MEMORANDUM

TO: Ernie Barber, provost and vice-president academic
FROM: Lisa Kalynchuk, chair, planning and priorities committee of Council
DATE: April 10, 2016
RE: Task Force Report on the Review of the School of Public Health

The planning and priorities committee was first made aware of the external reviewers’ recommendations about the School of Public Health on April 29, 2015, and shortly thereafter the external reviewers’ report and your response were posted on the university website. The conclusion reached by the external reviewers was that the university cannot maintain two separate public health units. The school’s collaboration with other units has been troubled, and the school was unable to put in place the incentives to attract collaboration with other stakeholders. A fundamental principle of the interdisciplinary schools was that they would be a locus where colleges would want to invest to achieve outcomes that would not be possible within a college structure.

Other observations at that time were that the Master of Public Health (MPH) program has achieved rapid growth as a professional program and placed a large teaching load on junior faculty. The school’s singular focus on its professional MPH program has hampered progress toward its research goals. As the MPH is focused on international students and international work, the areas of national public health and Aboriginal public health have not advanced at the same pace.

At that time, the planning and priorities committee noted that revisiting the original vision for the school was a critical first step for the consideration of the future of the school. Members noted that as resources are scarce, sound decisions would be required regarding the investment of additional resources in the school.

Subsequent to the release of the external reviewers’ report, you informed the planning and priorities committee that you had constituted an internal task force to review the report and consult with stakeholders across campus to identify a set of recommendations to guide the next steps for the school.

On March 23, 2016, the planning and priorities committee discussed the recommendations of the task force. The committee agreed with these recommendations as a logical next step for the school. It was clear to the committee, as it was to the task force, that the school in its current form is not sustainable. The school needs to be re-oriented towards its initial mandate and work on developing and maintain good and strong relationships with other departments and units on campus and with external health agencies. It is also crucial that
the school re-foster internal joint appointments to better advance its teaching and research outcomes.

Members agreed with the perception that the original conclusion reached by the external reviewers that the university cannot maintain two separate public health units was hasty given that the reviewers did not consult sufficiently with the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology. The School of Public Health and the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology have sufficiently different academic mandates and neither unit has a desire to merge with the other; therefore, such a merger would be unsuccessful and resisted internally. With the realization within the school of the importance of returning to its original mandate and vision, the appointment of a new executive director who is aligned with this vision, a new enrolment plan, and regular feedback on the progress of the school on its efforts to engage with other academic units, external health agencies and community-based organizations, the school has the necessary foundation to re-orient itself. The committee noted that although the school may not have achieved its original objectives, educational directions can change quite quickly.

Although the committee supports the recommendations made by the task force, there was some skepticism expressed about whether or not the school will be able to achieve its mandate. If the school is unsuccessful in meeting its original mandate and vision, the committee acknowledges that the university will need to support the academic commitments made to students, faculty members, and researchers but move their activities into another unit.

On behalf of the committee,

________________________

Lisa Kalynchuk, chair
Planning and priorities committee of Council