

The Swift Efficient Application of Research in Community Health (SEARCH)

Considering the Faculty

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The SEARCH Program

Considering the Faculty

HIGHLIGHTS

- The faculty members involved in the SEARCH Program are critical to its success.
- There has been tremendous evolution in the number, characteristics and nature of involvement of faculty members in the various iterations of SEARCH since 1996. Faculty involved in SEARCH currently feel strong ownership of the program.
- Involvement in the SEARCH Program does not advance careers significantly when measured against the traditional academic criteria; despite this, the benefits for most individual faculty members warrant continued involvement.
- Factors reported by faculty as being valuable include a sense of being involved in 'something important or ground breaking', the participative and collegial approach of program leaders, the team orientation, and contributing to an improved research environment in the Province.
- Potential benefit accrues to several stakeholder groups as a result of faculty involvement: individual faculty members themselves, university departments, SEARCH participants, the provincial health service and research system.
- There is strong support for identifying and leveraging the opportunities for improved 'fit' within traditional patterns of university recognition and reward for innovative activities such as SEARCH.

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INTRODUCTION

This report was written to capture the perspectives, in 2003, of key faculty members who have been integrally involved in developing and delivering the SEARCH program¹.

The purpose of the SEARCH program is to increase the capacity throughout Alberta to acquire, aggregate, interpret, and apply health information to individual, regional, and provincial health decisions and programs, and to facilitate more effective management of the health system. It is clear that the faculty members involved in the program are integral to its success. If building bridges between decision makers in the health system and the research enterprise is key to enhanced research impact, then the contributions of university-based faculty members in essence represent the bridge-building originating from the research milieu. The contributions of individual faculty members, and their relationships with their supporting organizational home faculty or department, are important to achieving the goals of the program.

Faculty commitment and involvement in this program are critical to its success and the program has evolved substantially in terms of the individuals, model and structure of faculty engagement since it was first conceived in 1995. **The purpose of this report is to capture through feedback from the faculty team members, the key dimensions of faculty engagement which are important to the short and longer term evolution and evaluation of the SEARCH program, and to consider the implications of those dimensions for program development and impact assessment.**

In 2001, a blueprint for the evaluation and ongoing development of the SEARCH program was articulated². It was clarified that there are several levels and sectors that could both experience, impact and inform the evolution of the program. This conceptualization of the 'whole' was somewhat more explicit than had originally been described, and reflected a natural evolution of an important program. The matrix below (Figure 1) summarizes the various components which are key to understanding the program's success. The blueprint identified specific evaluation questions of priority for the two stakeholder groups that were 'top of mind' since the program was conceived: the SEARCH participants (professors in the health system) and their employing organizations (most often regional health authorities). However, in the early iterations of the program, it was unclear what the outcomes for faculty or the university could be (or should be).

The shaded cells in the matrix in Figure 1 indicate the general areas of interest in this report. During the development of the Blueprint, it became evident that the contribution and role of the faculty was broader than those dimensions which have been documented in an ongoing fashion (i.e. curriculum evaluation), and it also became clear that the program partners (AHFMR, health care organizations and universities themselves) had not articulated the key outcomes in the university sector that would be markers of program success and value.

Therefore, this project was undertaken not as an evaluation of faculty participation, per se, but to capture faculty perspectives on key dimensions of the SEARCH Program that are important in the short and long term for them as individuals and for the overall goals of the program, from the perspective of the academic sector. This current work will contribute to creating a framework for evaluating outcomes in the academic sector in future.

¹ Most of the current faculty are located at either the University of Calgary or at the University of Alberta. There have been a small number (including one of the present core faculty) who are located primarily in the private sector.

² Birdsell, Judy and Matthias, Sharon (2001) SEARCH Program Evaluation, Research and Development Blueprint. Edmonton: Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. September 2001.

Figure 1: Areas of Expected Change to Inform SEARCH Development and Impact Assessment

	Locus of Change			
Level of Change	Service Delivery e.g. RHAs, MDs	Academic e.g. Universities	Funding e.g. AHFMR	Citizens, Consumers
<i>Individual</i>				
<i>Individual in Organization/Group</i>				
<i>Organization/Group</i>				
<i>System (e.g. Group of RHAs)</i>				
<i>Trans-sectoral System</i>				

SEARCH Governance and Management	
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Despite the fact that outcomes for the faculty or for the program resulting from faculty actions have not been the focus of specific attention, from a process perspective, faculty contributions are evaluated regularly via curriculum assessments, advisory and planning meetings, ‘real time’ feedback during learning events and annual reporting which the faculty does. Nevertheless, as the program matures and evolves, it is important to understand more clearly

- what outcomes for the program are achieved as a result of faculty contributions;
- what outcomes for the individual faculty members can be attributed to involvement in the SEARCH program
- what outcomes for supporting universities might be expected from SEARCH Program engagement.

Evolution of Faculty Engagement in the Program

This section provides a brief history of how the SEARCH Program model of faculty engagement changed over the first six years of the program. Later in the report faculty members’ opinions about what constitute the key features of the SEARCH program are given.

