

GAA “Building for Centuries”

Friday, April 8th, 2016

Peter Stoicheff

I have heard from many people on and off campus over the last five months – here through transition meetings with most colleges and schools and administrative units; through meetings with newly tenured faculty, research-intensive faculty and department heads; with deans council and the Senior Leadership Forum; with student council and USSU and GSA leadership; and with the Board. I have also heard from many off campus – the provincial government; the federal government; Universities Canada; the U15; alumni and donors; on my president’s provincial tour; on my national tour with alumni and other stakeholders; from regional college presidents; and from the local business community.

My understanding of this university’s role and significance has not changed from what I offered in my remarks at convocation – in fact, it has been strengthened and confirmed: the university has a great and proud past, an enviable present and a future of promise, with high hopes for us held by many thousands of people in the city, province, nationally and internationally.

I always take the opportunity, in larger public presentations, to call attention to parts of a long list of influential alumni and professors emeriti who have forged a history for this university that places it among the very best in Canada. Today, I’ll offer this truncated version:

C.J. MacKenzie (dean of Engineering and president of NRC and Atomic Energy Canada); Henry Taube (graduate student in Chemistry and Nobel Laureate); Gerhard Herzberg (Physics professor and Nobel Laureate); Thorberger Thorvaldson (who developed alkali decay-resistant cement); Harold Johns and Sylvia Fedoruk (who did crucial work developing the Cobalt 60 cancer treatment); John Diefenbaker (Prime Minister); Ramon Hnatyshyn (Governor General); Hilda Neatby (author of *So Little for the Mind*, critical of the Canadian education system); Mabel Timlin (the first female social scientist to become a member of the Royal Society of Canada); Sharon Butala (author of *The Perfection of the Morning*); Blaine Favel (former chief of the FSIN, our Chancellor and a Canadian Aboriginal leader).

I also like to take the opportunity to call attention to what that history has enabled us to be doing today. In that regard, I think of the role of the College of Medicine in leading health care innovation in the province and the world; of the College of Agriculture in leading farming innovation and research with a huge return on investment and improvement in the lives of people of this province and throughout the world; of the Western College of Veterinary Medicine and its prominent role in animal care and research nationally and internationally; of the great athletes and coaches who were here and who were trained here; of the fact that this is the only major university in Canada with a College of Arts and Science gathering together the fine arts, the social sciences, the humanities and the sciences.

I think of the fact that we are seen as a research leader in the country, with Canada's only synchrotron; one of the world's most advanced vaccine research facilities at VIDO-InterVac; one of the country's five current Canada First Research Excellence grants (in food security); a cyclotron; excellent nursing programs and research that are also leading examples of distance education; colleges and graduate schools of dentistry, pharmacy and nutrition, kinesiology, education, engineering, business, law, environment and sustainability, public health and public policy, as well as an excellent library system to support their work, and groundbreaking accomplishments and alumni of which they can be proud.

We also see many of our research, scholarly and artistic work achievements in the media. Recent examples include coverage of research identifying a protein biomarker that can test for concussions; on sequencing the bread wheat genome; on identifying a cause for Alzheimer's; on developing a simple, cheap, fast and environmentally safe solution that extracts gold from old electronics; on the Gordon Oakes Red Bear opening; and on Prime Minister Trudeau with the basketball signed by the Huskie women's basketball team that later went on to win the national CIS title.

I also think of the fact that we have one of the widest arrays of colleges and disciplines of any university in the country. This to me is a crucial feature of who we are, because although we do not know what the solutions are to the major challenges facing us today, we do know this – that none of them will be solved by a single discipline or a single person, but by many people from many disciplines working together. We are poised to help do that.

Many others have offered reflections about us as well. A recent study tells us that 90% of people surveyed in Saskatoon believe we offer students a high-quality education; 95% believe we are important to Canada; and 89% believe our teaching and research are beneficial to the community.

