

Okanagan College's Applied Research Strategy

A Backgrounder for Discussion

Introduction

This document has been prepared to share information about the development of Okanagan College's Applied Research Strategy and to inform the consultation process. The development of the Applied Research Strategy process is grounded in Okanagan College's Inspire Plan and the related Road Map documents. The time is right for Okanagan College to develop an applied research strategy. Applied research is identified by Colleges and Institutes Canada and many levels of governments as being a key driver in economic recovery for small and medium sized enterprises. Strengthening research links and collaborations between Canadian colleges and partners will create economic, social, health and environmental benefits for Canada. Okanagan College has many areas of applied research expertise and programming that can contribute to building resilient communities.

Okanagan College employees have a long history of engaging in various types of research that aligns with the classifications of either basic or applied research. Both types of research are valuable to the researchers, students, Okanagan College, and society in general. The College has made and continues to support research activities in several ways including grants, time release, study leaves, and partnerships with business and community partners. Okanagan College will continue to support research across the institution.

This strategy is specific to applied research. However, many tenets of the strategy will align with employees conducting both basic and applied research. While Okanagan College employees have been involved in various forms of research for many years, this applied research strategy is intended to create a solid foundation for ensuring that employees interested in pursuing applied research have access to various supports and that applied research can optimally be incorporated in student projects, courses and programs that will enhance real world learning experiences for students with community partners.

Defining Applied Research

The Applied Research Working Committee reviewed several applied research strategies from other post-secondary institutions to inform the consultation process and identify key considerations for the strategy. The Working Committee held consultation sessions to seek information on what employees viewed the scope of applied research to be.

In determining a working definition of applied research, the Working Committee acquired inspiration from CICAN's applied research definition and has created the following as the working definition.

Applied research is the development of innovative solutions to real-world challenges affecting our communities. It seeks to resolve practical problems by applying the latest knowledge and technology to create or improve services, practices, processes, or products.

Purpose of the Applied Research Strategy

The purpose of the Applied Research Strategy is to guide Okanagan College toward the following goals:

1. Contribute to participating in solving real-world challenges with students and the community we serve.
2. Enhance professional learning and teaching by drawing upon new knowledge created from applied research experience.
3. Enhance college programs and the student experience by engaging in working on solutions to real-world challenges.
4. Inform teaching, learning, curriculum relevance and innovation.
5. Contribute to the economic and social development of our communities by connecting research expertise to researchers and their students and industry/community to support them in solving core problems.
6. Create an inclusive culture in applied research that aligns with the EDISJ principles and practices of the college.
7. Contribute to the associated goals and objectives outlined in the Inspire Plan.

Further, the applied research strategy will contribute to identifying and building applied research capacity and support for researchers, employees, students, business and community in advancing research and development across Canada.

Pillars

Okanagan College's core mission is to transform lives and communities. High quality teaching, learning and applied research leads to creating a community of researchers who showcase research, understand what opportunities are available for applied research, and foster collaboration. The applied research strategy will provide new opportunities for Okanagan College to expand its mission, particularly with respect to connecting learners and researchers with community, innovation, new knowledge creation, and economic and social development. The applied research strategy will help guide the expansion of applied research. To support the expansion, four pillars have been identified. They are:

1. Create pathways and opportunities for students and employees to develop applied research competencies.
2. Empower/enable researchers to enhance their research interests, opportunities, and community collaborations, and to transfer their learning from applied research into their practices.
3. Develop an engaging, enriched, and flexible applied research training program for students and researchers that contributes to understanding how applied research solves real-world problems.
4. Create a flexible and adaptable applied research infrastructure with the internal and external community.

Students and Applied Research

Okanagan College engages in applied research to support student learning. Through participation in applied research, student researchers:

- Apply program knowledge and skills to real-world situations and in new environments,
- Become team members who are challenged to identify and resolve complex problems,
- Expand 21st century learning skills drawing upon lessons learned from participating in working on real-world problems,
- Contribute to new knowledge creation, product development or services before entering the workforce, and
- Connect with future employers and identify an interest/specialization in career aspirations.

For many students, participating in applied research contributes to them being able to draw upon the theory learned in their programs to apply to real world problems. As well, in some instances, applied research contributes to individuals identifying career directions and aspirations.

Researchers and Applied Research

As outlined in the Inspire Plan, applied research is a contributor to teaching and learning excellence. Researchers model to students the knowledge, skills, attributes, and strategies that contribute to solving real-world problems. Applied research strategies are grounded in research-based principles, community partnerships, experimenting with ideas and methods, collaborating, curating, ethical practice, and sharing new knowledge creation.

Okanagan College's applied research strategy will support researchers, students and those who support applied research in building or expanding core research competencies, ideation, and community development; all of which contribute to the economic and health of our communities.

Research for Learning – An understanding of how research contributes to students gaining real-world experiences and how applied research can enhance curriculum content and teaching and learning strategies.

Collaborator – Modeling the power of collaboration with other researchers, students, and research partners within, across and between departments, disciplines, and community settings.

Scholar – Modeling research-based applied research practices appropriate to the real-world problem being examined for the intent of being solved.

Experimenter – Modeling a sense of curiosity to see possibilities, try, reflect, and learn from a variety of people, ideas, experiments, pedagogy and technology.

Knowledge dissemination – An openness to share learning and approaches to various applied research opportunities and findings.

Infrastructure

Okanagan College has experience in a variety of research areas, research tools and current industry/community partners that contribute to the research space. As interest in applied research evolves, there is a need for Okanagan College to strengthen the applied research infrastructure so that more educational and research opportunities can be identified and acted upon.

The infrastructure created will reflect the Inspire plan and related road map and align with the Government of Canada, Tri-Council principles and practices and college policies. Also, the infrastructure will support college programming and community partnerships. As part of the infrastructure, there is a need for researchers and students to have designated space to work on their applied research projects.

Timelines and Process

This Background document is intended to support dialogue from various stakeholders that will inform the development of the Applied Research Strategy. Consultations will continue in January and February 2023, with the applied research strategy being developed in March and April. Opportunities for further feedback on the draft will take place as the plan is developed.