

**Town Hall Presentation  
On  
Strategic Directions  
Monday February 6, 2006**

Welcome and thank you for taking time from what I know are busy days to be here.

I wanted to take this opportunity early in a new year to stop and reflect on the Strategic Directions we embarked on almost six years ago. These have been eventful years, and I believe it is important that we take a look at how far we've come and what work remains to be done.

If you hearken back to the late 90s, you might remember that we had a significant challenge before us. Our reputation was slipping. The trajectory of research grants from the Tri-Councils was sliding downward. Saskatchewan students no longer considered the U of S a preferred choice when selecting a university for their studies and our profile in the rest of Canada was very low.

Universities across the country were refining their mandates, identifying areas of excellence and gearing up to compete for students and faculty. At the same time, new government funding programs were being designed to favour those who did these things while those who did not would fall further and further behind.

We had a responsibility to future generations to ensure that the dream of our founders was honoured. A half century after it was established, the University of Saskatchewan was recognized across Canada as being one of the best universities in the country. Many of us benefited from that reputation and we had a responsibility to protect it for future generations.

All of this is to say that the Strategic Directions came at a time when there was a strong appetite for renewal and a sense that current trends were dangerous given profound changes in our environment.

The process leading to the vision that was approved by Council, Board and Senate was a highly collegial enterprise that engaged nearly 800 members of our university community. The strategic direction statement was not an abrupt pronouncement on direction or redirection; rather it was the expression of individual reflection; countless one-on-one discussions; and widespread consultation over a period of more than two years. It was critical to our future as a major Canadian university that we recognize our strengths and our weaknesses, our opportunities and our vulnerabilities, and chart a course for the future that emphasized success.

And there is nothing obscure or subtle about what success means for universities like ours; it means being a preferred place for faculty and staff to work. It means being a preferred choice for students to study. It means demonstrated research success commensurate with our broad and advanced mission.

We agreed as a community that the future direction of the university should be guided by three principles. These signposts signal to us that the standards that apply and matter are **international**; that we must establish **preeminence** in some of our activities; and that we must continue to honour the **sense of place** which has been such an important part of both our consciousness and our behavior at the University of Saskatchewan.

We also agreed on four very clear objectives:

1. Attract and retain outstanding faculty
2. Increase campus-wide commitment to research, scholarly and artistic work.
3. Establish the University of Saskatchewan as a major presence in graduate education.
4. Recruit and retain a diverse and academically promising body of students, and prepare them for success.

Under the leadership of Provost Michael Atkinson, this community jointly developed an Integrated Plan for achieving our vision. An outstanding document, it has enabled us to identify priorities and focus our resources in a way that was not possible previously. This planning process and its resulting impact on our teaching, learning, and research activities is in very large part responsible for the rise in our institution's national reputation.

We cannot say that our progress has come easily or that we have it all right. Some have implied that our agenda is too ambitious, that we can't do it all. While it has not been easy, I believe we are getting better at finding the right balance among our goals, while maintaining the principles to which we are all committed.

There is no question that we have made considerable progress in a relatively short period of time.

In the case of **international standards**, we have refashioned our tenure and promotion standards to be recognizable at any major university, and I think, they are now among the best in the country. We have implemented Systematic Program Review to ensure our academic programs will be broadly recognized as meeting the standards set by those in the discipline around the world .

With regard to **pre-eminence**, our Colleges, departments, and committees have made excellent progress in developing a landscape in which high levels of research performance can be anticipated and preeminence achieved.

Faculty at the University of Saskatchewan have been successful in consistently attracting in excess of \$100 million in external research funding for each of the past five years. The efforts of our faculty and those that support their work have resulted in the University of Saskatchewan moving to 12<sup>th</sup> place among medical/doctoral institutions in terms of total research revenue attracted.

In **sense of place**, we have reinvigorated the search for new and exciting ways of connecting the institution to the broader world. Council last week approved our outreach and engagement document; and we have seen other critical developments including U of S participation, and in some respects leadership, in the University of the Arctic initiative. These examples are over and above the extensive network of engagement that we already had at the University of Saskatchewan.

