

Report of the CAUT Ad Hoc Investigatory Committee into allegations concerning Working Conditions at Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph

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Introduction

In December of 2011, Dr. Judy Sheeshka, President of the University of Guelph Faculty Association (UGFA) wrote to Dr. James L. Turk, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) requesting that CAUT make an inquiry into the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) and the Health Sciences Centre (HSC; once known as the Veterinary Teaching Hospital, VTH), citing a number of concerns related to diverse aspects of working conditions at the OVC and the HSC.

Following due deliberation, CAUT decided to institute an Ad Hoc Investigatory Committee (AHIC), and on 3rd February 2012, Turk wrote to the AHIC's appointees (Dr. Claire Card of the Department of Large Animal Clinical Sciences, University of Saskatchewan, and Dr. Paul Handford, Emeritus Professor of Biology, University of Western Ontario and member of the CAUT Academic Freedom & Tenure Committee); to UGFA's President Sheeshka; and to Dr. Alastair Summerlee, President of the University of Guelph, to announce the formation of the AHIC, and to specify the Investigatory Committee's membership, terms of reference and operating procedures.

The terms of reference are as follows:

1. Examine allegations of:
 - Improper procedural practices in investigations of faculty members' behaviour;
 - Inappropriate practices in hiring decisions;
 - Intimidation of faculty and veterinarians by the OVC administration;
 - Refusal to recognize the teaching done by veterinarians;
 - Failure to hire any continuing appointments in the teaching hospital since the first collective agreement was signed in 2008;
2. Consider other issues that may arise in the course of its investigation;
3. [Make] any appropriate recommendations.

The Committee made several visits to Guelph in 2012 – interviewing the Provost, the Assistant Vice-President (Faculty and Academic Staff Relations) and Executive Advisor to the Provost, the Dean, the Associate Dean (by conference call), officials with the University of Guelph Faculty Association, 46 OVC faculty members in addition to staff veterinarians, technicians, and eight 2nd and 4th-year undergraduates.

We also invited written commentary and reviewed a variety of documents provided by the administration, faculty association, faculty and staff. We are happy to register here that we were provided a good degree of cooperation by Provost Mancuso and her staff: at our request, she provided us with various documents and evinced a sincere wish that all concerns be identified and

appropriately dealt with. While it is fair to say that we did not share the Provost's perspective on all matters, we gratefully acknowledge that we were made to feel welcome and respected by all representatives of the administration of the University of Guelph. We also want to express appreciation to representatives of the University of Guelph Faculty Association who assisted us in many ways and to the faculty and staff of OVC who gave so generously of their time to help us understand the situation within the College.

Observations

The most obvious—indeed an inescapable—conclusion to draw from our investigation is that OVC, despite local contentment in certain quarters, is often a deeply unhappy place: there is widespread puzzlement, frustration, dismay and discontent— even outright anger— and a serious loss of morale, accompanied in some instances by serious stress, affecting many individuals in all segments of the OVC community. This community malaise finds many expressions, related to several lines of causation, but we believe it is possible to trace most if not all of them back to **changes made to the operational model for OVC and to the manner of its deployment and implementation in recent years**: that is, we see causes related both to the **policies** and to the **style** of OVC's current management. It is unclear where the locus of these initiatives lies, whether in the office of the OVC Dean, or within the university's central administration.

The framing context for the changes in OVC's management model is the apparent budgetary shortfall— an asserted constraint on the funds available for running OVC's programs. In today's times, the mere existence of budgetary constraints will occasion little or no surprise in anyone, whether in tertiary education or elsewhere. Certainly we found no sign of rejection among our interviewees of the general claim of a deficit of some dimension; indeed, there is general acceptance of the notion. Nonetheless, a great many wonder at, or are openly skeptical about, or suspicious of, the following aspects of the putative OVC deficit:

- The suddenness of the deficit's appearance, or of expressed concern about it (this notwithstanding the general understanding of the 2008 severe economic downturn);
- The size and origin of the claimed deficit;
- The need for the specific management model adopted to deal with this deficit;

It is plain to us that the OVC community needs and deserves thorough and credible explanations regarding these fundamentals of the budgetary problems purportedly faced by OVC and by the University at large. Without the provision of satisfactory clarity, it is hard to imagine how any large and diverse community of experienced and thoughtful experts can enthusiastically subscribe to, and energetically carry forward, a program of actions that will certainly be demanding of time and effort, and perhaps even require significant sacrifice and compromise on matters of great importance to them in the fulfillment of their collective vision of OVC's teaching, research and service missions. Nonetheless, despite this obvious need for unimpeachable clarity, and despite repeated efforts made by many OVC members— including past and present Department chairs to gain such clarity— the origins, timing and size of such budgetary deficit as OVC might in fact suffer remain in some part mysterious. Likewise, the rationale and wisdom of the specific business model approach adopted by management has not been articulated in such a way as to clearly demonstrate its necessity and adequacy to a properly described empirical problem; rather, it seems to have been treated as an unavoidable and self-evident imperative. Several of our interviewees— some very senior and experienced— have directly expressed to us the suspicion that, in fact, much remains actively

obfuscated or downright hidden; indeed some have suggested to us that there is an entire agenda for significant change at OVC, with the budgetary situation providing an enabling pretext.

Representatives of the administration have engaged in presentations to faculty and staff on budgetary matters, and they have insisted to us that they have provided all the information that lies behind their policy prescriptions. Despite these initiatives, it is abundantly clear that much remains obscure to the expert community expected to engage with and advance any action plans developed. These representatives have also reported that they have taken the steps to address and respond to a significant number of the concerns and inquiries which were heard from the OVC faculty and veterinarians who participated in the CAUT Investigation process.

