

University of Saskatchewan Strategic Directions Update

April 2010

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President Peter MacKinnon



"The University of Saskatchewan is charting a course for its future. We are determined to make the changes that are required to place the University of Saskatchewan among the most distinguished universities in Canada and in the world. We have set high goals for ourselves and we will continue to work together to attain them."

The Strategic Directions are our pathway to the future. They have guided and will continue to guide the renewal process at our university by providing focus and direction for the integrated planning process. They represent the first step in establishing academic priorities for our university by identifying four major areas for development. Most important, they signal the type of university we aspire to be."

These words have inspired me through my first two terms as president. Over the past decade, the University of Saskatchewan has worked hard to fulfill the goals we collectively articulated for ourselves and which all three governing bodies (Council, Board of Governors and Senate) approved. Together we have made substantial progress.

I will comment further below on our progress on our critical goals around faculty, students, and research, scholarly and artistic work. I would be remiss, however, if I did not remark on how fortunate we have been to have the "once-in-a-generation" opportunity to build and renew our campus infrastructure that is currently occurring. With over \$1 billion in construction in the past decade, this represents an enormous public investment in our university. This investment comes with the expectation that the University of Saskatchewan will be a full participant in the knowledge economy of the future. We need to be ever vigilant in proving ourselves worthy of that expectation.

I am confident that the *Strategic Directions* will persist in inspiring us to achieve the bold vision of our founders, who, over a century ago, envisioned a world-class university at the edge of a swift flowing river surrounded by vast prairies. They continue to challenge us today to build on that original vision as the University of Saskatchewan embarks on its second century. The future has never looked brighter.



For what will the University of Saskatchewan be known in its second century?

- **International Standards** - The University of Saskatchewan will be known for its adherence to international standards in all its activities.
- **Academic Pre-eminence** - The University of Saskatchewan will be known for its pre-eminence in specific areas of creative academic programming and scholarship.
- **Sense of Place** - The University of Saskatchewan will be known for its connections to Saskatchewan, Western Canada, the North and the Great Plains environments of the world.

The National Context

There is a “shake-up” occurring in the Canadian university scene. I believe that, at the conclusion of this transformation, we will see a very different university world emerge with re-ordering of institutions and significant changes in their activities. There are at least six reasons for this revolution in Canadian higher education:

- 1) the maturing of the country and the national higher education landscape;
- 2) changes in funding for universities, particularly in federal government funding;
- 3) Canada’s continuing weak innovation performance;
- 4) changing local and national expectations of universities;
- 5) technology and its impact on how we organize our activities; and
- 6) the international higher education context, particularly in Europe and China.

We cannot yet be satisfied with the progress we have made as we continue to be vulnerable in fully meeting our *Strategic Directions* goals. As we have moved ahead, so too have others. In this competitive environment, we must be ever watchful. We must develop strategies that propel us towards the forefront of higher education in Canada and internationally.

This document is excerpted from President Peter MacKinnon's address to the General Academic Assembly April 9, 2010.



Our Strategic Directions

1. Attract and retain outstanding faculty

From 2001 to the present, we have seen significant turnover in our faculty. Nearly two-thirds of our current faculty members were hired in the last nine years. It is obvious we have made great strides in attracting outstanding faculty. I see it and hear about it twice a year in the spring receptions for newly tenured and newly promoted colleagues, where, as you know, members of our academy are presented and celebrated for their award of tenure or for their promotion. Sitting there and listening to the achievements as they are summarized is one of the most rewarding experiences of my year.

I should observe that in 2001, 26% of our faculty members were female. Today 34% of our faculty members are female and 40% of those under the age of 45 are female. This is important progress. We can and do compete for the best in the world. The facilities and support we can offer, the market compensation to which we are committed, and the social, cultural and environmental amenities of our community are all facilitating our commitment to do what we said we would do: "attract and retain outstanding faculty". To retain them, we must support their careers and live up to their expectations for themselves and for our university. This will require great leadership in departments, colleges and support units across our campus.

2. Increase campus-wide commitment to research, scholarly and artistic work

There is no question that this has happened. Total annual research funding is now between three and four times what

it was 12 years ago in Canada Foundation for Innovation competitions. This is success by any standard or comparator. Research infrastructure, existing or under development, is unsurpassed in our country. We have seen some improvement in Tri-Council funding, outstanding individual successes and a growing research culture. In short, research commitment at the University of Saskatchewan is growing and improving.

However, we continue to underperform in Tri-Council research performance. Our progress is uneven; we are more successful with Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) than we are with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). It seems that some academic units and even a few colleges have not taken seriously enough the importance of improving our Tri-Council research funding. Whether the explanation lies in not sharing the goal or lack of enthusiasm in its pursuit, this has to end. The pursuit of Tri-Council funding does not just bring research dollars for faculty members; it augments the resources for the entire university, including graduate students, infrastructure and staff. We must continue to improve our Tri-Council performance, particularly in SSHRC and CIHR, where the performance remains weak.

