Strategic Plan Submission

Executive Summary:

- UAlberta is underutilizing the money spent on contract academic staff: teaching (CAST).
- Re-directing some monies currently used for CAST to hire tenure-track assistant professors would more effectively use UAlberta’s limited resources because it will statistically net more citations (reputation), statistically net more funding, and enhance institutional capacity to serve students (core mission) and to engage the community (public good).
- Actually calculating the opportunity cost of continuing to rely on CAST instead of TT profs will enable the UAlberta senior leadership to plot a strategic course based on data (including return on investment) rather than inertial notions of budget constraint.

Discussion

According to UAlberta data publically available through the Office of Strategic Analysis, over a 10 year period, UAlberta increased its full-time equivalent (FTE) faculty by 5%, while increasing its FTE Contract Academic Staff: Teaching (CAST) by 13.9%. FTE CAST, as a proportion of FTE CAST plus FTE Faculty, represent 26.99% of UAlberta’s teaching workforce.

Consider the stipulation in the Association of Academic Staff: University of Alberta (AAS:UA) collective agreement that not more than 10% of a Faculty’s faculty may be on sabbatical at any given time. Presumably, then, 90% is the level below which the university and the association agree that service standards would suffer. If CAST were only used for genuine short-term coverage needs (e.g. to cover sabbaticals and leaves), then FTE CAST should only account for ~10% of the teaching workforce. Since CAST currently represent ~27%, it appears that UAlberta is only operating at ~83% efficiency.

Various UAlberta communities have identified faculty renewal as a priority for the university, and in particular, have identified a need for more tenure-track assistant professors. The numbers outlined in the Discussion Paper, suggest a drop in assistant professors as existing assistant professors are being promoted while fewer hires being made. This suggests that the assistant-professor level of tenure-track professors is most in need of renewal so as to optimize the appropriate number and mix of high-quality staff. Focussing on increasing the tenure-track professors at the assistant rank make sense because (a) there are fewer of them; (b) they are the lowest costing of the three ranks; and (c) they have the longest potential period for the UAlberta to benefit (i.e. the return on investment).

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2 As defined by the Employee sub-category in the reports.
3 Counted as FTE.
4 I also note that the number of FTE contingent faculty has increased by 118 FTE over the same 10-year period. If I include contingent faculty with CAST, the proportion rises to 38.96%.
5 E-mail from uofapres to All employees. “FYI: From the President’s Desk: Institutional Strategic Planning Update and Invitation”. Nov 26, 2015. For example, see p.16 of the summary notes from the Joint Board/Senate/Alumni Council/GFC Exec Retreat on Nov 23 2015.
6 For example, comments by Dr. Julie Rak, Department of English and Film Studies, Faculty of Arts at the first Institutional Strategic Planning Forum in November 2015.
7 Or any at all – I understand that some Departments are in a hiring freeze.
8 The appropriate number and mix being identified as one of UAlberta’s Top 11 Institutional risks.
When hiring was raised at the second institutional forum, Dr. Turpin’s comments in response were along the lines of how UAlberta needs to work within its budget parameters. Then, allow me to suggest that UAlberta is underutilizing the money spent on CAST. In a promising political environment provincially and federally, yet one where ‘economic realities’ dictate that UAlberta cannot reasonably expect significantly increased operational funding from these parties, UAlberta’s strongest alternative is to maximize the return on the dollars it is already spending.

**Re-directing some monies currently used for CAST to hire tenure-track assistant professors** will statistically net more citations (reputation), statistically net more funding, enhance capacity to serve students (core mission) and the community (public good).

**More funding.** UAlberta’s *Eligibility to Apply for and Hold Research Funding Policy* states that CAST are only eligible to apply for funding (1) as a co-applicant and only if (2) if stipulated in assigned duties. Meanwhile, the CAST collective agreement only permits rather than expects CAST to have research responsibilities and even then, “in particular circumstances.” So, by institutional design, CAST are marginalized from contributing to the university through research.

Assuming the “83% efficiency rate calculated above, then there is an opportunity for up to a 17% increase in funding. UAlberta’s research intensity numbers currently stand at $271,800 per faculty member. A 17% increase would mean about a **$100 million increase** in research funds. If these additional FTE were even one-quarter as productive as average, that would still mean an additional $25 million increase. With a 17% increase, one could also reasonably expect a further diversification of research funding sources for the university.

