STRENGTHENING THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO’S LEADERSHIP
IN FORESTRY, CONSERVATION STUDIES, AND RELATED DISCIPLINES

A Summary of Consultation Findings and Discussion of Options

Office of the Vice-President and Provost
October 4, 2017
Introduction

As Canada’s leading research university, the University of Toronto plays a critical role in supporting research, education and programming on the environment and on the sustainable management of natural resources. These activities inform responses to urgent challenges such as climate change through forest science research and professional forestry educational offerings, as well as related scholarship and teaching that takes place in a range of academic units across the University. The recent consultations regarding potential academic restructuring of the Faculty of Forestry have considered potential structures that would allow forestry and the academic programs and research related to the discipline of forest sciences at U of T to flourish, while also having more stability and sustainability.

Discussions about potential academic restructuring are a normal and healthy part of university operations. They create opportunities for disciplines to adapt and respond to changes within their fields, and to ensure that the University’s structures can support new and evolving offerings. Engaging in consultation does not predetermine an outcome of academic change. A possible outcome of this particular process could be no recommendation for academic restructuring of the Faculty of Forestry. Or, proposals for restructuring could come forward for consideration and further consultation. As many individuals recognized through the course of the consultation, discussions about the most appropriate structure to support the research and programs of the Faculty of Forestry have been ongoing for many years. Their contents are summarized in detail at Appendix A here.

A Provostial memo, dated March 23, 2017, announced a Collegial Process of Exploration and Consultation about the Faculty of Forestry, under Section 5 of the Policy and Procedures for Faculty and Librarians on Academic Restructuring. The purpose of this consultation was to explore the context and parameters of potential academic restructuring of the Faculty of Forestry and consider possible structures and the relationships between the academic programs and research in the Faculty of Forestry and those in related disciplines and units. The consultation was announced as the first step in a multi-phase process that would include the drafting of this discussion paper, as well as further consultation.

A second Provostial memo, dated May 12, 2017, announced Professor Elizabeth Smyth, Vice-Dean, Programs, of the School of Graduate Studies, as the Chair of this first phase of consultation. The Office of the Vice-President & Provost would like to thank Professor Smyth for her service to the University, and to express its appreciation to students, staff, and faculty members for their extensive engagement during this phase of consultation.

This discussion paper summarizes input received through the consultation website and email, as well as through the in-person consultation sessions, which Professor Smyth reported to the Provost in August 2017. This document also provides clarification in response to input received. It notes some potential structures to support the research and programs that have been the focus of the consultation process, and outlines key principles and criteria that should inform any proposed academic restructuring.

Summary of Input Received through the Consultation Process

Consultation took place both in person and online. A consultation website was created, with a web form through which members of both the University community and the general public could submit their input. The consultation website was open from May 12 to July 4.
The Provost’s Office also invited a broad range of stakeholders to participate in the consultation process in person. These included faculty members, students, alumni, and others from the Faculty of Forestry, as well as faculty members and librarians, Deans, Chairs and Directors from cognate units. Invitations to cognate units were sent by email to Chairs, Directors and Deans. Invitees were given the choice of several ways to engage with the process. In some cases, consultation sessions were planned with faculty members in a given unit. In others, Chairs or Directors consulted with faculty members in their units and relayed their thoughts in writing or in person. In others still, the unit head forwarded the invitation to individual faculty members to engage with the process online or in person as they saw fit.

A full list of invitations and meetings can be found in Appendix A.

