



FLOURISHING AS A FACULTY

APPROVED BY FACULTY COUNCIL
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Lakehead
UNIVERSITY

Faculty of
Education



Preamble

The Faculty of Education is committed to values that promote sustainability and human dignity such as equity, diversity, inclusion, reconciliation, and empowerment, both within the Faculty and in our relationships with the wider world. Indeed, the Faculty of Education is committed to helping create the conditions by which all humans, all life, and the land can flourish. We strive to work and act in accordance with these values for the benefit of all as we seek to enable conditions of flourishing within and beyond the Faculty.

While we embrace flourishing as an aspirational aim, we also acknowledge the historic, and current, challenges to flourishing facing diverse groups and individuals, nations, the other-than-human world, and the very life systems of the planet. The climate crisis, mass extinction, and global societal inequities exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic are just three examples of many conditions that limit flourishing for the Earth's inhabitants. Many of our collective challenges stem from a long history of human struggle for survival, from the ravages of imperialism, settler colonialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism, and from the damaging psychological, social, and ecological consequences that these systems have produced. The ideal of flourishing is in part a response to this damaging history and the way it has been perpetuated in modern institutions governed by the logic of neoliberal economics. We take up flourishing not as a quixotic dream, but as a necessary correction to a history that has failed to produce enough of it.

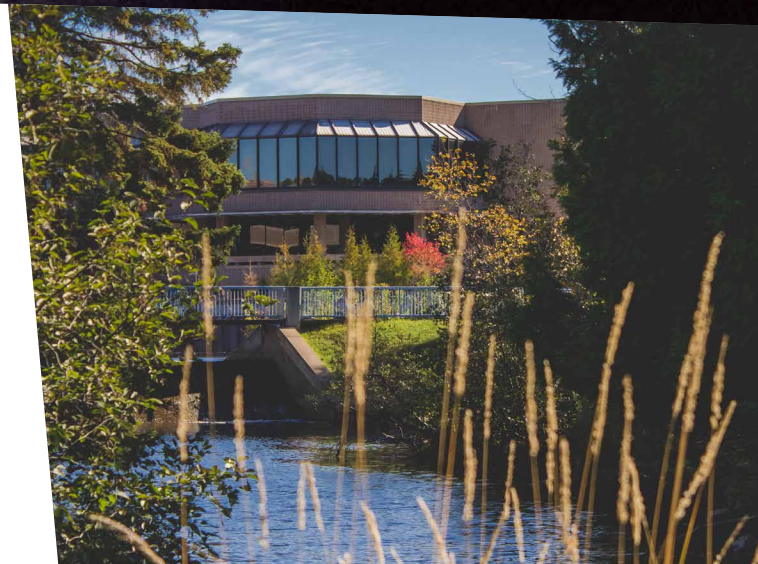


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Flourishing in the Faculty of Education

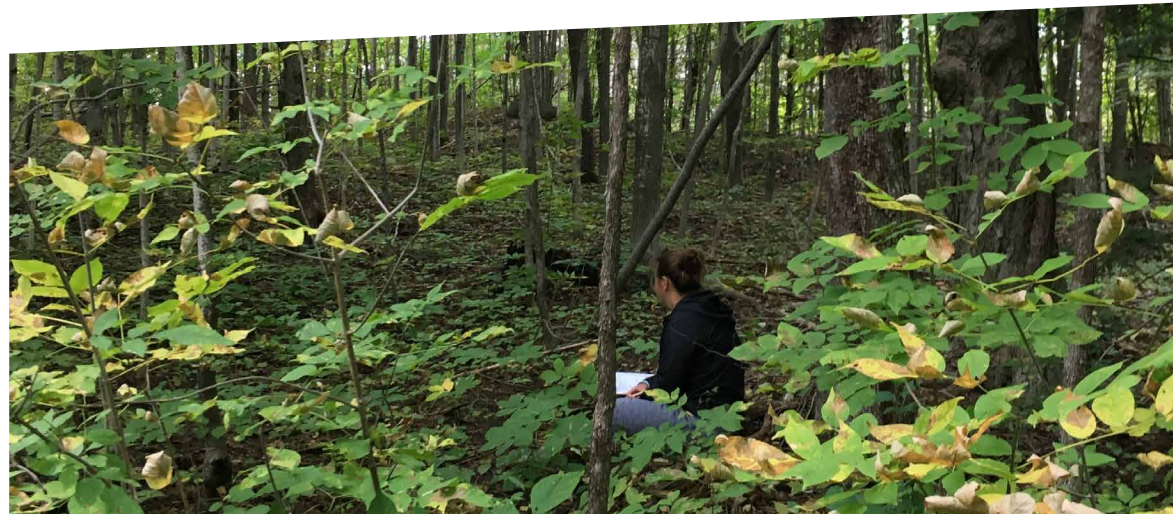
The idea of flourishing draws upon an understanding that human dignity is best realized through the development of opportunities that promote and sustain the exercising of human capabilities and the cultivation of strengths (Gereluk, 2018). It also takes inspiration from feminist, Indigenous, and environmental scholars who critique the isolation and individualism fostered in the contemporary academy and beyond, and reminds us that as members of human and ecological communities we have a responsibility to work together to ensure all members of our communities can thrive (Adams-Hutcheson & Johnston, 2019; Cuomo, 1998; Kimmerer, 2014; Whyte & Cuomo, 2016).

