

Royal Roads University Strategic Research Plan Summary October 2011

Royal Roads University Institutional Background

Royal Roads University (RRU) is a special purpose university created under the Royal Roads University Act of June 21, 1995, to provide high-quality education and applied research that contribute to economic prosperity, social advancement, and environmental sustainability. The university develops and delivers programs as required by students and their employers in a completely interdisciplinary way, without traditional disciplinary boundaries and with a problem-based approach to learning. RRU's primary areas of academic focus—sustainability, leadership, entrepreneurship, communication, and peace and conflict management—cross disciplinary boundaries and live in all programs.

The Royal Roads learning model blends short residencies with cohort-based online learning. Focused on the needs of today's students and employers through innovative degree programs at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels, RRU's applied research, at both the student and faculty level, is reflective of, and complementary to, its applied and professional degree programs.

Program offerings are organized under two Faculties: the Faculty of Social and Applied Sciences (with four schools: Communication & Culture, Environment & Sustainability, Leadership, and Peace & Conflict Management) and the Faculty of Management (with two schools: Business, and Tourism & Hospitality Management). The Faculties have a highly interdisciplinary structure, without conventional disciplinary boundaries.

As a primarily graduate university, RRU offers an interdisciplinary doctoral program, 21 master's degrees, 17 graduate certificate and diplomas, and 14 undergraduate degrees and certificates. The Doctor of Social Sciences (DSocSci) was launched in 2010 and is Canada's first applied research doctorate. Unlike traditional doctoral programs, the DSocSci focuses on interdisciplinary application of the social sciences to complex problems of direct concern to organization, communities, and society in general.

The two faculties have 50 full-time faculty members and a large associate faculty group with a scholar-practitioner orientation, which serve a student body that includes many mature and highly experienced practitioners. The current student population totals almost 5,000 domestic and international students enrolled in credit programs, and nearly 1,000 students enrolled in non-credit continuing studies program.

Research Policy

Research was identified in the Royal Roads University Act (1995) as a key component in one of its three stated purposes: "to maintain teaching excellence and research activities that support the university's programs in response to labour market needs of British Columbia." The Board of Governors approved a research policy in 1998 positioning the importance of research to the mandate of the university. The policy was revised in 2002, emphasizing the integral role applied research should play in RRU's strategic direction, the importance of applied research to the teaching and learning functions at RRU, the contribution it can make to the economic and social development of the province and beyond, and the benefits to the university of making applied research a core activity.

Research Model and Strategic Research Themes

Research themes emerge directly from the interdisciplinary nature of the university's applied and professional degree programs and reflect the synergies of existing strengths and evolving priority areas. The university's strategic research themes are revisited regularly through open university forums and by its Program and Research Council, an entity mandated by the RRU Act to advise the Board of

Governors. The university recently completed a review of the research themes through a year-long consultation, concluding in spring 2011, with the refinement and redefinition of its two themes, “*innovative learning*,” and “*sustainable communities, livelihoods and the environment*,” and the emergence out of the existing areas of a new research theme, “*thriving organizations*.”

Guided by these strategic research themes, “*innovative learning*,” “*thriving organizations*,” and “*sustainable communities, livelihoods and the environment*,” RRU integrates applied research and student learning, advancing the university’s mandate. Key to the realization of this integrated approach is the production of applied knowledge. This entails a curriculum that is solution oriented and real-world focused, developed and guided by research conducted by faculty, students, and staff. Research is highly interdisciplinary, and often transdisciplinary, involving stakeholders integrally in its design and implementation. Students gain much of their knowledge, practical skills, and experience through applied research and action learning, through research projects, case studies, and other learning activities. The tremendous value of these competencies lies not only in their response to global, national and community-based problems, but also in their inherent capacity to transfer seamlessly to organizational settings.

Research at RRU responds to and seeks to address critical issues of our time. Engagement with stakeholders and communities is a defining feature. Social and environmental justice, as well as responsiveness, guide the university’s research, and its relevance is evident in the mobilization and transfer of knowledge beyond traditional academia into the public sphere.

Sustainable communities, livelihoods and the environment as a research theme focuses on resilience, diversity, development, vitality, and the ability to innovate and adapt. Arguing that a vital community is one that can thrive in the face of change, research explores ways for communities to make the most of their ecological, social, cultural, and economic capital. Research considers livelihoods and wellbeing of individuals, communities and societies. Examining assets—natural, physical, human, financial and social, mediated by institutional and social relations, research seeks ways to enhance them. Incorporating multiple perspectives at global, national, and local levels, the theme explores multidimensional understandings of how systems, such as social, political, environmental (natural and built), and economic, intersect and influence each other.