When SEARCH was initially conceived, the program built on a curriculum previously used in Canada, the U.S. and internationally in a comparable context, with similar capacity-building goals (The International Clinical Epidemiology Network (INCLIN) Program). From the beginning of SEARCH, faculty members from two key departments (Public Health Sciences at the University of Alberta (UofA) and Community Health Sciences at the University of Calgary (UofC)) were involved primarily on the basis of invitation/direction from department heads. For SEARCH I and II, two faculty received ongoing funding as ‘Curriculum Coordinators’ the basis of a .5 position (one each at Public Health Sciences and Community Health Sciences). In SEARCH I (1996-1998), specific faculty members from those departments were asked to

present certain parts of the curriculum and a number of faculty from outside Alberta, who had been involved with the original program (INCLLEN) were central in the program delivery.

In the second iteration of SEARCH (1998-2000), groups of faculty from the two core departments planned and presented specific residential modules. The model of supporting two Curriculum Coordinators, one in each participating department, continued. Other faculty were engaged on a per diem basis, linked to their face-to-face teaching commitment. For example, the UC team developed and delivered two modules on 'Research' and 'Data Issues'. An independent consultant was engaged for the first time to design and manage two of the six residential modules. The faculty teams who designed and delivered the other modules were based in each of the core departments, with little joint planning and teaching.

Before the third iteration of SEARCH, the AHFMR undertook a major consultation with its partners in the Program, including health regions and university faculties. Pursuant to that consultation, the model for faculty involvement was reviewed and redesigned in an effort to address the following key issues that had been identified:

- a sense of isolation among individual faculty members involved in SEARCH
- lack of cohesion in the faculty groups contributing to SEARCH
- lack of a sense of ownership in the program, except for the Curriculum Coordinators
- difficulties in sustaining curriculum cohesion and integration across multiple teaching faculty
- difficulty in providing sustained support to SEARCH participants in projects work and between modules, with only two faculty supported in this role
- a need for a multi-disciplinary faculty reflecting the range of participants' professions
- little incentive for engaging in collaborative research relationships with participants and their organizations.

In SEARCH III (2001-2003), the faculty model moved to one which was aimed at developing a distributed but sustained multidisciplinary faculty team, working effectively together on curriculum design, evolution and delivery, and providing ongoing mentoring to participants.

With this intent, health science faculties from all four Alberta universities were invited to participate in SEARCH. As a result 5 faculties (Nursing and Medicine at U of C; Medicine, Nursing and Business at U of A) had 10 team members engaged in the program and funded on an ongoing basis for .2 time. This group of ten formed the 'Core Faculty Team', of whom three were 'Lead Faculty' funded for .3 time as coordinators and leaders of each curriculum theme area. One of the Leads was from the consulting sector continuing on in her role from the SEARCH II program in program design and delivery. Before SEARCH III, the curriculum was reviewed updated and redesigned in a participatory manner involving core faculty members, together with program users. This move to a larger and distributed faculty was a significant shift for the program.

The fourth iteration of SEARCH (2003-2005), is now underway, with the same faculty team model, and following largely the curriculum and program model developed for SEARCH III but with enhancements and revisions determined by the faculty team in response to participant and Steering Committee feedback. Since the beginning of the program, a faculty member from each university has been a member of the SEARCH Steering Committee.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this report are to

1. **Explore the value and potential impact of the SEARCH program** for individual faculty members and their departments
2. **Identify implications for future evaluation** of SEARCH
3. **Make recommendations for program design** related to faculty recruitment, organization and development.

APPROACH TAKEN

Information for this report has been obtained from several sources:

- A report written in early 2003 (based on a series of interviews) describing faculty perspectives about participation in SEARCH and comments from faculty about the report
- Group interviews in September 2003 with core faculty members currently involved with SEARCH
- Consultant's prior experience as a program director at AHFMR and subsequently in the development of the SEARCH Blueprint
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Discussions with faculty in early 2003 provided a range of comments on questions related to participation in the SEARCH program (e.g. career advancement, personal interests, impact on research, impact on academic sector and collaboration). These comments were exploratory in nature, rather than evaluative. In order that this input be put to specific use as the program evolves, this report builds on those discussions through further input and consideration in light of the overall blueprint for development and evaluation of the SEARCH program.

Other Relevant Work and Focus for this Report

There are several pieces of work being done that will inform the SEARCH evolution. These include several evaluation projects addressing various cells in the matrix in Figure 1, and also a general high level strategic planning process which is considering SEARCH in light of the broader AHMFR and health system environment in the province and country. This report is one piece of a larger effort.

This report contributes data on one specific aspect of SEARCH evolution. It focuses on the role and involvement of SEARCH faculty from Alberta's universities, on the basis of a continuing and important role for academic departments and their members in future iterations of the program, and on working collaboratively to deliver a program of broad interest in the province. The input considered in this report is from faculty members (as compared to other stakeholders e.g. SEARCH participants).

