



UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY

*energizing*   
**EYES HIGH**  
Strategy 2017-22

**STUDENT EXPERIENCE**  
a focus group guide

September 16, 2016

# Overview

## Participation

Thank you for agreeing to participate in an Energizing *Eyes High* focus group session. We have received research ethics approval for the focus group sessions. Based on this approval we are including the following information. Your involvement in this session is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time. Your choice to not participate or withdraw will not affect any rights that you might have at the University of Calgary now or in the future.

## Confidentiality

All of your comments and responses to questions will be kept completely confidential. Your name and anything else that can identify you will be removed from all written records. Any of the materials that come out of our discussion will only be evaluated by staff working on this project and will be kept secure and protected. Information from focus group sessions will be aggregated. Quotes may be used in summary reports and other forms of public communication but they will not be attributed to individual participants. Personal contact information collected for prize draws will be deleted once winners receive their prizes.

## Results

The results of the session will help the Energizing *Eyes High* team better understand the impact that the *Eyes High strategy* has had from the perspective of students, faculty, staff, alumni and other members of the University of Calgary community. The results of this session will also help to develop recommendations for change.

## Information

If you have questions that are not answered in this session, you may contact:

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# Background Information

In 2011, the University of Calgary embarked on a journey to define its future direction. The university had experienced significant momentum and growth in a community known for its energy, opportunity and expectation of excellence. There was a shared sense that the ‘time was right’ to raise the bar on the impact of the University of Calgary locally, nationally and internationally.

A broad consultative process was launched in January, 2011 as part of Project Next. The key deliverables were to:

1. provide opportunities for the campus community to listen, learn and share
2. build consensus and alignment for the future
3. articulate an inspirational strategic statement and institutional values
4. increase pride through clarity of purpose
5. establish a framework for decision-making and resource allocation

Over 4,000 students, faculty members, staff, alumni and community leaders participated in the process through a broad range of engagement tools including workshops, social media and one-on-one conversations. Based on this consultation process, the *Eyes High* strategic planning document was approved in June, 2011.

The *Eyes High* strategy articulates an inspirational strategy statement as follows:

*The University of Calgary will be a global intellectual hub located in Canada’s most enterprising city. In this spirited, high-quality learning environment, students will thrive in programs made rich by research and hands on experiences. By our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2016, we will be one of Canada’s top five research universities, fully engaging the communities we both serve and lead.*

The *Eyes High* strategy is supported by three foundational commitments:

1. Sharpen focus on research and scholarship
2. Enrich the quality and breadth of learning
3. Fully integrate the university with the community

The *Eyes High* strategy served as a guide to planning, development activities, priority identification, and resource allocation, as well as measuring and reporting progress over the past five years. It also served as a beacon for change, elevating excellence and building a strong community around a shared future state.

Given that 2016 is the University of Calgary’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, it is both timely and opportunistic to “energize” the *Eyes High* strategy so it can continue to provide the platform from which the University of Calgary leverages its momentum and aspirations. The process to energize the *Eyes High* strategy will be similar to that of Project Next. It will provide opportunities for the university and its primary stakeholders to review progress to date. Additionally, members of the community will be invited to share in the development of a new future for the University of Calgary.

This is one of five background documents that have been developed to inform the Energizing *Eyes High* consultation process. It describes where we started in 2011 and the path we would take to achieve success by 2016. I would encourage you to read this and the four other background documents as a starting point for the energizing *Eyes High* discussion. Thank you for taking the time to participate.

# Student Experience

## WHERE WE STARTED

In 2011, when the *Eyes High* strategy was released, we understood that every facet of campus life should be geared toward student success. As one of Canada's leading research universities, we were home to faculty members, postdoctoral fellows, research technicians, support staff and legions of smart, ambitious students who were passionate about knowledge. We were also home to world-class facilities that include innovative technology, state-of-the-art libraries, laboratories, and exceptional teaching resources.

Our goal was to offer programs and services to help students fully engage with the university to make the most of their experience. Whether it was through advising students as they chose their major, helping them with personalized academic planning, programming to get them through the first six weeks of university, accessing scholarships and bursaries, or even writing support, our student support staff right across the university cared about student success.

Our residence program was intended to transition with students as they progressed through their university experience. From shared dorm-style rooms in first year, to full apartments in upper years or grad school, to family housing for families, there would be options available for all students. Whether students lived on campus or commuted from across the city they would have access to our world-class active living recreational facilities, which includes our aquatic centre, fitness centre, gymnastics centre, Olympic oval and racquet centre. From fitness classes and intramural leagues, to sports clubs and fully-equipped gyms, there would be multiple ways to stay active on campus. Students could also join one of over 300 clubs that brought together people who share similar passions.

We also recognized that academic success was only possible if students took care of themselves first. Our wellness centre focused on creating a healthy campus community and empowering students to maintain their own health and wellbeing. With health services, counselling, student support and outreach, and numerous events and programs throughout the year, we would ensure that students could easily access programs and services to keep them healthy and well.

