

Engaging the Future: Update on the Strategic Plan – January 2008

Introduction

Engaging the Future, the Report of the Task Force on Strategic Planning, was approved by the Senate in October 2006 and the Board of Governors in November 2006, and published in its final form in print and on the University website in January 2007. In its discussion of the terms of reference and composition of the Task Force, the Report states:

In keeping with the Task Force's commitment to accountability, the President will report annually to Senate and the Board of Governors on the University's progress in fulfilling the objectives set out in the Commitments which conclude each section of the report.

A year following the publication of the report, this update provides a description of the University's progress in those areas identified as commitments and priorities in *Engaging the Future*. This report takes a largely qualitative and summational approach to updating the Strategic Plan. Quantitative measures are provided annually through the detailed Performance and Activity Indicators presented to the Board of Governors each Spring and in the University Budget brought to Senate and the Board in April of each year. The 2007-08 Operating and Capital Budgets specifically related resource allocations to the issues raised in *Engaging the Future* (Section C, pp. 7-11).

This was the first such clear correlation of resource allocation decisions to the priorities articulated in the Strategic Plan, and the Budget document directly addresses those commitments set out in Section 11 of *Engaging the Future*, "A Planning Process Designed to Promote Choice." Further extensions of the commitments in Section 11 are the Interdisciplinary Initiatives Program, instituted with the funding of seven major proposals in 2007, and the request contained in the Fall 2007 Planning Guidelines that Deans identify a number of "signature areas" of education and research in which The University of Western Ontario is of demonstrable international stature. These are direct reflections of issues discussed and commitments undertaken in *Engaging the Future*.

Setting Directions

In approving *Engaging the Future*, the Senate and Board defined as a formal Mission for the University, "Western provides the best student experience among Canada's leading research-intensive universities." This Mission embraces both the commitment to the breadth and quality of student learning opportunities, inside the classroom and in the University and wider communities, and the fundamental context of the Research University. The Mission guides students, faculty and staff in maintaining an environment of diversity and richness, in which scholarship is linked with citizenship and the academic development of all members of the University complements personal and social engagement within the University and beyond.

Success in sustaining our commitment to “the best student experience” was reflected in Western’s dominance in the sixth successive *Globe & Mail* “University Report Card,” a survey measuring students’ satisfaction with their university experiences across a number of categories embracing academic quality, support and services, and campus life. In the October 2007 edition of the “University Report Card,” Western scored first among our peer institutions in 13 of 19 categories, including Quality of Teaching, Campus Atmosphere, Libraries, Technology, Buildings and Facilities, Course Variety and Availability, Student Residences, Student Services, and Food Services. Western’s ranking as first in overall student satisfaction confirms the University’s commitment to and ability to act in support of our institutional objectives.

Enhancing the Undergraduate Student Experience

An important way that Western can ensure the quality of the undergraduate student experience is to maintain our entering first-year class at the Senate-mandated level of 4,350 new students at the Constituent University. In the last admissions cycle, the actual figure at the November 1, 2007 count date was 4,412, with an additional 1,531 at the Affiliated University Colleges. The average entering grade of new, full-time students entering from high school was over 85%. In response to a recommendation in the Plan addressing quality issues, a new Subcommittee on Undergraduate Program Review was established under SCAPA and the process was integrated into the mandate of the Senate.

The Strategic Plan called specifically for the development of special initiatives for the recruitment and support of Aboriginal Students. We continue to actively recruit Aboriginal students to Western through a range of activities, including visits to First Nations schools and undergraduate course offerings in First Nations communities, as well as pre-university enrichment programs, including sports clinics and athletic events, as well as mini-university summer camps hosted by the Faculties of Health Science, Science and the Schulich School of Medicine. Western recently entered into an articulation agreement with Onkwawenna Kentyohkwa, the Mohawk Language Institute on the Six Nations Grand River Territory, to provide advance standing for transfer students. Western has also collaborated with Lambton College of Applied Arts and Technology in Sarnia to develop an Aboriginal Health Sciences and Science pre-degree certificate program and provides support to Aboriginal students through Indigenous Services and special academic bridging programs, including the Health Sciences and Sciences Access Transition Program.

