

Director's Response

The Wilson Centre
External Reviewer Report
17 December 2020

On behalf of the Wilson Centre, I would like to express our thanks to Professor David Hirsh and Professor Emerita Jocelyn Lockyer for their extremely thoughtful and thorough review of the Wilson Centre. In spite of the challenges posed by this review being postponed from April 2020 and conducted virtually, Professors Hirsh and Lockyer adeptly articulated the foundational values, ethos, and culture of the Centre. I note with pride and gratitude their description of the many strengths of the Wilson Centre, including (while not part of the remit of the review) their acknowledgement of the many ways we have stepped up and made significant contributions to education scholarship and practice during the pandemic. I am also appreciative of their helpful identification of targeted areas for attention, and know that a focus on these will support the Centre as we make strategic and pragmatic plans for the future. In the remainder of this Director's response, I will outline the areas of opportunity and concern noted by the reviewers, as well as their specific recommendations, and propose action items for moving forward.

Opportunities:

1. Prioritizing partnerships and relationships:

One strength noted by the reviewers was the many local, national, and international partnerships and relationships in which the Centre is engaged. They particularly noted our commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion, including attention to Indigenous health education. While identifying these relationships and partnerships as key opportunities for the future, they cautioned that we should set priorities to ensure that these partnerships and relationships are meaningfully aligned with the vision of the Centre and our governing organizations. I thank the reviewers for this observation, as it is an ongoing area of great importance. Since she started in her role as Associate Director of Collaborations and Partnerships, Dr Tina Martimianakis has been leading the Centre's work in this area, ensuring that partnership priorities are re-evaluated on a regular basis. Dr Martimianakis also brings new partnership requests to the Senior Management Committee for fulsome consideration. We intend to make this an area of ongoing attention in our upcoming strategic planning process.

Action: To examine existing and potential future partnerships and relationships and use the development of the new strategic plan for the Centre as a place for broad consultation and consideration of partnership priorities.

2. Ensuring that the Centre's theoretical research yields practical application:

The reviewers identified the scope, quality, quantity, relevance, and impact of research conducted at the Wilson Centre as a key strength. They deemed the Wilson Centre to be a global exemplar for education research and productivity, with our capture of research funding far surpassing that of other units in Canada and also internationally. The reviewers commended us for commitment to collaborative research and for recognizing the importance of research informing practice and practice informing research.

The reviewers identified as an opportunity the importance of ensuring that our theoretical research yields the practical applications that we value and espouse. They suggested that the Centre could benefit from developing metrics and measuring this. In the past few years we have begun preliminary conversations about the types of metrics that would be meaningful to track and measure, and look forward to continuing this work.

Action: We will form a working group to develop metrics and measurement of the theoretical impact and practical applications of our research outputs. This will help us consider additional mechanisms to increase the extent to which we achieve this goal. We will include this area as a focus in the development and implementation of our new strategic plan.

Challenges:

1. Support Scientists and Researchers in terms of achievable and sustainable levels of achievement:

The reviewers noted the strengths of the Scientists and Researchers who are highly productive and driven to succeed. They noted our community to be highly collaborative and collegial. They rightly raised the issue of the high expectations members of our community have of ourselves, and advised us to ensure that the drive for high achievement does not lead to burnout. This issue has been accentuated in 2020, with increased work and family pressures. Although our community has been physically distanced, we have deliberately maintained a focus on wellness, including recognition that additional stresses during the pandemic has meant that some among us need more time for activities such as childcare or eldercare. To date, mechanisms for support have mostly been undertaken in informal ways.

Action: We will continue our informal processes of attending to balance and wellbeing. We will also collectively consider additional opportunities (formal and/or informal) to ensure that achievement expectations are realistic and sustainable.

2. Revisit the issue of tenure:

As noted by the reviewers, the issue of tenure has been a longstanding concern at the Wilson Centre. The reviewers also recognized that the creation of tenure-stream positions is beyond the remit of the Centre itself. Two key advantages of tenure are job security and the ability to take sabbaticals.

Action: While continuing to explore possibilities for the creation of tenure-stream positions going forward, we will simultaneously look for other ways to enhance job security (possibly through longer-term contracts) and work to create other structures to enable study leaves. The latter will also allow Scientists to recharge, helping with item (1) above in terms of alleviating potential burnout.

3. Ensure that Centre space needs are recognized and prioritized:

The reviewers clearly recognized the importance of our physical space in maintaining the collegial culture of our community, including enabling the robust exchange of ideas and facilitating collaborative research endeavours. They highlighted that space is a critical facilitator of relationships, opportunities for idea generation, collaboration, problem solving, support, mentoring, innovation, and efficient productivity. Space that maintains the relational manner in which the Wilson Centre operates was identified by the reviewers as a necessary condition for us to continue to be a global leader in advancing health care education and practice through research.

Action: As space planning continues to evolve at University Health Network (UHN), we will work closely with organizational leaders to ensure that any potential space changes will not constrain the key spatial elements that underpin our globally recognized research relevance, productivity, and leadership.

4. Planning for advancement and alternate sources of funding:

While the Wilson Centre has strong support from both of our governing organizations, the reviewers recognized that new sources of funding are needed to fund our growing cohort of PhD students, as well as professional development opportunities for Scientists and Researchers. Dr Jeannine Girard-Pearlman is our Philanthropy Lead, and we are working directly with the UHN Foundation and the Temerty Faculty of Medicine (FOM)

Advancement office to explore options. We will also seek fund growth synergies with close partners such as The Institute for Education Research (TIER) at UHN. Dr Nikki Woods' roles as Wilson Centre Associate Director Operations and Director of TIER will facilitate this work.

