

PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO SENATE SEPTEMBER 2021

Welcome Back

I would like to start my report to the Senate this month by welcoming everyone back to campus for a new academic year. It is so good to see students, staff and faculty back on campus, engaged, interacting and learning. While life on campus is not fully back to normal and many challenges remain, I know from my personal conversations that there is an overwhelming sense of enthusiasm for, and relief in, the return to campus.

Everything possible is being done to ensure the safety and security of everyone on campus and we appreciate everyone's contribution and patience with these efforts. While the province has allowed an exception to Universities to allow for full classroom occupancy, we are working under strict guidelines issued through Public Health Sudbury and Districts and the Province to provide a safe environment. Everyone's cooperation is greatly appreciated and will contribute to the success of the fall term.

These health and safety guidelines include mandatory vaccination for everyone that comes to campus and masking for everyone when indoors in all situations except when seated and eating or drinking. This includes in small group study spaces, lounge areas around campus, and of course in the classroom. Disinfectant is available throughout campus and its regular use as well as frequent hand washing is encouraged for all.

Laurentian's Health and Wellness Services team, led by Lyne Rivet, worked closely with public health officials and the operational resumption team to develop Laurentian's [Policy on COVID-19 Vaccination](#) and to host a series of on campus vaccination clinics. A portal has been developed on myLaurentian to allow confidential tracking of compliance, to provide a pathway to full vaccination and/or to provide an exemption for medical or religion/creed reasons. The form, as well as the process for uploading certification or attestation, is very straightforward to complete. All information is held in the utmost confidence according to strict protocols for the handling of individual health information and I am pleased to report that as of this writing, over 98% of the community have complied with the first step of this process. However, community members are reminded of the continuing expectation to complete the self-screening questionnaire on the SecurLU-UL app every day before attending campus.

While rapid testing continues to be available and is required for individuals still working towards becoming fully vaccinated or who are awaiting approval of an exemption request, full compliance is expected by October 15th and after that date only fully vaccinated individuals or individuals with a valid approved exemption and negative test will be allowed on campus. Vaccination is a condition of employment for anyone whose work requires them to be on campus, as well as for students, community members and external contractors attending campus. I wish to thank everyone, and in particular, our student associations, labor partners and the Laurentian Operational Resumption Team led by Dr. Tammy Eger and Cindy Cacciotti for their role in helping to promote a safe, COVID-19 free campus.

Vigilance and compliance is key. As has been communicated earlier, one low risk instance of COVID-19 occurred during the first week of class. Keeping the risk of further instances as low as possible is the best possible way to maximize our ability to offer in-person classes for the entire term and beyond.

Everything being done with respect to a safe return to campus has as its goal to maximally enable the in-person student experience. Thus, we encourage meetings and activities that are peripheral to this overarching goal to be conducted virtually if possible. Indeed, in support of this objective, Senate meetings will continue to be held virtually through at least the end of this calendar year, rather than returning to low density in person or hybrid experience. Similarly, the successful hybrid convocation model employed this spring will be continued for fall convocation. Further, in person campus events extraneous to the student experience will require a special exemption in order to be held on campus this fall - all with the goal of minimizing the number of members of the external community on campus and focusing on providing the safest possible student experience.

Providing flexible learning opportunities to students also aligns directly with the goal of providing an optimal student experience and maintaining a COVID-19 free campus. Interest amongst students for online, virtual and hybrid learning options continues. Here I would like to acknowledge and thank the efforts of all members of Laurentians faculty and academic support staff that are working so hard to provide learning opportunities that meet our students' needs.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge and thank everyone who has had a role in welcoming students back to campus. The Orientation 2021 Committee collaborated with AEF, SGA, and GSA, to host welcome events remotely and in-person to help welcome new students. The committee, chaired by Jason-Scott Benoit and Dr. Michelle Brunette, hosted Planning and Registration Clinics beginning in June, Student Success Seminars, Academic Orientation Day, an in-person Welcome Booth, Clubs Day, Student Services Fair, Residence Activities, and other student engagement activities to provide a warm welcome to new and returning students through the start of Fall courses. I would like to congratulate and thank everyone who participated.

Establishing a Path Forward

While the COVID-19 pandemic is a stressor for everyone, Laurentians financial challenges and subsequent restructuring under the Companies' Creditor Arrangement Act (CCAA) is acknowledged as a further source of stress for the entire Laurentian community. As everyone is aware, a great deal has been achieved in restructuring Laurentian and in implementing an operational and academic model that is focused on student needs and long-term sustainability.