Throughout its work on the Strategic Plan, the Task Force heard of the need to expand programs that integrate classroom study with community engagement and service. Teaching and Learning Services, including the Teaching Support Centre, the Career Centre @ Western and the Centre for New Students, have been working together to increase service learning and engagement opportunities for students through curricular support to the Faculties, and special events and programming. Western students have access to a growing number of courses and programs that include service learning components, as well as opportunities to take part in practical, experiential learning in the broader community. One example is the Trois-Pistoles French Immersion Program, now

in its 75th year, that allows students to participate in a 5-week exchange in Quebec to study the French language in a small community. Other examples are required elements in degree-credit courses offered through many of the Faculties, such as Technical Writing (Writing 208), in which students work as volunteers on community technical writing projects, such as writing text for catalogues and assisting with in-school mentoring programs and Field Experience in Sport Management (Kinesiology 498), in which students are actively involved in the managerial activities of a sport organization. Western students have access to a wide range of extracurricular activities, including the extensive clubs system of the University Students' Council and volunteer opportunities through programs such as the Student Development Services' International Student Peer Connection and Volunteers in Progress and the Centre for New Students' Peer Mentorship Program.

With regard to opportunities for cross-disciplinary study and interdisciplinary programs, new program modules and concurrent degree programs continue to be developed in the Faculties and approved by Senate. In addition, the Centre for New Students continues to provide 'out of class' engagement and support for some of Western's highest achieving students, the 'Western Scholars' and students enrolled in the interdisciplinary Scholar's Electives program. There has been a conspicuous increase in the number of students applying for international exchanges and study abroad opportunities, as well as enthusiasm for participating in off-shore volunteer opportunities, such as Western Heads East and the Alternative Spring Break program.

The University's central career service has changed its name to **The Career Centre @ Western** and implemented a range of new programs which have attracted thousands of students and alumni to workshops, outreach sessions, employee information sessions, and counseling appointments and been successful in bringing more employers to campus through events such as **Career Week** and specialized career fairs. In early 2008, a new **Careers database operation management system** will be launched to support students, staff and employers with job postings, event information and online scheduling.

Graduate Expansion and the Graduate Student Experience

In its 2005 *Reaching Higher* plan for postsecondary education in the province, the Government of Ontario provided direct funding support for an increase in graduate student enrolment for the first time in a generation. In the first round of graduate expansion, funding for 14,000 new spaces were allocated across the universities, an increase of 50% over 2002-03 levels. Institutions indicated to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities their enrolment aspirations, and the Ministry assigned funding to enable them to increase graduate enrolments to agreed-to levels, to be achieved by the November 1, 2007 count date. Western's submission was based on the plans of our graduate programs and was reasonably conservative in its submission (346 additional Masters and 321 additional PhD over 2004-05), although many other institutions in the province allowed their aspirations to exceed their capacity to meet their targets, creating a substantial provincial shortfall in both categories. At the count date, Western (including the Affiliated University Colleges) had exceeded the Masters target by about 20 and

fallen short of the doctoral objective by about 90 students. The government has agreed to extend the eligibility period for this round of graduate expansion for a year, with a final count date of November 1, 2008. The second and final round of allocation for graduate enrolment funding is expected in Spring 2008, and Western will again be responsibly aggressive in seeking an allocation, consistent with the plans of those of our graduate programs that wish to expand.

In assessing Western's ambitions to expand graduate-level study across all Faculties and Departments, it became clear that a change to the structures of administration and support of graduate education at the University would be necessary. Extending "the best student experience" to embrace graduate as well as undergraduate students also required broadened opportunities for professional development, career preparation (for both inside and outside the academy) and an expanded range of student services tailored to the specific needs of graduate students. In January 2007, Senate established an *ad hoc* Committee to Review the Faculty of Graduate Studies, charged to examine the role and operations of the current Faculty and consider alternative approaches, including the level of leadership appropriate to this area of increasing University priority. The Committee met through the course of the Winter and Spring, consulting widely with all constituencies and providing a draft report to the University community in June 2007. Following further consultation, the report was accepted in principle by Senate in September 2007 and implementation of its recommendations was begun.

