

## **President's Report to Senate May 2020**

With our spring/summer session now well underway, I would like to again thank Senators for their hard work in providing the academic tools and accommodations needed to ensure the continuation of courses, enable the success of our students, and thank all of our faculty colleagues for their commitment, dedication and flexibility through these challenging times. I would also like to recognize the Senate's role in enabling the graduation of our class of 2020. Unlike many universities that have significant numbers of academically stranded students unable to complete their degrees due to the disruption of COVID-19, the great majority of eligible Laurentian students have had the opportunity to graduate.

As we work towards preparing for the best possible fall semester, I look forward to similar senatorial engagement and applaud the leadership that continues to be shown by all and in particular by our provost, Prof Demers.

Enrolments for Fall 2020 are crucial for the viability of the university sector, and for Laurentian University in particular, where the impacts of COVID-19 have already depleted essentially all of our financial flexibility to traverse the pandemic.

You will have seen in the past several days, universities are announcing their plans for the fall, so as to provide both learners and instructors the time needed to adapt their courses to the new reality. For the most part, you will notice a commitment to a return to the physical classroom in some areas that require in person attendance and are expected to be deliverable ensuring appropriate social distancing and sanitization. You will also note that most universities have raised the expectation for continued remote learning and an increase in online learning. With ongoing expectations for social distancing and restrictions on international travel, it currently seems impossible for any university to expect to offer the full on-campus experience that we all offered last year.

Laurentian has declared and committed publically to offering a full suite of courses and programs for the fall and I know that our Provost is working with Senate colleagues and our labor partners to define the mechanisms through which our programming is delivered. During this challenging time, we must all think outside the box, to be innovative, creative, and flexible in working to offer our students the best possible learning experience. We must inspire confidence in our students that they can and will be successful in their studies and are making the right choice in continuing their studies through these uncertain times.

As we reach agreements on program delivery modes and expectations, I look forward to being able to make a formal announcement with respect to the delivery of fall programming at Laurentian soon.

## Planning a return to Campus

Over the past several weeks, the Operational Resumption group, a subgroup of Laurentian's Emergency Response Team has been planning the logistics for initiating a staged return to campus. There is much that needs to be planned for, from classroom and laboratory configuration, technology needs, residence and ancillary operations, to PPE requirements, to other protective measures including plexiglass, signage, and safety and security monitoring.

The Teaching and Learning committee of the Senate is also turning its attention to the academic reopening of campus - from the prioritization of courses and programs, to planning to ensure that classrooms and technology can be used safely and effectively as learners return to campus.

I believe that Laurentian has a competitive advantage over other Ontario universities in moving to the reopening of campus. Our beautiful and spacious campus offers opportunities for learning in low-density environments that few other universities can match. Further, the Greater Sudbury region has one of the lowest rates of COVID-19 transmission in the province. We must take advantage of our assets and opportunities to continue to show leadership for the province and country in safely reopening our campus to academic activity.

On last Thursday, May 14th, the province announced the implementation of phase one of a three-phase reopening plan. There are opportunities for universities to begin to partially reopen campus within phase one. Further, on Thursday afternoon, Minister Romano requested submissions from universities for pilot reopening projects to be submitted by May 21st. The scope of these pilots will be restricted to approximately 250 people for a campus with the student population of Laurentian.

Laurentian's emphasis in the first instance will be on the reopening of the campus to graduate students and research, focusing on areas that have been the most impacted by COVID-19 measures. Vice-President Research Eger in collaboration with Dean of Graduate Studies Lesbarreres and the Operational Resumption Committee are drafting plans for phased in resumption of on-campus and field research activities. As soon as possible, and with the concurrence of Public Health Sudbury and Districts and the approval of the province, plans for staged reopening of on-campus graduate and research activities will be communicated

Individual decisions on the reopening of access to buildings and facilities will be determined by our ability to ensure the safety and security of students, faculty and staff. We truly recognize every student's program and every scholar's research as being of equal importance. However, the physical configuration of our facilities and ability to provide and monitor safe access must be our first concern in reopening. In addition, as we move to increase activity on-campus faculty, staff, and students that are able to perform their duties remotely will continue to be encouraged to do so. Maintaining low density will be essential to support physical distancing.

Therefore, I thank everyone in advance for your understanding and patience if your area of campus is not first on the list. We are committed to providing access for the full suite of required on-campus activities just as soon as possible.

## **Spring Programming Update**

Laurentian's spring offerings are now well underway and their success is a credit to all of our faculty and instructors, to your commitment, dedication and flexible responsiveness.

