

President's Report to Senate March 2021

I would like to begin this report by acknowledging the hard work and dedication of students, faculty and staff as we head into the final weeks of the winter term. At this time last year, we made the difficult decision to move to alternative course delivery modalities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As we head into spring with the same measures in place, there is much hope for a return to face to face in the fall as vaccines continue to be rolled out across the country.

Increasingly, universities in Canada are turning their attention to the Fall with the expectation for increasing on campus and face to face activity. This too must be an objective for Laurentian University. In particular, we must be flexible in looking towards the Fall, taking every opportunity to safely promote a return to campus where possible, while building in the flexibility in our offerings needed to maximize the educational experience for Laurentian students.

Registration for Spring Term is Now Open

Laurentian is pleased to have posted and opened for registration, a full suite of courses for the spring semester which begins on May 3rd. In total, we have over 400 offerings across all programs and levels, 229 of which are remote delivery courses and 208 online. The delivery of these offerings presupposes that Laurentian achieves its milestones and objectives required for the end of April in the context of the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* (CCAA) process, but is an essential next step in building towards the future. Here I particularly wish to acknowledge the collaboration of the Laurentian University Faculty Association for their flexibility in providing for instructor assignment for these courses.

Laurentian Ranked Second in Canada for Online Programs

Laurentian's online programs and course offerings have long been acknowledged as a leader in Ontario. Now, University Magazine has ranked Laurentian University amongst the top universities to study online in Canada (<https://www.universitymagazine.ca/the-best-online-universities-in-canada-2021/>). Laurentian University is ranked 2nd, ahead of McGill University in 3rd place, and just behind Athabasca University. This result has been realized thanks to the dedication of many faculty members, staff, and students who have contributed and of course with special acknowledgement of the Laurentian Online team for their great work.

Establishing a Path Forward

As we look ahead to the spring and fall semesters, I acknowledge the uncertainty that exists in the community, amongst students, faculty and staff, as Laurentian continues through the CCAA proceedings. As of this writing, it has been six weeks since the commencement of these proceedings. Stakeholders representing diverse interests from across the University have been engaging in mediation led by the Honourable Justice Sean Dunphy, a bilingual judge of the Ontario Superior Court, appointed by the Court as mediator.

With the goal of finding operational restructuring changes that will allow Laurentian to be a long-term sustainable part of our community, sharing of insights and perspectives by stakeholders has been critically important and I acknowledge all who are part of the mediation process as they work diligently in representation of diverse interests. Such representation includes this Academic Senate, through a selection of committed faculty and students, which includes Francophone and Indigenous perspectives; the Laurentian University Faculty Association (LUFA), the Laurentian University Staff Union (LUSU), and the federated universities (University of Sudbury, Thorneloe University and Huntington University). The recommendations that emerge will not only take into consideration the bilingual and tricultural mandate of the university, but also the broader needs of Laurentian students and the benefits to our communities. The Senate representatives are specifically focused on the sustainable go forward structuring of Laurentian's academic offerings.

Mediation is ongoing, and participants are unable to comment on specific progress being made due to court-imposed confidentiality with respect to the mediation. However, as part of the critical milestones of the first phase of Laurentian's restructuring, the Senate can expect a report back by its elected representatives during the month of April.

Provided Laurentian and the mediation parties are able to satisfy the critical milestones in the first phase of our restructuring, May 1st will mark the start of the second phase of the CCAA process. That will involve obtaining further interim financing from our CCAA lender and an extension of the stay of proceedings. In this phase, we anticipate that certain operational restructuring steps will be undertaken. It is also at this juncture that Laurentian will undertake a process to formally receive and assess creditor claims, and engage in discussions with a broader group of stakeholders with a view to developing the framework for a formal Plan of Arrangement that will outline the terms of its emergence from CCAA protection, progressing towards financial sustainability.