Chief among the Committee's recommendations was the change from a Faculty of Graduate Studies to a School of Graduate Studies (to include Postdoctoral Fellows, following their Association's unanimous vote to join the new School), led by a Vice-Provost (Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies). The Vice-Provost will have an institution-wide perspective and responsibility for graduate education, with the authority to engage in University planning and budget decisions at the highest levels. The School will provide support and quality control for graduate programs across the Faculties and be the home and centre of advocacy for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. Certain academic functions of the previous Faculty of Graduate Studies will be devolved to the graduate programs within the Faculties, with support from the School of Graduate Studies and a key set of administrative roles, particularly in the area of records and data management, will be devolved to other administrative units, principally the Office of the Registrar. The School will be specifically engaged in quality assurance across the graduate programs, in the allocation process of graduate student support, and in creating expanded opportunities for professional and career development for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

The transition to the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies is proceeding by way of small teams addressing specific issues, with the priorities of ensuring continuity of operations for all programs, faculty, staff and students engaged in graduate education and of building support for all aspects of the transition across the constituencies particularly affected. Elements of the transition requiring Senate action will be brought forward through the Senate Committee on University Planning; a Selection Committee for the

new Vice-Provost has been established and has begun its work. The target date for this appointment and for the establishment of the School is July 1, 2008.

Building the Research-Intensive University and Internationalization

Funding for research from the Tri-Council agencies continues to grow year over year, with significant increases in 2006-2007 for NSERC and SSHRC of 36 and 13 percent, respectively. Funding from these and other sources are tracked annually and reported to the University community through the Annual Report of the Vice-President (Research & International Relations). As called for in *Engaging the Future*, Western's draft 2008-2011 Strategic Research Plan sets ambitious targets for research funding performance at Western. The Plan calls for the University to achieve a fifth place position or better in funding from the Canada Foundation for Innovation, fifth place in funding per researcher from SSHRC and NSERC, and fifth place overall for CIHR.

A major achievement in "Building the Research University" has been the integration of the Robarts Research Institute into the University through its becoming part of the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry. Robarts scientists account for roughly 40% of Western's research revenues in the biomedical area and bring to the University an international reputation in research excellence.

With the consolidation of the C4 group of Universities, and the integration of the Robarts Institute, and the establishment of new incentives such as the Western Innovation Fund, the University has increasingly demonstrated a strong commitment to knowledge and technology transfer. Relative to 2005-2006, the value of contract research involving industry rose 31 percent in 2006-2007. The number of reports of invention from faculty increased by nearly 50%, to 61 that same year. And while licensing income for the constituent University dropped slightly to \$544,000 in 2006-2007, Western established three start-up companies in the energy and life sciences sector. Total licensing income for Western, Robarts, and Lawson continues to be strong. In the last AUTM report (based on 2005-2006 data), Western posted \$4.8M in income from licenses and royalties, placing 3rd in total income from these sources in the G-13. In all, we are on track to achieving our five year commitment of doubling performance levels on these indicators by 2011.

We have redoubled our efforts to seek recognition of our best researchers through their nomination to prestigious distinctions and awards. In 2006-2007, three Western faculty were named to the Royal Society of Canada, while six were named to the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences. In addition, Prof. Richard Puddephatt (Chemistry) was named an Officer of the Order of Canada. In collaboration with the Faculties, Research Western has developed a comprehensive listing of all such awards, and works closely with Deans and individual faculty members to develop winning nominations.

In support of student engagement in research, Research Western has redesigned its website in order to provide up-to-date information on short-term research opportunities for undergraduates. As in the past, our Work Study program is also an important vehicle

placing Western students directly into the research process while at the same time offering opportunities to earn income.

