

President's Report to Senate November 21, 2023

It's already almost the end of November, which means we are rapidly approaching the December exam period! I would like to acknowledge this as a very busy and stressful time for all members of the Laurentian community, including especially our students. Thank you to all who nevertheless made time to join us today.

I would also like to thank those who worked on quite a bit of contingency planning ahead of the potential NOSM U labour disruption. Fortunately NOSM U's tentative agreement was ratified by all parties, thus avoiding any labour action up to and including a strike. Having had to work in those roles before at various points in my past, I can truthfully say that it is one of the few tasks where you do actually hope your work is in vain.

I have recently returned from the Royal Society of Canada (RSC) meetings in Waterloo, where Laurentian University was warmly welcomed as an institutional member. Laurentian joins 63 Institutional Members of the RSC, most of whom are other universities. This is welcome news for all of us, and a recognition of our commitment as an institution to research and research excellence.

The long-awaited [Blue Ribbon Panel Report](#) was finally released last week, on November 15th. We are grateful for the work of the members of the Blue Ribbon Panel and will take time to reflect on their recommendations. I at least am heartened that the Panel recognized the multiple factors that play a part in funding, which is very relevant specifically here at Laurentian University. The recommendations around Northern institutions, those providing French-language education, those serving a larger proportion of Indigenous students, and implications for institutions with smaller student populations are of great interest to us. We will look forward to further discussions with the Ministry of Colleges & Universities (MCU) as well as with leaders of other postsecondary institutions, including via COU, the Council of Ontario Universities. An important piece to keep in mind is that these recommendations are just that, only recommendations for the consideration of MCU, and there have not yet been commitments on the part of the government around implementing the recommendations. One element that Minister Jill Dunlop provided comment on was that each university will need to demonstrate that they are operating as efficiently as possible, before she will allow any tuition increases. Laurentian's Operational Transformation Plan may turn out to be a good way for us to demonstrate that we are as efficient as we can be. It remains to be seen if the Government will act in enough time, whether with respect to fees or to grants, to help our 2024-2025 budgets, which will be approved in February 2025.

Operational Transformation

Laurentian's [Operational Transformation plan](#) was passed by our Board on November 1, and later, in closed session, so was the Deloitte contract for the next phase (ERP evaluation, Enterprise Resourcing Planning). The Transformation Consulting Group (TCG) continues and met last week; TPIO (Transformation Program Implementation Office, if that name remains) still needs to be fully fleshed out and formed, but can't really move significantly forward until we have MCU approval and have made a decision on the ERP. I would like to acknowledge those who served on the Transformation Consulting Group and the more than 120 people who

participated (faculty, staff, students, alumni) in engagement sessions over the spring and summer. The next steps are already in motion as the TPIO will soon be building its team, which will be made up of members from each of the four workstreams, along with supporting resources of various kinds (e.g. communications)..

Strategic planning

I would like to thank the more than 2500 members of our community who have provided input across the various engagement channels. Throughout the summer and fall, we hosted twenty (20) one-on-one interviews, fifteen (15) focus groups, twenty (20) group interviews, four (4) drop-in engagement sessions, and four (4) online surveys. It's never too late to contribute, but the last of the formal consultations has now happened, and StrategyCorp has formulated a [“What we heard” document](#). They have started to shape possible pillars of a plan based on that consultation; there is still much work and refining that needs to happen. The [DRAFT Strategic Plan](#) is being presented in various engagement sessions this week, such as the Townhall on November 23. With the benefit of your feedback, we will then work further with Strategy Corp to get the draft Strategic Plan to Board for its December 15 meeting. After that discussion, we will finalize the Strategic plan and share it again in early 2024, for final Board approval in February. The engagement process has made one thing extremely clear: our community is very hopeful for the future of the University and is extremely committed to seeing Laurentian succeed.

Board of Governors

This is now so-called Cycle 2 of the Board meetings. On December 14, there is a Board education session. This begins with Alex Usher, president of HESA (Higher Education Strategy Associates) with a presentation on the current context for universities in Canada/Ontario, and then former VPFA Michel Piche presenting an update on where we are vis-a-vis the CCAA requirements. The regular Board meeting will be on December 15, followed by our Festive Gathering the afternoon of December 15. The various preparatory Board committee meetings are underway; there is always a long lead time, so there is adequate time for circulation of materials, translation, and making sure all the materials from the committees are in and in order.