Let's turn our attention now to the progress we've made on our four objectives:

**1. Attract and retain outstanding faculty**

Since 2002, we have recruited a large number of new and impressive faculty, including 28 (of the 33 allocated) Canada Research Chairs.

We have invested in the success of our new faculty, dedicating \$2.3 million in start-up funds for operating and equipment grants over the past three years, and the performance of these new people is already very encouraging.

Over the next five years, retirements and long-term attrition rates will require us to attract almost 300 new high-caliber scholars and we expect to invest more than \$5.9 million more in start-up funds from 2006 to 2011.

Beyond these very positive numbers, we are witnessing a generational change in our faculty complement and this generation brings a new perspective and energy to our university that has had a positive impact on all of us.

The university's success in attracting some of the best of this new generation of scholars lies squarely with the departments which have worked hard at articulating their own visions for how they can best support the University's overall direction and aligning their recruitment activities accordingly. These departments are gaining momentum and I believe their potential is unlimited.

**2. The research productivity of our institution has also improved:**

Our ability to successfully compete for national facilities like the Canadian Light Source and the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization has significantly enhanced our reputation across the country.

We have also seen the emergence of other smaller, but no less significant University of Saskatchewan research clusters that are almost certain to build national and international reputations for innovation and excellence. These include groups like the Saskatchewan Isotope Laboratory, the Toxicology Centre and the Aboriginal Research Centre.

But we know that if we are to truly achieve our objectives, our successes must go beyond one or two large examples, beyond a handful of others. We must see vigorous,

competitive research programs across the university and throughout our complement of faculty.

Our colleagues have succeeded in bringing to this campus a level and breadth of research quality and a sensitivity to its importance that didn't exist before. Since 2000, the number of faculty receiving Tri-Council funding has increased for each of the granting councils.

In 2000/01, we received 41 SSHRC grants. In 2004-5, that number had risen to 68. In 2000/01, our NSERC grants stood at 395, by 2005, that number had risen to 477. During that same time period, our CIHR grants grew from 103 to 121.

We are making significant strides in research intensity, but our peer institutions are doing no less. Although the number of grants coming into our institution has increased, our overall share of Tri-Council funding has changed very little.

We still have a lot of work to do. We started from behind and we do need to catch up. We are especially vulnerable in the SSHRC area where our peer institutions continue to outperform us. We have had some major successes with regard to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council – the largest single grant ever awarded by SSHRC went to the Centre for the Study of Cooperatives – but we know we can do better overall in the social sciences and humanities.

### **3. Our graduate student recruitment has also seen excellent progress.**

Assisted by the addition of \$2 million in graduate support, and a renewed commitment by our faculty, we have increased our Masters and PhD enrolments substantially. Since 2002, our PhD registration has increased by more than 50 per cent.

We have a distance to go in certain academic areas, but overall, the trajectory is the right one and the future looks promising. We are adding new graduate programs in critical areas, as required by the Enrolment Plan. Council has approved the Masters in International Trade that will begin in 2006. Graduate Council has approved a Masters program in Physical Therapy. Within the next several years, there will be new graduate programs in Public Health; Vaccines, Immunity, and Infectious Diseases; Public Policy and the Environment. We have completely restructured the M.Ed. in Counseling and the MBA, as directed by the Systematic Program Review reports.

But, we cannot afford to lessen our efforts with regard to graduate students, to believe that our successes to date have put us in a safe position. They have not. Every other university in the country has also been ramping up its activities to attract and retain graduate students and, in many cases, they have had equal or greater success.

The growth in full-time graduate student enrolment in Canada has increased 48% in the last decade. Our increases have been about half of the Canadian average.

We will continue to pay close attention to this area and to provide support needed to ensure the momentum we have built so far continues.

**4. We have made substantial investments in the recruitment and retention of students and in the quality of the student experience and we are poised to make even more.**

I am especially pleased with the developments that have evolved with regard to the recruitment and retention of students and in the quality of the student experience. These sorts of efforts rarely get the same level of attention that big research so frequently does, so they are often overlooked or taken for granted.

