

President's Newsletter



While we all enjoy the relative quiet of the summer, we also look forward to the excitement of our students returning. For those of us in the academic world, September is always filled with hopes and expectations for the institution and for our students. It is an exciting time with all sorts of special events underlining the sense of beginning that characterizes this time of the year.

The many successes of MacEwan University have been the subject of discussion virtually everywhere I have gone during the past year. There is no question that the institution enjoys a sense of place and importance in Edmonton. In my many conversations about the university, people focus on the dramatic change that is occurring here, something we all experience on a daily basis.

I know the institution expects and receives a lot from everyone, but it is this commitment that has taken the institution so far so quickly. I do not expect the pace of change to slow down during the coming year, and I hope that everyone has the same optimism and excitement about the future that I do. We are all fortunate to be part of an extraordinary time in MacEwan University's development, and we have the privilege of creating an important legacy for both our city and the province.

THOUGHTS ABOUT PLANNING

Key to change is determining where we are going. I know that with all the day-to-day activities consuming everyone's time, planning for the future might seem an onerous burden. But given our institution's position as a new university wishing to establish its place on the post-secondary landscape, nothing could be more important. I have said on several occasions that the development of a new comprehensive strategic plan must be a priority for the coming year. We did develop a set of operational priorities last year to guide our budget process, but these priorities were only ever intended to have a life of about 18 months.

Any new plan must identify our objectives and provide mechanisms by which success is to be measured. It must express our "value propositions" and articulate in detail what it means to be a "downtown" urban university, which, as we all know, goes well beyond being physically located in Edmonton's city centre. More than anything, though, it must be a fully integrated plan ensuring that all areas of the organization are moving in unison towards furthering its institutional ambitions.

I will be consulting with the Academic Governance Council, the President's Group and the Board of Governors in the near future to determine how best to proceed with institutional planning. I realize this will be a huge undertaking, but it is necessary to ensure clear direction for the future.

Academic Direction

Determining the academic direction of the university is by far the most important element of any plan. Over the last several years, the institution has made great strides in its transformation into a university, with new degree programs developed with the understanding that they are a requirement of being a university. That we have been successful hardly needs to be said. At present, the university offers seven degrees with 25 individual majors and 21 minors, as well as three transfer degrees, two collaborative degrees, and two applied degrees.

The question is: "What is next?" As we build on our solid foundation, we must keep in mind such things as labour market demand, student interest and institutional reputation. Any new initiatives must ensure student access to professional and graduate programs, and further the overall mandate of the organization as a teaching-centred university.

It is not only a matter of degrees. We remain committed to offering two- and three-year diploma programs. These too must be evaluated for their relevancy and how they further institutional ambitions and reputation. We need to recognize that by doing so MacEwan University identifies itself as a unique "dual-purpose" institution. The importance of bridging between diplomas and degrees remains central, as does the need to position our diploma programs as post-degree options for students.

We will need to consider carefully the role of distance delivery, and the our relationship with eCampusAlberta. Service learning is rapidly developing across North America, and we must keep up. We must do more around co-op education; we are not where we should be in this area. There is a lot of talk about the topic of "sustainability" within our curriculum, but this talk needs to be expressed in action. And the notion of internationalizing the curriculum has been around for a long time. No one would disagree that our curriculum must be responsive to the rapidly changing geo-political circumstances of the world in which our students live.

There is no lack of things to think about or to do.

Student Services

MacEwan University needs a student services plan. We hear about how students enjoy their experience here. The welcoming environment of the university is something that distinguishes the institution and contributes to its popularity.

But there are gaps and we can always improve, recognizing as we do that as a commuter institution, we face particular challenges in encouraging student life. Be that as it may, we should look at a number of outstanding examples in the U.S. and elsewhere of institutions that use their urban flavour as a means of enriching student life and connecting with the local community.

Enrolment, Recruitment, Retention

The development of an enrolment and retention plan is critical. We have benefited from a general increase in demand for our programs, and this will likely continue for a few years. But there is every reason to believe that the 18- to 23-year-old cohort is going to shrink and will be replaced by an older student body with a different set of expectations. At present, we have no strategy to deal with changing enrolment trends and no effective way of measuring them. We need, as well, to be mindful of retention, recognizing that it is easier and more economically viable to keep a student than it is to recruit one. And we must bring greater coordination to our present recruitment efforts, which are highly decentralized. Our new associate vice-president, enrolment, planning and recruitment should provide important leadership in this area.

