

## Department of Plant Science Strategic Planning (2021)

### Strategic planning process

With the assistance of Heidi Adamko and Caroline Quinn (Change Management & Project Services), the Department of Plant Science met on April 7, 14, and 28, 2021 to discuss research, outreach, and teaching activities.

After reviewing the results of the three sessions, six “needs” were identified as the most relevant priorities for the department:

- I **Infrastructure upgrade** with emphasis on the existing plant growth facility;
- II **Visibility** of the department through a process requiring internal and external communication;
- III **Administrative support** to alleviate the workload of academics and support staff;
- IV **Unique, flexible and accessible** undergraduate and graduate curricula;
- V **Transparency** from Departmental administration;
- VI **Accountability** from individuals and committees.

The Department Head (DH) and Associate Department Head (ADH) developed specific questions asking each Department Council (DC) member to identify action items addressing the most relevant “needs” that emerged from each of the three brainstorming sessions. The action items listed in this document were developed based on the written responses received (indicated in green below) from DC members. While unreasonable to address all the proposed initiatives, those resonating with the majority have been addressed. A total of **16 Actions items** are proposed.

|          | Ayelle | Brûlé-Babel | Cattani | Daa yf | Duncan | Entz | Fernando | Fristensky | Gulden | Lawley | Li | McCartney | MacMillan | Stasolla | Grad Stud Rep. | Supp Staff Rep | PDF /RA Rep |
|----------|--------|-------------|---------|--------|--------|------|----------|------------|--------|--------|----|-----------|-----------|----------|----------------|----------------|-------------|
| Research |        |             |         |        |        |      |          |            |        |        |    |           |           |          |                |                |             |
| Outreach |        |             |         |        |        |      |          |            |        |        |    |           |           |          |                |                |             |
| Teaching |        |             |         |        |        |      |          |            |        |        |    |           |           |          |                |                |             |

### **ACTION ITEMS**

#### I **Need to upgrade infrastructure with emphasis on plant growth facility**

There is consensus that upgrading of the plant growth facility is an urgent priority and that funds need to be allocated to at least maintain our current capabilities to grow plant material. Two strategies identified include a gradual improvement replacing a few obsolete

units every year for the next few years, and bulk replacement and/or renovation of all growth room/growth cabinet facilities. A reliable and fully functional growth facility has been identified as a requirement for both research and teaching activities.

A current CFI application developed in collaboration with Biological Sciences will address this need. The Plant Science CFI committee (Daayf, Fernando, McCartney, Li, and Ayele) will ensure that substantial upgrades to the current greenhouse and plant growth facilities will be included in the application.

**Action items (3):**

1. The PS CFI committee will actively engage the Department to reach consensus on the upgrades to be included in the application. Regular meetings (**at least 1 per month** starting June 2021) will be held by the committee to update colleagues in the Department. The CFI committee will also work closely with the Plant Growth Facility manager and the Controlled Environment Committee. In the event the CFI application is unsuccessful, action item 2 will be implemented.
2. Creation of an *ad hoc* committee to evaluate possible fundraising opportunities to upgrade the Plant Growth Facility. The DH and ADH have been in contact with Dr. Farenhorst who is willing to assist with the fundraising effort. According to Dr. Farenhorst, a possible fundraising activity could be started not earlier than December 2022, right after the current Faculty fundraising campaign ends.
3. To assist with action items 1 and 2, the Controlled Environment Committee will develop a “needs assessment plan” by the end of **August 2021**, to identify what is needed to upgrade our current growth facility. Dr. Brule-Babel who has previous experience, has volunteered to coordinate the effort.

*Notes from the administration:*

Depending on the outcome of action item 1 or 2, this could be a good opportunity to strategically use Storgaard/Smith donor funds. Annual interest (about 80-90k) could be used for incremental replacements of units, or capital could be used for bulk replacement.

The Department has been advised to use Plant Science designated donor funds, and that immediate Faculty support towards this initiative is not likely given: a) their current efforts towards other programs/projects; and b) resources are indeed available in the department, i.e. donor funds. A proposal to renovate greenhouses through the University capital campaign submitted in 2019 was not considered.

## II Need to enhance visibility through internal and external communications

### a. **Internal communication**

More interaction among labs and colleagues needs to be facilitated through informal and social events.

