

President's Report to the Senate June 2020

Racism on Campus

This past month has been a tumultuous one for both the University and for society as a whole. Layered on top of the ongoing progression of the COVID-19 pandemic have been stark images of racism and a wellspring of responses spurred through growth of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Just a few short weeks ago, the world witnessed the violent death of George Floyd, sparking global protest movements demanding an end to racism in our communities. The news of Mr. Floyd's death was met with immense shock, horror and grief, including in our community at Laurentian. On June 2nd, [I reached out to our community](#), affirming my solidarity with the Black community and my commitment to personally work to end all inequities and injustices that Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour face on a daily basis in our community.

During the week, I reached out to student leaders who are working to end racism, assuring them of my solidarity and support for their powerful anti-racism work. I have begun meeting with groups to directly solicit their input and learning how the University can better assist them in their efforts. I am also looking to the ongoing leadership of the group leading the conversation on Strategic Plan Outcome 23, which seeks to promote and foster inclusion, acceptance, and respect for the diversity that exists within our campus community. I look forward to further development and implementation of recommendations from the group

On June 8th, the issues and challenges we face at Laurentian landed closer to home with a tweet by a leader in the Laurentian community that was inappropriate and offensive. [I condemn any racism on campus](#). The issue is not one of intent, but of outcome and impact.

To members of our community who have been affected by racism: I hear you and I stand with you. I am committed to continuing this pressing conversation and to taking further action on racism. As was shared with me by one of the groups that I have met with, while issues of racism are systemic, we must work towards solutions through engagement and education leading to behavioral change.

We must speak up, and we must speak out. We all have a responsibility to support the resilience and advocacy of equity-seeking groups. Embracing our values which give power to diversity, equity, and inclusion, we will move forward *together - ensemble - maamwi*.

Reflections on Year 1

While my term formally started on July 1st, 2019, I turned my mind to all things Laurentian earlier in the year when I agreed to take up the position. I took advantage of some transition time in April, May and early June to begin meeting with community members and supporters, to build relationships and begin to acclimate to Laurentian's culture. Spending the entire summer on campus as I took on my position gave me the opportunity to meet people at Laurentian and in the Greater Sudbury community in a more relaxed environment than is possible during term. As an outsider to the university and community, I came with a deliberate strategy to meet and build relationships early and to grow my understanding of how I might approach the challenges I knew about coming in, as well as those I was learning along the way. These meetings were helpful in refining my vision of how to bring transparent and collegial leadership to Laurentian, in a manner that is strategic, inclusive, action oriented, and consultative. They were also helpful, I believe, in getting the Laurentian community to begin to know me as a person.

With fall, I ramped up meetings with groups, units, faculties, student associations etc., and experienced my first Board and Senate meetings. I also launched a monthly breakfast with the President Series as well as monthly open office hours for the community. Through all of these meetings, the passion of the community for Laurentian came through as a singular theme. Everyone has their own particular vision for the University, and while there is much overlap, there are also differences in the specific aspirations and outcomes sought for the University. The common thread is the passion that exists for the University and its long-term future.

Winter/spring has been the most challenging of times. Much of the determined planning to return the University to a balanced financial position was upended by the arrival of COVID-19, in addition to the massive disruption on curriculum delivery and on our students and community. It has also been a time when the Laurentian community has come together: raising over \$100K to support stranded students; rallying overnight to transfer our curriculum from face-to-face to remote learning and ensuring that all eligible students had a chance to complete term; and working together to first shut down on-campus activities and transfer to remote working - and now, beginning a thoughtful phased-in return. Cooperation across the community, and open and transparent conversation at Senate, Board, and with our labour partners, have positioned Laurentian as a crisis management leader in working toward the success of our students, while keeping our community safe. I can honestly say that I have never been so proud to be associated with an institution as I am today to be part of the Laurentian community.

I would be remiss if I did not highlight and recognize the specific collegial leadership contribution that this senate has contributed to Laurentian over the past year. Engaged, passionate, responsive, respectful and collegial, this body has risen to every challenge presented, and has worked diligently and determinedly in the best interests of this university and its students.

