CROSS UNIVERSITY MEETINGS: FEEDBACK FROM OUR FACULTY AND STAFF
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As part of my commitment to open communication and dialogue at the University of Calgary, I held a series of small group meetings with faculty and staff during July and August. These groups – typically consisting of five to 20 members – were intentionally composed of faculty or staff from various units across our university to solicit diverse opinions about our challenges and our aspirations as an institution. During these 17, 90-minute sessions, I had the pleasure of engaging with almost 130 faculty and staff and I am very grateful for their attention and candor. I opened each session by giving an overview of these three key, five-year goals for the University of Calgary:

1) Our first goal is to ensure the University of Calgary is seen and celebrated as a community with an abundant sense of pride. Pride starts within our organization and our internal stakeholders must be vocal and enthusiastic ambassadors for the University of Calgary. Our graduates must have an educational experience that reflects our community's enthusiasm and leadership, and be recognized for their knowledge and skills. Our external stakeholders should recognize and champion the University of Calgary as an integral part of the fabric of our great city.

2) Our second goal is to ensure our university is identified as a leading research-intensive institution with a strong focus on undergraduate education. Specifically, we must be recognized as a research leader internationally in key priority areas. This means we are highly competitive in national research competitions and that our faculty members are recognized and rewarded as leaders in their respective disciplines for the impact of their scholarly work. It also means we recognize the relationship between good teaching and good research – and reward and facilitate both.

3) Our third goal is to have the University of Calgary recognized and respected as a well-run organization. We need to be seen as an institution that is sustainable both financially and environmentally. We should be appreciated as an organization that has embraced best practices in our systems and processes and one that operates with discipline, integrity and transparency.

One thing became very clear to me during these meetings: the level of commitment our faculty and staff have to the University of Calgary. Whether someone has been with us for six months or 40 years, each is here to contribute to this institution while seeking to reach their individual potential. We must protect and grow this commitment. Reaching our goals depends on our ability to listen to one another and on my access to your advice. I promised those who attended the meetings that I would distribute a summary of the key themes and issues that emerged during our discussions. Your comments were generally very consistent, which will be helpful in identifying priority action areas for the future.

The Executive Leadership Team and I have already started work on the issues you raised. We are committed to addressing them in a timely manner.
PRIDE IN OUR FUTURE

There was a strong consensus that pride in our organization is a necessary ingredient to future success. Meeting participants noted we have great pride in our student interactions, research accomplishments and committed staff. They also noted; however, that this internal pride needs to be expressed externally and restored where the challenges of the last couple of years may have eroded it. Here are some of the suggestions I heard:

- **The University needs a clear and sustainable vision for the future that is coherently and consistently communicated both internally and externally.** Our current strategic planning process will promote the proactive, rather than reactive, culture that real success requires. Our values need to be expressed so that we build an organization that leverages creativity, imagination and a commitment to excellence with persistence and courage.

- **We need to work together as one university.** The administration needs to support and build the future of the University hand-in-hand with all stakeholders on campus. Our General Faculties Council (GFC), and its committees, need to be active and engaged in defining our future so ownership is shared across the institution. Our Deans’ Council must be a relevant forum to balance university planning with faculty issues. Our faculty and staff need to understand our respective roles so we can support each other.

- **We need to nurture pride and leadership.** This starts with empowering people and supporting them through professional and leadership development opportunities. Leadership needs to be rewarded and change-management seen as a fundamental commitment by our administration. We have excellent faculty and staff, and respect for them and their contributions must be a core institutional value from the day each joins us.

- **Internal communication needs to be enhanced.** We need to create new opportunities for internal engagement including more face-to-face meetings. Trust and understanding are fostered where all stakeholders have frequent opportunities to share concerns and celebrate successes.

- **We need to communicate our pride in our students and their accomplishments.** We need to listen to our students and use their input to drive new programs and initiatives. We must promote our students’ successes and their contributions so the external community can see their leadership and excellence. Our alumni must feel engaged with us and be champions for our future.

- **We need to engage our external community in developing a shared vision of our future.** Our external stakeholders need to be aware of student and faculty accomplishments so they can become champions of the university and the high standards it sets.

BUILDING A TOP RESEARCH-INTENSIVE UNIVERSITY WITH A STRONG MANDATE IN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

There is strong recognition that we have two key mandates: we are a research-intensive university and we have a strong mandate in undergraduate education. Research and teaching are not mutually exclusive; in fact, these two responsibilities are interwoven and interdependent. We must build capacity
and excellence in research and graduate education while also creating an exciting environment for undergraduate education. This means that we place value on both teaching and research and support both equally. There was significant dialogue on this issue with numerous suggestions for increased activity and recognition of our university. Below is a summary of suggestions for research, teaching and the intersection of these two mandates.