The first cited by the administration is the appointment of Mr. C. Riggs in early 2012 to conduct an internal review of the OVC- HSC. We were advised that the Riggs Report and action plan were provided to all faculty and veterinarians in a group meeting with the Provost, and that all action items are now completed. It must be noted that many in the OVC community saw Riggs' appointment as a poor choice because he had been a lawyer who had acted on behalf of the University administration previously, and had had no evident first-hand expertise either in veterinary or in academic working environments. The scope of Riggs' investigation was limited to the HSC, at the Provost's public insistence, despite requests that it be broadened to include conditions in the OVC as a whole. There was a poor response to the invitation to speak with Riggs. Our information is that at most seven or eight faculty attended (out of a possible 133 from OVC), and even this number is thought to include three officers from UGFA (non-OVC members). As Riggs himself noted in his report: "The number of faculty members who chose to respond to the invitation was disappointing and as a result must lead to some wariness in drawing conclusions ...". In our view, the Riggs' Report provides little of any great utility towards ameliorating the problems that beset the OVC community.

Other steps cited by the administration are:

- the appointment in January 2013 of three external clinicians to conduct an independent External Review and Assessment of OVC's clinical program;
- conducting a report on feedback from the External Review, seeking the community's consensus on which of the Review's 27 recommendations should be focused upon in the short term. The results of this survey (which included responses from 41 members of the Clinical Studies Department, 65 from the OVC-HSC, and 98 DVM Students) demonstrated substantial agreement amongst the community on many of the key recommendations, which are actively being addressed as part of a jointly developed plan for the future;
- meetings by the Provost with a number of the OVC faculty directly to discuss concerns, seek input, and resolve issues;
- increased opportunities for faculty and veterinarians' to provide input, and to engage in meaningful consultation and dialogue related to issues including the budget, benchmarks and caseload, curriculum, and teaching, through a variety of venues;
- Personnel changes in the Dean's management team.

That said, it is clear that important further work needs to be done. All parties agree that it is essential to find a productive way to move forward. In light of our investigation and careful consideration of all we have heard, we make the following 21 recommendations.

Recommendations

A. Budgetary matters

1. An independent general audit of OVC and all of its components is required as a fundamental step towards the restoration of trust and to the development of coherent budgetary policies and plans that are accessible and intelligible to all.
2. The agents employed in the conduct of such an audit should be chosen following careful consultation among all interested parties; the chosen agents must be acceptable to all parties.
3. The results of such an audit should be presented directly to the OVC community, to UGFA, and to the senior administration of the University of Guelph.
4. There should be open public discussion of the role and extent of revenue-generation in the overall budget of OVC operations and of the degree to which such revenues should cover the costs of such operations, particularly where revenue-generation offers to compromise teaching and/or research.
5. An action plan to address the budgetary matters should be developed jointly by the OVC community, including OVC faculty and senior administration.

B. Administration & Management

6. An immediate search for a CMO / Hospital Director for the HSC. The search committee should include faculty and veterinarians, with a vote. Stated qualifications should include: that the candidate is a veterinarian with knowledge of academic veterinary clinical practice, having previous experience in service delivery in an academic clinical setting, and / or administration of a referral veterinary hospital that has an educational mandate.
7. An immediate search for a COO for the HSC. The search committee should include faculty and veterinarians, with a vote; qualifications should include experience in the management of hospital operations.
8. A university is a locus of vigorous rational intellectual exchange and challenge. Therefore, notwithstanding the legitimate responsibility of all parties at all times to maintain general decorum and an inclusive social and intellectual environment, the rhetoric of “respect” shall not be used by anyone as a means to avoid or suppress legitimate dissent and discussion.
9. There should be scrupulous attention given to progressive discipline, due process, and the universal involvement of UGFA in any disciplinary procedures.

Appointments

10. The development and use of benchmarks must not conflict with the Collective Agreement.
11. There should be genuine search committees with equal voting voice for faculty in decisions re: hiring and firing of all Hospital staff, including managers and directors.

Academic matters

12. All final decisions on academic planning matters— curriculum content, structure and delivery— are the prerogative of the academic staff of the OVC, and should be decided through a collegial process.

13. Academic Freedom guarantees should be comprehensively stated and promulgated by a joint committee including representatives of the upper administration, of OVC faculty, and officials of UGFA.

Workload & Working conditions

14. Bodies capable of rectifying inequities and injustices should institute a comprehensive review and monitoring of workload.
15. Decisions on workforce complement should be made in light of OHS standards, and animal health needs, and be discussed with representatives of the UGFA and USW bargaining units.
16. Technical staff supporting the academic program should be consulted in the development of approaches, such as cross-training, to deal with issues in workload and staff complement.
17. All data relevant to the development of caseload targets and performance indicators, such as benchmarks, should be made available to any OVC member to whom such indicators are applied.
18. Benchmarks should be set in consultation with department heads and other members of the bargaining unit. The use of performance indicators must not contravene the Collective Agreement.
19. The assignment of duties must follow the Collective Agreement and consultations between the Dean, department heads, and members of the bargaining units.

Involvement of UGFA

20. The OVC administration must deal expeditiously, and in a fair and reasonable way, with all outstanding grievances.
21. UGFA needs to take the initiative in educating the OVC membership about its prerogatives as academics, most especially as it concerns the matter of academic freedoms.

Respectfully submitted by:
Claire Card, PhD
Department of Large Animal Clinical Sciences
University of Saskatchewan

Paul Handford, PhD
Emeritus Professor of Biology
University of Western Ontario
Member of the CAUT Academic Freedom & Tenure Committee