INPUT RECEIVED

The information considered relates to two periods of time: past/present and the future. The input is reported in four sections: the first, *The Meaning and Value of the SEARCH Program to Faculty and Departments*, reflects mainly perceptions of faculty based on their experience to date; the other three sections focus on future implications for the program, *Future Evaluation*, *Program Design and Monitoring*, and *Faculty Recruitment, Organization, Management and Development*. Discussions held in early 2003 reflected a whole range of comments made by various faculty members and the intent was to seek a range of comments and reflections, rather than to seek agreement or consensus. Nevertheless, when future directions are being informed it is helpful to understand the level of concurrence among the broad faculty group. This report attempts to reflect those areas where there is broad and general agreement.

Participant Profile

The initial consultation through individual interviews included almost all current core faculty members as well as faculty involved in early iterations of the program, and some outside observers. Further input to explore identified issues was received from 9 out of 10 core faculty involved in SEARCH III through two group interviews (one each in Calgary and Edmonton) and supplemented by individual discussion where necessary. A list of faculty involved in these latter discussions which took place in early September 2003 is included in Appendix B, where a list of all key faculty involved in the program since its inception is included.

The Meaning and Relevance of SEARCH Program to Faculty and Departments

Following is a summary of faculty comments in two areas: first, the key elements of the current SEARCH program design which are contributing to its success; and second, some themes which relate to assessment of the program to date.

Faculty Perceptions of Key Design Features of the Program Currently³

Since the inception of the SEARCH program, the faculty role has become more clearly delineated and more integrally involved with program design and delivery. The current understanding of the role is described officially in 'Terms of Reference' for faculty support (Appendix C), and in the annual reports reflecting faculty involvement which are now submitted to AHFMR (Appendix D).

The points below highlight those features or characteristics which faculty members feel are key to the current successes and their continued involvement.

- **Faculty configuration.** The incorporation of a 'core' faculty team into the program design has been positive. This has enabled significantly enhanced team building and shared ownership of the program. Having fewer total faculty involved, but having those few involved from varying disciplines and more integrally involved in the program has

³ This report is not intended to provide a complete description of the SEARCH program, but rather only those aspects of most relevance to faculty involvement. Additional information on program design is available the AHFMR website (www.ahfmr.ab.ca), in the current Program Descriptions, and the *Evaluation, Research and Development Blueprint* of 2001. For more complete descriptions of the program in total, contact Sarah Hayward at sarah.hayward@ahfmr.ab.ca

been a positive development. Core faculty members are those who make a 20-30% time commitment to the program and this contribution is formally acknowledged by both AHFMR and the university. In SEARCH III, for example, there were 10 core faculty members, with 2-4 aligned primarily with each of the three themes named below.

- **Curriculum design.** Designing the curriculum content around three themes: Creating, Choosing, and Using Evidence has made the intent and content of the program more transparent and understandable to a broader audience. Explicit efforts to coordinate and articulate the three themes has worked well. Clear identification of the underlying principles, philosophy and supporting 'plinths' of the program have also assisted in strengthening the cohesion of the curriculum.
- **Team work.** The opportunity to create small 'teams' around the three curriculum themes has worked to varying degrees of success. Teams of 2-4 faculty members have coalesced around each of the themes (creating, choosing, using). The teams have worked more or less closely, depending to some degree on personal interests of the members. In those teams that have 'jelled', the team approach has distinct appeal to members.
- **Whole faculty interaction.** The opportunities for all core faculty members to interact have been important in substantive design areas, but perhaps more importantly in creating a collegial atmosphere, momentum and ownership. For example, in the early stages of SEARCH III, all core faculty members met for a 24-hour retreat to plan an integrated curriculum for the two years, and annual faculty retreats have since become a hallmark of the program development, as well as regular faculty meetings integrated into all SEARCH modules.
- **Program management and leadership.** This has been important on many dimensions. There is now a stability associated with the program that has not always been the case; the participative leadership style of the program director is notable but specific expectations for deliverables (e.g. explicit expectations for materials for each session) are also helpful.
- **Financial incentives or compensation to faculty.** The importance of this is at least as much symbolic as substantive. The money forwarded to faculties was used in different ways (e.g. project support, release time, personnel support) and decisions about its use made through different processes in various faculties. The very fact of its existence was important, quite apart from the specific use to which it was put.
- **Ongoing nature of interaction among faculty and learners.** This is facilitated by both the *SEARCH Desktop* (online environment) which is an inherent part of the program and also the expectations for projects and mentoring which occur for the two years duration of the program (and in fact, beyond).

The faculty mentioned many specific components, as reflected above, which can be singled out and described. As important, however, is the non-specific feeling many faculty members describe, that they are involved in something 'exciting', 'world class' or something that is 'going somewhere'. There is a tangible energy reflected among the majority of core faculty interviewed.