Innovative learning as a research theme focuses on learning that creates opportunities to generate knowledge and to empower. Research explores models of knowledge generation and dissemination, ways of knowing and learning, participatory learning, emerging technologies, reflective engagement, and qualitative and transformative inquiry. The theme considers learning at the level of society and organizations, as well as the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Innovative learning is a natural focus for a university with program delivery founded on a blended learning model, i.e. based on intensive residencies combined with team-based online learning, and with a curriculum developed specifically to meet the needs of the global workplace. RRU is a living laboratory for applied learning innovation. Its learning and teaching model is one-of-a-kind in Canada and of interest to many institutions recognizing the potential for innovative learning and for e-learning educational delivery in meeting the demands of today’s knowledge-driven economy. As a strategic research theme, it capitalizes on sixteen years of successful experience developing and experimenting with new ways of learning as well as a range of applied research, outreach, and innovation initiatives. Expanding on the empirical results of institution-wide experimentation, it distills the practical applications and limitations of learning innovations as these impact formal and informal learning organizations.

Thriving organizations as a research theme focuses on the spectrum of development in organizations, systems and sectors, and how these adapt, innovate and lead with a vision to the future. Research explores human and operational dimensions, seeks to foster individual and organizational capabilities, and considers communication a fundamental enabling process. From a local to global context, research examines leaders, leadership, and divergent accountabilities. The theme also explores

issues such as resiliency, responsibility, stakeholder engagement, design, strategic planning, change, and diversity.

The three strategic research themes often function symbiotically. For example, the Canada Research Chair (CRC) in Sustainable Community Development is using e-dialogues and e-research methodologies to conduct and disseminate her research, and the CRC in Innovative Learning & Public Ethnography is using multimedia strategies to investigate and to mobilize knowledge regarding his area of focus: off-the-grid dwelling in the context of livelihood and technology. Similarly, the proposed interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research program of the nominee for the Canada Research Chair (CRC) in Transdisciplinary Studies: Livelihoods and Sustainability, while focused thematically in one theme area, will facilitate integration across research themes given the applicability of his research to all three areas.

The university is actively engaged in building online research collaborations and using multimodal communication technologies, both to increase public literacy around key societal issues and to explore how to influence the policy development process. Students at all levels participate actively in a range of e-dialogue and e-research, manifesting the essential relationship between applied research and student learning.

The university supports the advancement of applied research in these strategic areas through its internal research grants programs. Faculty members have the opportunity to apply for funding to support their research through two internal funding mechanisms annually: the Internal Research Grants and the Professional Development/Scholarly Activity Pool. Two further opportunities are offered on an occasional basis: Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Grants, and Teaching and Technology Grants. Only research aligned with the strategic research themes are supported. Further, the university supports research development and collaborations in these areas through several research development and communication mechanisms. An RRU cross-faculty research committee, coordinated by the Office of Research, discusses strategic issues pertinent to the development and success of the themes, and sponsors an annual forum that brings together faculty members for university-wide dialogue on key research issues. The Office of Research organizes a *Roads to Research* speaker presentation series to highlight faculty research and to support inter-faculty dialogues on their research; the series also includes doctoral and superior graduate student research to provide students opportunities to present and generate more awareness of their research. The Office of Research is active in building inter-faculty collaborations, by facilitating conversations and connections across research programs. It also publishes *Research in Action* to profile RRU research externally.

The university allocates research chairs to support the three strategic areas and will ultimately seek a balance across the areas.

Research Structures

The Office of Research provides a full suite of services including: identification of funding opportunities; proposal development coordination; writing assistance; contract negotiation; grant and contract administration; administration of ethical review requests; community, business, and industry liaison; technology transfer; long term research program planning with faculty; the development of policies and procedures that comprehensively fulfill requirements of the Tri-Council Memorandum of Understanding.

The Office of Research reports to the Associate Vice-President Research (AVP Research), who in turn reports to the Vice-President Academic and Provost. The AVP Research is responsible for ensuring the execution of the strategic direction of research and research services for the university. In addition, the AVP Research liaises with the executive, senior management, faculty, staff and students on the strategic direction of the university, and with government, other universities, industry, associations, and funding agencies to strategically position and promote RRU's research.

As mandated by the Royal Roads University Act, the Program and Research Council advises the Board of Governors on instructional program and research priorities, program objectives and desirable learning outcomes.