Importantly, the CCAA process was always expected to have three phases and these phases are reflected by the terms and extensions of the Stay of Proceedings. Phase 1 was the most difficult and challenging, requiring agreements on immediate academic and operational restructuring at the University. It was also the most emotional phase of the process - everyone in the community was affected and impacted by the changes and job losses that resulted. There understandably was -- and continues to be -- much hurt surrounding these very difficult decisions.

While we explored all other potential options for the university to continue, this was unfortunately the only option that allowed the university to both continue to serve its students and have an opportunity for a successful future. While many have criticized the ability of a university to engage in the CCAA process, without this option Laurentian would have closed its doors at the end of January 2021.

The process is still ongoing and there is much rebuilding to do - a rebuilding of relationships, of trust and confidence in the future of the university. I know this will be a gradual process, but I truly believe that with the starting point of a sustainable operating model for the university and a commitment to collegial engagement on developing the vision for the future of Laurentian, we will be able to rebuild pride in the university.

Phase 2 of the CCAA process, with extension of the Stay of Proceedings to August 31st, included a number of milestones. This included that agreements reached in Phase 1 were to be fully implemented, the list of Laurentians creditors to be compiled, and real estate, operational and governance reviews be implemented. The further extension of the Stay of Proceedings to January 31st, 2022, reflects the judgement of the court that the progress achieved in Phase 2 was sufficient to merit an extension of the stay. During Phase 2, a Chief Redevelopment Officer, Mr. Lou Pagnutti, was also appointed by the Court to assist the university in its work.

Cushman and Wakefield was retained to conduct a thorough review of Laurentian's real estate holdings. Their mandate in this review was first and foremost to determine the land and buildings that Laurentian requires going forward as a sustainable institution and only after that make recommendations on what surplus real estate, if any, could potentially be monetized by the University to further increase its sustainability and help fund a successful exit from the CCAA proceedings. This review is being done with an understanding of the importance of the campus to greater Sudbury and the wetlands and conservation spaces that are included on the campus. The results of the review are expected before the end of the year.

Laurentian continues to work to engage an independent third party advisor to undertake a comprehensive governance and operational review of the University. An important component of ensuring the future of Laurentian is to ensure that our governance and operational practices are strengthened in a manner that minimizes or eliminates the risk of the university ever experiencing similar challenges in the future. We are committed to consulting with the entire community in this review, which we expect to be conducted prior to completion of Phase 3 of the CCAA process, with recommendations to subsequently be implemented going forward. It is important to stress that one outcome of this review is expected to be recommendations on where Laurentian needs to invest to ensure its future success. I know that for many there is an ongoing concern about additional cuts. I stress that we are not anticipating any further reductions in the number of positions at Laurentian. Rather, the expectation is that the operational review will bring forward recommendations with respect to investments in people and technology that are needed to ensure the University's future.

The critical milestones for Phase 3 of the CCAA process include concluding a plan of arrangement with Laurentian's creditors that is acceptable to them in satisfaction of their claims, is acceptable to the Court and then to implement the terms of the restructuring plan.

While the current extension of the Stay of Proceedings is to January 31st, 2022, the exact date of Laurentians exit from the CCAA cannot be stated unequivocally at this time. However, it will need to occur in the first quarter of 2022. As the community knows, Laurentians path through the CCAA process is being assisted by a \$35M Debtor in Possession Loan. Cash flow at the University is currently relatively strong, which is expected for this time of year, but the process must be concluded as rapidly as possible.

I know this process has been extremely difficult and has caused much pain and frustration. I reiterate that the university only embarked on this path, as there was no other option. We stand by the decision to undertake a formal restructuring proceeding, and the extraordinary milestones achieved to date make clear that it was in the best interest of the university to have done so. Through the process classes continue, students continue to learn and graduate - and the ability for Laurentian to continue and thrive as an institution of Learning remains our primary goal. Laurentian is a tremendous community, with exceptional people and wonderful engaged students, and it is a community that deserves to have a strong future.

(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)

Laurentian's Commitment to an Outstanding University Experience in French and English, Bilingualism and its Tricultural Mandate

#Imagine2023, Laurentian's strategic plan states *"Laurentian is committed to strengthening the foundation of knowledge in higher education and research to offer an outstanding university experience in English and French with a comprehensive approach to Indigenous education"*.

These words have guided the restructuring process and the vision for the new Laurentian. Yes, the changes to Laurentians academic programs were substantial in number - but those decisions were made strategically and through a consultative process - and have substantially impacted less than 10% of the student population, while providing a way forward to grow in-demand programming that meets the needs of students and employers.