Our own economic impact study tells us that about 40% of Saskatchewan's university-educated population—more than 62,000 people—earned their post-secondary degrees at the U of S; that we generated \$1.2 billion in GDP for Saskatchewan in 2013/14, about 1.5% of the province's GDP; that employee salaries and benefits are valued at \$534.7 million; that we are one of Saskatchewan's largest employers with over 6,200 people employed full-time or part-time; that the per capita impact of the U of S on the provincial economy ranks first or second among Canadian universities, depending on the measure.

These are some of the measurable economic impacts we have. There are other less measurable but equally if not more important ones: the fact that our graduates are highly sought after and recognized for their work ethic, creativity and excellent training; the impact on other organizations in the province (who want to attract talent of their own) of having a first-class university in their midst; the impact of training the vast majority of visual, dramaturgical or musical artists in the province.

And there are impacts that are not measured in economic terms, but instead in terms of a

contribution to a civil society that a great university can make. That's why I've said before that our role is to Inquire, Inform, Innovate, and Indigenize. By "inquire" I meant "to ask questions about our world and to try to find answers to them that have value for people". By "inform" I meant "to communicate what we've learned for the benefit of people". By "innovate" I meant "to push our boundaries of inquiry into new territory" and "to put new ideas into practice for the benefit of people". By "Indigenize" I meant "to ensure we are the best university we can possibly be for Aboriginal students and their communities".

Note that I propose we "ask questions about our world and to try to find answers to them *that have value for others*"; that we "communicate what we've learned *for the benefit of others*"; that we "put new ideas into practice *for the benefit of others*"; that we "ensure we are the best university we can possibly be *for Aboriginal students and their communities*". We are enriching lives through our many disciplines, and by doing that we are a force for changing, thoughtfully and respectfully, our culture. That's why I have also offered that we are a "cultural institution: leading the intellectual, scientific, professional, artistic, medical and environmental enrichment of the people. ... That's our purpose; that's the place we occupy – as a cultural institution leading transformative change."

Given that the U of S has a past and present of excellence, what is its future? That's the question we need collectively to answer and to act upon. When the university's first president, Walter Murray, was traveling to Saskatoon to begin his work here in August of 1908, he wrote to a friend that "we must remember that we are building for centuries." What is the role of the modern university in a time of change, maybe a time of the greatest change humankind has seen? And what is the responsibility you and I and all of us here carry with us through the great privilege of being part of this university – of having the kind of educational opportunity the vast majority of people in this world can only dream of?

When I was studying literature I was taken by a phrase of Ezra Pound's, a modern poet who influenced many changes in 20th century poetry: "Poets are the antennae of the culture". I'd apply that to us: "Universities are the antennae of our cultures." They help envision and prepare for the future, to build for centuries.

I want to suggest that to do this, a university must contain high levels of *connectivity* (among programs, researchers, industry, communities), *diversity* (among students, staff and faculty), and *sustainability* of all kinds including environmental and cultural. Great universities have high levels of many of these.

We have the right conditions to be purposeful about connectivity: For example, we were seen as real trail blazers when we developed our 3 multi and interdisciplinary graduate schools back then. Our six signature areas were deliberately designed to be multi- and interdisciplinary, intended to solve some of the key issues/opportunities of the day. We have established a partnership with the NIH (National Institutes of Health) who have been working with us to enhance a culture of "collaborative science" - and we have a number of initiatives being led by various faculty in this respect across campus. We have recently put in place leadership and

resources to support interdisciplinary health research and professional health education for health sciences. All of our big institutional proposals - CERCs, CFREF, etc. have a criterion to be interdisciplinary. We have embarked upon a series of "Research Cafés" to bring people together to incubate ideas around interdisciplinary research with the intention that the UofS keeps a well stocked "Innovation cupboard" of ideas and initiatives that we advance. Our newest buildings (such as the Health Sciences building) have intentionally been designed to enable interdisciplinarity and collaboration.