Update on senior administrative searches

Today we welcome our new VP Finance & Administration, Sylvie Lafontaine, who started October 30, to her first Senate. Some of you will already have met with her in other venues. Also, our new VP Francophone Affairs, Natalie Poulin-Lehoux, started October 18, one day after our last Senate meeting, so this is her first official Senate meeting, even though she did attend last time. The Provost & VP Academic search continues with second round in-person interviews November 27, 28, and 29. The Presidential Search Committee, chaired by Vern Cameron, has identified its candidate, and various processes around that are underway, and I understand there is a Special Senate meeting coming soon about this. Provost Brouwer can update on decanal-level searches that she is chairing – Dean of Education & Health, University Librarian, and Dean of Management. The searches for a second Legal Counsel, an Associate University Secretary, and the next AVP Financial Services continue.

Fall convocation

We had two excellent convocations on Saturday October 28, with such beautiful weather showing the campus off at its best. Unlike last spring with so many sets of twins, I noticed that there were no twins this time. This is also a reminder that spring convocation will take place from June 3rd to 7th, 2024, and we hope to have honorary doctorates again by then. To my knowledge, neither Senate nor the Board has fully populated its membership on the joint committee which recommends these honorary documents, and I urge everybody to remedy this gap quickly, so that we can begin to find our next honorary degree recipients. [DRAFT: Call for nominations for honorary degrees.](#)

Enrolments

The data below is preliminary, as of November 1, 2023 and being reported by approximate headcount.

- Total enrolment: ~8,100 (increase of 6%)
- Growth in enrolment is being driven by International Graduate students in course-based degree programs (M. Computational Sciences, MBA and M. Engineering)
- Undergraduate students: ~ 6,400
- Graduate students: ~ 1,700
- International students: now 17% of total enrolment
- French language degree program enrolment up 6%, maintaining the same proportion of students at 23%
- New intake enrolment is up 19%

We also saw a 24% increase in guests at the November 4th Open House event, a positive sign of things to come. I would like to thank all those who made this such a great experience for attendees. I am told that over 350 faculty, staff, students, and volunteers combined to put Laurentian on display for future students and their loved ones. This dedication and passion for the University is truly special and I commend all those who volunteered their Saturday to make the event the success that it was. I myself attended, and could feel that enthusiasm throughout the Atrium where most events and booths were hosted.

Universities Canada Building Reconciliation Forum at Laurentian

Laurentian University has been chosen by Universities Canada to host their next Building Reconciliation Forum, an event aimed at connecting Indigenous and university communities to create meaningful change in support of Indigenous education and Truth and Reconciliation. The Forum will facilitate sharing of knowledge and experience in a wide variety of formats including panel discussions, oral histories, workshops, posters, lectures and presentations through visual and performing arts. Guest speakers, Elders and Knowledge Keepers will all be engaged in advancing Truth and Reconciliation. Hosted by the office of Academic and Indigenous Programs, this Building Reconciliation Forum will take place in the Indigenous Sharing and Learning Centre in June 2024. The dates are still tentative, but most likely will be June 24 for pre-forum events, with the main forum June 25-26, 2024. These are the most likely dates as the event has to fit around other events (Canada Day holiday afterwards, National Indigenous Peoples Day, convocations at many universities held throughout early and mid June). Hearty congratulations to Dominic Beaudry and his team for this winning application! It brings pride and positive attention to Laurentian University.

Congratulations

With funding from the Jane Goodall Institute of Canada, the **Environmental Sustainability Committee** developed over 25 plant identification signs displaying the Anishinaabemowin names of native plants found along the Biodiversity Reclamation Trail. Elder Sandra Corbiere and youth member Jade Corbiere of Wahnapiatae First Nation worked in collaboration with the Committee. Congratulations specifically to Anastacia Chartrand and Taylor Nicholls who played key roles in the project.

Congratulations to **Dr. Mark Kuhlberg** (Liberal Arts) on receiving the 2023 Weyerhaeuser Book Award from the Forestry History Society for his book, "Killing Bugs for Business and Beauty: Canada's Aerial War Against Forest Pests!" The award recognizes superior scholarship in forest and conservation history and rewards authors who provide fresh insight into a topic through clear narrative analysis that is inventive, and thought-provoking.