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10 s.8.05: “*In particular circumstances*, the appointing officer and the staff member appointed to teaching duties may agree that the responsibilities shall include research.” (my emphasis). Since part of the core activities for RSO is compiling statistics on research applications and awards ([http://www.rso.ualberta.ca/About/CoreActivities.aspx](http://www.rso.ualberta.ca/About/CoreActivities.aspx)), they should be able to inform you with the number of CAST staff who apply as co-applicants for funding. Another statistic of note would be
11 A further, symbolic way that UAlberta expects less of CAST (and thus, underscoring how CAST are underutilized), is in the Faculty Collective Agreement. Sections 2.02.1 and 2.02.2 state: “The University of Alberta is committed to the pursuit of truth, the advancement of learning, and the dissemination of knowledge. The University expects each staff member to engage in these endeavours.” Despite this expectation about “each staff member”, this language is not actually included in the CAST collective agreement and thus, it does not appear that UAlberta expects these 900-some individuals – for it would indeed affect CAST as individuals rather than as FTE – to “contribut[e] to their potential.” Further to this symbolic exclusion, CAST are not currently listed as university staff in the calendar, as if they were not contributors to UAlberta on the same level of other university faculty in its critical mission – education. At one of the ISP roundtables, the notion of symbolism to demonstrate inclusion and diversity was raised. At the very least, remediying the above two examples of CAST exclusion should be undertaken.
12 From *Canada’s Top 50 Research Universities 2015* p.3 Nov. 6, 2015. by RE$EARCH Infosource Inc. They looked at Sponsored Research Income (“includes all funds to support research received in the form of a grant, contribution or contract from all sources external the institution”) for FY2014 and Faculty as defined by “full, associate, and assistant faculty”
13 Which would be the equivalent of approximately 383.5 FTE.
14 383.5 FTE x $271,800 = $104,235,300.
Should UAlberta ever be in a competitive research funding environment like New Zealand’s Performance-Based Research Fund\(^{15}\) or the UK’s Research Excellence Framework\(^{16}\), it will be all the more critical to maximize our research potential; to do so, researchers would need to already be in place well in advance of such a scheme being implemented.

**More citations.** In the reputational university rankings, citations account for 30%,\(^{17}\) 20%,\(^{18}\) and 20%\(^{19}\). Rankings are important for attracting high-calibre students and staff. For example, the QS World University Rankings gives 40% weight to ‘Academic reputation’ “measured using a global survey in which academics are asked to identify the institutions where they believe the best work is currently taking place within their own field of expertise.”\(^{20}\) Looking at the graph presented on the overview\(^{21}\), one notes that the number of citations is based on full-time faculty members. Using the same 17% increase, UAlberta could see a significant increase\(^{22}\) in UAlberta-affiliated research: **over 1400 additional publications and over 10,000 additional citations per year.** Again, if these additional FTE were even one-quarter as productive as average, that would still mean an additional ~350 publications and an additional 2,500 citations per year.

Consider the Faculty of Arts, which has one of the highest contingents of CAST. Increased research visibility would significantly enhance its reputational profile and facilitate its overarching goal of being a destination of choice and the best Arts Faculty in North America. The Department of English and Film Studies, despite a reported hiring freeze, in 2014 was the highest ranked area of study at UAlberta by a significant margin. If CAST members in this Department were to be tenure-track members, this pocket of strength could be nurtured into a full-fledged world-class field of strength for UAlberta.

**Enhance institutional capacity to serve students (core mission) and the community (public good):** Positioning UAlberta as committed to improving the work conditions for the so-called precariat through this shifting would be a bold, distinguishing move which would put UAlberta at the forefront of this issue nationally. Certainly, an organization requires surge capacity and appropriate staff coverage, and I am not advocating for a total elimination of CAST. Instead, I suggest a realistic\(^{23}\) **goal of reducing CAST to 10% of the total FTE teaching staff.**\(^{24}\)

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\(^{17}\) The Times Higher Education World University rankings


\(^{22}\) 383.5 FTE x 19.2 publications = 7363.2 publications / 5 years = 1472.64 additional publications per year. 383.5 FTE x 138.4 citations / 5 years = 10,615.28 additional citations per year.

\(^{23}\) This goal is realistic because it’s Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and – given the ISP’s five-year duration – Timebound.