An interesting example of how connectivity can exist at the academic programming level is found at Duke University. Its "Bass Connections [program] is a university-wide initiative ... that provides both graduate and undergraduate students with greater exposure to inquiry across the disciplines, partnership with unlikely fellow thinkers, sustained mentorship in teams and the chance to experience the intersections of the academy and the broader world." Duke describes the five themes they have developed within the Bass Connections program: "brain & society; information, society and culture; global health; education & human development; and energy. Students gain problem-centered expertise and team-oriented skills and use them to apply knowledge and research across disciplines to explore societal and cultural challenges."

Another interesting example of academic connectivity is found at Stanford University. It has only seven schools (equivalent to our colleges, of which we have 13) but 18 interdisciplinary institutes that cross school boundaries and foster collaboration. The structure is based on the principle that "students whose research bridges disciplines are prepared for a changing world". Its buildings are designed to "increase chance encounters that draw faculty together around common problems." As a result, "far-flung collaborations flourish – physicists create dance performances, biologists and musicians expand our understanding of epilepsy, and engineers speed environmental research." The University of Aalborg in Denmark has a very similar structure with a high degree of problem-based learning.

A small but wonderful example of connectivity at the U of S, as well, is the Emma Lake Kenderdine Campus. Many people have worked for several years on how to rehabilitate it and how to shape its academic mission. We have been looking for a partner for years now to no avail. Re-opening means having an academic vision for the campus and a site-plan that makes it sustainable for the long term. I want to announce here president's office "strategic initiatives" funding to support the visioning and site planning for ELKC, an example of connectivity at the U of S. This work is a necessary step in any potential reopening of the campus in the future.

Universities well positioned for the future also have a high degree of *diversity* – cultural, international, gendered. We have an “Employment Equity Program”. The University of Auckland has a pro-vice-chancellor position devoted to equity; and its equity policy states that “The University will enhance its national and international reputation and attract, retain and support talented people to achieve their potential through its commitment to equity outcomes. This will benefit the creative and intellectual life of the University, and support engagement with the University’s diverse communities.” Note that equity and diversity become principles that lead to high national and international reputations; they are not barriers to them. The University of Auckland is one of the highest ranked universities in the world.

At the University of Pennsylvania, students can apply to participate in the Intercultural Leadership Program. This brings together a group of domestic and international students for a series of workshops and projects, with the aim of nurturing “an intercultural community of leaders who are ready to take on issues they are passionate about, learning more about communities different than their own, and make a lasting impact.”

The University of Maryland has a comprehensive approach to ensure that LGBTQ-identifying first year students make a successful transition to college. “The One Project” aims to retain LGBTQ students at the University of Maryland by providing intentional academic and personal growth and promoting the development of those students. The “One” in The One Project represents the first year of a student’s new life at the University. It also represents a hope that the LGBTQ community can come together in an intellectual, social and civically-minded way to support each other through the first year of college.

No university is great if it does not connect with other countries, cultures, and ways of thinking. So internationalization is a part of diversity (and stems from connectivity). It is a topic unto itself. But I would like to raise to your attention the “Scholars at Risk” program that helps universities support scholars affected by adverse circumstances in other countries. Canada is a member of the “Scholars at Risk” program and, given the times we’re in, I encourage you to look at it if you know of someone who is affected and needs support.

Universities well positioned for the future also place a high priority on sustainability – financial, environmental and cultural. The following are not ways necessarily to increase environmental sustainability in themselves (though some of them could be) but they stand as symbols for a university that thinks of sustainability across everything it does. Our Campus Sustainability Plan, based on years of consultation, research and best practice, links operations, governance, research, education and community engagement into a continuum that stretches across every aspect of the institution. It has designed many wonderful projects, including the “Sustainability Initiatives Lab” for students.

The University of Copenhagen has Denmark’s first carbon-neutral public building, the “Green Lighthouse” student centre. UNBC has a Farmers’ Market (the UFM) that is a volunteer-run, weekly market of local vendors held at the Northern Undergraduate Student Centre Event Space at UNBC. The UFM “seeks to promote local sustainability by creating a market that

addresses environmental, economic and social/health issues around food production and locally made products.” We have held prototypes of farmer’s markets this year.