WHAT MIGHT THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION LOOK LIKE IF FLOURISHING WAS AN ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE?

The focus would be on developing people as learners with, and within, the environment in “such a way as to generate the highest quality of experience and inspire the

finest creativity of response and expression” (Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin, n.d., p. 6). The work of the Faculty would be focused on supporting people, both individually and collectively, in leading mino-bimaadiziwin (the good life) in relationship with the cultural and natural world.

It would mean cultivating a sense of critical hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) within the Faculty, and committing to caring for each other, the places we inhabit, and ultimately the planet. Critical hope will promote a commitment to education that rejects the current binary of social justice and academic rigour. It will cause us to take stock of ourselves and our work and commit to addressing injustices. Finally, it will encourage us to do what is right if we are to reimagine a Faculty that both responds as an institution and equips its members to address the social and environmental issues that confront us.





A Capabilities Approach to Flourishing

If this is the difficult path we wish to tread, then where do we start? The Capabilities Approach, developed by Sen (2009) and Nussbaum (2011), has the explicit goal of promoting social justice through participatory, deliberative, and democratic processes. From a Capabilities Approach, which focuses on what people are actually able to do and be, an individual who is flourishing is “filled with emotional vitality and they are functioning positively in the private and social realms of their lives ... Flourishing individuals are truly living rather than merely existing” (Keyes & Haidt, 2003, p. 6). A key feature of the approach is an emphasis on individual agency: “the individual’s ability to choose and to act, to be autonomous, and to make decisions on their terms and that they value towards a purposeful, goal directed activity; and also on diversity and difference” (Brunner & Watson, 2015, p. 6).

Such an understanding also recognizes that there are structural and systemic issues that create barriers to the development of human capabilities, and thus flourishing, within the Faculty. Consequently, as a Faculty, we have an

obligation to recognize, name, challenge, and ultimately dismantle these barriers, seeing our reforms through an equity lens. Further, it means that we must acknowledge that all life forms, including us, “are vulnerable bodies living on a volatile planet” (Ginn, Beisel, & Barua, 2014, p. 117). In line with Lakehead’s *Sustainability Plan 2019-2024*, that means a commitment to climate and environmental justice should inform not only our academic programming but also our community engagement, planning, administration, and physical operations.

In the Faculty *Strategic Plan 2018-2023*, the foundations were laid for this conceptualization of flourishing:

The Faculty of Education offers innovative undergraduate, graduate, and ongoing learning opportunities that are grounded in research and a commitment to social and environmental well-being. We serve diverse communities through active partnerships and learner engagement.





Flourishing Conversations Highlighted a Range of Issues

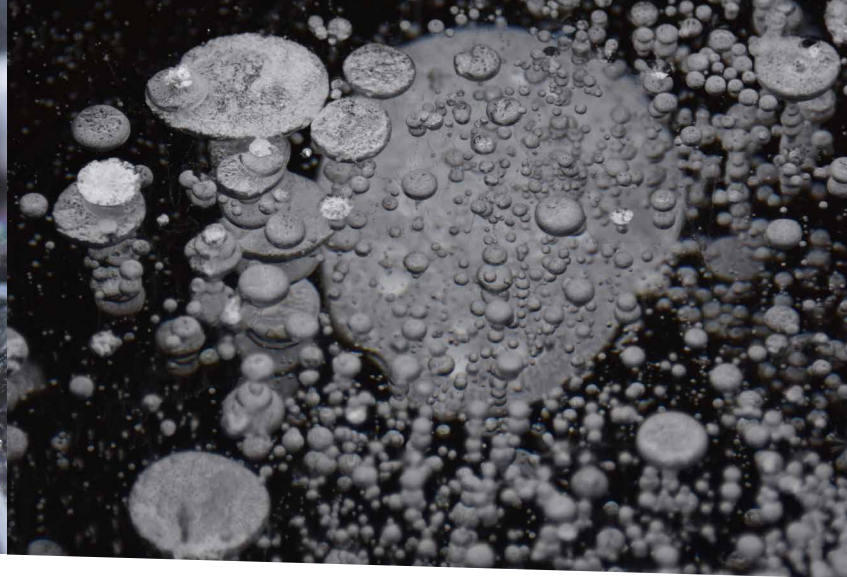
What we are working towards now is based on the conversations that started in September 2020 and December 2020. Those conversations have highlighted a range of issues. These include imbalances in power; access to resources, both tangible and intangible; pressure from various sources (such as academic traditions, curriculum restrictions, time constraints, the legacy of settler colonialism, and the neoliberalization and adjunctification of the academy) that sacrifice long-term ideals for the tyranny of the present; and a sense of tokenism in addressing issues such as Indigenous education, environmental education, social justice, and the wider social contexts in which we operate.

