

Re-Envisioning ISGP: Exploring Opportunities for the Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. ISGP OVERVIEW: WHAT AND WHY

The Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program (ISGP) at UBC has existed successfully for almost 50 years and is the first of its kind in Canada. It is a program designed for students who aspire to address complex and globally relevant problems through their research projects; problems that can only be solved by going beyond disciplinary and/or methodological boundaries. From such highly innovative student projects, which bring together supervisors from different faculties and departments, new methods, ways of thinking and integrated vocabularies arise. ISGP students absorb the traditions and practices of different communities and are willing to carry their message out into the world. At present, the ISGP has 108 students (9 MA, 5 MSc, 94 PhD). One of the strengths of ISGP is its diversity -- reflected in cultures, inter-generational dimensions as well as non-academic backgrounds (e.g. industry, public service, civic, and social leadership roles). Usually ISGP PhD. students are problem-research driven and bring a wealth of transferable skills that add value and support a diverse range of UBC's academic communities.

B. WHY NOW? UBC STRATEGIC PLAN

Given the momentum that has built over the last year around the ISGP program and the idea of fostering collaboration at UBC, the timing is right to take advantage of the potential of ISGP to improve its quality and reputation as well as possibly contribute to UBC's vision about fostering interdisciplinary teaching and collaborative research. The new UBC Strategic Plan articulates four core areas of activity, which perfectly align with ISGP's vision: People and Places, Research Excellence, Transformative Learning and Local and Global Engagement. Under these core areas are specific strategies. We envision the ISGP to possibly help with the following seven key strategies: **Strategy 1: Great people, Strategy 2: Inspiring spaces, Strategy 5: Systems renewal, Strategy 6: Collaborative clusters, Strategy 9: Knowledge exchange, Strategy 13: Practical learning, and Strategy 14: Interdisciplinary education.** Given that UBC is now an active proponent of interdisciplinary teaching and collaborative research, ISGP could be positioned as a flagship program for this interdisciplinary UBC-wide strategy.

C. WHAT? THE RE-ENVISIONING PROCESS

This document shows the outcomes of a series of sessions using the Strategic Design Method (developed by Moura Quayle at the Policy Studio in the UBC School of Public Policy School and Global Affairs) which is a participatory process, rooted in user research; participants discuss, co-create, test, and propose resilient solutions to systemic challenges. This 9-month Re-Envisioning ISGP process included senior leadership at UBC, ISGP faculty and staff, ISGP students and alumni as well as ISGP supervisors. Forty-four stakeholders participated in total. The following page summarizes the recent and ongoing ISGP actions. It then summarizes the four core long-term goals regarding interdisciplinary teaching and collaborative research and suggests concrete actions that (1) fall within the ISGP mandate; and, (2) go beyond the ISGP mandate.

D. SHORT AND LONG-TERM GOALS WITHIN ISGP AND UNIVERSITY-WIDE

1. RECENT SHORT-TERM GOALS

1.1 Recent ISGP Goals

- Re-work the funding policy
- Raise the bar for admissions
- Re-work transfer criteria

1.2 Ongoing ISGP Goals

- Re-constitute the Faculty Advisory Committee (FAC) and enhance recognition of their contributions to ISGP
- Improve mentoring and recognition for the work of ISGP supervisors
- Improve communication (website)
- New policy for comprehensive exams
- Peer-mentoring of new ISGP students and ISGP student club

2. LONGTERM GOALS WITH ISGP AND UBC-WIDE

As part of the Strategic Design method and after engaging with over 44 stakeholders, the following four core goals were developed:

Goal 1: Support Cross-Campus Collaboration;

Goal 2: Enable Excellent Student/Faculty Experience;

Goal 3: Increase Visibility and Establish a Forum for Knowledge Exchange;

Goal 4: Support High Quality Interdisciplinary Research at UBC.

Within ISGP Mandate:

GOAL 1: SUPPORT CROSS-CAMPUS COLLABORATIONS

- Create an ISGP Agora at UBC
- Reach out to undergraduate interdisciplinary programs

GOAL 2: ENABLE EXCELLENT STUDENT/FACULTY EXPERIENCE

- Improve career mentoring
- Continue to collect and communicate key ISGP data
- Implement ISGP collaborative software

GOAL 3: INCREASE VISIBILITY AND ESTABLISH A FORUM FOR KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

- Communicate, re-brand and update web-site
- Increase opportunities for student-run activities
- Prepare ISGP for its 50th Anniversary

GOAL 4: SUPPORT HIGH QUALITY INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

- Create niche for innovative PhD. formats

Beyond ISGP Mandate:

GOAL 1: SUPPORT CROSS-CAMPUS COLLABORATION

- Engage ISGP in the proposed “UBC Collaboration Table”
- Build a network of interdisciplinary programs

GOAL 2: ENABLE EXCELLENT STUDENT/FACULTY EXPERIENCE

- Create a suite of INDS courses
- Improve faculty member recognition for ISGP service
- Increase and improve academic mentoring and scholarship

GOAL 3: INCREASE VISIBILITY AND ESTABLISH A FORUM FOR KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

- Create opportunities for student engagement with external communities

GOAL 4: SUPPORT HIGH QUALITY INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

- Increase funding support for ISGP students
- Offer leadership through interdisciplinary research clusters