Even with all of the above said, I have also come to realize another truth during the year that can not be deflected even by a pandemic. Simply put, the academic success of Laurentian University,

indeed the very survival of the University itself, depends on the evolution of our programs through academic renewal: the high school leaving population in the North is declining; over the past 20 years reductions in per-student government funding have established the requirement that Ontario universities be the most efficient in Canada in delivering their programming; the postsecondary sector continues to evolve rapidly as a global enterprise with competition ever increasing, and; it continues to be laid bare that we as a society, and as a university, still have miles to go to eliminate bias and prejudice in all its forms. To thrive, let alone survive, Laurentian must undertake a fundamental journey of renewal - an open, transparent and collegial journey, where prejudices and preconceptions are left on Ramsey Lake Road, and where innovation, creativity, enthusiasm and compassion are given the opportunity to guide this University to the standing and success its passionate people truly deserve and which our students will relish.

A New Academic Plan

By the time our agenda for this Senate meeting arrives at my President's report, Laurentian is expected to have a new academic plan. One of my first interactions at Laurentian as incoming President came in early June 2019, when the then draft academic plan was presented to the Laurentian Leadership Group for feedback. It was clear in that meeting that the draft plan was not ready to go forward. I applaud the efforts of ACAPLAN and the Academic Plan subcommittee of ACAPLAN for the work that they have done over the past year, and the consultation that they have engaged in across the community in developing the plan that was presented today.

A university's academic plan is meant to provide an enabling roadmap for its academic success. Deeply versed in our values and informed by other university plans including our strategic plan and strategic research plan, the version of the academic plan presented today, in my view provides a strong aspirational vision for the academic growth of the University, and the guidance necessary to achieve our broad objectives, without being overly prescriptive. I also believe that this plan provides a solid foundation for the academic journey that we are embarking on overcoming years.

Spring and Fall Enrollment Update

Provost Demers, Senate and LUFA are commended for working collegially and efficiently to establish and approve the course delivery modalities for the fall term. In a highly competitive environment, it is critical that Laurentian be a leader in establishing our course delivery modalities and bringing innovation to this COVID-19 induced transition period - and to the new normal as we move forward.

Key to Laurentian's long term success are enrollments that consistently meet or exceed our planning and models. Indeed, our current financial planning and returning to a balanced budget is heavily dependent on pre-pandemic enrollment projections. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on fall enrollments is the biggest wild card for Laurentian, and indeed the entire Ontario PSE sector. There are no models to accurately predict the impact of COVID-19 and thus the Board is considering only a preliminary 2020-21 budget this week, with management to bring a final

budget forward in the fall once the impacts of COVID-19 on enrollments and on-campus university operations are better understood.

Amidst the chaos, spring enrollments across the system, including at Laurentian have been strong. Overall individual course registrations for spring term are up 24% over 2019 and the number of individual students registered for courses is up approximately 5%. Thus slightly more students are registered for significantly more courses. Notably, registrations were stronger in our traditional online courses compared to our previously face-to-face courses offered through alternative modalities this spring.

Numbers for fall are considerably more tenuous. Laurentian is continuing the year-over-year trend of a decline in high school leavers accepting offers to Laurentian, directly in line with the declining number of students in this category. By contrast, program acceptances by mature students is up slightly and graduate student acceptances (particularly at masters level) are up significantly. It is impossible to say at this early time, how this will translate to course registrations, which are expected to open as of June 15th, and how those registrations will translate into participation in the fall. There is similar uncertainty with our continuing students, how many will continue their studies without interruption in the fall.

Our greatest uncertainty is with international student enrolments. While the Federal Government has been very proactive to accommodate international students at a distance for spring and fall terms, a very important part of the international student experience is the face-to-face and community experience. Thus the levels of international student enrolment, at Laurentian, and throughout the PSE system are at greatest risk. To date, we have noticed an increasing number of international students deferring their enrolments to the winter term.

Our pre-budget document includes consideration for potential scenarios for COVID-19 related enrolment and ancillary revenue declines. Even a modest decline in overall enrolments will exacerbate the financial pressures on the University. We look forward to the solidification of our numbers at the end of the summer that will bring greater clarity to our final budget projection for 2020-21, and will guide our government advocacy strategy in which we would be seeking the active participation of government to assist us in buffering the COVID-19 specific impacts.