There are some that have said that the closure of 28 French language programs is a betrayal of the francophone community and Laurentians promise of meeting the French language university education needs in the North. While superficially this may be persuasive to some, the overriding goal for the restructuring of Laurentians academic programs is to better meet the needs of students, employers and the community going forward. No university can indefinitely support programs in which students have little interest and offerings that do not attract students cannot meet the needs of communities. We can only accomplish our mandate through programming that is timely, topical, as well as appealing to students and which produces graduates that are in demand by employers. Of the 28 French language programs closed, 10 had not had a single student registered across at least the past four years and the other 18 programs supported only 160 students. Similarly, the program closures on the English side affected only 8% of students studying in English.

The 33 French and 72 English programs that continue to be offered at Laurentian clearly meet the needs of students, employers, and communities. Every year over the past decade Laurentian

has ranked in the top three of all universities in Ontario for the percentage of graduates who find employment within their field. Laurentian graduates also directly contribute to a “brain gain” for Northern Ontario. Laurentians continuing programs provide a foundation for this enviable success to continue and a platform on which to build new programs to meet the future needs of our students.

Laurentian remains 100% committed to its mandate as a bilingual University. Being a bilingual institution with strong academic programs in French and English makes us stronger academically and enhances the student experience while producing graduates employer’s value. Laurentian is proud of its partial designation status as a bilingual university and has been working with the Ministry of Francophone affairs to ensure our ongoing compliance with that commitment going forward. We are also committed to working directly with the francophone community to ensure that Laurentian can continue to meet the needs of all of our students going forward. Laurentians policy on bilingualism is central to this mandate. It must be reviewed regularly to keep it aligned with the expectations of our communities and students. One important component of the policy is the designation of specific positions, including senior academic leadership positions, as bilingual in order to ensure that members of the Laurentian community can be served in the language of their choice. Thus, as Laurentian looks forward to renewal, we must maintain our focus on this commitment in our hiring practices. We must also commit to a serious discussion on improving functional bilingualism across the university.

Laurentian is also committed to the growth of its tricultural mandate and to meeting the needs of Indigenous students and Indigenous communities. The loss of the Indigenous Studies program upon the dissolution of the Laurentian Federation was extremely difficult and was felt broadly across the community. Working with the Laurentian University Native Education Council (LUNEC) and Indigenous scholars, Laurentian is committed to enhancing and expanding its offerings in this area in order to develop a new Indigenous Program.

Enrolment

Enrolment numbers for the first day of class in September are now available and are encouraging. While the uncertainty around Laurentian’s status and the ongoing CCAA process was expected to impact fall enrollments, our first day of class numbers suggest that we may exceed those projections to at least some degree.

In past years, first day of class enrollments have represented between 95 and 96% of final headcount numbers. On the first day of class this year, Laurentians enrollments sit at 102% of our enrollment target that was included in Laurentians preliminary projections filed with the Court as part of the CCAA process.

Our first day of class enrollments represent a decline in headcount of 12.9% over the same time last year, -13.6% for English programs, 10.0% for French programs. Some notable trends appear to be continuing. First, it appears that the proportion of students studying in Laurentian’s French language programs will increase for a fifth consecutive year. Second, enrollment in Laurentian’s online program offerings as a proportion of total enrollments is positioned to continue to grow. Final registration numbers will be as of November 1st, and will be communicated following reporting to the Ministry of Colleges and Universities.

I wish to thank our students for their continued interest and confidence in Laurentian - we are 100% committed to achieving your expectations. I also wish to thank everyone - faculty, staff, and volunteers - who have worked tirelessly through the past several months to encourage students to enroll in our programs.

Jour des Franco-ontariens

Laurentian will proudly clad itself in green and white in celebration of the Jour des Franco-Ontariens September 25.

We encourage the community to participate on Friday, September 24th and Saturday, September 25th: dress in green and white; celebrate with [a Zoom background](#); speak French in your rich range of accents; and proudly wear your Franco-Ontarian flag pins.

We are also inviting you on [Instagram](#), where we will be showcasing the voices and perspectives of young Franco-Ontarians in the midst of a celebration.

National Day of Truth and Reconciliation

On September 30th, our community will mark the first-ever National Day of Truth and Reconciliation - a day to mourn the victims and honour the survivors of the estimated 150,000 First Nations, Inuit and Metis children taken from their families and their communities and sent to residential schools across Canada.