Evaluative Comments of Faculty About the SEARCH Program

- **SEARCH has been a positive experience for faculty members.** This is as a result of various factors, including: collegiality of participative process, applied focus of work, flexibility and responsiveness of approach taken. **'Fit'** between the SEARCH program and personal and professional interests and aspirations of faculty members **is important.** Some speak primarily of appreciating the collegial nature of the process, others see it as enhancing understanding of and access to the health system, while one faculty member has used SEARCH involvement as a central component to building an academic career. Faculty members have differing reasons for positive assessments, but fundamentally continued involvement is due to high personal interest and commitment.
- **Involvement with AHFMR and health regions is positive.** AHFMR is respected and the importance of good relationships with AHFMR is recognized. Many faculty members also acknowledge the importance of improved relationships with and access to decision makers in the health system.
- **SEARCH does not advance careers significantly when measured against usual academic criteria.** This is not to say that it is not possible to work at least partially within the SEARCH program to accomplish traditional academic goals, but this has not been the experience of most faculty members. In spite of this, most of them find adequate reasons for continued involvement.

Academic advancement is usually assessed on contributions to (in decreasing order of importance) research and publication, university teaching, graduate student supervision, external teaching, community service, and outside professional activity. The Faculty take a range of approaches to considering and reporting their SEARCH involvement in their annual reviews for their department. At least one person frames it within the usual hierarchy, including striving to publish from their SEARCH experience, while most faculty view it either as external teaching, community service or outside professional activity. In some cases, it is considered activity that is recognized formally (i.e. some get teaching release time).

- **The benefits of involvement in SEARCH warrant continued involvement.** Although not necessarily those that contribute directly to career advancement, there were tangible benefits nonetheless. These included involvement in an enterprise that was well managed and flexible, development of relationships with health system managers (and hence future access for research), and a focus on applying research for societal benefit. At least one person mentioned that programs such as SEARCH were helping to improve general attitudes in the province (beyond the university) about research.
- **Limited information was generated about the value and impact of the SEARCH program to university departments.** From input received from faculty members, it seems as though maintaining good relationships with AHFMR is a key concern of department heads, as well as contributing generally to research-relevant community activities. However, with respect to teaching, contractual arrangements made within the university would generally take precedence over SEARCH commitments (i.e. once a course is offered in the calendar, it must be offered).

Future Evaluation

The SEARCH Blueprint implies that it is desirable to understand the contribution of all contributing stakeholders and impact on all sectors involved in the goals of the program.

The goals of the SEARCH program as stated in 1996 were:

1. To have health professionals in the RHAs and agencies use current, relevant and appropriate information to assist in identifying priority health issues and in making decisions on these issues based on research results.
2. To develop a collaborative network of expertise across Alberta to initiate and carry out health research on a local, regional, or provincial basis.
3. To create a culture in which policy-responsive research is both valued and supported.
4. To conduct a formal evaluation of the SEARCH program.

To date, there has not been a systematic evaluation of the academic sector component⁴ nor systematic feedback from faculty relating to their SEARCH involvement. These conversations were designed to inform future evaluation initiatives by identifying the range and nature of outcomes that may be anticipated in the academic sector from the SEARCH Program.

Faculty comments implied potential benefit arising from the SEARCH program for a number of parties in addition to SEARCH participants: faculty members themselves, university departments, and the provincial health and health research system. Potential indicators of positive impact in each of the areas that were identified are listed below.

- **Faculty career enhancement**
 - publications (directly emanating from SEARCH involvement OR from SEARCH projects OR influenced or enabled by SEARCH)
 - invitations to be on advisory committees
 - enhanced access to research sites (e.g. relationships between faculty and personnel in health authorities facilitates research by faculty members)
 - application of the SEARCH educational experience and skill set (e.g. experiential learning, responsive curriculum design) to benefit in other educational settings
 - conference presentations (e.g. concerning SEARCH as an innovative learning community)
 - potential for future collaborative research with SEARCH participants and their colleagues and organizations
- **Faculty personal and professional achievement / satisfaction**
 - public and professional recognition

⁴ This is not to say there has not been evaluation of modules and learning sessions in which the faculty have been involved. There is extensive and ongoing evaluation in 'real time' of all of the in person modules in the program. The focus however is on evaluating the content and process, rather than explicitly on individual faculty members. Many learning activities involve more than one faculty member.

- opportunity to work in multi-disciplinary teams
- faculty provide appropriate learning and mentoring to meet SEARCH participants learning objectives.
- personal satisfaction with involvement in a quality program
- **University departments**
 - enhanced links with AHFMR
 - increased flexibility for program planning and delivery due to financial contribution of SEARCH
 - ability to recruit graduate students through SEARCH
 - relative value to department compared to other community service programs
 - transference of SEARCH experience/knowledge/curriculum into other department activities and grant applications
- **Provincial environment**
 - enhanced relationships and good will between faculty/university and health community
 - improvements within health organizations in using research to inform decision making

Program design and monitoring

In order to understand comments related to program design, it is helpful to have a sense of what that program design process has been, as referred to in the evolution of faculty engagement in the program in the section called 'Evolution of faculty engagement in the program' (p. 3) in the Introduction and the section titled 'The meaning and relevance of SEARCH program to faculty and departments' earlier in this section (p. 6).