Our Proposition— Identity and Branding

We know that the university enjoys a terrific reputation, but what the institution actually is remains unclear in many people's minds. MacEwan University, notwithstanding its popularity, continues to struggle with an identity problem, as many people remain unclear as to whether we are a university, a college, a university college or a polytechnic.

The university must position itself in relation to other institutions and its various communities. This positioning will inform everything we do. Much of the challenge here derives from our single label "MacEwan," which is not especially helpful in identifying what we actually are. It was with this concern in mind that the Board of Governors stipulated last year that "University" must be attached to MacEwan in all formal documents, and asked the university community to follow suit in any communication being issued. I confess I am still surprised when I see documents and signs that identify MacEwan University as a "college."

Central to this initiative is our work with Watermark, a marketing, communications and advertising firm from Calgary. A number of you have participated in focus groups organized by Watermark, and there will be further consultations with the university community during the fall, with the expectation of launching a new brand early in 2013. From the feedback received at these meetings, institutional brand pillars are being developed that will clearly identify the features of the university. These will, in turn, provide a context for any strategic planning. We hope to have these proposition statements available for our fall consultation, both within the university and with our external community.

Human Resources

We recognize that all those who work here are a critical part of shaping the university's future. In this context, the need for a human resources plan is crucial in mapping out institutional goals as they relate to the future needs of faculty and staff. Mary Anne Wilkinson, our new associate vice-president, human resources has already started the process of developing such a plan. It will focus on promoting a safe and healthy work and learning environment; advancing continuous learning, inspiring and enabling people to reach their full potential, and strengthening the university's ability to recruit and retain talented faculty and staff.

Funding and Facilities

Fundamental to everything is the issue of resources. While the university is currently in solid financial shape, resources will be much harder to come by in the future. The institution has been blessed with substantial surpluses over the last several years, which have been used for a number of major projects, including degree implementation, Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and the University Service Centre. But these resources can only be spent once, and we cannot use them for continuing programs and initiatives. This surplus is diminishing, and while the Government of Alberta has committed to a two per cent grant increase per year for each of the next three years, this will not keep up with inflation, and leaves little room for new initiatives. We will continue to have the benefit of an excellent facilities plan, which must be kept updated in response to the changing circumstances of the university.

There is no question that future development may be impeded by lack of or limited resources, although many things can be managed within established budgets or by reallocating resources. We need to have our future plans secure so that when opportunity does arise we are in a position to take action. Important is the need to establish priorities for future development and to avoid any tendency to respond to immediate issues and problems.

NEW BUILDING – PROJECT WORKING NAME

Design work continues on the new facility, and we hope to have something to show the university in the coming weeks. Our intention remains to begin construction in the first half of 2013. We continue to make progress on the sale of the South and CFAC campuses although I am not in a position to reveal details.

Along with staff from University Advancement, we have been meeting with potential donors and sponsors. We must raise a minimum of \$20 million from the private and/or corporate sector.

Several names have been used to describe the building project. This has created confusion concerning what to call it as we go through the design and building process. We need to have a name that will be generally descriptive of the use of the building, yet not one that defines the name of the

building too narrowly. We also do not want to confuse the building with the faculty and programming it houses or to place limitations on any future naming. Accordingly, the building will be referred to as the "Centre for Arts and Culture." This name will be used to describe the project until such time as naming rights have been secured for the building.

RENOVATION PROJECTS

One cannot help but notice the many renovation projects around the university. The following projects are underway or were completed over the summer:

- Christenson Family Centre for Sport and Wellness – Fitness Centre Expansion

Work is progressing on the addition of 200 square metres to the facility. Currently, there is a flurry of activity with exterior brick work, interior taping and painting, flooring and HVAC finishing. The anticipated handover date is September 17. The project is on budget at \$600,000.

- Christenson Family Centre for Sport and Wellness – Aquatic Centre Upgrade

This is a complex project that is regularly experiencing technical and cost challenges. Nevertheless, progress is being made to hand over the upgraded pool in early 2013. To date, the mechanical room has been prepared for new equipment, a service tunnel has been hand-dug around the perimeter of the pool, and we have installed a new rooftop air handling system.