With a renewed focus on internationalization across the institution and with the financial support of new funding programs such as the Western Ambassador Awards and the Course Internationalization Fund, the number of undergraduate students participating in study abroad activities has increased markedly during the last two years. Currently, over 800 students each year leave Western for periods of up to one year to study abroad, representing over 2% of the undergraduate cohort. Further, Western has achieved success in aligning its strategic international objectives in research, development assistance, and service learning through the establishment of institutional initiatives involving faculty, staff, and students in targeted countries and regions. Two prominent examples are the Western Heads East Project in Tanzania and Kenya, and various initiatives related to health care and environment in Rwanda.

Through Western's new Interdisciplinary Initiatives program, the University has directly encouraged the establishment of a variety of new research and study opportunities, in areas such as environmental research and immigration.

Faculty Recruitment and Retention

Engaging the Future calls for investment in the resources that faculty need to do their work, so that Western is able to recruit and retain outstanding colleagues. The resources identified include competitive compensation, space and laboratories, an excellent library, effective and available information technology, and a safe, attractive, family-friendly campus. Progress has been made in all of these areas. Through negotiated agreement with the Faculty Association, the University is able to offer a competitive total salary and benefits compensation package that is competitive with peer universities. The University also continues to work with representatives of Clinical Faculty on the provision of a benefits plan that meets their needs. Western currently has an ambitious building plan that is generating new academic space and allowing renovation of older academic space. Western Libraries continue to benefit from policies that protect the acquisitions budget and enhance access to information resources. Special emphasis is currently being placed on ensuring that members of Western's campus community experience an environment that is safe, respectful and welcoming. In particular we are seeking to ensure that all individuals are able to recognize behaviours that cross the boundary of acceptability and can be sure that situations having a negative impact on climate will be addressed.

Engaging the Future also calls for increased representation of women and other under-represented groups in the professoriate. The University continues to provide funds to aid in the recruitment of women candidates in competitions where the top-ranked candidate is female, and this continues to result in a higher proportion of women being recruited into faculty positions than has been the case in the past. This program has been extended to competitions where the top-ranked candidate is from the First Nations community. The Office of Equity and Human Rights Services has undertaken a workforce gap analysis to identify areas where the representation of designated groups is lower than in

the applicant pool. In addition, an employment systems review is being planned that will identify any practices or policies that create barriers to designated groups in our recruitment and appointment processes. Further, the Employment Equity Guide for use by faculty appointments committees, promotion and tenure committees and annual performance evaluation committees has been re-written and will be distributed shortly.

Western's Strategic Plan commits to providing academic leaders (Chairs, Graduate Chairs, Directors, Associate Deans and Deans) with clear outlines of their administrative roles and responsibilities, and the training to perform these roles successfully. To this end the Provost's office hosts a two-day conference for all Chairs and Directors of academic units each June that is supplemented by Chairs and Directors forums that are held in the fall and winter terms. This year, a June conference is also being organized for Associate Deans, and events are being developed to aid Graduate Chairs in their roles. A recent and continuing focus of these events has been the role of academic leaders in mentoring junior and mid-career faculty, and also their role in creating and maintaining an environment of respect in their academic units. These events also serve to create a network of Chairs and Directors, and the University officers who are a resource to them, and provide a venue to equip them with the tool kit they need to undertake their roles effectively.

Commitments to Staff and a Supportive Workplace

Over the past year we have been focused on health and safety, developing a new performance feedback tool and enhancing staff skills to deal with difficult situations.

For the fourth year straight Western has received the GOLD Healthy Living Worksite Award for a large employer from the Middlesex-London Health Unit. The 2007 award recognized the University's on-line implementation of WHMIS training, our commitment to employee safety, and our promotion of healthy lifestyle practices through our Western Wellness series offered to all faculty and staff. Western also received a very positive feedback from the Workwell Audit on our safety culture conducted by WSIB in 2007.