In the course of consultations, the contributions of Forestry’s faculty and graduates were often highlighted. Participants referenced the book *One Hundred Rings and Counting: Forestry Education and Forestry in Toronto and Canada, 1907-2007*, which provides detailed accounts of forestry education at U of T and in Canada. The Faculty of Forestry’s six tenure-stream faculty members and one contractually-limited term appointee (CLTA) are active participants in funded research, working on the leading edge of areas such as forest ecosystem management, forest conservation science, sustainable biological resources, urban forestry, as well as biomass utilization for sustainable materials and products. In 2016-2017, the Forestry faculty taught 111 graduate students engaged in its MScF, PhD, and accredited Master of Forest Conservation (MFC) programs, as well as undergraduate students pursuing forestry courses and programs in the Faculty of Arts and Science. Together with the activities of faculty, students and staff in cognate units on all three campuses, Forestry’s activities are part of the University’s commitment to the environment and sustainability, which is reflected through programs, research, interdisciplinary units, as well as other initiatives.

1. **Summary of online submissions**

Online submissions included those received through the consultation website, as well as through email. The consultation website allowed individuals to indicate their affiliation with the University by identifying as a faculty member, student, staff member, alumnus or alumna, someone with another affiliation to the University, or someone external to the University (i.e., no affiliation).

Twelve faculty members external to the Faculty who attended an in-person session also used the consultation website to submit written versions of input communicated during these meetings. For the purposes of this summary, such input is treated as delivered in person and is not included in the summary of online submissions.

In total, there were 99 online submissions:

- 41 submissions from individuals who identified as University of Toronto alumni, mostly alumni of the Faculty of Forestry, several of whom are also members of the Forestry teaching staff
- 21 submissions from members of industry groups, non-governmental organizations, special interest groups, members of the general public, etc.
- 20 submissions from students, including 8 Forestry graduate students, 4 students in undergraduate forestry programs, and a letter signed by 33 Forestry students and 4 alumni
- 17 submissions from University of Toronto faculty and instructors, including 5 members of the Forestry teaching staff, including both faculty and other instructors

During their meeting with Professor Smyth, students from the Faculty of Forestry mentioned that they had started an online petition related to the consultation process. Professor Smyth asked that the students submit a final version of the petition once the consultation window had closed. This final version,
coordinated using a petition website, included 886 signatures as of July 2, 2017, as well as 53 pages of comments from those who signed.

The summary below reviews the main themes from the petition comments and those from the submissions made through the consultation website and by email. All input is presented anonymously.

a. Summary of petition comments and online submissions

The prompt at the beginning of the petition suggested that “The Faculty of Forestry is at risk from inappropriate academic restructuring that could further restrict programs and operations and threaten the future of forestry education at the University of Toronto.” It also highlighted some of the contributions that the Faculty of Forestry has made to forestry education and research.

Approximately 20 percent of petition comments were submitted by individuals who self-identified as students or alumni of either the Faculty of Forestry specifically or the University of Toronto in general. Some of the online submissions may have been received through both email and the consultation website, but duplicate submissions of that kind could not be verified as such. Many online submissions from students and alumni used a common letter template; its themes are included in the summary below.

All comments expressed support for the Faculty of Forestry in light of the prompt above. The tone of most online submissions was similar to those of the petition, with significant overlap in themes as well. Online submissions were almost universally supportive of maintaining the current structure of the Faculty of Forestry.

The following themes recurred in both the petition comments and the online submissions:

• the need to protect forests and the environment; the important role forestry as discipline plays in protecting the environment and fighting climate change; the important role that foresters and forestry have to play in this
• alumni’s appreciation of how the education they received in Forestry allowed them to reach their career goals; the importance of the experiences provided by the Faculty to alumni’s positive outcomes, including a wealth of networking opportunities, small classes, and hands-on experience; praise for the quality of Forestry graduates
• specific praise for the Faculty of Forestry’s contributions to education, research, and practice related to its field
  o the Faculty’s unique and especially valued focus on the forests of Southern Ontario
  o the Faculty’s evolution over time to embrace the changing nature of forestry
  o the Faculty’s strength in urban forestry, and the benefit of its urban location in downtown Toronto
  o the Faculty’s high quality, internationally recognized research, often conducted with industry and impacting industry practice

The following themes recurred in either the petition comments or the online submissions:

• students’ positive experiences in Forestry programs or courses
• support for increased investment in Forestry faculty hiring
• support for addressing the challenges raised in the 2016 external reviewers’ report
• concern about restructuring when other leading universities are renewing their commitment to forestry education
• the interdisciplinary nature of Forestry education, and concern that combining individual courses from different departments would not replicate this interdisciplinarity
• employers’ view of Forestry graduates as high quality; alumni experience of success in the labour market; the high demand for Forestry graduates, who find work in a range of sectors

The following themes appeared in only a small number of either ‘petition comments’ or ‘online submissions’:

• potential structures or changes that could be made to the Faculty of Forestry (see Potential Structures)
• the benefit to Forestry students of the downtown Toronto location, which allows proximity to cognate units
• criticism of the University’s “neglect” of the Faculty of Forestry over the years, especially with respect to the allocation of resources
• criticism of the consultation process and its timing during summer when some students were away on internships and fieldwork
• requests for clarity on why restructuring is being considered and what metrics for success exist
• Forestry’s status as a legislated profession and the importance of this certification / accreditation in any restructuring proposal
• disappointment that the forestry degree seems to be of little interest to the commercial sector
• the important role that the Faculty of Forestry and its graduates play for sectors in Ontario’s economy related to forestry

2. Summary of input from in-person sessions

Thirteen in-person consultation sessions were held with academic units or individual faculty members who accepted invitations to meet. In total, 79 faculty members, students, staff, and alumni attended these meetings. All consultation sessions were chaired by Professor Smyth, who was assisted by two note-takers.

In-person consultation sessions took place with:

• 3 academic divisions
• 6 academic units
• 6 individual faculty members
• 3 members of the executive of the Faculty of Forestry Alumni Association (2 of whom were also adjunct faculty in the Faculty of Forestry)
• graduate and undergraduate forestry students, including members of the executive of both the University of Toronto Foresters’ Club and the Forestry Graduate Student Association

A full list of meetings is included in Appendix A.

Discussion at the meetings was structured around four topics identified in the March 23, 2017 PDAD&C memo as central to the consultation process:

1. The academic structure of forestry at the University of Toronto
2. The relationships between the academic programs and research within the Faculty of Forestry and related programs and research in cognate units
3. The context and parameters of potential academic restructuring; and potential structures that would allow academic programs and research related to the discipline of forest sciences at the University of Toronto (including related programs and research in cognate units) to flourish, and have stability and sustainability
4. Any other thoughts relevant to the consultation process
The summary of input is organized below to reflect the themes emerging from the in-person meetings. All input is presented anonymously.

There was significant overlap between the themes from the online submissions and petition comments and those we heard from Faculty of Forestry students and alumni during in-person sessions, while the input from faculty members in cognate units was strongly supportive of change to the current structure of the Faculty of Forestry.

a. The importance of forestry as a discipline

At all in-person sessions, those consulted emphasized the importance of forestry as a discipline in addressing issues and challenges faced by the environment and the planet. The discipline of forestry is also crucial for communities and economies in terms of sustainability concerns and renewable and natural resources. Forestry has particular prominence in current affairs, from the Paris Agreement to the North American softwood lumber trade. To Forestry students, the Faculty provides an important platform for multidisciplinary research; without such a unit at the University, many students expressed concern that the University would not be as committed to issues of environmental studies and sustainability, and that they would not be able to pursue their research topics.

Most input noted the changes that had happened in the discipline over time, both academically and in terms of the forestry industry. Feedback from those connected with the Faculty of Forestry indicated that it had evolved to respond to these changes. On the other hand, those consulted in cognate units felt that U of T’s Faculty of Forestry had not evolved to the extent of other forestry units in Canada to reflect contemporary problems in forestry.

The reputation of the Faculty is well-established internationally and has domestic importance as one of only a few forestry faculties at Canadian universities. The Faculty’s strong network among forestry professionals also contributes to a high rate of forestry graduates securing positions as they enter the workforce.

