This document is prepared for the Senate Round Table on Outreach and Engagement to illustrate the degree to which Regional Advisory Councils fulfilled their mandate over the last year. Providing the opportunity for key decision makers in communities and university personnel to discuss the university’s overarching plan has set the stage for communities and the university to identify areas that will support mutually-beneficial goals.
Background

Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) are one of the networks the University of Saskatchewan uses to connect more closely with Saskatchewan communities. They:

- are located in Saskatchewan Senate districts
- include representatives from many regional groups including aboriginal groups, business and industry, chambers of commerce, Enterprise Saskatchewan, health regions, school divisions and other educational organizations, municipal government and community based organizations
- are chaired by University of Saskatchewan senators elected in each region
- liaise with multiple groups within the university about important community issues

The role of Regional Advisory Councils is to:

- provide the University Senate with a means to carry out its role to promote enhanced communication with the public
- assist the university in identifying and implementing strategies to respond to the communities it serves
- advise the university on matters pertaining to university policies, procedures, programs, initiatives, etc.
- increase public awareness and act as an advocate for university programming and activities
- seek out new engagement initiatives, and provide feedback from the community
- provide a vehicle for consultation related to university programs and activities
- provide opportunities to build new partnerships with communities and sectors
- facilitate two-way communication with the public about the university's academic programs and research
- provide input into, and receive information from, the Senate Round Table on Outreach and Engagement

Year In Review: Highlights of 2008-2009

The university’s RACs participated in multiple discussions about the university’s core activities, including top issues like the student experience, enrolment, accountability and community engagement.

As key stakeholders, RACs were included in regular communications with the university about significant initiatives, developments and events. As an example, RACs were included as part of the audience that participated in the Board of Governors dinner in Yorkton.

Other highlights of community/university connections made this year include:

- Pauline Melis, assistant provost of institutional planning and assessment, presented and consulted on the second integrated plan and the teaching and learning foundational document to four regions – Prince Albert, LaRonge, Moose Jaw and Melfort.
- As part of his provincial tour, President Peter MacKinnon met with the Northern Regional Advisory Council in LaRonge, as well as the RAC in Rosetown/Kindersley with video links to Biggar and Outlook. University progress within the global economic downturn and opportunities for engagement that will help us to emerge stronger were discussed.
- Chancellor Vera Pezer held ‘meet and greet’ sessions with two RACs - the Northern RAC in LaRonge as well as the RAC in Regina. Hayley Hesseln, dean of undergraduate programs at the University of the Arctic, participated in the LaRonge meeting. RAC members discussed the value of enhancing the student experience, identified that communities could assist with recruitment initiatives and spoke about the importance of providing access to rural, remote and northern students.
- Ernie Barber, vice-provost of teaching and learning, presented highlights of the teaching and learning foundational document at two locations — North Battleford and Rosetown.
- Brett Fairbairn, provost and VP academic, met with six RACs via video link in two different sessions to report on progress of the university's activities, and to present an in-depth look at the quality and accountability commitment and to assess the appropriateness, relevance and usefulness of an achievement record as it pertains to community engagement. The videoconferences included Swift Current, Kindersley, Rosetown, Moose Jaw, Melfort and Prince Albert.
- Senators Laurel Krause and Ed Bourassa provided Senate Round Table on Outreach and Engagement updates to six RACs.
Themes that emerged from discussions included the following:

1. Community-university partnerships

- The integrated planning process and reports on progress were welcomed. It was noted that having senior administration people involved with communities signaled the emphasis and interest the university was putting on engagement with external partners.
- Both community and university representatives identified their desire to work together and suggested areas the province would benefit.
- Communities noted the complexity of the university and identified there were many situations where the community and province could engage but they do not know where or how to start the process. Requests for a “front door” to the university for community partners to know where to go to initiate engagement with the university were common. College deans or the communications office were identified as key places to start as the university implements the second integrated plan. One example provided was the need for university and municipality engagement to address regional and provincial bridge inspection.
- Economic development sectors in several areas of the province requested a “process template” on strategy for engagement which would outline best practices and process to facilitate potential community-university opportunities and rural, remote and northern capacity and accessibility need to be pursued as joint initiatives.

2. Community-university engagement accountability

- As partnership baselines are developed, the process and outcomes of new university community engagements should be tracked and recorded.
- An increase in partnership activity was identified by the community as a measurement of community-university engagement.
- Communities identified partnership sustainability and lessons learned along the way as important measurements of success.
- The economic development sector in Kindersley-Rosetown stated, “If the university is not growing, it is not self-sustaining.”
- University-community engagement should be measured by community stability. A stable community will have strong linkages with the university.
- There were requests for regular updates on university quality and accountability.
- A university activity-at-a-glance quarterly reporting system would help inform RACs, alumni and the broader community.

3. Enhancing the student experience

- Communities were pleased the university was beginning to provide graduate opportunities in centres outside of Saskatoon, and requested expansion of off-campus graduate programming to assist communities and the province in areas where there are deficits in trained professionals. It was noted that this could assist with human resource recruitment in specific professions and sectors.
- Rural, remote and aboriginal communities would like to see increased community-based program and practicum opportunities.
- The university should support students in a nurturing environment.
- There is a need for immediate implementation of vigorous recruitment strategies to meet or compete with other institutions for Saskatchewan students.
- Community partnerships to expand the number and kinds of summer camps for children more widely throughout the province would provide early, positive contact for children.
- Alumni, business and industry in communities are eager to assist with recruitment in some cases.
- Additional articulation agreements, which provide credit for work done at other institutions, are needed. They would help address university recruitment issues and provide unique opportunities for potential provincial and national potential students.
- Expanding e-learning opportunities to include unique provincial and national niches will avoid competition with already existing programs available through other universities. Examples cited were post-degree certificates for professionals in education and health.
- The U of S should expand service learning and practicum opportunities in rural Saskatchewan.
- Economic development sectors identified the need for university programs to be in alignment with needs of industry and community.
The Future of Community Engagement
In support of the university’s vision to be an engaged university where partnerships on campus and beyond enrich our work and make contributions visible and meaningful, the role of Regional Advisory Councils will continue to evolve in 2009-2010. Regional Advisory Councils will continue to work closely with communities, with the Senate Round Table on Outreach and Engagement, with the commitments identified in the second integrated plan and with faculty and alumni in pursuit of common university and community objectives.

Additional Information
Regional Advisory Council terms of reference, locations, membership, meeting agendas and background reading used for meetings can be found at www.usask.ca/rac.

Meeting Locations
Regional Advisory Councils

La Ronge
Districts 8, 10, 11 and 12
(North of 55th parallel)

Prince Albert
District 11

Melfort
District 9

Humboldt
District 7

Yorkton
District 6

Fort Qu’Appelle
District 4

Regina
District 14

Estevan
District 1

Swift Current
District 3

Moose Jaw
District 2

Kindersley and Rosetown
District 5
(Meetings alternate between locations)

North Battleford
District 8

www.usask.ca/rac