Thorneloe and Senate Motions

The challenges faced by Laurentian University are challenges faced by the entire Laurentian federation and many of these challenges existed pre-COVID-19. At the end of April, Thorneloe University's Board of Governors voted to close two long-standing departments, Theatre Arts, and Motion Picture Arts, due to low enrolments and high delivery costs, and to cease offering courses in the academic programs provided through these departments. This elicited tangible concern in the community over the students impacted and over the overall future of the Arts within the Laurentian Federation.

All of the students impacted by this decision are Laurentian Faculty of Arts students and I commend our Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Professor Dickinson, for her efforts to identify suitable accommodations to allow all of the active students in the impacted programs to continue towards their degrees.

Concern over the fate of the affected academic programs generated considerable discussion at Laurentian's Senate of May 19th, 2020, ending with two motions being passed by senators to emphasize their concerns. The first motion reiterated the Senate's authority over academic programs, and resolved that the academic programs impacted by Thornloe's decision remain open as per the original approval of the programs by Senate. Notwithstanding this resolution, as reiterated subsequently by Thornloe's Board, the courses within these programs at Thornloe are no longer being offered. Further, Laurentian is not in a position to be able to take on these courses, or to hire any new faculty in these areas, at this time.

The loss of faculty complement associated with these programs as a result of closure of the departments has triggered an academic review of the programs through Laurentian's academic Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) that will proceed over the next year.

A second Senate resolution, paraphrased here, recommended to me that the Laurentian University Administration proceed with negotiations with the Federated Universities to bring about the administrative and financial transfer of all programs that lead to Laurentian University degrees. I have received the recommendation in the spirit in which I believe it was intended: as an expression of concern for the academic future of the Federation and a call to action. As senators understand and spoke to, a strong federation is a partnership that must be actively nurtured. Since my arrival at Laurentian, I have instituted regular meetings with the Presidents of our federated partners, in which we have collegially discussed issues of the Federation. I believe that we all recognize that our federation is a living entity, and as such must continuously evolve to succeed. Further, as I discussed above, this success depends on creativity, innovation and transparent collegial engagement.

I look forward to growing the conversation with our federated partners around how we can create, innovate and renew our relationships as we work towards strengthening the academic and financial viability of the Laurentian Federation at large, and to reporting back to both Senate and Laurentian's Board on our progress. It is important to recognize in these conversations that our federated partners are independently incorporated entities, with their own Boards. Further, academic hiring at all of our institutions is a strictly collegial process, and that collegiality must be respected in considering any change in federation governance.

#Imagine2023 - Strategic Plan Midterm Review

Laurentian's 2018-2023 strategic plan continues to play a fundamental role in guiding the University forward during these uncertain times. Like all plans, at the midway point it is important to reflect on the progress made to date and on the work still to be achieved and to check in on how the vision supporting the plan has evolved.

In December, I initiated a conversation with Group 26, the group originally tasked with overseeing the implementation of the Strategic Plan, on the steps needed to provide an insightful midterm review.

With leadership from my office, and the support of Group 26, information on progress has been collected and a format for the midterm review report explored. While completion of the review, like many things at the moment, is being delayed by effects COVID-19, I am committed to bring forward a midterm report on our strategic plan in the coming months as our activities return to a new normal.

Return to Campus and Research Resumption

Laurentian's campus has been formally closed since March 24th, 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in support of the provinces efforts to flatten the infection curve. I wish to commend again all of the members of the Laurentian community that have worked so hard through the ensuing months to ensure the safety of everyone in the community and to provide the best possible support to allow academic activities to continue in the best manner possible.

With infection rates now declining, over the past few weeks we have turned our attention towards staged, stepwise and safe return to campus. While undergraduate programming has largely been able to continue during the campus closure, university research and graduate student activities have been severely impacted. Thus it is critical that we begin a return to campus as soon as it is safely possible to do so.

For the past several weeks, a Laurentian operational resumption team has been planning our return to campus. Again here, Laurentian is committed to being a leader in Canada for charting a safe return to campus. They are now being assisted in their work by a larger Return to Campus Committee.

The focus of the planning has centered first on a return to research activities in advance of planning for a return to on-campus teaching in the fall for courses where face-to-face learning is required. The team is also considering how to manage student traffic on campus come the fall, including the availability of residences and other operations.