The Professional and Managerial Association (PMA) Executive and Human Resources have collaborated to improve the performance feedback process for PMA-eligible employees. The new process, called Performance Dialogue and Goal Setting (PDG) is an effort to support ongoing performance dialogue between leaders and staff and to ensure fairness and consistency in the performance appraisal process across campus. Features of the PDG include employee self-reflection, an assessment that focuses on work achievements and alignment of individual work goals with operational priorities, and on career development with attention to factors that affect employee effectiveness and engagement.

Over the past year we implemented two new skill building programs for Western Staff members. The P.E.E.R. program, focusing on deepening self-awareness, increasing respect for work style and personality differences, and enhancing interpersonal communication, has been extremely successful. After completing the course, participants

report significant changes in the way they view workplace problems, and the way in which they approach conflict with colleagues. In August, Learning and Development launched a workshop to help participants manage “challenging conversations” with increased skill and confidence. This session uses a framework of “5 Forbidden Phrases” to consider in de-escalating upset clients in a customer-service environment. These specialized programs are in addition to the professional and degree programs that the University supports financially for staff.

Western has undertaken a major commitment to ensure that the entire University community maintains a culture of respect and civility for all, a supportive environment for women, and a safe and secure campus. Specific initiatives have been undertaken to improve the climate and workplace culture at Western. In the Annual Planning Guidelines for 2008-09, Deans are asked to describe guidelines, policies and practices in their Faculties and Departments encouraging respectful and appropriate behaviour among colleagues, staff and students; culture and environment issues have been the topic at an annual Deans’ Retreat, a Forum of Chairs and Directors, and a meeting of the Academic and Administrative Leaders/Managers Group. In January 2008, a “safe campus initiative” was introduced, which focuses on the identification and prevention of violence, harassment and discrimination (with a particular emphasis on bullying and inappropriate interpersonal behaviour) and campus-wide preparation and training for emergency situations. An inclusive and welcoming campus environment is fundamental to Western’s success.

Alumni Engagement

The University of Western Ontario Alumni Association has now completed its own strategic plan to ensure its mission, objectives and priorities align with the recommendations in *Engaging the Future*. The Association affirmed its mission to “build lifelong relationships between alumni and the University” and to ensure that its work creates the best alumni experience of any university in Canada.

The Alumni Association and Alumni Relations Department has expanded its outreach activities to alumni. The number of active alumni branches has increased from 12 to 24 in the past two years, and programs such as Homecoming, the Senior Alumni Program, London Reads and the Travel the World program are experiencing 15% annual growth in attendance. Efforts to reach alumni through the improved use of technology have also been expanded. More than 31,000 graduates now receive the monthly Purple Flash e-newsletter, the Purple Circles on-line community boasts more than 1,100 communities and 25,000 users, and a new technology platform called Convio has been implemented in the past year to provide alumni with an e-commerce mechanism to confirm their attendance at alumni events, purchase tickets to University and alumni programs, and to donate to the University.

Efforts to partner with the University to provide career development and mentoring services for students and young employment have also continued. In the past year 20 events were held reaching more than 1,800 Western students and young alumni.

Institutional Advancement

Planning for the next institutional fundraising campaign is well underway. Priorities for the campaign are being finalized by Deans and will be brought forward for approval to Senate and the Board of Governors in Spring 2008. The Volunteer leadership for the campaign is being identified and recruited. Lead commitments to the campaign are now being sought and a preliminary target of \$500 million has been established as the notional goal for this effort. It is anticipated that the public launch of the campaign will occur in late 2009 or early 2010.

Efforts to increase the level of endowed funds, in partnership with Foundation Western, also continue. Endowed funds at Western and Foundation Western increased by 20% between 2005 and 2006 reaching a new high of \$282.5 million. One-third of all funds donated to the University are endowed by donors and it is anticipated this will increase to half of all funds in the upcoming campaign.

Strong collaboration between units continues to define the Advancement enterprise at Western. A renewed agreement with Foundation Western has been finalized, fundraising for the Robarts Research Institute has been integrated within the central Development Office, the Ivey and University campaigns are being coordinated effectively, and all Faculties are staffed with at least one Development Officer position.