Students, faculty and staff are invited to a number of activities that will educate and promote healing across our communities. The full program will be announced shortly. We invite the Laurentian community to a sacred fire at the Apology Cairn in Parking Lot #15, which marks the site where Indigenous communities gathered to receive the first apology by the United Church of Canada in 1986. The community will renew and care for the Apology Cairn, planting Medicines and preparing the Cairn for spring planting. Laurentian will further participate in "Light the Country Orange," illuminating our buildings in orange light, a national university campaign proposed by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) based at the University of Manitoba. We invite the broader Sudbury community to come see the lights from the safety of their vehicles, observing all of Laurentian's COVID-19 safety protocols. We are also pleased to host students, faculty, and staff in the Atrium of the Parker Building, where we will be encouraging everyone to tell us how they are actively contributing to reconciliation efforts.

Fostering a Culture Free from Racism and Discrimination.

Laurentian University remains firmly committed to working to end racism and discrimination in its institution, all while embracing equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The Ad-Hoc Committee on Racism and Discrimination at Laurentian received its mandate from Senate on June 23, 2020. Since its inception, the Committee has met on numerous occasions.

The path that will lead to the Senate's recommendations has two axes that will be used to implement measures and an action plan to eliminate systemic racism and discrimination within the Laurentian university community.

One of the axes is the development of a policy that will define multiple forms of racism, as well as the implementation of mechanisms to signal and eradicate them. In addition, this policy, while covering all areas of the University's activities, will complement all Laurentian University policies that address equity, racism and racial discrimination.

The second axis will be that of a survey whose results would inform Senate on the types of discrimination and systemic barriers faced by students, staff and professors who are unique and specific to Laurentian University.

Finally, the work of the Committee has been temporarily suspended as a result of the immediate focus required to continue and complete the CCAA process and the need to bring on new members. A call for nominations is underway.

Monthly Kudos

- Continuing Learning news

The staff of the newly created Centre for Continuing Learning (CCL) (created December 2020) has been working diligently (despite staffing and deadline challenges) to update and prepare 160 asynchronous online course sections for online programs for September 2021. The work included making revisions to 25 courses and creating 9 new Laurentian Online courses (mostly for the newly acquired Gerontology Program). The new center includes the programs and courses offered by Laurentian Online, and also supports non-credit micro-credential programming. The staff of the Centre also continue to contribute research to the field of online and distance education and in Spring 2021, the director of CCL, Dr. Bettina Brockerhoff-Macdonald, published an article with Christina Sckopke, Program Coordinator, in the Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, entitled "Identifying and Removing Barriers Influencing New Students' Decision to enroll in an online course".

- Fall Orientation 2021

The Orientation 2021 Committee collaborated with AEF, SGA, and GSA, to host welcome events remotely and in person to help welcome new students. The committee, chaired by Jason-Scott Benoit and Michelle Brunette, hosted Planning and Registration Clinics beginning in June, Student Success Seminars, an in-person Welcome Booth, Clubs Day, Student Services Fair, Residence Activities, and other student engagement activities to provide a warm welcome to new and returning students through the start of Fall courses.

- Student Success Advising

Students' Fall registration is being supported by Student Success Advisors in collaboration with Deans and faculty advisors across all faculties. The Student Success Advisors are responding to an average of 1460 cases per week to provide academic advice for undergraduate students related to: navigating course registration and transfer credits, understanding university regulations, and academic support programs. The Student Success Advisors work closely with faculty advisors who provide academic advice for undergraduate and graduate students related to: program updates, program-specific requests, appeal support, degree-completion, and future careers. Faculties have been engaged in the Fall Orientation and Welcome Events through presence at the Welcome Booth, Meet & Greets, Academic Orientation Day, and more.

- COVID-19 Vaccination and Testing

Laurentian's Health and Wellness Services team, led by Lyne Rivet, contributed to the COVID-19 vaccination policy and worked closely with public health officials to host vaccination clinics on campus from August to October, and are offering rapid COVID-19 testing until members of the community are able to obtain Fully Vaccinated status.

- Peer Health Promotion

A Peer Health Promotion program was launched with funding from a Bell Let's Talk grant, to hire three Peer Health Promoters: Maria La Rosa, Amalia Secenj, and Heather Simpson. The Peer Health Promoters worked collaboratively with the Indigenous Sharing and Learning Centre (Mary Laur), Equity, Diversity and Human Rights (Shannon Goffin), and Student Success (Michelle Brunette) to increase peer to peer health promotion, to increase awareness of the More Feet on the Ground Training, The Inquiring Mind peer programming, and increased usage of the Welltrack mental wellness app.