The University of Canterbury in New Zealand has community gardens on campus there that “aim to be creative and relaxing places - a time and space out from work or study. Anyone is free to wander through the gardens – there are regular gardening times where participants can meet others, take part in some hands-on gardening and learn new things. No previous gardening experience is necessary, and volunteers get to take home their share of the fresh produce collected that day.” We have the McEown Community Garden.

At the University of Peru, paper waste is sold to a recycling company, with the proceeds providing scholarships for students from low-income backgrounds. They also offer a course, “Art and Recycling”. We have our “Single Stream Recycling Program.” The University of Tokyo distributes free second-hand laptops. Cape Breton University has recently built three wind turbines that will supply twice the power the campus needs annually.

To prepare our students for tackling sustainability issues in new and innovative ways, I am pleased to announce president’s office “strategic initiatives” funding to support the development of opportunities for students to actively work on sustainability issues on our campus and in our communities. We will explore and build ways to create more and stronger opportunities for students to connect meaningfully and in hands-on ways with sustainability through course and capstone projects, immersive learning experiences and extra-curricular activities. These opportunities will build upon existing initiatives like the Sustainability Living Lab, One-Health, the Sustainability Certificate and the U of S Innovative Energy Team (to name a few).

Another kind of sustainability is cultural, and here I want to give a kind of progress report on where we are and need to go in terms of making the U of S the best place it can possibly be for Aboriginal students and their communities.

Over the last five years, undergraduate Aboriginal (self-declared) student numbers increased by 8% (vs. 2.5% overall for the UG population). New, first time, direct entry Aboriginal student enrolments are up 4% over last year. The proportion of graduating Aboriginal students has also increased from 8.3% to 11% for undergraduate students, and from 4% to 5.7% for graduate students.

We have created successful first-year transition programming in the college of Arts & Science; revitalized and newly invested in ITEP’s on-campus and distributed learning sites; continued to see success in Nursing’s distributed learning programs; announced an Indigenous Language Certificate in the College of Education; seen the development of a new first-year course on Indigenous Traditions and Law to begin in the fall of 2017 in the College of Law; approved a motion at Council to ensure Indigenous content in all U of S degree programs; developed ceremonies for our Powwows and Aboriginal Achievement Week; included twelve Aboriginal symbols into our visual strategies; developed and approved a smudge policy; completed and

opened the beautiful Gordon Oakes Red Bear Student Centre; created the positions of Director of Aboriginal Initiatives and Director of First Nations and Métis Engagement; begun the process of defining the position profile for a Vice-Provost, Indigenous Engagement; begun the process of designing an Elders Advisory Council; developed and approved welcome protocol language; hired a Diversity and Inclusion Consultant in Human Resources; hired thirteen new Aboriginal faculty members since July of 2014; created and expanded Indigenous Voices, a U of S-designed professional development opportunity; developed a framework for recruitment, retention, and advancement of Aboriginal faculty and staff; and launched the Aboriginal Career Start program to welcome and create employment for Aboriginal people.

We know, too, that we will have an internal follow-up forum to the Building Reconciliation Forum held last November. This will be an occasion for colleges and schools and other units to share how they are moving forward on the TRC Calls to Action. I am announcing president's office "strategic initiatives" funding to support that forum, and to support individual college-, school, unit- and university-level projects that stem from it.

In future GAA talks, I would like to build on how the university can imagine its future through these lenses of connectivity, diversity and sustainability. I foresee discussing a digital future for the university – in the classroom and in distributed learning, in pedagogy and in research, under the theme of connectivity. I also foresee discussing internationalization as part of diversity; and I foresee discussing financial strategies under sustainability. But in general, moving the U of S thoughtfully into the future will involve all of us using whatever assignments we have to expand the possibilities for connectivity, diversity and sustainability.