluate the impact and demand for the services they offer and their

delivery times. Developing and distributing satisfaction surveys should also be considered to assess these units' responsiveness to service delivery and capacity to meet demands.

The review committee learned that the timing of the institutional budgeting process is, essentially, backwards where cost units (i.e., central support/service units) set their budgets ahead of the revenue centers (i.e., teaching faculties). Specifically, the cost units set and approve their budgets during the fall term each fiscal year whereas revenue centers set and approve theirs every spring. The reality of this timing is that the university is spending blindly against revenues they don't know are actually available. This creates significant financial risk especially in the university's current reality with a decrease in international student tuition revenue. It is recommended that the university, minimally, invert this timing with revenue centers setting and approving budgets first with cost centers following thereafter. Or, more ideally, the entire institutional budgeting process should be realigned so the timelines for budgeting and reconciliation are the same for all units. This would greatly facilitate forecasting throughout the year thus allowing for in-year fiscal adjustments, as needed, across the entire university.

FSS has a healthy financial reserve at the moment given the careful stewardship of its resources and sound planning over the past five years. Importantly, the faculty reconciled a sizeable institutional structural deficit in recent years, which should be recognized and praised. In the face of declining revenues and increasing expenditures, including inflationary costs, these reserves will need to be drawn down to prevent the accumulation of a future Faculty deficit. However, the review committee learned there is an administrative process to justify accessing these reserve funds. This is a prudent measure to ensure that they are spent responsibly when needed and in support of strategic priorities. Given the precarity that the sector expects in the coming months and years, it is recommended that this administrative process to request access to these reserves be streamlined as much as possible to avoid bottlenecks and efforts to be responsive to a fluid financial landscape for the faculty and McMaster broadly.

Systems

McMaster, like many other universities in Canada, is operating with an old enterprise system that requires a massive capital investment to upgrade and/or replace. While McMaster's registrarial system (Slate) is newer and can be maintained by institutional IT staff rather than relying on vendor support, the institutional enterprise system – Mosaic – is described as non-intuitive and not user-friendly. Consequently, users are relying on time-

consuming workarounds to complete operational tasks. Faculty and staff in FSS universally said that the FSS IT team and the Data Analyst are what keeps everything together and functioning effectively. These colleagues and their skills are highly valued, and they are recognized as invaluable resources to FSS. It is recommended that these roles are maintained and resourced effectively to continue providing the entire faculty with the support needed to do their work in support of teaching, learning, and research.

7. Concluding Remarks

The coming years are undoubtedly going to be difficult given the financial challenges facing the Canadian post-secondary sector. The need for innovation and new thinking to help navigate and weather these challenges is required. Importantly, FSS is in a strong position given widespread support for the Dean and the decanal office, the established practice of consultative and transparent decision-making, and a considerable reserve balance. FSS students are generally pleased with their programs, the quality of instruction they receive, and with the overall support provided to them. Curriculum review is ongoing, focused on a desire to increase instruction by permanent faculty members and to identify the causes behind drops in enrolment in FSS courses serving as electives for non-FSS students. And intentional efforts to strengthen the research culture within the Faculty appear to have taken root.

As noted in the self-study, however, the fiscal outlook for the Faculty in the coming years will be a challenge. The Dean anticipates deficit budgets and enrolments appear to be declining, particularly given the international student study permit restrictions imposed by the federal government. Student retention is a concern particularly when the country is facing a cost-of-living crisis. The focus on increasing revenue by increasing enrolment and alternative sources of revenue (e.g., micro-credentials, professional master's programs) is imperative to navigating future challenges. There are, however, no single nor simple solutions to such complex issues. A targeted approach that is designed to future-proof FSS's existing strengths in the face of cuts is encouraged. A continued commitment to consultation and transparency is essential for ensuring the buy-in required for units to investigate and develop innovating solutions and programming. Reducing the unnecessary bureaucracy that swallows up limited research time and developing post-award support in FSS could help to address the increasing time demands on researchers. Increased focus on the professionalization of programs, with clear information on career outcomes, holds the possibility of increasing both retention and enrolment. And, the new Wilson College

has the potential to attract a strong new cohort of students to FSS. In short, a continued focus on developing the existing strengths within FSS, while also directly addressing needed change should positively position the Faculty for addressing these challenges.