Faculty comments regarding program design and monitoring in future included:

- **Involvement of faculty in both teaching and mentoring is valuable.** This dual participation increased awareness of what the participants had been learning and their organizational contexts. Nevertheless, it was also recognized that faculty could be engaged in either activity (teaching or mentoring) without the other, given appropriate support.
- **Guidelines for the mentoring process would be valuable.** This is a variable process at present, and more concentrated attention to this aspect may improve it. There were varied perceptions about how mentors and learners became paired. Ideally, there would be a process through which agreed common interest between mentor and learner could be found before a mentoring relationship began.
- **Higher level of graduate student involvement in SEARCH program is desirable within certain limits.** It is traditional in academic environments to provide maximum learning opportunities for future faculty members (i.e. graduate students). Typically, this happens in a variety of ways: as teaching assistants, research assistants and participants in events where there is potential for students to learn. While there is support for student involvement, it should not happen at the expense of achieving the goals of the SEARCH program. It is acknowledged that the SEARCH learners are not a

traditional student group, and require a certain type of mentor or instructor: experienced, mature, confident, comfortable working with very experienced individuals. Therefore, only in very select instances would it be appropriate to involve a student in a 'teaching' role, for example. That being said, it was generally felt that if mature graduate students were available, they could perhaps be involved in some ways such as mentoring on projects in a situation which would involve learning in both directions, which faculty generally feels happens in most cases. Also, as there are opportunities to involve graduate students and post-doctoral fellows in doing research about some aspect of SEARCH, that would be very welcome.

- **It would be worthwhile to identify areas where SEARCH evaluation and recognition could be more closely aligned with academic performance criteria, but not at the expense of jeopardizing progress toward uniquely SEARCH goals.** Aspiring to perform well on the traditional academic yardsticks is NOT the reason that faculty participate in the SEARCH program. They are attracted by aspects of the program that are purposely different. That being said, there is an acknowledgement that most faculty do live primarily in an academic milieu, so where it is possible to identify components that can serve a dual purpose that is desirable. For example, there is extensive evaluation data collected relating to the SEARCH modules. An exploration of how this data might be framed and presented in such a way as to have currency within the university⁵ may be worthwhile. (Indeed, some faculty use it in its current state). The principle would be to find some areas of overlap, where activity or accomplishments that serve the SEARCH purpose also contribute to academic goals, or can be changed or framed in such a way. AHMFR has collected on an annual basis (since 2001) information on key variables e.g. time commitment to SEARCH, level of satisfaction, related publications and presentations, etc. Some faculty members use this annual report (and the information contained) in their annual reports to their own departments heads. Other faculty members had not thought of doing that.

Short term implications. Faculty expressed strong support for some aspects of the program which would suggest the following:

- Continuing use of Lead and Core faculty structure, with enhanced collaboration and curriculum design between the theme teams to ensure the sections don't become disconnected.
- Introduction of new faculty as contributors with limited roles so that they get exposed to the program and the potential pool of more involved faculty grows
- Development of mentoring guidelines.

Long term implications. There is a major discussion inherent in determining the appropriate direction in program design and monitoring, that is related to the appropriate underlying 'reference frame' which should be used when assessing the SEARCH program. There are potentially several competing (or perhaps complementary) reference frames. Clearly one such frame is the academic one. Faculty members involved in SEARCH are almost all located within an academic environment; therefore it is tempting to use this as the predominant reference point. However, this program was consciously initiated outside the existing academic milieu to achieve things which history had shown had not been achieved within that setting. The competing reference frames are not so clear or compelling, but may include things such as

⁵ Although the conversation at this point in time refers mainly to those in a university environment, the principle applies equally to those employed in other venues.

novel pedagogical approaches (e.g. experiential learning) or knowledge utilization or system change.

If one adopts the perspective that 'success will be defined for faculty according to the predominant milieu within which they work', then the outcomes and success indicators will be driven by this dominant frame. However it seems clear from conversations with faculty and from evaluations informed by other SEARCH stakeholders that viewing the academic milieu, with all its attendant yardsticks, as the primary lens through which to evaluate SEARCH is not appropriate. At the very least, this lens should not take pre-eminence in determining relevant yardsticks for the SEARCH program.

Faculty recruitment, organization, management and development

Faculty comments included:

- **Faculty have been recruited through a variety of means.** Some were approached by SEARCH staff, some by colleagues and some by department heads. It seems not to make a difference, as long as the 'fit' is right between the faculty member and what they are expected to do as part of SEARCH.
- **Faculty with established track records in research (and ideally tenure) are the best choice for SEARCH faculty.** It is felt that it is helpful if faculty have established profile and reputation among the community; and it may be risky for a junior or non-tenured faculty member to participate (as focus and opportunity on publication and the usual research yardsticks is low in SEARCH). In exceptional circumstances it may make sense to include a more junior person (e.g. if a focus on applied health research was central to career goals).
- **Faculty members are very appreciative of the supportive and facilitative management style used by SEARCH leadership and staff.** The activities the SEARCH staff do in managing participants and their organizations (e.g. negotiating projects, dealing with time commitments, following up on participation and project progress) is important.
- **Participative and collaborative approach to program design is important.** The opportunities for faculty to have input into a variety of dimensions which are central to the program are highly appreciated; the fact that there are staff members who work to ensure the desired directions come to fruition is also important.
- **Funding from AHFMR to support faculty involvement is important, but flexible arrangements about use of the money are helpful.** All faculty were aware of the financial arrangements regarding their participation. There is a wide variation in how the funds for faculty support are used within the departments. Suggestions about how it should be used range from contractual arrangements among two or three parties (faculty members, department, AHFMR) to competitive personnel awards to SEARCH faculty to a model which would have faculty employed under a personal service contract as an 'outside professional activity'. What does seem clear is that it is desirable for the faculty member to feel some personal recognition and benefit for their participation in SEARCH. Use of funds from AHFMR can be instrumental in this. There was a fairly strong feeling that direct compensation to faculty members is a desired outcome. Another desired

direction might be to identify a mechanism whereby that money that transfers hands could be acknowledged and 'counted' in a way that contributes to academic achievement (e.g. some sort of 'award'). Whatever the outcome, transparency and clarity about the approach is important.

- **Having universities involved as formal entities in the program is important to the continued involvement of academic faculty.** While most faculty members are very supportive of making a commitment to helping achieve the SEARCH goals (which vary from traditional academic ones) it is doubtful whether many of these same faculty would be involved in the SEARCH program if their department were not formally involved (i.e. they would not do it as outside professional activity exclusively, for the most part).
- **A competitive personnel award to recruit new faculty into the program may have merit.** SEARCH faculty are very keen that the current core committed faculty and existing teams be maintained to the degree possible. That being said, the importance of bringing new faculty and new perspectives into the group was acknowledged. Introducing a competitive mechanism for purposes of introducing new faculty may be worth considering. It has the added advantage of providing some 'social capital' for the successful applicant (i.e. they can list it on their Curriculum Vitae as a personnel award).

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

General Comments

This report has focused on the role and contribution of university faculty members in the SEARCH program, and on the contribution that involvement in SEARCH has made to their careers. It is important to remember that the overall goals against which success of the program must be measured are those of the SEARCH Program, and the faculty role is being considered within that context. There is a potential for tension to exist due to competing goals – those of individual faculty or participants or single organizations may not align exactly with program goals (for example, what is best for an individual faculty member may not be best for the program). Ultimately, the challenge for sustainability is finding the common ground which has the best chance of providing positive outcomes for both the program and the organizations and individuals engaged in it. However, overall, SEARCH Program goals need to be preeminent in these discussions.

In closing, the objectives for the present work are revisited and comments summarized under each objective.

The Value and Potential Impact of SEARCH for Faculty Members and their Departments

For those individual faculty members for whom participation in SEARCH is a good fit, the collegial approach, commitment to the SEARCH ideals and sense of contributing to something important to the province are sufficient reason to continue involvement. This is true in spite of the fact that for the majority of faculty, SEARCH does not contribute in significant ways to their career advancement.

Since the informants of the recent faculty consultation are faculty team members this report cannot conclude very much directly about how the universities or faculties as organizations perceive SEARCH and its outcomes for them. However, the following points can be made in so far as some messages can be extracted from what faculty said about the relationship of the SEARCH Program to the participating universities by the spring of 2003:

- From the department's point of view, faculty members believe **SEARCH is probably still seen more as a 'resource drain' than a positive contribution** to their short term objectives. Nevertheless, **there is an emerging sense that the SEARCH program is 'something to watch'** and may lead to exciting opportunities and places in future. Therefore faculties want to remain involved. The program is developing some cachet, partly because of its potential to open doors to innovative ideas and resources such as the SEARCH desktop and creative learning modes.
- **Awareness of the SEARCH program is probably extremely limited** at the university level, and the impact is therefore also limited.
- **The SEARCH program has been VERY responsive to the input of faculty members.** This has noticeably changed with SEARCH III and IV. Faculty members who have been involved for a long time express this very clearly and newer faculty members sense the energy and commitment. The program has been very successful at nurturing faculty commitment in the recent past. SEARCH leadership has been flexible with respect to differing contexts within faculties.

Implications for Future Evaluation

To this point in time, the contribution of and impact on faculty members in the SEARCH program has not been the focus of a formal programmatic evaluation effort, except in so far as the direct program delivery (such as modules, teaching sessions and curriculum) have been evaluated by participants. On the one hand, faculty members identify several stakeholders (participants, departments, the health system) who do benefit from their involvement but point out that this benefit has not been explicitly recognized. There has been considerable effort spent to evaluate certain aspects of the SEARCH program (e.g. modules) and in so far as faculty have been instrumental in those evaluations, input about faculty has been sought. There are two aspects of evaluation of the SEARCH Program related to faculty engagement that need to be considered:

- 1) the impact of faculty members, the team and the model of engagement on the program and;
- 2) its outcomes for participants, and the impact of program involvement on the academic sector.