6
c. Consultation process

Faculty members in cognate units noted the long history of discussions about the future of the Faculty and the lack of change that has resulted. Many cognate faculty saw a resolution as long overdue and voiced concerns about investing time in the current consultations should no change come from them. Alumni were concerned that, having been cast as “trouble makers” over many years of discussions about the Faculty’s future, Forestry faculty were not able to view restructuring as a positive process. Alumni had reservations about the current process, which they feared had the potential to be unfair to the Faculty of Forestry or have a pre-determined outcome.

3. Considerations to Inform Potential Structures, Based on Consultation Feedback

In considering potential structures, respondents focused on a range of goals.

Respondents associated with the Faculty of Forestry focused on:

- maintaining control over budget and hiring decisions
- having a leader empowered to make decisions, so that the Faculty could plan and act strategically
- maintaining alignment with external requirements for accreditation of Forestry programs
- increasing their faculty complement
- strengthening relationships with cognate units
- continuing to support programs and structures that are already working well for students

In addition to many of the points above, students and alumni associated with Forestry graduate programs and forestry undergraduate programs offered through the Faculty of Arts and Science also focused on:

- the benefits of transferring the undergraduate programs to the Faculty of Forestry
- having access to more field courses
- having a new major in urban forestry
- protecting the value of their degrees
- ensuring that restructuring conversations did not negatively impact enrolments in forestry programs
- ensuring the timely completion of their degrees (e.g., regarding a possible move to another campus)
- ensuring a campus location that is attractive to international students

Faculty members in cognate units focused on:

- concerns over their ability to maintain the collegial nature of their own units
- concerns over their ability to maintain existing relationships; to promote interdisciplinarity; and to have the ability to make decisions and plan collegially
- ensuring a coherent combination of disciplines with their units
- ensuring alignment with academic priorities
- concerns over their ability to maintain research excellence and alignment of research interests within their departments
- maintaining students’ positive views of their units and programming
- ensuring that undergraduate forestry courses remain as accessible as possible to students in other academic units so as to ensure breadth of coverage across disciplines
- concerns over their ability to maintain eligibility to hire new faculty positions, which are often allocated based on teaching ratios, and to maintain their ability to recruit excellent new faculty
- concerns over their ability to ensure the same teaching load expectations for all faculty in their units
• not exacerbating competition for students or existing shortages of space and staff support, especially lab space and technicians
• the importance of having a clear focus (e.g., focus on questions of conservation and sustainability) rather than trying to address every forestry-related topic
• the importance of clearly identifying the audience for research, especially with regard to industry
• the importance of a sustainable unit structure

Respondents also highlighted the importance of communication to students throughout the consultation process. Students should be made aware of the University’s commitment to their education and to supporting them through the completion of their degrees, even if some type of restructuring takes place.

4. Potential Structures
A number of possibilities for academic restructuring or other changes to the Faculty of Forestry were discussed during the consultation process:

a. Retain the current Faculty structure
- generally suggested by individuals affiliated with the Faculty of Forestry
  • continue as-is, with some changes that do not involve academic restructuring
  • re-brand and re-focus the Faculty’s work within the broader field of study (e.g., on questions of conservation and sustainability) rather than trying to address every forestry-related topic
  • clearly identify the audience for the unit’s research, especially with regard to industry
  • keep the undergraduate programs in the Faculty of Arts and Science to ensure their accessibility to students in a wide range of disciplines

b. Expand the current Faculty structure
- generally suggested by individuals affiliated with the Faculty of Forestry
  • move the forestry programs currently offered through the Faculty of Arts and Science to the Faculty of Forestry
  • expand the range of undergraduate programs including programs that combine undergraduate training in forestry with forester and arborist certifications, as well as 2+2 programs with the college sector
  • create three streams of undergraduate study focused respectively on forest science, forest engineering, and forest industry commerce
  • include other academic units related to resource management
  • create a new Faculty for all earth-science and resource-based disciplines, such as a new Faculty of Environment and Forestry, or of Forests, Environment and Sustainability
  • clearly identify the audience for the unit’s research, especially with regard to industry