At face value, to name the flourishing of people and the planet as a central aim of education may seem uncontroversial. Who would object to such a goal? However, we recognize that fulfilling this aim may require that we *reinvent* ourselves, rather than simply *reform*. To truly strive for flourishing may mean *unlearning* and *undoing* much of what we take for granted, developing new structures and processes, resisting institutional apathy and inertia, and recovering other ways of being and knowing that are better suited to our moment of collective need and possibility. We also recognize that education alone cannot solve the social and ecological dilemmas that inhibit flourishing. Yet we believe

education must play a decisive role in equipping people to shape responses to the dilemmas we face now, and into the future. Recent events, like the recognition of unmarked graves on the grounds of former residential schools in Kamloops and Saskatchewan and undoubtedly soon elsewhere throughout Canada, illustrate the historical and systemic nature of the injustices we face, and the challenges that we will confront in dealing with these issues. But confronted they must be, for in the words of Murray Sinclair (2021):

There have been several apologies and a promise of things will change. But there's been no change.... So long as any change is only given reluctantly, it means there remains a willingness, ability—and even desire—to go back to the way things were.

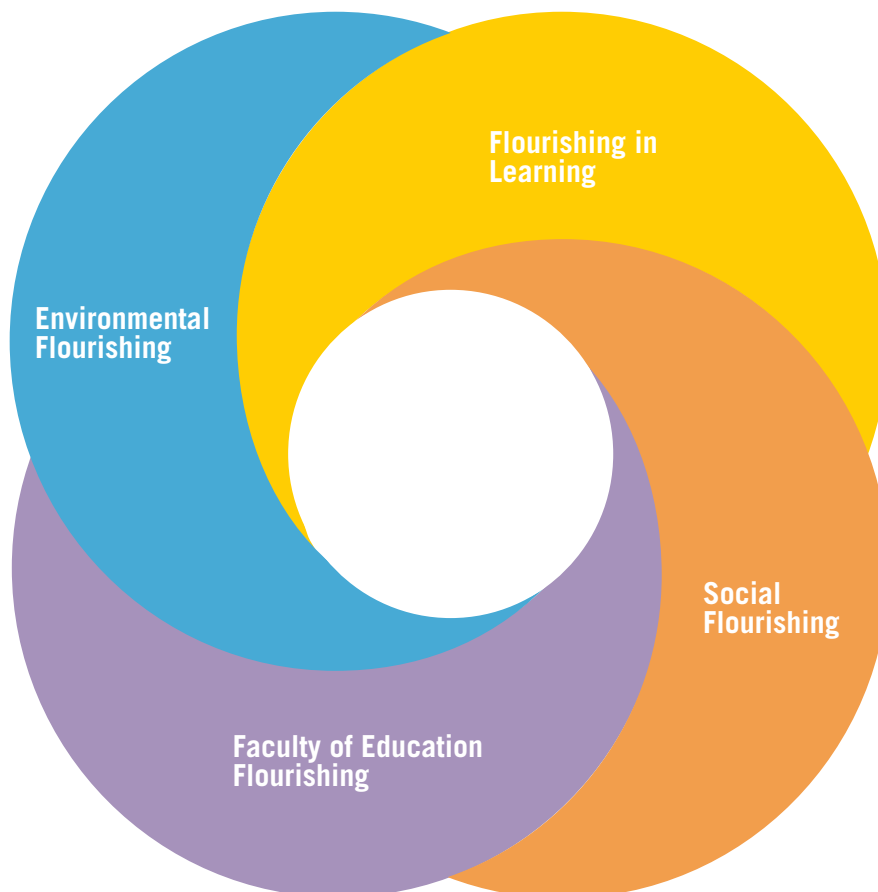
This work will, at times, be difficult at both an individual and institutional level. To accept the aspirational challenge of promoting flourishing, therefore, is to accept that we intend to change and to persevere through the difficulties of working towards the reimagining of the Faculty.