On June 4th, a community conversation, attended by over 700 members of the community solicited feedback on both plans (research and fall teaching). The Laurentian community emphasized a strong desire to return to on-campus activities, together with a strong realization and concern that

any and all resumption of activity must be done with considerations of safety and enabling student success being paramount. A number of insightful suggestions were received to enable the further development of plans. In October, it may be anticipated that Senate will recommend protocols for the delivery of academic programming for the winter term, which if all goes well, will include an increased return to on-campus activities according to the new normal.

In order to evaluate health and safety procedures and risk mitigation plans we started, on June 8th, with a pilot opening of the Vale Living with Lakes Centre to graduate students and researchers. This pilot is being carried out under strict supervision to ensure appropriate safety and sanitary measures, and responsible social distancing. The lessons learned and protocols validated in this pilot will be incorporated into plans to open additional facilities. If all goes well, it is hoped that most campus research activities can be reanimated within four to six weeks, with the exception of research involving face-to-face interaction with human participants.

It should also be stressed here that Laurentian is working very closely with Public Health, Greater Sudbury and Districts, and closely following the directives of Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health in all our planning.

I look forward to a successful and safe return to campus for all over the coming months.

Kudos

- As an update and kudos to donors that the response to the call-out for our Student Emergency Fund was overwhelmingly positive with more than \$110,000 gifted by 225 donors which has helped more than 310 students. Some notable gifts include:
 - Family of Jean and Bob Lye: \$20,000 (matching dollars in the appeal)
 - LUAA donation (alumni association): \$10,000
 - LUFA (Faculty Association): \$7500
 - LUSU (Staff Union): \$5000
 - LUAPS (administrative and professional staff): \$1000

I was so pleased to see the Laurentian family, friends and community rally around our students to help support them through these tough times, and sincerely thank everyone for their heart warming generosity.

- Thank you to our alumni who were asked by our Advancement team to send congratulations to graduating students by recording and sending a short 30 second video, welcoming them to the Laurentian University alumni family. The call was well received and resulted in a total of 28 videos.
- The Student Engagement Team, in coordination with academic units, mobilized to create a new summer academic transition program for new students. Beginning in July, the Science Prep program includes refresher courses in Math and Chemistry. In August, the

Start Smart program helps students prepare for university success through an academic transition course and academic skill building workshops.

- Two Laurentian Online staff members will be graduating with their Masters from Laurentian in June - Christina Skopke with a MScN and Linda Fiorino-Piette with an MBA. I offer my sincere congratulations to both for this achievement.
- A multidisciplinary team consisting of staff from Purchasing, Contract and Risk, the Office of the Vice-President, Research, Health and Safety, the Print Hub and Marketing are working with Dr. Eric Gauthier from the Department of Chemistry to provide hand sanitizer for the University community to ensure the safety of our staff and students as we begin the process of re-opening campus. Through the efforts of this group, Laurentian will have bottles of hand sanitizer available for all work areas. The production of hand sanitizer was initiated by Dr. Gauthier early in the pandemic when supply of the product was inadequate to supply local organizations and businesses and requests were made to the University for this essential product. Having obtained both a product and site license from Health Canada, the University has been able to accommodate those requests using the World Health Organization formula and has now ramped up production for the entire University community.
- Thanks to the funding from the RBC Future Launch initiative and Desjardins, on June 3rd, Laurentian University invited 100+ employers to create profiles on *Outcome*, an online platform that allows employers to post job opportunities for Laurentian students. The second and third steps in this rollout include a module for the University's co-op programs, and tracking of non-academic activities students undertake as part of their Laurentian experience. This is known as a co-curricular record which is a great way to show employers the fulsome experience a student gained during their time in university.

Not only will Laurentian University benefit from quantifying, tracking, and cataloguing all offerings into one streamlined, and easily searchable, digital library but we will also be able to leverage extractable data sets that reveal an in-depth perspective on student engagement, skills, and growth opportunity areas unique to our campus.

Outcome gives students the highest quality and most tailored experiential learning opportunities available in Canada. It is the most trusted experiential learning solution by Canadian post-secondary institutions.