\(^{24}\) A bold goal would be 5%, which could be achieved if UAlberta would be willing to commit to creating permanent part-time positions as well. As for the remaining CAST, utilizing a pro rata model, like the one proposed by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), would more effectively leverage the expertise of these highly trained professionals for the university for not only their teaching but also their ability to research and serve. Dr. Dew commented at the GSA Executive meeting regarding the ISP of December 2, 2015 that not all sessionals want...
UAlberta would demonstrate its commitment to the local community through quality job creation. This shifting would also be one facet of UAlberta integrating sustainably, inclusiveness, and equity into all its practices. It would encourage campus cohesion, for it is difficult to collaborate with colleagues on campus if it’s unknown if one will still be employed by the University the next semester or next year to implement a research project or community engagement initiative. This shifting would demonstrate that these professionals are equally respected contributors to a top-five-in-Canada institution and would tap into their discretionary effort to the benefit of students.

Concluding remarks
Concerns over CAST have been repeatedly raised during the consultation, yet I have yet to hear or read of a solution to this issue that goes beyond ‘just hire more’. My proposal that the university shift some of its monies provides a practical means of addressing the issue.

I challenge you, Dr. Turpin and Dr. Dew, to ask for an analysis based on actual, hard data to see for yourselves precisely how much of an impact shifting CAST to assistant-level tenure-track positions would net. In your roles as President and Provost respectively, you have access to more robust data than the general UAlberta community does. Allow me to suggest that this shifting of monies hasn’t occurred prior because no one has actually taken the time to do the analysis and calculate the lost opportunity cost.

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25 Specifically, it would address s. 4.1 of the Draft Sustainability Plan.

26 For example, what is the actual dollar amount difference – on average – between a FTE CAST and an TT Assistant Professor? Looking at the increment value for full-time PHD or equivalent staff, it’s $2,452 for CAST as of 2014-2015 and it’s $2,452 for TT Assistant professors. Glancing through the collective agreements, the benefits for the two groups already seem to be more similar than one might expect but that exact calculation would need to be done by HRS. UAlberta should consider the number of years it would take for the assistant professor salary range to outstrip that of CAST in the context of the research dollars a fully supported professor is able to bring in. UAlberta noted in the 2015 Comprehensive Institutional Plan that “it is critical to note that substantial growth in revenue generation will take years to develop.” (6). Similarly, there will likely be a gap between on-boarding a TT assistant prof new to the organization until they engage fully with the, for example, UAlberta’s research facilitation officers and successfully apply for grants.
Appendix: Some Implementation Ideas

- Once a full analysis is completed, the senior leadership team could take that gap – assuming there is one – and turn it to the Faculties to generate ideas. For example, ‘to hire X number of profs in your Faculty, we need Y amount of dollars each in the first year, with X*increment in the following # years. Suggest to us how we can find this money.’
  - Once achieving the rank of full professor, perhaps they could opt for half-time positions -- with proportionate reduction in pay. This would
- There’s an opportunity for variance of staff contracts: ss. 6.05 and 6.06 of the AAS:UA collective agreement. So, varying, the teaching load could allow for additional classes to be taught with fewer bodies – the service and research portions would have to be adjusted accordingly.
- Lest I suggest that UAlberta simply transition most of its existing CAST members into newly created tenure-track positions, UAlberta could undertake a highly publicized hiring campaign to ensure attracting the best/brightest persons to the positions. This campaign would need to be done broadly (including and especially internationally). I suspect that Faculties such as Nursing would be able to more easily fill their tenure-track positions if candidates but knew of the position. A broad campaign would net quality candidates for tenure-track roles which might be interdisciplinary or responsible for teaching and research in multiple areas. Moreover, a university-wide campaign would ensure consistent messaging about UAlberta. Advertising can also be done creatively through low-cost electronic sources such as academicwiki, academia.edu, jobs.co.uk, or listservs. Since a majority of these would be entry-level professor positions, postings could be sent to the career offices of other universities.
  - A hiring campaign in this economic climate in this industry would garner disproportionately positive media and industry attention. Besides the story of precarious workers to stable positions, this shifting could emerge as a distinguishing story for UAlberta – paired with the university’s initiatives in response to the TRC, including Maskwa House of Learning, a broader theme for UAlberta could be ‘innovation with respect.’