At this point, it is possible to begin to articulate the evaluation questions related to impact in the academic sector that may be considered a priority for the SEARCH Program. Three general evaluation questions could profitably be asked in future:

1. How does participation in SEARCH impact faculty satisfaction and career progression?

2. How does university-based faculty participation in SEARCH affect the achievement of SEARCH goals and objectives?
3. What is the impact of SEARCH on university departments and the university role in provincial health and health research utilization systems.

In the future, evaluation of faculty impact and impact on faculty should be timely and ongoing so that input can be sought from all faculty members and the perspectives of those who choose to leave are captured as consistently as that of those who chose to remain involved.

Recommendations for Faculty Recruitment, Organization and Development

The faculty informants feel that as SEARCH continues to expand and grow, there needs to be close attention paid to succession planning and continuing support of faculty. The following recommendations are made:

- **Build on current strengths and goodwill.** Faculty ownership and commitment to this program has increased tangibly since 1996. In the course of this current work, there have been many strengths identified (e.g. integrated curriculum, participative and shared leadership, team work, financial incentives). Future evolution should capitalize on this.
- **Take careful steps toward enhanced synergy with academic environment, without wavering from commitment to the SEARCH vision.** Recognizing that most of the faculty involved with the program are located within an academic milieu, and that there is value in maintaining this relationship, both for the individual faculty member's career and for the SEARCH program, ways should be found to increase the synergy. This may include considering new models of financial support for the faculty team, such as
 - introducing a competitive personnel award as a mechanism through which to involve new faculty members,
 - creating a financial 'award' or 'prize' to recognize faculty contributions,
 - involving department heads and university administration more directly in program planning and execution and
 - identifying a range of potential sources of recognition for SEARCH contributions within existing university performance appraisal system.
- **Construct and implement a strategy for faculty succession planning.** It is important to maintain the involvement of core committed faculty, while facilitating the incorporation of more faculty, including perhaps some younger faculty, to deal with anticipated program growth and also to maintain a sense of 'momentum' within the program.
- **Implement a strategy for seeking regular input from faculty members and university department heads on topics such as discussed in this report.** In particular, faculty members who choose not to remain involved in the program should be interviewed on their views to ensure a balanced perspective about program goals and operations.
- **Build a set of cogent and credible arguments for enlarging the scope and orientation of traditional university recognition and reward for "non traditional" but nonetheless important contributions to the academy.**

- **Remain flexible but focused in relationships and contractual relationships with faculties.** The financial support to the department to facilitate SEARCH faculty participation is important. Nevertheless, the situation for each faculty member and department is unique. The incentive that it represents to university departments should be handled in a transparent way, perhaps acknowledging that there is an explicit three way relationship between AHFMR, the individual faculty member and the department.

Limitations of this Report

Any undertaking has limitations. Although it should not limit the usefulness of the comments contained in this report, the following should be considered:

- Faculty interviewed for this report were, for the most part, those who have chosen to remain involved.
- University department heads were not interviewed for the current purpose.
- As with any complex undertaking, there are multiple stakeholders. Other stakeholders will no doubt also have important reflections about what appropriate outputs and outcomes arising from faculty contributions are. The only group interviewed here were the faculty members themselves.

Appendix A: SEARCH Faculty Terms of Reference (from 2001)

Background

The Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research recognizes that one of the critical factors in the further development of applied health research, research utilization and a health care culture that values research, is the deepening of ties between health delivery organizations and universities.

The SEARCH program (Swift Efficient Application of Research in Community Health) provides skill and knowledge enhancement for health care professionals in Alberta. Participants are supported by their organizations, and undertake research work driven by the practice priorities in collaboration and with the mentorship of faculty members in research institutions. The learning component of the program is comprised of seven residential training modules over two years, totaling 40 instructional days, plus on-line curriculum delivery and support, together with individual and group project work.

The program was developed by AHFMR in 1996 in consultation with the Regional and Provincial Health Authorities and Alberta Health and Wellness. It is administered by AHFMR while being delivered by faculty members from the University of Alberta and University of Calgary. To date, the leading collaborators in this endeavor have been the Departments of Public Health Sciences (University of Alberta) and Community Health (University of Calgary).

Purpose

This support is intended to sustain membership in a multi-disciplinary team to

1. design, deliver, and maintain the SEARCH program curriculum, and
2. collaborate with SEARCH participants in applied health research projects.

Funds will be used to ensure 20% time relief for core faculty and 30% time relief for lead faculty members.

SEARCH Core Faculty Team

The SEARCH Core Faculty Team is comprised of ten members, who are from five faculties and two universities. Three members lead three sub-groups with responsibility for each of the curriculum themes: Creating Evidence, Choosing Evidence, and Using Evidence in Context.