- **We need to aim high in our aspirations.** Our research must be benchmarked against the highest standards in relevant disciplines with clear reporting on goals and accomplishments. We need to deliver and be recognized for research that is competitive nationally and internationally in a range of priority areas.

- **We need to take a strategic approach to nurturing and supporting excellence in our researchers and programs.** This applies to programs such as future Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) competitions, allocations of Canada Research Chairs (CRC’s), University Professorships, Urban Alliance, etc. Stable funding for faculty members who have been on ‘soft funding’ and research infrastructure are important to our future success.

- **Research support processes need to drive enhanced competitiveness at the national and international level.** Internal review processes need to be strengthened across faculties and our policies and programs (e.g. ethics reviews, trust accounting, overhead, University Research Grants Committee) need to be clear, streamlined and ‘researcher friendly’. Committees to support research enterprise, such as the Associate Deans’ Research Council (ADRC) and the Research Development and Policy Committee (RDPC) need to be strong platforms for communication, the development of best practices and policies that support research excellence.

- **Our centres and institutes need to be supported.** They need appropriate accountabilities and linkages to ensure they are delivering on their mandates while also ensuring they are sustainable.

- **We must maintain and enhance our relationships with our key research funding agencies such as Alberta Innovates, the federal Tri-Council agencies, CFI and other industry/government partners.** Knowledge of new policies and programs, in addition to responsible stewardship of research funding, need to be priorities.

- **Our graduate students are the engines of many of our research programs and they need support through funding and programs.**

- **Our incentive programs need to reflect our belief that teaching is a priority.** We need better metrics for measuring teaching quality and effectiveness - and good teaching needs recognition. Innovative teaching methods should be supported by programs such as community service learning (on and off campus), experiential learning tied to research, and podcasting. Some of our teaching facilities need upgrades to encourage innovative curriculum delivery. Faculty members should be actively involved in student recruitment and engage with first-year students through a broad range of interactions.

- **We need to be clear on the value of an undergraduate education at a research-intensive university.** Unique programs in our institution, which support this synergy, need to be communicated and enhanced. These include international linkages, summer research opportunities, honours programs and research-informed experiential learning opportunities.
Our students need to feel supported inside and outside of the classroom. Program advising, mentoring, career planning opportunities and participation in the co-curricular record are meaningful ways to enhance student satisfaction and personal/intellectual growth.

We need to formulate a clear international teaching and research strategy with principles, goals and expectations articulated. We currently have a broad range of international liaisons and exchanges but we need to develop a focused plan. The role of our international office to support this plan, along with incentives for international engagement, need to be clear.

The ability to work across faculties and disciplines needs to strengthened. Interdisciplinary research and teaching are seen to be difficult in some cases and incentives for doing either are not always obvious. New structures need to be considered to break down perceived or real silos.

**COMMITMENT TO BEING A WELL RUN ORGANIZATION**

Our university has grown significantly over the past several years to a community of about 35,000 students, faculty and staff. We are a large and complex organization that needs a high level of sophistication in our systems and processes to provide a solid foundation for our current programs and future initiatives. Building this foundation is the key to ensuring we deliver to our internal and external stakeholders a standard of service that supports our aspirations and those of our community. This in itself will contribute to institutional pride. Below is input from our participants on how we can better deliver on these expectations.

There needs to be clear and consistent transparency in decision making. We need to clearly communicate how and why decisions are made if we want to build alignment, trust and confidence in our processes.

As a community of professionals, we need to commit to a high standard of service in all that we do. We need to set priorities, be analytical in our approach and focus on better decision making.

We need to broadly communicate the value, outcomes and timelines of the IS2 project to the wider university community so there is a shared sense of ownership and pride in its success.

Our faculty, staff and students come first. We need to provide proper training and orientation for new staff and faculty and work together to build a supportive and balanced culture. We need to protect that culture with adequate succession planning.

The physical space on campus must support our teaching and research mandates. Physical spaces are important foundations for excellent research and teaching. Our capital projects need to clearly support these activities.

This summary of suggestions represents the key themes emerging from my meetings with staff and faculty over the summer. I am committed to taking what I heard from you into our Executive Leadership Team meetings and into our strategic planning process to ensure that your insights help shape our
future and support this university’s goals. We can’t do it all at once but we will begin addressing your concerns and I will keep you informed about our progress. I appreciate your time and the commitment your participation demonstrates.

More information on the strategic planning process and its outcomes will be published on my website as it becomes available.