## OUR PATH TO SUCCESS FOCUSED ON FIVE KEY AREAS:

### 1. Academic Support

Inside the classroom we would provide high-quality educational experiences where student learning was facilitated by highly qualified academic staff. We would also complement the classroom experience with academic supports available to all students. The following activities and initiatives were undertaken to enhance academic support between 2011 and 2016. We:

- revised the academic advising model and recruited additional advisors to promote integrated campus advising, using an online system for cross-campus collaboration, regular professional development, and a network of senior advisors focused on streamlining advising across advising offices;
- piloted the Thrive Priority Support Network in 2015 and launched the program campus-wide in 2016 to proactively reach-out to and support undergraduate students who may be at academic risk;

- established the Academic Turnaround Program in 2012 to support those students who had been required to withdraw from their program on the basis of academic performance to practice academic strategies and develop a learning plan to improve academic performance and regain good academic standing;
- piloted faculty-based offerings of the Academic Turnaround Program in the Schulich School of Engineering and the Haskayne School of Business in 2016;
- refined and expanded Academic Development Specialist advising and support services to broaden learning support and study skills development as well as academic decision-making for high-achieving students
- registered approximately 1,600 students annually with our Student Accessibility Services and accommodated approximately 9,773 student exams in our specialized exam centre;
- implemented a new Student Accommodation policy in 2015;
- implemented new registration and course scheduling timelines to enable students to plan their next academic year and register in courses before the end of the winter term;
- improved communication to students to take a more proactive approach to informing students of upcoming events, deadlines and opportunities associated with scholarships, awards, registration, student aid, payment deadlines etc.;
- revised academic regulations for withdraws, reappraisal of grades and non-disciplinary academic appeals to clarify language and simplify processes for students.
- revised the model for the Student Ombuds Office and renovated facilities;
- offered over 170 study abroad opportunities annually;
- established the Scholars Academy to provide unique programming and individualized support for the university's best and brightest undergraduate students in a newly renovated space centrally located on campus;
- established a checklist to define the expectations and responsibilities of the graduate student and supervisor. Completion of the checklist may take several meetings, but it is expected that it will be completed within the first two months after a supervisor has been appointed;
- launched the My SupervisorSkills program provides training to supervisors to mentor graduate students, resolve conflicts, and prepare students for oral exams, etc.; and
- Awarded the 2014-15 Excellence and Innovation in Graduate Education award from the Western Association of Graduate Schools.

## **2. Accessibility of Resources**

We knew that a truly transformative experience was one in which students had opportunities to experience a depth and quality of learning that extended far beyond a test, a textbook, classroom, laboratory or country. Whether students were making face-to-face, telephone, or online inquiries, our goal was to ensure they had prompt access to knowledgeable, friendly staff and other resources. We would ensure that they perceived a high level of professionalism in interactions with staff and faculty and that our policies and practices were supportive and understandable. The following activities and initiatives were undertaken to increase student access to resources between 2011 and 2016. We:

- initiated an Aboriginal Relations Leadership program in 2012;
- enrolled over 250 graduate students in MyGradSkills workshops annually;
- expanded leadership advising and increased the uptake of StrengthsQuest inventory participation by incoming students, as well as strengths-based program offerings throughout the year to extend the application of strengths advising to academic and career planning.

### **3. Physical and Social Spaces**

We understood that the physical and social spaces students occupied on campus would shape their overall experience. Everything from the classroom to on-campus housing, from Wi-Fi connectivity to safe spaces for social groups would all contribute to students feeling comfortable, safe, and supported on campus. The following activities and initiatives were undertaken to create and enhance physical and social spaces between 2011 and 2016. We:

- opened the Vitruvian Space to support spiritual health, wellness and diversity related initiatives such as religious observance, workshops and community gatherings, reinforcing and celebrating pluralism and inclusivity on campus;
- invested more than \$11.0 million in learning spaces across campus since 2011 to facilitate active learning, innovation, and creativity for a wide variety of disciplines;
- invested \$4.0 million in wireless infrastructure to greatly improve connectivity, speed and access for one of the largest and most complex wireless networks in Alberta, covering what is in effect a small city and four distinct campuses. The wireless network will allow guest access for the first time, enabling visiting scholars and members of the public to go online without having to request a temporary IT Account; and
- constructed two new residence buildings – one for upper-year undergraduate students in their third or fourth years and one for graduate students.

### **4. Co-curricular Opportunities**

Outside the classroom, our programs and services would enrich campus life and encourage personal growth and engagement, professional development, and community connections. The following activities and initiatives were undertaken to enhance co-curricular opportunities between 2011 and 2016. We:

- expanded and improved the coordination of co-curricular credited hours on the UCalgary Co-Curricular Record officially recognizing extracurricular activity participation;
- expanded curricular and co-curricular (non-credit) community-based learning opportunities including the UCalgaryCares service-learning programs that build on partnerships with service agencies and non-profits in the community;
- began offering the Global Citizenship program in Toronto for first-year students in 2016; and
- held the first annual Camp LEAD in 2011 and the first annual Leadership Exchange conference in 2013 giving students the opportunity to practice the fundamentals of leadership and engage in leadership dialogues with faculty members, staff and industry professionals.

### **5. Access to Health and Wellness Resources**

We would provide students with the health and wellness supports necessary to encourage them to achieve their maximum potential. The following activities and initiatives were undertaken to increase access to health and wellness resources between 2011 and 2016. We:

- launched the UCalgary Strong program in 2014 to assist students in navigating the transition to post-secondary education, integrating elements of personal wellness, leadership and engagement;
- launched the Campus Mental Health Strategy in 2015, aimed at supporting the mental health initiatives and well-being of students, faculty and staff;
- launched the annual UFlourish Week in 2014 to increase knowledge, awareness and capacity for improved mental health and overall wellness in students, faculty and staff;

- facilitated the development of Healthy Campus Alberta, a provincial post-secondary community of practice in 2015;
- Expanded mental health and addictions programming with a 3 million dollar grant from Alberta Health, including embedded support in faculties, residence and student service units;
- developed tailored wellness workshops based on specific faculty requests and designed innovative new programs such as the Community Helpers Training Program, Roots of Resiliency, mindfulness programs for graduate students as well as self-directed online mindfulness programming in 2015; and
- launched the Global Families Program in 2014, and the family housing collaboration in 2016 to provide advising and workshops for family members accompanying international students, connect families in family friendly activities, and support intercultural communications in residences and on campus.