- Centre for the Arts and Communications (CFAC) – Renovation

Renovations to accommodate our music degree program are complete. The renovations added two music ensemble rooms, upgraded the main dance studio for music performance, added a recording studio and renovated four music ensemble studios. The project came in \$200,000 under its budget of \$1.9 million. Notwithstanding our intention to sell the campus, these changes are necessary in the interim to support our music program students.

- Communication Studies – City Centre Campus

Renovations provided a new Mac lab, a laptop classroom and faculty space to accommodate the Bachelor of Communication Studies move from CFAC.

- Services for Students (S4S)

Renovations on the main floor of Building 7 for the Office of the University Registrar and Student Resource Centre are complete and staff have moved back into their spaces. The renovated space provides improved functionality for staff and will contribute towards enhancing services provided to students. The project came in on budget at \$2.9 million. Everyone should take particular notice of the new welcome desk.

- Humanities

Construction on the third floor of Building 7 for the Humanities student commons and faculty offices was completed as of August 31.

- Emergency Communications and Response

The Emergency Communications and Response program will relocate from Building 7 to the third floor of the Robbins Health Learning Centre. Renovations to construct a new lab and classroom are now complete, and are available for classes this semester.

This is an extraordinary list of projects, and I wish to thank everyone in Facilities and in other departments who worked so hard to bring them to completion. This amount of activity also impacts those working in the areas and I would like to express our appreciation for your patience and support.

ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENTS

We continue to move forward in our planning for a Faculty/School of Continuing Education. The deans completed a planning document earlier this year, with the intention that it would constitute a foundation for further discussion and deliberation. In this context, we have formed a small committee comprised of Janet Paterson-Weir, John McGrath, Dorte Weber, Alan Vladicka and Mike Henry to move forward with detailed planning. We are using the services of Bob Cram to provide strategic advice in this regard. Bob is a distinguished member of Canada's continuing education community, and is currently director of the Centre for Extension at the University of Saskatchewan. I would like to finish this exercise by the end of the calendar year so that we are in a position to plan for the 2013/14 academic year.

As I mentioned in my July 2012 newsletter, the university will be reviewed this fall by the Quality

Council of Alberta. The review committee of Doug Oworm (chair), Susan Duncan and Sam Scully will be on campus October 18 and 19 for discussions with faculty, staff and students, along with the Academic Governance Council and the Board of Governors. We will keep everyone advised of plans surrounding the review.

There are a number of developments and achievements in the Faculty Commons worthy of note. Among these are a two-day new faculty orientation, a chairs' networking session and the publication of a chairs' handbook, an academic integrity handbook, a faculty evaluation handbook and a research showcase brochure.

The Academic Governance Council has now been operating for several years, and its effectiveness as the university's chief academic body has improved significantly in that short time. We are now at a point where we need to examine just how well it has done, and to this end, the Academic Governance Council will conduct a review of its committee structure and operations during the fall semester.

By way of aside, I am increasingly concerned about the proliferation of committees around the institution. Getting people to serve on these many committees is a challenge and they most certainly use up a great deal of time.

ENTERPRISE RESOURCE PLANNING — PEOPLE SOFT

Progress continues on the PeopleSoft Stabilization Project. Over the summer, a number of initiatives were completed:

- 2011/12 and 2012/13 salary adjustments and payment of retroactive salary rate changes for all faculty and staff.
- Processes that improve and support the academic advisement, convocation and admissions functions.
- Student Financials enhancements.
- University consolidated financial statements, benefiting internal users as well as several stakeholders, including the Board of Governors, the Ministry of Enterprise and Advanced Education and the Office of the Auditor General (OAG).
- New, feature-rich P&L statements created at the department, division and university wide level.

- New tools to simplify user access to detailed financial information.
- The first phase of the OAG Security Review.

More details about work on PeopleSoft can be found on www.MyMacEwan.ca. Additionally, work on an overall ERP governance model is continuing, with a draft proposal presented to the President's Group. We will continue to work on defining the model with the intention of implementation starting sometime during the fall.

The majority of the initial Priority 1 Stabilization projects will conclude this fall. Work is underway to define Priority 2 projects. These will be initiated as capacity and business cycle timing allow, with some starting in the late fall. Initial indications are that these projects will primarily focus on bringing the software up to date with vendor-supplied updates as well as developing the next set of critical business reports.