c. Amalgamate the Faculty into another unit
- ideas discussed by a few cognate academic units
  • take into account the considerations outlined in section 3, above
  • units mentioned in relation to amalgamation included:
    o Department of Geography at the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM);
    o Institute for Management and Innovation (UTM);
    o Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (FAS);
    o School of Environment (FAS);
Department of Physical and Environmental Sciences in the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC); and
John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design

d. Closure of the Faculty
   - generally suggested by individual cognate faculty members
     • transfer individual Forestry faculty members to cognate units, based on intersecting research interests
     • consider the proper academic home for the accredited MFC program

e. Create a new unit
   - generally suggested by individual cognate faculty members
     • an Extra-Departmental Unit (EDU-C) that could act as a hub for faculty members interested in forestry research across the University, with faculty champions to propose and support it

Questions Arising Throughout the Consultation Process
Some questions arose repeatedly throughout the consultation process, suggesting that some clarification might be useful in this discussion paper.

1. Why is academic restructuring of the Faculty of Forestry being explored?
The latest external review report of the Faculty of Forestry highlights the long history of discussions about its status and, while it commends the Faculty for its resiliency in the face of uncertainty, emphasizes the need for a resolution. Under the new Policy and Procedures for Faculty and Librarians on Academic Restructuring, if restructuring proves to be the appropriate way to resolve the long uncertainty, consultation is required. The consultation process to date has not limited the range of options under consideration, and the Office of Vice-President & Provost remains open to new suggestions as they might arise. No decision on a way forward has been made.

2. How can consultations take place over the summer if some students are away?
Given the long history of discussions, the decision was taken to start the process of coming to a resolution immediately. The extensive engagement from Faculty of Forestry students both in person and online during consultation suggests that the timing was not an obstacle. Following the release of this discussion paper in the fall of 2017, consultation will continue, during which time further feedback and submissions will be welcomed.

3. How could the consultation take place without a Dean at the Faculty of Forestry?
At no time has the Faculty of Forestry been without a Dean. The previous Dean’s term ended on June 30, 2017. A new Dean was then appointed with a term that began on July 1, 2017.

4. Why aren’t all the consultation meeting notes posted publicly?
The consultation process prioritized frank and honest discussion by letting participants contribute confidentially and anonymously if they wished. Attributing and/or publicizing individual comments might have discouraged some participants from providing input. This discussion paper reflects the range of input
received through consultation. It is hoped that providing aggregated comments along with details on which constituencies and units provided input will be facilitative of further discussion.

5. What metrics are used to measure the success of units and programs?
The University provides standardized data packages for all units and programs undergoing cyclical review under the University of Toronto Quality Assurance Process (UTQAP). These packages use existing reports from the University’s main data sources (student enrolment information, research data, etc.). The University also provides standardized data packages to support the annual academic budget reviews for each division. Because disciplines differ, there is no single metric or threshold that indicates overall performance or sustainability.

6. How does the University allocate resources, including new faculty positions?
The University adopted the University of Toronto Budget Model in 2007-08. The decentralized model introduced a simple methodology for attributing revenues and the costs of shared infrastructure to each division, including the Faculty of Forestry. A division’s net revenue reflects its programs, student enrolments, advancement activities, research, etc. A brief description of the University’s budgeting process can be found [here](#).

Approximately 90% of the Faculty of Forestry’s operating costs have been allocated from the University Fund. The University Fund is a redistributive mechanism in the University’s budget model, comprised by collecting 10% of each division’s operating revenue annually.

New faculty positions are determined through annual budget reviews and faculty complement planning. Many factors are considered when deciding on new faculty position allocations, including: financial resources available in that academic division, space requirements, areas of research strength and weakness in the unit, programs with increasing student enrolment, strategic direction of a unit, etc.