If the above steps occur, then we anticipate that as the Fall 2021 Term commences in September, so too will begin a third phase of the CCAA process, reflected by the full implementation of the change to Laurentian's academic programming and operational structure. In looking towards the Fall, Laurentian is committed to delivering the highest possible quality education together with a dynamic experience to our students, both new and returning. An experience that will hopefully include, as indicated above, a first opportunity for students to engage in significant face to face on campus learning activities since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In my community update on March 8th, I acknowledged the significant amount of work that remains ahead. I echo that message in this report to the Senate and I offer sincere encouragement not only to those Senators working as part of the mediation, but to all Senators, all stakeholders, and all members of our community, as we work through this difficult chapter in Laurentian's story in an effort to set Laurentian on a path for success for the next generation.

A reminder that our website dedicated to the CCAA proceedings can be accessed at: www.laurentianu.info and that the same for the Monitor can be accessed at: www.ey.com/ca/Laurentian.

Ensuring Students are supported

Moving through these proceedings has of course not come without challenges and questions relating to some of our every day operations. Our FAQs continue to be updated at www.laurentianu.info. We have also been able to address certain delays that may have disrupted the student experience since the filing was announced on February 1.

First, payments to graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) who were being paid as of February 1 for the Winter term are continuing. Additionally, the review of payments to graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) who started their graduate studies at Laurentian in Winter 2021 is almost complete at this writing and payments have been initiated. Students who have not yet received payment are asked to contact Dayna Hicks in the Faculty of Graduate Studies. (dhicks@laurentian.ca).

Second, research stipends are also continuing to be processed for graduate students. Students who were receiving a research stipend prior to February 1st will continue to receive their stipend through April 30th. Further, the process to approve expenses that are critical to support graduate student research between now and April 30th is well underway. Students are asked to speak with their supervisor who can contact the Vice-President Research (vpresearch@laurentian.ca) if they have questions. Provisions for May and beyond will be communicated once it has been determined if the phase I milestones within the CCAA process were achieved in April.

Last but not least, the student emergency fund continues to be available to students who have emergency-related expenses due to the pandemic. Students can apply by sending an email at financialaid@laurentian.ca with a letter detailing their financial need due to COVID-19.

Monthly Kudos

- MERC Director Ross Sherlock and HES PhD candidate Rebecca Montsion featured in *CIM Magazine*
 - Two of our resident experts in mineral exploration earned global recognition in the Jan-Feb 2020 edition of *CIM Magazine*. Ross Sherlock, Director of the Mineral Exploration Research Centre (MERC) at the Harquail School of Earth Sciences, and Rebecca Montsion, PhD candidate, provided context for how geologists are leveraging the latest technology in AI and machine learning to provide relevant results for top-level mining industry decision-makers. Link to article: <https://magazine.cim.org/en/technology/data-crunchers-not-decision-makers-en/>
- Harquail School of Earth Sciences student wins provincial geoscience award: BSc student Luc Roy is one of two Ontario geoscience students to win a prestigious [APGO Foundation scholarship](#). A selection committee chose the winners, who were praised for their exceptional academic credentials, demonstrated professionalism, and excellent references.

- Congratulations to the Laurentian University Women in Sport (LUWIS) team, Chaired by Sydney Graper (4th year Sport Psychology) and Vice-Chair Mandy Steele (4th year Health Promotion) for hosting their 2nd successful event in the *She Is* conference series. On February 26, 2021, the *She Is Brave* conference welcomed National, Olympic, NCAA, and professional female athletes who spoke with students about mental health. The LUWIS group aims to educate, motivate and inspire the next generation of those who identify as female to achieve their physical health, mental health and career goals.

Well done to the Laurentian [2021 Canadian Mining Games](#) team on their 2nd place finish this year. Members of the Laurentian team are Tommy Adair, Xavier Beneteau, Cat Biskupski, Jessica Bronicheski, Milton Chateauvert, Jay Chenier, Michael Chevalier, Sarah Cholewinsky, Tylor Gmehlin, Johnathan Hutteri, Bryce Jones George, Jonathan Leroux, Jack Miteff, Reid Murray, Scott Villeneuve, Connor White.