

Lessons Learned During CRECS' First 15 Years

By Robert Flynn < rflynn@uOttawa.ca >

CRECS has three main purposes: contributing to the overall mission of the University of Ottawa, producing and transferring knowledge through applied research, evaluation, and dissemination, and providing training and building capacity in the community agencies with which it collaborates in the social, health, and educational sectors.

In pursuing its first purpose, CRECS tries to align its activities with the four strategic goals articulated in uOttawa's strategic plan, (1) providing a rich, inspiring student experience, (2) achieving research excellence, (3) promoting bilingualism and the French language and culture, and (4) developing leaders through internationalization. These university goals, and especially the first two, provide a convenient hook on which to hang these reflections on the lessons learned at CRECS by professors, professional research staff, and students during our first 15 years (2000-2015).

Student experience

Regarding CRECS' role in enhancing the uOttawa student experience, we have learned, from many of the hundreds of undergraduate, graduate, or postdoctoral students that we have welcomed over the years, that the time they have spent at CRECS has been a highlight of their student careers, whether they were gathering thesis data, participating in field placements for academic credit, or publishing the results of their work on applied research or evaluation projects. A second lesson has been that CRECS has provided an accessible vehicle whereby professors, staff, and students could make concrete their commitment to contributing to the welfare of children or adults faced with the risks of homelessness, child maltreatment, or many other forms of social exclusion. Thirdly, we have learned that engaging in "real world" research or evaluation seems to foster a climate of mentoring and positive relationships from which students, staff, and professors all benefit. Finally, students in programs with an important professional component, such as clinical psychology or education, have

often remarked that their involvement at the program, agency, or even national or international levels has served as a valuable practice and policy complement to the micro-level, individual focus of their professional training.

Research Excellence

In relation to achieving research excellence, we have learned that a research centre such as CRECS can leverage a modest but crucial contribution by uOttawa (i.e., \$92,000 in 2014-2015, from our co-sponsoring Faculties of Social Sciences and Education and from the Office of the Vice-President—Research) into 18 times as much in grant and contract revenue (i.e., \$1,659,470 in 2014-2015, generated by CRECS' 8 core professors).

Second, these 8 core professors supervised, in 2014-2015, 4 postdoctoral, 30 doctoral, and 9 masters students. Together with their students and CRECS professional and administrative staff, the 8 core professors produced, in 2014-2015, no fewer than 30 peer-reviewed articles, 2 books, 9 book chapters, 15 technical reports, 29 conference presentations, and 13 mentions and 6 interviews in the media. If we were to include the research contributions by the other 28 CRECS senior researchers and 14 affiliated researchers, the overall counts would obviously be much higher.

Third, we have learned that CRECS' numerous collaborations with community agencies have had many mutual benefits. Agencies have shown greater appreciation of the merits of applied research and evaluation for improving services, and CRECS has made uOttawa more visibly present in areas of community service, particularly to disadvantaged citizens, than would otherwise have been the case.

Fourth, as a research centre sponsored by the Faculties of Social Sciences and Education and as a rallying point for researchers from a broad range of uOttawa Faculties (Education, Social Sciences, Arts, Management, Health Sciences, and Medicine), teaching hospitals, and other universities, we have learned firsthand the benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration. At the

same time, we have also discovered that the Faculty-oriented structure of universities makes it difficult to achieve a high level of interdisciplinarity, which, in Destination 2020, is seen as a catalyst for innovation.

A fifth lesson has been that the research, training, and interdisciplinary contributions of CRECS would probably be enhanced if the centre had a defined role and visible presence in Faculty deliberations and decision-making, together with the other research centres in our cosponsoring Faculties.

Bilingualism

I also want to mention (without elaboration because of space limitations) that CRECS has learned from its activities related to the third and fourth strategic goals of uOttawa. With regard to promoting bilingualism and the French language and culture, we have learned that the ability of CRECS' core professors to teach, supervise, and conduct research and evaluation in both official languages has been a great asset. Our bilingualism has enabled us to teach core courses on evaluation in French or English that are either required or else taken as valuable options by full-time masters or doctoral students in psychology, education, or other disciplines. Our bilingual competency has also allowed us to teach in both official languages to the part-time students enrolled in the Graduate Diploma in Program Evaluation offered jointly by the Faculties of Education and Social Sciences.

Internationalization

Finally, concerning developing leaders through internationalization, CRECS in 2014-2015 learned just how rich study visits (including colloquia) by international visitors can be. We welcomed two doctoral students, one from the Autonomous University of Barcelona in Spain and the other from Oxford University in England. We also welcomed a distinguished visiting researcher from the University of Stockholm, in Sweden, and a professor and doctoral student from Queen's University in Belfast, in Northern Ireland. In addition, CRECS core professors, their students, and

professional staff have continued to experience the benefits of membership in international research networks or collaborations. While CRECS has engaged in recent years in international work (e.g., research projects or capacity-building in evaluation), we hope to expand the amount and scope of our international efforts in future. For the moment, we conclude these reflections by extending our heartfelt thanks for their steadfast support over the last 15 years to our many colleagues, benefactors, and friends at the University of Ottawa and in a wide range of local, provincial, national, and international organizations. With them, we look forward to the future with hope and confidence, convinced that the best is yet to come.