

President's Report to Senate March 19, 2024

This is my last Senate report – and of course, as you might imagine, that brings various mixed thoughts and emotions. As often with very intense experiences, my time here at Laurentian seems both short and long, as if I arrived really just last week but have been here for many years. I don't want to distract from the real business of Senate today by listing many of the things that we have accomplished together over these 15 months – or a list of things that have not been accomplished, or that I had hoped to accomplish but did not. Bill Gates supposedly said “We always overestimate the change that will occur in the next two years and underestimate the change that will occur in the next ten”. I think that's probably going to apply to Laurentian ... and I'll be watching to see if it's true. It has been a real pleasure and rewarding experience to work closely with and be inspired by so many of you proactively and purposefully collaborating around such a worthwhile goal as rebuilding the future for Laurentian University, with all the implications that has for the City of Greater Sudbury, but really the whole northeastern portion of Ontario. For this experience I am deeply grateful.

The cyber incident which began the morning of February 18th has been a unique event during my experience here at Laurentian University. I hope it remains unique in my career and in all of your careers too! Through it all, I want to thank the entire university community for their patience and understanding as well as some beyond our immediate community here at Laurentian, and others who made offers to help (HSN, Boreal, Cambrian, MCU, and others who I am forgetting or who I never knew about). I think there is a general recognition out there in similar institutions that in the current world, this could really have happened to any one of them, and we need to support each other. Obviously major thanks are due to all the LUSU and LUAPSA employees in IT, but let's also not forget those in so many other parts of the University who were part of implementation teams, or who had suddenly to take on extra work or change their processes and find work-arounds, on essentially no notice.

I think of those processing 3 payrolls within days of the attack, of those who made sure our most important bills were paid, of those who made sure our admission offers went out on time, of those who got the T4s and other tax-related forms out by mail, of those who got transcripts out by mail, of the calls for paper, envelopes, printer cartridges and printers that could work without being networked – things we thought we had abandoned a long time ago. I also think of those in-person instructors who, within a week, had to give up most of the teaching technology we have become so used to and revert to techniques abandoned a decade or longer ago. And of course the on-line instructors who simply couldn't do anything in the way that they were used to. I have also been heartened and truly amazed by the way the various teams came together to implement next steps as quickly as possible – planning, replanning, prioritizing, devising workarounds, reviving manual processes, etc.

Typical of all emergency incidents, communication around such incidents is always challenging. There are questions of what is known and what is not known, and making sure one does not contribute to misinformation or speculation or inadvertently reveal information to the “threat actors”. Timely communication is important and yet almost every hour brings new news so any update report is probably outdated by the time it goes through translation and is posted. Most of the main players are too busy working on the actual problem to take too much time away to communicate. The recipients of the communication all want just the right amount of communication for their personal needs, and

that the topics concern things they use but not concern things they do not use. We settled on daily status update reports supplemented by FAQ's, together with Townhalls by zoom (Tuesday February 27 for all, Friday March 1 for students and another for faculty and staff). Running large Townhalls by zoom on a campus with not much internet was of course a huge challenge too – again, it took a team.

Operational Transformation

Progress has been extremely limited here, for various reasons including the cyberattack. Administrators and staff could not get into their files to revise and update some of the documents necessary to move forward. Deloitte has concluded their detailed work on the transformation budget (costing and resourcing calculations). The next major step is to hire a program director, and other positions in the Transformation Implementation Office. My understanding is that our VP F&A, Sylvie Lafontaine, needs a few more conversations, and then that program director position and other positions for the TIO can be posted.

Strategic planning

The University's Strategic Plan was approved by the Board of Governors on Friday, February 16. This approval marks a significant milestone towards the University's next chapter. The plan is entitled "Laurentian's Plan for Connection, Innovation, and Impact", Strategic Plan 2024-2029. I have a great deal of confidence in the plan, mostly because of the way in which the contributions of over 2500 community members shaped the plan, but also because for every action or direction, responsibility has been assigned to particular individuals, with goals for the initial steps to be taken. Next is the construction of the academic plan, led by Provost Brouwer and a team, and the research plan, led by VP Research Eger and a team. I will look forward to seeing these plans' implementation over the coming years.

Board of Governors

The most recent regular Board meeting was February 16, but there have been several special meetings to update on various matters related to the cyber incident and to transact a few matters relating to the impending sale of the President's House. The committee meetings in preparation for the next cycle of Board meetings are just starting this week. The next Board meeting is April 26.

2024 Fall Enrolment

There is not a lot more to say at this point in the admissions cycle compared to what I reported in February. Our overall domestic applications from Ontario high schools ("101s") are stable at about the same increase as the last update (+6.5% year-over-year). Domestic applications from all sources other than directly from Ontario high schools ("105s") are at +14.2% year-over-year. Visa student reports for OUAC never capture our full activity; however, for non high school applicants (the majority of international applicants) the sector is down -15% for international undergraduate demand with all universities seeing a decline except for Laurentian.