I also must acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of Liaison, Laurentian Online, Teaching and Learning, Academic Advising, Transitions and Engagement, myLaurentian Hub, Admissions, Registrar, Marketing, Communications, Digital Strategy, as well as others, who have worked so hard to attract students to our spring programming.

With numbers remaining to be fully finalized, we are trending up approximately 5% in individual students registered from spring term over spring of 2019, with total course registrations up over 20%.

Two important notes of caution in over-interpreting these numbers. First, we are very closely monitoring fall applications and acceptances, and Laurentian, like the entire system, is extremely concerned by the prospect of significant loss of enrollments for the fall term. Second, our overall increase in registrations for spring has been driven by our online offerings, with registrations in courses delivered at a distance through alternative modalities being down compared with 2019.

## **Government Advocacy**

Laurentian continues to advocate strongly with government about both what we can do to assist the province and our own needs for support. During the past month, I have engaged repeatedly with Minister Romano and Parliamentary Secretary Paccini on a one on one basis to promote their understanding of our Laurentian specific circumstances and to solicit their support. This work is ongoing.

I have also engaged with Minister Romano and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities through conversations at the COU table and have engaged with the Federal government through Universities Canada tables and directly with our local MPs. Further, the entire executive team are working through their respective COU groups to ensure that Laurentian's interests are fully represented with the province.

These conversations are currently focusing mainly on campus reopening, enrollment predictions for the fall, international students and the supports needed by universities generally and Laurentian University specifically to come through COVID-19 strong and positioned for future success.

As part of the provincial Ministry's effort to understand the needs of the sector and the specific needs of each institution, Laurentian recently responded to a call for how the Ministry could best assist the sector. Our submission focused on three areas: Engaging students in post-secondary education; supporting the needs of students to enable their success and; supporting faculty renewal.

The province is monitoring the situation at universities closely and is particularly focused on fall enrollments and how they can assist the reopening of campus. However, the Minister has also

explicitly stated that universities must deal with the initial repercussions of COVID-19 on their own and they should not expect any additional financial assistance to assist in our initial response beyond the \$25M already provided to the PSE sector, of which Laurentian received \$793K.

### **Collaboration with Northern Institutions**

With recognition of the unique challenges Northern institutions always face, Laurentian has taken the initiative to launch two conversations about improving collaboration and messaging in the Northern PSE sector. First, together with Collège Boréal and Cambrian College, we are looking at ways we can improve pathways and coordinate student supports and other activities. Second, we are leading a conversation with Nipissing, Algoma, Lakehead Universities and NOSM about how we can cooperate better academically, as well as the development of common messaging for government on the specific needs of Northern institutions.

### **Programming Closures at Thorneloe University**

Recently, Thorneloe University made the difficult decision to close academic programs that had become financially unsustainable for them, with registrations far below the level needed to continue. We recognize how stressful it has been for the affected students. We are ensuring that all affected active students can get the courses and experiences they need to meet their academic and career aspirations.

Thorneloe students are Laurentian students, but Thorneloe University is a separately incorporated institution, with its own Board of Governors, employees and collective agreements. I am assured that this decision was not made lightly and that Thorneloe is making every effort to continue to provide the maximum number of offerings that it is able to support.

I understand that the closure of these programs is causing significant disruption to students scheduled to continue in them. The Faculty of Arts, led by Dean Dickinson, is working hard to implement personalized plans for every student registered in the affected programs to ensure that they can continue to achieve a Laurentian degree. My understanding is that most students active in the affected programs have already received accommodation to allow them to complete a degree.

Many have wondered why Laurentian University cannot simply assume the affected programs and faculty needed to deliver the curriculum for affected students. Unfortunately, as will be elaborated on by Vice-President Hayes in her budget update to the community to be presented as part of this President's Report to Senate, the present COVID-19 emergency has removed any and all flexibility that Laurentian might otherwise have had to take on these programs.

We are providing our students with every possible opportunity to earn a Laurentian degree. We look forward to seeing our students thrive in their new courses, and contribute to our community's vibrant artistic and cultural scene.

## Laurentian's Fiscal Sustainability Measures and 2020-21 Budget Consultation with Senate

COVID-19 and the necessary university response to the pandemic have exacerbated what was already a challenging budgetary situation for Laurentian. From a near balanced budget projection for fiscal 2019-20 (\$-0.7M), the university now expects to close the books on 2019-20 with a deficit of \$5-6M. Further, winter budget planning assumed that the \$9M fiscal challenge that the University was facing due to the province's effective 16% cut to tuition since 2019 and the end of the one-time Northern Sustainability Grant funding, could be bridged in part through the generation of new revenues. Given the present outlook for COVID-19 and fall, it would be irresponsible to project an increase in revenues for Laurentian in fiscal 2020-21. Rather, with the addition of the \$6M 2019-20 shortfall, Laurentian is faced with a \$15M budgetary shortfall that must be achieved entirely through cost reductions.