Our ability to attract and retain diverse and academically talented students' is essential to our future as a university. As we expect more of our students they too expect more from us. To that end over the past several years, our university has fostered an increasingly student-centered philosophy of service intended to organize our services around student needs rather than organizational structures.

We implemented Student Central, a single integrated location that offers a broad range of online and in person information and services. We have relocated and improved spaces for a number of units that provide critical services to students (Student Central, Recruitment and Admissions, Aboriginal Students' Centre, Global Commons, Disability Services and others, not to mention the Physical Activities Centre). We invested more than ten million dollars in the implementation of new student information systems, and we implemented the PAWS portal.

With the improvements made to academic activities and student services well under way, we have significantly increased our efforts to tell potential students that the University of Saskatchewan is a preferred institution in which to pursue their academic goals.

Student recruitment activities in Saskatchewan have been ramped up considerably, and last year we began recruiting students more aggressively than ever before in Ontario, across western Canada, and in a number of regions internationally. This year we have seen promising growth in the number of new students from out of province and international destinations.

Particularly gratifying are the rapidly increasing numbers of Aboriginal students enrolling in our University and their growing success rates.

We have invested significantly in both undergraduate and graduate scholarships and introduced a new entrance scholarship program for undergraduates that guarantees awards for all students entering first year with an entering average of 85 per cent or better.

Soon we will have completed the most comprehensive, cohort-based retention study ever conducted at the University, and are in the early stages of planning for a range of new initiatives that will help us reduce attrition and improve the success rates of our students.

### **Staff Contributions**

Faculty and students are two-thirds of the triumvirate of our on-campus community. The remainder is our staff, and I cannot end this reflection on our progress without also commenting on the contributions of our non-academic staff. Change is not easy and our progress has not come without significant effort and commitment from every part of our campus.

While faculty have carried a major portion of the load to realize our strategic direction, our non-academic staff have also played an important role. The mission of a university is a shared mission – shared by the faculty, staff, administration, students and supportive communities.

Most of us have seen and are aware that the university's support staff are performing at very high levels. The changes in the institution have required many of them to adapt to new technologies, do things differently and take on diverse responsibilities. They are working extremely hard to help us meet our goals and their efforts have been critical to our success and I want to thank them very much.

The environment in which we are all fortunate enough to work is an important component of our reputation. Long considered one of the most beautiful campuses in the country, the new buildings and facilities are also challenging our people in Facilities Management to ensure this university remains both inspirational and functional. They have repeatedly risen to that challenge over the past four years and I believe their efforts should be enthusiastically applauded.

Finally, I am privileged to work with one of the best executive teams in the country. Their commitment to the University of Saskatchewan and singular focus on what is best for the institution is unwavering. Their leadership throughout this process has unquestionably been a significant part of our renewal.

### **Conclusion**

While change is difficult, there are pay-offs and we're starting to see them. Consider that our progress has been witnessed by others as indicated in an external reputation survey that has seen the University of Saskatchewan move from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> in reputation among Canadian universities.

Consider the departments that have fully engaged in realizing this university's full potential and their success in recruiting top scholars, earning research grants, and attracting government and philanthropic support.

But we cannot merely rest content with the progress we have achieved. We continue to be vulnerable in key areas, in particular student recruitment, and research indicators that, while much improved, are still below where they should be. And it is not as though we have been making progress while others have been standing still. The environment in western Canada and across the country continues to be dynamic. Other universities are making plans and pursuing them in precisely the same areas that we have identified for our own endeavours. Change is happening but more change needs to happen. We can be confident, however, that we are on the right track.

On February 27<sup>th</sup>, Provost Michael Atkinson will give his annual address, where he will discuss in greater detail the progress to date on the Integrated Plan and where we must all go from here. I encourage you all to attend.

The window of opportunity to capture the promise of the U of S is open – we have a clear path. The emphasis and the effort on my part and on the part of my colleagues on the senior executive team will not change or diminish. We are committed to our path and to work with you, our faculty, staff and students, in pursuing our strategic directions to the place where we can say and celebrate, in the words of Walter Murray, that “the University of Saskatchewan truly has an honoured place among the best.”