International Visa Issues

There is no further concrete news yet, although the rumour is that information about our caps will come later this week. Federal Immigration Minister Marc Miller had previously announced that about 360,000 attestation letters for international students would be available nationally in 2024, but various sources including the *Globe and Mail* report that the federal government has since indicated that this figure included students—such as those in graduate programs or K-12 education—who are

not subject to the cap. We had all assumed that since those groups were exempt, they would not enter into the number of attestation letters that the sector was given nationally. One thing to realize is that visa approval rates vary hugely from country to country, so the number of “wasted” attestation letters is going to be much higher for some countries than others, and will inevitably lead universities to prefer to make offers to students coming from countries with higher visa approval rates. It is the provinces not the federal government that will be issuing the attestation letters. About half the provinces have already begun issuing their attestation letters. In Ontario, the provincial cap would be known by now but has not been revealed – nor of course the caps for individual institutions.

Update on senior administrative searches

Our next University Librarian has been appointed (endorsed by Senate, approved by Board in February). **Danielle Dennie** has a Masters of Library and Information Studies from McGill and an MSc in Applied Microbiology. She brings over 20 years of experience in university libraries, most recently as Head, Vanier Library, at Concordia University since 2021. She is Franco-Ontarian and a Laurentian alum. She will join LU on July 1st.

The Provost search continues, with two candidates coming for second interviews and a campus visit as soon as those can be scheduled.

Provost Brouwer continues to lead two dean searches – Management, Education & Health – and also the search for an AVP Students, where campus visits for the second round of interviews have begun.

The search for the Dean of Graduate Studies and International is in its consultation phase (there were open forums last week re qualities desired in this dean), with a search firm engaged.

The search for the next AVP Financial Services continues; we hope to close that soon.

Budget Process

The process for establishing budgets for the fiscal year 2024-25, which began in the fall, is now well underway. Unsurprisingly total requests are more than can be afforded, so at the moment the senior administrative team is in the process of putting those budgets all together and seeing where the most important needs are. You can imagine how difficult and labour-intensive this was for those involved with no systems available for much of that time. It is still about a month before the budgets will go to the Board Finance Committee, and we intend to meet that deadline.

Funding News

With respect to further news about Government of Ontario funding that would make the University and College sector sustainable in its funding, there is little further news. There was a meeting of all Ontario university presidents with David Wai (Deputy Minister of MCU), on February 26, in which some funding was announced. Some is re-announcement; nothing is base funding, some was only 3-year money. There is \$10m in one time only money 2024-25, in a Small, Rural and Northern Grant. They are still designing the method of application for these various funds. There is nothing to support our sector as we exit the wage-restraint period brought about by the new rescinded Bill 124 (unlike hospitals and K-12 who did get some extra funding for support). There are a few smaller grants, financed by funds that became available before the government’s fiscal year end (March 31), but results are embargoed for now, so I can’t say anything about what we got there.

Events

Once again we hosted a large-scale open house for prospective students interested in Laurentian University. On March 16, many staff, faculty, and students came together to welcome the next

generation of Laurentian University students. Despite promotional challenges related to the cyber incident, such as the inability to promote the event via the usual e-mail, text, and digital campaigns, and the web-page being down at a crucial time, the event was very well attended. In 2023 there were 220 prospective students and this year there were 215, but maybe that was just because of the surprise snow this year. Marketing, Digital Strategies and IT pivoted the promotion of our event and did everything possible to get the word out and were on site to make sure everything ran smoothly. Domestic recruitment is one of the most important activities we do. Thanks to the dozens of people who organized and attended the event!

This is currently Research Week, with events all five days this week. There are several research symposia and special lectures, events at the School of Architecture, a two-day Graduate Student symposium, GradFlix, 3MT competitions, a Voyageurs Innovation Challenge, an Indigenous Makers Market today, and an awards ceremony on Friday.

Congratulations

Behavioural Neuroscience student **Ashtyn Mowbray-McMillan** has been accepted in the [Amgen Scholars Summer Program](#), an undergraduate summer research program in science and biotechnology hosted by universities across the world. This scholarship will provide Ashtyn with a unique opportunity at the University of Toronto to conduct research alongside some of the leading scientists in the country.

The **Master of Social Work / Maitre en Services Sociaux** has received accreditation for 4 years.

L'Association des Etudiantes et Etudiants Francophones (AEF) 50th anniversary gala, held at Science North, Saturday March 2, 2024, MPs/MPPs there, commemorative plaque presented by France Gelinis on behalf of the Government of Ontario, good attendance, I was on hand also to deliver my congratulations.

In early March, the **Laurentian Mine Rescue** team competed in the 2024 Intercollegiate Mine Emergency Response competition in Squamish, BC. The team won third place overall in the competition. Jordan Sutton, the team's briefing officer, won 1st place in the Incident Command category.

Laurentian University hosted the 34th edition of the 2024 **Canadian Mining Games**, March 7 to 10, here in Sudbury. This annual challenge brings together university students from across the country to network, work on realistic industry problem solving, and develop their skills through a variety of challenges.

The **Voyageurs women's curling team** competed at the USPORTS national championship this past week in Fredericton. The Ontario University Athletics champions performed admirably throughout the championships and two Voyageurs were named to the second team all-Canadians (Lead, Britney Malette and Second, Mya Smith).

Tracy Fleury, a leader in our Finance Office, recently became a national level curling champion as part of Team Homan, which won the 2024 Scotties Tournament of Hearts in February. Tracy is now

competing in the World Championships of Curling from March 16 - 24, 2024 in Sydney, Nova Scotia, and as of March 17, was undefeated at 3-0.