Our Campus, Neighbourhood and Community

A new Campus Master Plan was developed and adopted by the Board of Governors in June of 2007, following a number of consultations, including those with the surrounding community. The CMP confirmed our adherence to the Collegiate Gothic style of architecture and identified the South Valley site as our next primary site for development. This Plan also confirms our intention to protect the regional facilities designation of land around the University as indicated in the Official City Plan, as well as our practice of actively responding to rezoning and variance applications within 300 metres of the campus in the best interests of the University and the neighbourhood. Construction directed to implementing our long-range space plan, developed and announced in the 2006 University Budget, continues apace with the focus on creating space in the centre of campus for academic and other student purposes, and adhering to the space planning principles contained in the new Campus Master Plan.

Our efforts in reducing our environmental “footprint” continue to gather momentum with new initiatives such as that undertaken in Hospitality Services, including food services and residence operations. The unit’s Mission Statement is: “Hospitality Services is committed to creating, producing and enhancing a sustainable culture for the life legacy of the Western community.” This Mission is put into practice through all areas of operation, including recycling of a wide variety of materials, making sure that left-over food is donated daily to local food banks, implementing energy efficiency programs, and promoting healthy lifestyles through nutritional counseling, education and awareness

programs available to all staff and students (including Lifestyle Options in residence meal service), using organic foods and biodegradable packaging, and composting waste. More broadly, a sustainability and energy conservation committee, led by the Physical Plant Department, ensures that all new construction and renovation designs incorporate energy efficiency which would qualify for LEED certification. The new Claudette McKay Lassonde Pavilion in the Faculty of Engineering is being designed to LEED Gold standards. A tree-planting and replacement program reflects concern with the natural landscape of Western, as a designated arboretum. The University is engaged in lighting and steam line retrofits for energy efficiency, practices minimal use of biocides, and has in place a recycling and waste audit program that other institutions have used as a model.

The Research Park in Sarnia, managed by our Research & Development Park in London, was able to secure significant funding towards the creation of the Ontario Bioindustrial Innovation Centre. In London, we continue our efforts to attract firms with research and educational interests that fit well with the Park and University strengths and hope to be able to show results from these efforts within the next few months.

Public Investment and Accountability

As noted in the Introduction, an annual report is presented to the Board of Governors on a selected number of performance and activity indicators. These annual reports reproduce the same array of core indicators on a consistent basis, creating quantitative benchmarks which can be measured over time. These reports complement the academic and budget plans, financial statements, and proceedings of our Senate and Board which are published on Western's website. Selected excerpts from the report to the Board have appeared as a regular feature in *Western News* over the past year and will continue.

Western continues to take a leadership role among Ontario universities in the matter of public accountability. August 2006 saw the launch of a Public Accountability web page which draws together into one accessible location the various documents and statistical publications that inform the public about our performance, governance, plans, and resource allocation. The website also includes *Common University Data – Ontario (CUDO)*, which compiles data in a consistent manner for all Ontario universities, enabling prospective students and other members of the public can make informed comparisons among institutions. In this respect, Ontario has led the way in Canada, and the CUDO model is now being adopted in several other provinces.

Western's leaders have been fully engaged with the newly-created Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario on issues of public accountability and quality measurement through several invited presentations, participation in HEQCO workshops, and the involvement of several faculty members in developing research proposals on accessibility issues. The University considers its public support to be an investment on behalf of the people of Ontario and is committed to full and open accountability for the effective use of all our revenues.

Conclusion

In all areas central to *Engaging the Future*, the University is conscientiously addressing as many as possible of the commitments undertaken in the Strategic Plan. In the year since the publication of the Plan, significant progress has been made in many areas, as this report demonstrates. Through the efforts of students, faculty and staff, the University is striving to fulfill its ambitions as a centre of learning, an internationally known research institution, and an environment in which “the best student experience” is the responsibility and the outcome for all who live, work and study on our campus.