Action: We will continue to work with our governing organizations to seek opportunities for additional funds to support our PhD students and professional development opportunities for Scientists and Researchers. As we embark on our next strategic planning process, considering potential additional resources and further growth of the Centre will be important.

5. Continue to create and advocate for leadership opportunities for Scientists and Researchers:

The reviewers appropriately recognized the importance of Scientists and Researchers holding leadership positions both in terms of their own professional development, and in bringing education science into practice. This is an area of focus for annual performance reviews, and many in our community have taken on leadership roles within the Wilson Centre, and across the Temerty FOM, UHN, and Toronto Academic Health Science Network (TAHSN). The reviewers provided wise advice that an ongoing focus on creating and advocating for leadership opportunities will aid with succession planning and extend our influence on creating evidence-informed educational change.

Action: We will make leadership development a more explicit area of focus, including seeking additional funds to support people to attend leadership development programs.

6. Maintain a focus on innovative and boundary-spanning research, including explicitly challenging orthodoxy:

The reviewers pointed out that we need to keep a keen focus on innovating and pushing boundaries with our research. They astutely noted that we must make sure that our high international stature does not lead to complacency, stagnation, or risk-avoidance. I am grateful to the reviewers for stating so clearly that our stature as a 'jewel,' a critical element of the University of Toronto 'brand,' and a global exemplar for education research and productivity exists because of our willingness to challenge orthodoxy and push boundaries. While for many of us this is simply who and what we are, it is important that we not take for granted that this approach will inevitably persist. Instead, we must continue to actively foster a culture of critical questioning.

Action: We will ensure explicit attention is given to how to maintain innovation, boundary-spanning research and the challenging of orthodoxy as a core component of our future work, and will make this an area of focus in the development of our next strategic plan.

Recommendations:

1. Ensure that the next strategic plan includes annual reporting and metrics for monitoring key areas:

I thank the reviewers for highlighting the importance of developing metrics for monitoring key areas and providing annual reporting as we create our next strategic plan. Members of the Centre are looking forward to doing this in an innovative and boundary-pushing manner. We have identified an external international scholar who has agreed to work with us on the development of this thinking for the next strategic plan in 2021.

Action: We will begin the process of developing our next strategic plan early in 2021, which will include a focus on meaningful metrics and monitoring, including an annual reporting process.

2. Ensure that relationships are meaningful, feasible, and aligned with the strategic priorities of UHN and the Temerty FOM:

Our 2017-2020 Strategic Plan Refresh was developed prior to the current strategic plans of UHN and the Temerty FOM. As the reviewers noted, there are nevertheless strong synergies and significant alignment with the strategic priorities of both UHN and the Temerty FOM.

Action: We will ensure continued and close alignment of the Wilson Centre 2021-2025 strategic plan with the strategic priorities of UHN and the Temerty FOM.

3. Continued attention to fund development, including Centre growth, learner support, and individual faculty members' professional development:

Our capacity to grow requires a strong focus on garnering additional funds. I thank the reviewers for highlighting the importance of this issue and outlining three key areas to focus on. With Dr Jeannine Girard-Pearlman as our Philanthropy Lead, we will ensure that this is a priority. Further detail is provided above in the response to the fourth challenge identified.

Action: We will keep fund development as a key priority.

4. Continued attention to the Centre's capacity to support learners, and re-visiting membership categories for Scientists and Researchers:

Our learners are a core focus of the Wilson Centre. When we embarked upon our PhD program, we recognized that core teaching in our PhD program would become our teaching priority. Dr Maria Mylopoulos, Associate Director Training Programs, is keeping this issue at the fore. As the number of our PhD students grows, we recognize that we may need to further re-consider teaching priorities, and plan that this will be part of our next strategic plan development, tracking and monitoring.

Action: We will continue to monitor and set priorities related to the capacity of our Scientists and Researcher to support learners as our PhD program grows.

The reviewers identified that current membership categories are experienced by some Researchers in our community as perpetuating hierarchies between Scientists and Researchers. They suggested that we revisit the requirement for at least 70% protected research time for appointment as a Scientist. Dr Ayelet Kuper, Associate Director Faculty Affairs, and Dr Joanne Goldman, Assistant Director Researchers, have already started a process to reconsider membership categories, with Dr Goldman having interviewed many researchers. Given that many of our Researchers are also practicing clinicians, the goal of proceeding with a membership category review in 2020 was postponed as a result of the pandemic. Drs Kuper and Goldman are planning to resume this work in 2021.

Action: We will resume the review of membership categories in 2021.

Summary:

In summary, this strongly supportive External Review confirms that the Wilson Centre is highly valued locally, nationally, and internationally. It highlights the advantages of our dual governance by UHN and the Temerty FOM. It is laudatory about the high quality of our research output, educational programs, social impact, and relevance of our theory-driven work to practice. Professors Hirsh and Lockyer have eloquently described aspects of our collaborative culture, interest in boundary-pushing, and collegial community that underpin our academic endeavours. I am very grateful to them for their very thoughtful approach to guiding us forward. We will share the External Review Report and the Director's Response widely with the Wilson Centre community and relevant partners. Individually and collectively we will have appropriate discussions and take steps to ensure that all outstanding issues identified will be dealt with fully. These documents will also shape our next strategic planning process.

The preparation of the self-study documents and the planning and conducting of the External Review was made possible by the work of many. I would like to acknowledge all the efforts of the Wilson Centre community, the Temerty FOM review team, members of our Governance and Senior Management Committees, and our internal and external partners in contributing to this review. This review positions the Wilson Centre well in terms of considering our priorities for the future, and I am humbled by the strong support of so many in allowing the Centre to flourish and thrive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Cynthia Whitehead'.

Cynthia Whitehead, MD, PhD, CCFP, FCFP
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Network
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