Most unfortunately, due to past challenges and obligations, Laurentian no longer has the financial flexibility to increase its debt to weather the challenge.

With Leadership from Vice-President Hayes, a four phase plan to meet this challenge has been developed and is being implemented (please see VP Hayes presentation beginning on page 28 of your Senate package). To date, the first two phases of the plan have been implemented and will bridge approximately 50% of the required savings.

We have also received over 160 submissions in response to a call to the community for new ideas on sustainability measures and are currently working to implement many of these ideas. In the development and implementation of all cost savings measures, we are working to keep our community as whole as possible and are committed to principles of fairness and equity.

Recognizing the significance of the financial challenge facing Laurentian in April and May, the Laurentian Board of Governors has approved and recommended a number of additional measures to achieve the required savings. Thus, as was announced last week, Designated Executives, (President and VPs), Senior Leaders (Deans and AVPs) and LUAPS employees will be receiving an effective 5% reduction in compensation beginning July 1st, 2020. Further, these same employees will be forgoing one time merit pay and step increases for the year as well.

The response of our LUAPS employees and senior leaders to these measures has been exemplary and reflective of the commitment and dedication they have for the institution and the recognition of the impacts that COVID-19 is having on businesses and institutions across the country and around the world.

However, to achieve our fiscal requirements for 2020-21, everyone at the university must contribute and participate. In the coming weeks, the University anticipates it will be entering into discussions with all labour partners on creative solutions to respond to our financial circumstances. Only if everyone participates can we succeed, and I cannot and will not place an undue burden on any one group at Laurentian.

There have been many suggestions to our sustainability register for how staff, faculty, together with our labor partners can participate in achieving the savings needs. For this, I thank everyone who contributed sincerely. I for one am confident in this community that by working together, ensemble, maamwi, we will achieve our objectives and that Laurentian will emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic positioned to achieve our collective ambition of being a leading university for the North.

### Monthly Kudos

- A compilation of the great news surrounding the response of the Laurentian community to COVID-19 is available at the following link, I am very proud of the commitment and thoughtfulness of our entire community:

<https://laurentian.ca/good-news-stories>

- **Office of Francophone Affairs:**
  - January to April 2020

The initiative #SavoirsUL à ta portée is a series of free interactive webinars for grade 7 to 12 students from French language schools and French immersion programs, from across Canada. The program, which runs from May 4th to June 24th, consists of 28 webinars whose themes are based on the research of our francophone professors. The sessions are facilitated by a Liaison Officer who ensures the links between the theme addressed by the professor and the Laurentian programs. Therefore, students have an exceptional opportunity not only to enrich themselves intellectually, but also to become familiar with Laurentian's programs and services in general.

This initiative:

- responds to the critical need of our partners from school boards and educational organizations for virtual education content for students;
- allows the expertise and research work of our professors to be disseminated;
- offers a unique anticipatory activity that demystifies the university experience for students and comforts them in their ability to pursue postsecondary education in French;
- positions Laurentian among Francophone and Francophile middle and high school students (and their parents) nationally.

Congratulations to the team from the Office of Francophone Affairs, which set up this project in less than three weeks! Thank you to the 21 professors who answered the call and who are participating on a voluntary basis, as well as to the Liaison team who ensures that we take advantage of the scope of this initiative to nurture and maximize the impact of our overall recruitment strategy.

- The Transitions & Engagement and Academic Advising teams, along with Faculty members, delivered a successful Spring Orientation remotely, which attracted 1,035 participants to 40+ academic preparation and orientation sessions.
- The Cooperative Freshwater Ecology Unit capped off a year of celebration of its 30th anniversary with its annual meeting at the end of April. Great work to all those that have made this partnership between government, industry and the university, in support of environmental remediation in Sudbury and beyond, possible. For more information on the work of the unit and the environmental remediation progress it has contributed to, contact Dr. John Gunn, Canada Research Chair in Stressed Aquatic Systems and Director of the Vale Living with Lakes Centre.
- Thank you to the Translation Team, who continue to provide us with quality content in both official languages. Their commitment to bilingualism is truly exemplary.

Robert Haché, PhD  
President and Vice-Chancellor