Teaching and instruction

The faculty team continually enhances the curriculum design and delivery for the SEARCH program through:

- Participation in the design of the curriculum framework and module content
- Delivery of appropriate elements of the curriculum in face-to-face instruction during residential modules

- Preparation of course materials for both hard copy and the on-line learning environment
- Instruction and engagement with participants during residential modules, and through the virtual learning community
- Assistance with prior learning needs assessment of participants and pre-module instruction if required.
- Adoption of the approach to learning which embraces principles of adult learning and is committed to best utilization of information tools and technologies in support of learning.

Collaborative research network

SEARCH faculty are engaged in developing a network of expertise across the Province that can support collaborative health research by:

- Linking with participants, health system managers, other researchers and faculty members and AHFMR.
- Linking participants to others with common interests in a research theme, including colleagues.
- Attending SEARCH meetings and workshops .
- Liaising with existing university-based courses to develop links or credit recognition.

Research Projects

Faculty members work with SEARCH participants in individual and team research projects by

- Collaborating with participants to identify project themes and topics, design and propose appropriate research approaches, identify required resources and support
- Monitoring and mentoring through the process of data collection and analysis, including facilitating relationships with region-based people if required
- Assisting and facilitating the process of reporting and write-up of the projects

Lead Team Members

- Lead and coordinate a faculty sub-group for developing one curriculum thread
- Ensure a cohesive and coherent overall approach through meetings with the Lead Team.
- Liaise with the department/university as needed and advocate for SEARCH
- Manage the administrative support for SEARCH within the university

Outcomes

1. A clear and cohesive curriculum design and plan
2. Quality face-to-face instruction in an adult learning environment

3. On-line curriculum availability and material support
4. Implementation and reporting of at least one individual and one group project by each participant

Administration

Overall administration of the program is carried out by the Foundation. Administrative support for faculty members for SEARCH activities will be provided by part-time administrative assistants employed at the universities, based at:

- The University Calgary, Department of Community Health under the direction of Dr. Ann Casebeer
- The University of Alberta, Department of Public Health Sciences, Centre for Health Evidence, under the direction of Dr. Robert Hayward.

Support value

The faculty support is based on estimated salary replacement costs for 20% of core team members' time (totaling on average 7 weeks commitment per annum), and 30% of Lead team members' time (totaling 10.5 weeks commitment per annum). Only overheads specifically authorized in writing by AHFMR are to be paid from these funds.

Total value attached in Appendix A

The period of the award is annual, renewable for three years from January 1.

Review and renewal

Each faculty member will submit an annual report to AHFMR, copied to department chair/dean, summarizing SEARCH-related activity by October 31 each year. Between November 1 and December 15, AHFMR will meet with each faculty member and dean/chair to review the progress of the program and contributions.

Substitution of individuals for the roles outlined above will be with prior approval of AHFMR only. Additional people with expertise not available through the core team, who may be engaged from time to time, are outside the scope of this support.

Termination of Agreement

The Foundation will notify the University by November 30 if for any reason it does not intend to renew this agreement or parts thereof. The decision to renew is at the sole discretion of the Foundation.

Appendix B: SEARCH Faculty Annual Report (from 2001)

NOTE: It is important that you **use this form** when providing AHFMR with your annual report. This form has been designed from the requirements of our database for your information.

Surname (underline) First Name & Initial	Academic Rank/ Position Title	AHFMR Award Held
		SEARCH Faculty Support: <input type="checkbox"/> Core team (20% commitment) <input type="checkbox"/> Lead group (30% commitment)

Complete University Address – Including Department, Faculty and Postal Code	Phone Number:
	Fax Number:
	E-mail Address:

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITY

Classroom teaching hours:	Discussion participation/facilitation hours:
Inter-module instructional hours:	Project mentorship/collaboration (#):
Residential modules attendance:	Curriculum development:
Program development:	Other:

TEACHING

Session Name, Module and Date	Type (Module attendance, Lecture, Lab, Seminar, inter-module)	Total Hours

RELATED ACTIVITIES and OUTCOMES

i.e. professional activity related to (arising from or contributing to) SEARCH Program involvement

e.g.

- talks, presentations, papers and reports related to SEARCH involvement, directly or indirectly.
- networking and collaborative work with health system or researchers
- related developments and projects such as grant proposals etc
- editorial boards, grant panels, organizing committees for meetings/symposia, executive of scientific societies in applied health research

MENTORSHIP/SUPERVISION/COLLABORATION with participants

NAME OF PARTICIPANT(S)	HEALTH ORGANIZATION	FACULTY ROLE	PROJECT INTEREST/TITLE

RESEARCH PROJECT COLLABORATION (SEARCH Projects in which you have had a significant role)

PROJECT TITLE	TEAM MEMBERS	FUNDING	FACULTY ROLE	START DATE	END DATE

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PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES (Committee or Team meetings and contributions)

Committee or Meeting name	Number of meetings	Total Hours

SUMMARY

On this page, summarize your accomplishments and contributions through the SEARCH Program during the past year, and relate these to the objectives outlined in the SEARCH Faculty Support Terms of Reference. Highlight your most significant contributions. Provide a brief statement of your objectives in the SEARCH Program for the coming year.

