

## **An interim summary of Peter Wall Institute consultations**

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to thank everyone for engaging in such fruitful, constructive and open exchanges throughout the Peter Wall Institute's first 4 external review consultation sessions. We have had 46 unique participants from 38 departments in attendance at our sessions so far. I've provided below a summary of the key themes we've discussed together, identifying the Institute's strengths, opportunities and vulnerabilities. One of the possible solutions to address some of the Institute's challenges that we began discussing is the creation of a Peter Wall Institute Academic Board. We will continue discussions around this, and other potential solutions, at the next two community consultation meetings. I strongly encourage all UBC faculty to share your thoughts and experiences. We hope you will register to attend one of the upcoming sessions on November 5 and 8.

### A summary of key themes discussed so far

#### **Governance**

There was interest in positively impacting the Institute's governance to improve future stability and to have more transparency in decision-making. Concerns were raised that the Institute's Board of Trustees' decision-making processes may extend into the purview of the Director's responsibilities and may unduly influence the types of research that faculty are able to do, thus impinging on Academic Freedom. Strengthening the academic governance and mandate was presented as an opportunity to establish stability and future sustainability.

#### **Academic Mandate**

The Institute should develop a clear mandate and goals. The suggestion was made to formulate, through community consultation, what the UBC academic community truly values and commit to a clear course of action. The Institute has played an important role on campus, establishing connections across units in ways that other campus initiatives are unable to do. There was a deep appreciation for opportunities at UBC for faculty to interact with specialists in other disciplines, and to learn the language and approach of other disciplines (i.e. to bridge "different ways of knowing"). Participants described how the Wall Scholars program uniquely "rejuvenates", "builds collegiality", and brings about "transformational" change to their research and scholarship. We heard recommendations from participants that the Institute should seek a balance between "open and thematic" calls (e.g. The Wall Scholars program call should remain open, but the cohort could then be tasked with generating themes for further calls).

#### **Program evaluation**

There was discussion about the criteria for measuring success and the challenges with defining success. Defining outcomes by certain traditional standards can be useful guide posts in measuring the success of the Institute's programs, but some of the most important benefits are often less tangible. Suggestions were made for success to be measured in community engagement and public interest, as well as academic community building, both locally and

internationally. However, program outcomes can not be properly evaluated if the Institute lacks stability and *clearly* defined *goals*. As well, program evaluation should be an ongoing continuously updated process, informed heavily by academic considerations and the first-hand experience of participating faculty members.

### **Program adjudication**

We discussed the challenges of recruiting adjudication committee members for the Institute's programs, and possible ways that the Institute could address these challenges. Participants discussed the metrics for the Institute's programs and how the Institute might position itself as a leader in the exploration and research of criteria that disrupt commonly held and often problematic ideas of *excellence*, *elitism*, and *knowledge*. There was a general appreciation for how the Institute provides "a spirit of generosity" with knowledge sharing that is not always the case in the academic arena.

### **Communication strategy**

Many participants shared a passion for their experiences at the Institute. It was suggested that we capitalize on these stories to communicate, in easily understood language, the important and unique work that goes on at the Institute, so as to encourage greater interest and expand awareness, locally and internationally. We heard that many Wall Scholar alumni and members of the Institute's adjudication committees would be willing and able to act as ambassadors to the Institute; promoting its programs to researchers across campus at departmental meetings and at workshops abroad.

### **Building and Broadening Relationships**

Participants discussed how the Institute's programs play a significant role in helping the university by supporting UBC scholars, and their home departments and research centres, to advance their research and to attract and retain leading scholars at UBC. The Institute provides UBC faculty the time and space for fostering collaborations and personal connections both locally and internationally. The Institute's Wall Scholar program now provides funding for full-teaching and administrative release, to enable scholars to focus on the program activities while in residence. There is a need to develop better relationships with UBC's Department Heads and Deans in order to facilitate the implementation of teaching and administrative releases offered by the Institute, as well as to develop a better understanding of how the Institute can contribute more effectively to departments and other units on campus. The Institute already contributes immensely to the development of UBC's capacity for research and teaching innovation and the appreciation of this contribution should be encouraged and promoted.

Thank you again for your participation in the Peter Wall Institute's external review consultation sessions. I look forward to seeing you at future consultations.

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