Current State of Research

RRU has developed a balance between applied research and teaching that is appropriate to our organizational size, age, and mandate. As per the Collective Agreement between Royal Roads University and the Royal Roads University Faculty Association, faculty members commit on average 40% of their time to research. The university has steadily built its research capacity and has received research grants and contracts from a diverse range of funders. The university received \$2.49 million from external funders to support research in 2010.

In 2004, RRU appointed its first CRC, in Sustainable Community Development, held by Dr. Ann Dale, through the small universities competition, and in 2011 appointed its second CRC in Innovative Learning and Public Ethnography, held by Dr. Phillip Vannini.

RRU has three organized research centres, the Centre for Livelihoods and Ecology (formerly the Centre for Non-Timber Resources), which encourages the wise use of natural resources as a way to diversify and sustain rural communities, and has assumed a leadership role nationally in its field; the Centre for Health Leadership and Research, which focuses on current and emerging challenges related to leadership in the health care system; and the Institute for Values-Based Leadership, established in 2008, which explores the theory and practice of "values-based leadership."

CFI Leaders Opportunity Fund grants support the research of the CRC in Sustainable Community Development as well as Dr. Audrey Dallimore's paleoclimatic/oceanic/seismic research being conducted along the mid- and northern coast of British Columbia.

Royal Roads University's research development plan

The university Board of Governors endorsed a five-year Strategic Direction document in November 2009. This document in turn informed a three-year operational plan which incorporates a specific objective related to research: "innovative research that contributes to our mission and is self-sustaining."

The current research plan identifies 15 strategic objectives that serve as the building blocks for applied research at the university in alignment with the Royal Roads University Act. Moreover, they provide the base upon which strategic direction can be delineated and priorities established among the strategic objectives within a given time frame. The specific activity within each strategy will vary by year as well as the priority of individual strategies over one another in any given year.

Following are the 15 research strategies:

1. Promote quality
2. Generate research project funding
3. Facilitate the development of organized research centres
4. Create research chairs
5. Position RRU as a leader in e-research and e-learning
6. Position RRU as a leader in sustainable societies and communities research
7. Develop research infrastructure
8. Promote partnerships and collaborative, multi-sector and interdisciplinary research
9. Advance student research (we currently conduct 450 to 650 ethical reviews for student research per year)
10. Maximize the integration of research in the classroom for the benefit of students
11. Attract and retain high quality faculty, other researchers, and trainees
12. Respond to research service demand
13. Expand communication and marketing initiatives

14. Innovate and exploit research knowledge for social and economic benefit
15. Develop indicators and evaluation and monitoring mechanisms for tracking the outcomes of research and the alignment with university goals

Attraction and Retention of Excellent Researchers

RRU faculty excel as educators, applied researchers and practitioners. Given the university's emphasis on applied and professional programming, and an applied research model that is action-oriented and problem-solving in nature, its faculty are unique in spanning all three areas of competence. RRU aims to provide a research environment that provides the necessary infrastructure, resources, and opportunities to advance innovative, applied, and problem-solving oriented research and training that will attract and retain excellent researchers.

Planning, Approval, and Assessment

Royal Roads University's five-year Strategic Direction document (2009) identifies six institutional goals: 1) High quality, cost-effective education and applied research that contributes to economic prosperity, social advancement, and environmental sustainability by responding to the needs of working professionals and their employers; 2) The university of choice for working professionals in British Columbia and beyond; 3) A generative work culture; 4) A university supported by and engaged with the public; 5) Recognized leader for sustainable stewardship of historic lands; and 6) A financially-sustainable, high-performance organization. Each goal outlines specific objectives, with articulated measures, targets, and strategies. In addition, annual operational plans, including key performance indicators, align with the goals of the Strategic Direction and include annual targets, indicators and measures. The research activities of the existing CRCs and proposed CRCs are fully aligned with the university's Strategic Direction and its goals for the next five years. In fact, the proposed CRCs' research programs go to the heart of the university's teaching and research mandate.

As noted, a primary goal in the university's Strategic Direction is "a generative work culture" including objectives relating to diversity that have been advanced through a recently approved Diversity Statement. RRU is an equal opportunity employer, committed to the principle of equity in employment, and all job advertisements incorporate this statement.

Upon receiving notification of the new CRC allocation, the university community was consulted through a university-wide open meeting on a focus for the new chairs. RRU followed its normal recruitment process for recruiting and selecting the CRC nominees: advertising the position in *University Affairs*, and online; forming a gender balanced selection committee; interviewing the candidates; having the candidates conduct a presentation to the university community; and requesting feedback from the university community on those presentations. Upon selection of the preferred candidate, the selection committee met with the President and Vice-President Academic and Provost for final approval.