Interconnections in Flourishing

In the diagram below, we are seeking to represent the connections between the Faculty and the realms that we wish to focus our efforts on. In making these representations, we know that we are simultaneously dealing with abstract concepts, while trying to make them practical, and thus actionable. We also want to signal the dynamic nature of our work in that we are influenced by learning and movements that happen

outside the Faculty, while also striving to be influencers ourselves. While we recognize that we cannot capture the full interconnectedness, history, or depth and breadth of this work in a single diagram, it does offer us one way to visually organize our priorities, develop strategies to enact and support those efforts, and establish parameters for accountability.





A Whole Faculty Response

A whole Faculty response focuses on developing strategies that promote flourishing across the learning, social, and environmental realms while also ensuring strategies are centred on, and integrated within, the Faculty. To centre and foster a culture of flourishing, the following categories have been identified to integrate these strategies in a lasting way, extending beyond a specific Department, program offering, or single individual:

- Administration and Governance
- Research
- Teaching and Learning
- Community Partnerships and Engagement
- Operations and Facilities

In responding to the ideal of flourishing, we need to be cognizant of the fact that we are constrained by a range of factors. Some may appear outside our control, such as the structures and policies of the wider university, accreditation bodies, and political decisions. Others are within our control, but are rarely challenged, such

as academic traditions, Faculty culture, and our own personal preferences and prejudices. In looking to develop a Faculty-wide culture of flourishing, therefore, we will be challenged at a number of levels from the institutional to the personal. At times we will need to make hard decisions and recognize that some decisions may not benefit us in the short term. At those times, a sense of humility will be paramount.

We next describe the realms of flourishing that we will be working to address over the coming years. For each of the realms, we have generated initial lists of strategies to address each category. These lists are not static, and there will be a number of items that could potentially fit under more than one category. It is also quite possible that some categories do not require specific strategies, or that these may only become obvious over time.





Flourishing in Learning

For people to flourish in learning depends on honouring multiple ways of being and knowing. People learn differently, influenced by a variety of factors (e.g., cultural background, biology, and disposition). While conventional schooling focuses mainly on cognitive skill development through subject area training, a holistic approach addresses the whole person—mind, body, heart, and spirit—in an interconnected social world grounded in the Earth community. As Miller (1988) wrote in *The Holistic Curriculum*, “The focus of holistic education is on relationships—the relationship between linear thinking and intuition, the relationship between mind and body, the relationships between various domains of knowledge, the relationship between the individual and the community” (p. 3), including other-than-human communities. Along with this focus on relationships, flourishing in learning depends on opportunities to, for example, give and receive kindness and care, exercise the imagination, participate in democratic participatory processes, and balance discipline with freedom (Whitehead, 1929).

ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE

- Ensure class sizes are small enough to facilitate meaningful learning.
- Mentor new contract lecturers and full-time faculty.
- Develop support mechanisms for staff and contract faculty, including professional learning opportunities.
- Expand the Teacher Education Research Fund.
- Fund Post-Doctoral positions in the Faculty.
- Provide opportunities for contract lecturers seeking tenure-track positions to further build their cv’s through, for example, External Adjunct roles.
- Strengthen coherence of policies across both campuses, while recognizing local differences.

RESEARCH

- Strengthen a research culture that respects and promotes a range of research traditions.
- Develop or enhance research opportunities through community partnerships.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Review and revise Indigenous Education programming to encourage and respect community engagement.
- Revise the Bachelor of Education program to reflect practice-based pedagogy, High Leverage Practices, and learnings from Indigenous Education review.
- Examine student workload in the professional year of the Bachelor of Education program to ensure it is appropriate for facilitating meaningful learning.
- Strengthen graduate programming that respects, reflects, and integrates Indigenous forms of knowledge.
- Promote collaboration across campuses, disciplines, and divisions.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND ENGAGEMENT

- Develop new relationships and strengthen existing relations with school boards, Indigenous organizations, the Ministry of Education, and the Ontario College of Teachers.

OPERATIONS AND FACILITIES

- Work towards securing appropriate facilities in Orillia.
- Build on the improved communications and sense of coherence between campuses that has developed during the pandemic.