Our advantage as a research university, our distinctiveness, arises from the capacity we have to unite scholarship and teaching. This requires us to understand and promote the circle from discovery to teaching, from teaching to learning, from learning to new discovery. In my view, this happens best when teaching is informed by scholarly work and the scholarship of our faculty.



Our Strategic Directions continued

3. Establish the University of Saskatchewan as a major presence in graduate education

A decade ago, only 8% of our total student population were graduate students; today the percentage is 13.8. A decade ago, 19% of our graduate students were in doctoral programs; today it is 29%. Our growth here is responsive to the university's needs in the sense that with the range of programs, particularly the advanced graduate programs that we have, graduate students are critical to their success. It is also responsive to Canada's needs. It has been observed in many recent reports that while Canadians generally are exposed in large numbers to post-secondary education, the country falls short of the standards of other OECD countries in graduating master's and doctoral students. On a proportionate basis, we graduate one-third the number of master's and doctoral students than, for instance, the United States. Canada needs more graduate students and the University of Saskatchewan is responding to that need. We should, however, note the percentages at peer universities: University of Alberta 20%; University of Calgary 25%; Dalhousie 26%; UBC 29%; McGill 30%. These are just a few examples and demonstrate where we need to be to compete nationally.

4. Recruit and retain a diverse and academically promising body of students, and prepare them for success in the knowledge age

For this fourth goal, I can also report progress. Our new scholarship programs assist us in recruiting more of the best students. We have seen international student numbers grow, albeit modestly, from 3% to 5%. Self-declared Aboriginal students have increased from 3% in 2000-2001 to 9% this year. Over 550 students with disabilities are now registered with the office of disability services for students. We have increased the number of out-of-province Canadian students who are enrolled. Many more students are participating in off-site face-to-face, televised, multi-mode or web-based courses offered by five of our colleges. Again, the record is one of progress in this important goal.

However, the competition for undergraduate students continues. Whether we are recruiting local students, international students, out-of-province Canadian students or Aboriginal students, I believe we must embrace strategic enrolment management for our university to compete successfully. The strategic approach is comprehensive and it includes recruitment and retention. It includes consideration of the kinds of students we want to attract to our university and attention to student needs and the innovative programming that will meet those needs. Strategic enrolment management begins with first contact and extends to and beyond graduation.



Charting Our Future

The *Strategic Directions* remain University of Saskatchewan policy as well as my personal inspiration and guide. Their precise content will change as we mark progress and move on. For instance, we need to set new goals. I believe graduate students should be 20% of our total enrolment by 2015. Given that Aboriginal education is the great social imperative of the 21st century in our province and beyond, I believe Aboriginal students should be 15% of our student body by 2020. I would like to see this latter happen before 2020, but I think the next stage of progress with respect to Aboriginal students will require addressing critical issues at the secondary-school level in the province. Another emerging goal for the University of Saskatchewan is to increase our performance on Tri-Council competitions to be above the national average for medical-doctoral universities in all three Tri-Council competitions and in all academic units of the university. This will not happen tomorrow or next year. However, it is an important medium-term goal. Why not? I believe our faculty and academic units are certainly capable of meeting this goal.

I believe that the opportunities at our university match or exceed those at any other Canadian university, and I believe that passionately. We have planning and budgeting processes that are envied and imitated elsewhere. We have, I believe, comparatively mature partnerships with governments, with industry, and with others. Let me cite the recent provincial budget as an example of that. For the fifth year in a row, under two different governments, we have managed to see public operating budget support at levels that are more or less in the ballpark of what we have put in our *Operations Forecast* and discussed with the governments of the day. When that happens there is a reason for it and I believe that the reason is confidence. The provincial government has confidence in the direction of the University of Saskatchewan and in the coherence of its pursuit. We also have excellent faculty and staff. I am enormously privileged to work with competent and passionate faculty and staff.

I have come to appreciate that a university president is a story teller, if you like, one of the principal story tellers of his or her university. There are thousands of stories to tell. All of you have your stories and all of you have important parts in the stories of the University of Saskatchewan. After all, these are the stories of the women and men of this university—faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends. These are stories of dedicated visionaries connected to their communities, big or small, near or far, who are determined to make a positive difference for themselves, their loved ones and their communities. They know that this university opens the door and offers a pathway to a better future. That is why the University of Saskatchewan was established in 1907. That is why we have been here for one hundred years, and will be here for hundreds and I hope thousands more.

Our goals:

- **Graduate enrolment at 20% of our total enrolment by 2015**
- **Aboriginal enrolment at 15% of our total enrolment by 2020**
- **Tri-Council funding performance above the national average for medical-doctoral universities in all competitions and in all academic units of the university**