7. Is restructuring an attempt to acquire the Faculty of Forestry’s space?
No. The Earth Sciences building, within which the Faculty of Forestry is housed, was built in the 1980s using funds from both the Government of Ontario and University fundraising. Divisions do not own specific buildings. Instead, space is allocated centrally to divisions following University guidelines.

8. Will the MFC lose its accreditation if it is not offered by a Faculty that specializes in forestry?
The Canadian Forestry Accreditation Board has certified forestry programs at eight Canadian Universities, some of which have dedicated Faculties of Forestry to house these programs, while others offer accredited forestry programs through other unit structures. The same is true in the United States, where the Society of American Foresters accredits forestry programs at 14 Association of American Universities member institutions.

Potential Academic Restructuring
Any proposal for potential academic restructuring of the Faculty of Forestry should align with some key principles outlined in the Provostial memo dated March 23, 2017, and other criteria based on the feedback provided by members of the University community during consultation. Proposals should be informed by the input received through the first phase of consultation that is summarized in this document, especially the considerations outlined in section 3, above. Overall, any proposed academic restructuring should:
1) Allow academic programs and research related to the discipline of forest sciences and forestry education at the University of Toronto to flourish.

2) Have stability and sustainability, both academically and budgetarily.

3) Be accompanied by a clear academic rationale.

4) Support the continued accreditation of the Master of Forest Conservation professional forestry program.

5) Grow the University’s strength in the area of urban forestry.

6) Strengthen the academic, research, and program ties between the study of forestry and cognate fields of study, particularly those related to environmental studies, conservation, and sustainability.

Conclusion

This paper will be posted on the Provost’s Office website and input will be invited in response to its contents. Feedback is welcome about the conversations to date, as are specific suggestions about academic restructuring proposals or models that account for the considerations above. In addition, the Provost will continue discussions with the Faculty of Forestry as represented by the Dean, as well as engage in discussion with cognate units interested in being part of potential restructuring plans.

Subsequent to that, the Provost may choose to put forward a proposal for academic restructuring in line with the Policy, notifying Forestry faculty members at least 120 days before any proposal enters University governance. For further information about this consultation process, please visit www.provost.utoronto.ca.

The Office of the Vice-President & Provost expresses its appreciation once again to Professor Elizabeth Smyth for leading this initial phase of consultation, and is grateful to all members of the University community who participated in this important process.
Appendix A: List of Invitations and In-Person Meetings

List of invitations sent for in-person meetings
The Provostial memo, dated March 23, 2017, states that “the consultation process should include consideration of potential structures that will allow academic programs and research related to the discipline of forest sciences at U of T to flourish, and have stability and sustainability, including related programs and research in other units such as those listed in Appendix B.” That list was used to inform which units would receive specific invitations in addition to the general call for feedback.

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<td><strong>Faculty of Forestry</strong></td>
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<td>Faculty of Forestry Alumni Association</td>
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<td>Faculty of Forestry Advisory Board</td>
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<td>Incoming Dean of the Faculty of Forestry</td>
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<td><strong>Divisions</strong></td>
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<td>Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering Dean’s Office</td>
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<td>Geography and Planning (Faculty of Arts and Science)</td>
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<td>Geography (UTM)</td>
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<td>School of Public Policy and Governance (Faculty of Arts and Science)</td>
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<td>Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (Faculty of Arts and Science)</td>
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<td>Cell and Systems Biology (Faculty of Arts and Science)</td>
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<td>Chemistry (Faculty of Arts and Science)</td>
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<td>Munk School of Global Affairs (Faculty of Arts and Science)</td>
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<td>Biological Sciences (UTSC)</td>
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<td>University of Toronto Foresters’ Club</td>
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<td>Forestry Graduate Student Association</td>
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List of meeting dates for in-person meetings

In some cases, sessions were planned with faculty members in a given unit while in others, Chairs or Directors consulted with faculty members in their units and relayed their thoughts in person.

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<tr>
<th>In-person Meetings</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Faculty of Forestry</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Faculty of Forestry Alumni Association</td>
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