Social Flourishing

Considering the social inequities in post-secondary education that have made headlines in the past few years, it is clear that not everyone will experience flourishing to the same degree or in the same way, or perhaps not even at all. Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour, as well as sexual and gender minorities and those with disabilities, face systemic barriers that others do not face. For instance, subtle and not-so-subtle expressions of racism negatively impact the educational experiences of Indigenous peoples on campus and undermine their academic achievement (Bailey, 2016) and anti-Black prejudice and discrimination on campus, both explicit and implicit, are continued legacies of institutional policies that have disadvantaged Black people and communities for decades (Moriah, 2020). Thus, an equitable approach to building a culture of personal flourishing must connect to the call for the disruption of policies and practices on campus, including pedagogy and instruction, that continue to disadvantage equity-deserving groups. Such an approach links well to both the *Faculty Strategic Plan* and the *University Academic and Strategic Plans*.

Just as our social experience and sense of ourselves is influenced by culture and politics, it is also influenced by our emotional dispositions, our personal histories, and our unique ways of being in the world. We cannot disentangle affective, emotional, and spiritual matters from either culture or education. Social flourishing depends upon honouring the complexity of everyone's journey, everyone's story, and supporting

the cultivation of unique identities. It equally depends on regular experiences with diverse others so that everyone's view of personhood can expand and become more inclusive and more understanding of difference. Further, sometimes equity that honours difference means that those with privilege on the basis of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability need to take a back seat so that those who have been marginalized have more space for their voices to be expressed and heard.

ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE

- Develop strategies for promoting mental health of faculty, staff, and students.
- Develop, implement, and promote a Faculty EDI (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) policy that informs our academic programming, planning, administration, and community engagement.
- Address issues of economic and professional precarity of contract lecturers.
- Develop a culture that values and promotes work/life balance.
- Address issues of excessive workloads of faculty, staff, and Bachelor of Education students.
- Increase the sense of belonging to one Faculty in two places.
- Enhance the social aspect of Faculty life.
- Enhance participatory decision-making across the Faculty.
- Promote use of university-based health and wellness resources for all members of the Faculty.

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TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Promote student associations and student interactions with the wider Faculty.
- Review admissions requirements for equity-deserving groups.
- Support flexibility in program delivery to take into account students' other responsibilities.
- Ensure coherence within programs to reduce duplication and inappropriate workloads.
- Ensure access to resources for at-risk students.

RESEARCH

- Promote research focused on areas such as race, gender, social class, disability, culture, religion, sexuality, and personal and community sustainability.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND ENGAGEMENT

- Initiate or support projects with existing or new community partners (e.g., school boards, Indigenous organizations, local non-governmental organizations) related to social flourishing in educational contexts.

OPERATIONS AND FACILITIES

- Redevelop culturally appropriate spaces for instruction.
- Work towards improving accessibility across all spaces.
- Develop or improve areas for social interactions between staff, students, contract lecturers, and faculty (e.g., Student Lounge in Thunder Bay and Learning Commons in Orillia).
- In Thunder Bay, increase community utilization of gym and auditorium.





Environmental Flourishing

Lakehead's *Sustainability Plan 2019-2024* considers sustainability "in a pluralistic and inclusive way, encompassing human and ecological health, social justice and equity, Indigenous rights, secure livelihoods, workplace wellbeing, and leadership for vibrant and resilient communities" (p. 4). Our commitment to intellectual and social flourishing in the Faculty has the potential to contribute much to this broad understanding of sustainability, but here we want to single out ways we might address the serious environmental issues we are facing such as climate change, species extinction, plastic proliferation, and other forms of environmental degradation, and how we might contribute to the flourishing of all life and the land and water upon which we depend.

ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE

- Lead and support environmental initiatives at the University.
- Generate a Climate Change and Environmental Flourishing Action Plan for the Faculty.

RESEARCH

- Lead innovative research projects on environmental flourishing.
- Publicize faculty and student research related to environmental flourishing.
- Develop or enhance research opportunities through community partnerships.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Continue to support and promote our innovative environmental and climate change education programming.
- Infuse environmental sustainability content elsewhere in our programs as appropriate, providing professional development and support for faculty members as needed.
- Support our students in becoming active "solutionaries" (Weil, 2016) who have the desire, knowledge, and skills to contribute to environmental flourishing.
- Integrate Aki-based understandings of the world into our programs as appropriate.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND ENGAGEMENT

- Raise student awareness of environmental issues in our communities and the various ways community organizations are responding.
- Publicize existing environmentally-focused research and teaching partnerships in which faculty, staff, and students are involved.
- Develop and support environmentally-focused service learning opportunities.

OPERATIONS AND FACILITIES

- Reduce the carbon footprint of the Faculty as a whole, in line with international targets.
- Advocate for and build spaces that are at the leading edge of sustainability.
- Create spaces for connection and reflection with the more-than-human world.



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