#### Action items (2):

4. Biweekly informal meetings/conversations with academics only (**starting June 2021**)
5. Development of a Departmental social committee to encourage and engage academics, staff and students to interact on an informal level. A minimum of two events (on-line or in person, if possible) per year (**starting September 2021**).

#### *Notes from the administration:*

The DH and ADH will continue having separate monthly meetings with students and technicians, and twice monthly meetings with office staff.

### b. **External communication**

Need to showcase the Department to outside audiences by engaging more with industry, government and the public.

#### Action items (2):

6. Creation of a Communication/Promotion Committee for outreach exposure. Among other activities, the committee will work closely with Crystal Jorgenson to update the **website** and create a **newsletter** showcasing Departmental activities to the external audience (growers, industry and government).
7. Creation of an Events Committee for organization of tours at the Morrison Research Farm and lab open houses. The committee will organize at least **2 activities** per year (engaging farmers, industry, government and the public).

## III Increased administrative support

Increasing administrative duties have become an issue for several academics.

#### Action item (1):

8. Administration and General Office staff will discuss restructuring duties, enhancing transparency and communication, and identifying mechanisms to reduce administrative burdens. The Administrative Assistant (AA) will hold meetings with grant/contract holders to discuss procedures to facilitate administration and use of funds.

*Notes from the administration:*

We have already planned to replace the half-time receptionist position with a full time Office Assistant 3 position. A further increase in the number of administrative staff in the General Office is not likely to happen due to the tight departmental budget. Injecting funds into administrative support would translate in reducing funds from other resources currently funded or needed by the Department.

While the perception of increased administrative load is apparent, it must be noted that relative to other Departments, the load on our academics is comparable and sometimes less. Our present level of administrative support is unique within the faculty.

IV **Unique, flexible and accessible undergraduate and graduate curricula**

In order for our undergraduate and graduate programs to be competitive and attract students, our curricula need to be unique and different from other institutions - flexible in the way they can be navigated, and accessible through multiple delivery methods. It is recognized that implementing changes to our curriculum is a challenge and will require a collective and coordinated effort within the Faculty. Furthermore, addressing uniqueness, flexibility and accessibility at the same time can be overwhelming and time consuming. To retain focus on our identified needs, it is recommended to address each of the three attributes separately, starting with “uniqueness”. Flexibility and accessibility of our programs will be considered at a later time.

**Action items (2):**

9. An undergraduate Curriculum Committee will be formed to assess and recommend specific actions in order to make our undergraduate program more “unique”. The committee will review programs from comparable institutions and based on our strengths, weaknesses and limitations, will propose changes to specific courses and/or introduction of new courses.
10. The Plant Science Graduate Studies Committee will be engaged in a similar exercise as Action item #9.

V **Transparency**

Effective strategic planning requires transparency from administration.

**Action items (3):**

11. The Departmental AA will be invited to DC at least once a year to provide updates on the Department budget.

12. Administration (DH, ADH and AA) will meet twice a year (**January and July**, starting January 2022) with the chairs of the Land and Equipment Resources, Lab Equipment Resources, and Point Management and Operation Committees, as well as managers of the Plant Science Growth Facility and Ian Morrison Research Farm to review and coordinate expenditure priorities.
13. DC will be held at least twice per month.

## VI **Accountability**

Success in achieving the identified needs requires accountability from each member of the Department and efficient operation of committees.

### Action items (3):

14. Chairs of ALL Department Committees will be asked to provide a comprehensive report on committee operation in two dedicated DC meetings (**January and July**, starting January 2022). At the same times, committee chairs will provide a brief written report to the DH and ADH outlining the contribution and responsiveness of each committee member.
15. Attendance at Department Council will be monitored. Twice yearly (**January and July**, starting January 2022), attendance will be made available to Department Council members.
16. Once a year (**September**) the members of the DC will meet without the presence of the DH and ADH to critically evaluate Departmental administration. A written report containing anonymous comments will be provided to the DH and ADH. The report should indicate what is going well and areas of improvement needed.

### **Realignment with strategic priorities**

Review and realignment of strategic priorities will occur twice per year (**January and July**, starting January 2022).