APPOINTMENTS AND SEARCHES

We completed a number of important senior administrative searches over the summer, and I am very pleased to welcome our new colleagues to the institution.

Michelle Plouffe will join the university in the new position of vice-president and general counsel. Michelle is currently associate general counsel with Alberta Health Services, and prior to that position was Legal Counsel for EPCOR Utilities. Her experience with government and within the public sector will be an enormous asset to the university.

Reporting to the president, the general counsel provides legal advice to the university, coordinates the work of external legal counsel, provides professional advice to the Board of Governors and coordinates the development and monitoring of institutional policy. The general counsel will also lead other areas of the institution, including risk management, copyright, intellectual property, internal audit, Freedom of Information and Privacy, and government relations. Michelle will join us on November 5.

Kristine Smalcel Pederson joins the university as the new associate vice-president, enrolment, planning and recruitment. Kristine has a broad background in enrolment planning and student services, most recently with the University of Northern British Columbia. Kristine started at the university on

September 1. This new position is important to developing and implementing a comprehensive recruitment and retention plan for the institution.

Chantel Beaudoin very recently joined us as the institution's new sustainability officer. Chantal has recently returned to Canada from London, England, where she was the environmental compliance and sustainable waste management officer for the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Catherine Davis-Herbert is the university's new director of Student Life. Cathy brings a wealth of post-secondary experience from her many roles at Keyano College, most recently as dean of the Lifelong Learning Division. She will add significantly to maintaining and further developing our reputation as a student-friendly institution.

Jacques Bernizan joins the university as our new director, risk and assurance services. Jacques moved to Canada in 2007 from Sydney, Australia, where he was a risk and compliance specialist for ING Australia. Since moving to Canada, he has served as senior manager, risk and control self-assessment with the Bank of Montreal in Toronto.

Rick Ellis will join the university as associate vice-president, finance on November 1. Rick comes to us from the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, where for the last 12 years he has served as executive director corporate services. Rick is a CA, has a broad background in both health care and post-secondary education, and joins the university at a particularly important time, given our recent transition to PeopleSoft and changes to our financial business processes.

I am sure everyone would agree that we have attracted some excellent new colleagues, which certainly bodes well for the future of the institution.

A very large number of people served on the search committees for these positions, and I want to thank them for their many contributions. The university has certainly done well with its searches, and I welcome our new colleagues.

The search for provost and vice-president, academic is moving along. The search committee met in August and short-listed seven very impressive candidates. Interviews are scheduled for the middle of September.

NEW BOARD MEMBER

On behalf of everyone at MacEwan University, I want to welcome Enzo Barichello as a new public member of the Board of Governors. Enzo is a managing partner of the Edmonton office of Bennett Jones LLP. Formerly co-leader of the firm's commercial transactions practice group, Enzo acts in commercial electrical power and gas transactions, mergers and acquisitions with a focus on transactions in the pharmaceutical sector, forestry purchase and sale transactions, major commercial leases, and major commercial and financing transactions. He is past vice-chair and director of the Edmonton Regional Airports Authority and a past board member of the Forestry Industry Suppliers Association of Alberta.

REMINDERS

We will soon be embarking on this year's United Way Campaign. We improved significantly last year, raising \$42,146, compared with \$20,513 in 2011/12. While we should be pleased with this progress, we also need to understand that, given the size of our overall salary budget, we do not compare well with comparable organizations. As MacEwan University increasingly identifies itself as a downtown university, we must send tangible signals of our commitment to community.

A reminder, too, that the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation (EEDC), along with both MacEwan University and NorQuest College, is hosting a free pancake breakfast to welcome our students back into the city's downtown. Details are as follows:

When: Thursday, September 13, 7 to 9:30 a.m.

Where: On 103 Avenue, between 107 and 108 Streets

Please mark this on your calendars to attend.

THANKS AND CONGRATULATIONS

I want to recognize all those who worked hard to make the first week back such a success. Among other events, I was privileged to participate in parent orientation, student orientation, Faculty Development Day, orientation for new Academic Governance Council members and orientation for our athletic coaches. All were outstanding events. The next week or so brings many Students' Association activities, and, of course, our annual fall barbeques.

Allow me by way of conclusion to wish everyone the very best for the coming year – it promises to be another great one.



David W. Atkinson