

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it a rapid and far-reaching change of focus in our University's operations, and in my work as Interim President.

As a result, rather than focusing on Dr Timmons' 2019-20 objectives, I wish to provide members of the Board an update on the University's response to the pandemic response and our planning for the near- and medium-term future. This will also be the subject of a presentation to the May meeting of the Board. We will pay particular attention to:

- Academic continuity (teaching, learning and research) for the Winter 2020 term;
- Academic continuity for the forthcoming Spring/Summer, Fall 2020 and Winter 2021 terms; and
- Operational continuity in all areas of the University.

The report also contains updates on budget planning and the strategic plan launch and implementation process, as well as highlights of some student, faculty and staff successes at the University during these unparalleled times.

I have also submitted for the Board's consideration a draft set of objectives to guide future reports.

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### **Academic continuity for the Winter 2020 term**

Since the March Board meeting, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the largest change management exercise in the history of the University - the transition, within one week in the middle of an academic term, of all academic operations of the University to remote delivery. It is not possible to outline everything that took place to complete the semester; I would, however, like to draw the Board's attention to highlights of this rapid University-wide effort.

Preparations for a move to remote delivery of coursework had been underway as we had news of the worsening pandemic around the world. These preparations accelerated - and were executed quickly - after the University's decision in mid-March to suspend classes for four days to make the transition to remote delivery effective March 19.

The University remained in close contact with the Ministry of Advanced Education and postsecondary partners throughout this process. Much of the work done to complete the term was coordinated through the Academic and Research Continuity Working Group (ARC), which has broad representation from Deans and Directors, includes the federated colleges, and is chaired by Interim Provost and Vice-President (Academic) Dr David Gregory, whose leadership has been crucial to the sustenance of academic operations.

In terms of teaching and learning:

- Information Systems developed a portal through which instructors could communicate quickly and effectively to students how the transition to learning at a distance would take place for their individual classes. The unit also created comprehensive websites with detailed resources to assist both instructors and students in teaching and learning remotely, ensured that the required Zoom licences and UR Courses capabilities were in place, and developed a system of virtual “Zoom rooms” in which instructors could teach. Staff also addressed technological issues for both instructors and students, provided computers for students who did not have access to them, and created virtual “drop-in” supports for instructors.
- The Centre for Continuing Education also played a key role in the transition to remote delivery of coursework. Instructional designers provided initial assistance as instructors began redesigning courses for delivery at a distance (online and Zoom modalities), and delivered support for the remainder of the term. This included holding workshops for instructors, and helping during the exam period as instructors developed final examinations to replace those held in person.
- The Registrar’s Office did a tremendous amount of work to minimize disruption to students’ studies and help them progress through their programs. This included developing new regulations for deferrals and withdrawals, eliminating the required medical documentation for absence from class, and extending instructors’ grading deadlines. The Registrar’s Office also responded to student concerns by developing a final grading system for the Winter 2020 term that provided a number of options to accommodate students whose academic performance may have been affected by the pandemic. These have met with widespread acceptance.
- The University Secretariat ensured that governance processes continued during the pandemic. Among other things, this included changing the terms of reference for Executive of Council to enable Zoom-based meetings of this key governance body.
- The University Library offered supports for students and instructors throughout the term. Like several Faculties on campus, it kept its

computer labs and facilities open for students until restrictions around physical distancing necessitated closure. The Library then extended loan periods of material for students, moved instruction online, maintained reference services via chat, email, text and telephone, provided digitization services to instructors to help with course content, made reserve materials readily available to students, and provided detailed information on how to access online resources. Through technology, the Library remains very much open to the University community.

- Across all Faculties, staff supported instructors as they moved their courses to remote forms of delivery, and instructors who were experienced at teaching from a distance mentored and coached their colleagues.
- With these and many other supports - including the patience and cooperation of students - instructors made a remarkable transition from face-to-face to remote delivery of classes to complete the term.

Simultaneously, the office of Interim Vice-President (Research) Dr Kathy McNutt worked with the Health and Safety unit to implement a number of measures designed to ensure that research undertaken at the University continued as safely as possible during the pandemic:

- Faculty, graduate student and undergraduate student research in laboratories was suspended, as was all fieldwork. COVID-19-related research was permitted to continue, advanced laboratory instrumentation was maintained, and the care of animals also continued.
- The Research Ethics Board is neither reviewing nor approving any part of an application for a project that requires any member of the research team to gather in-person data. Research applications with other data collection methods continue to follow normal review procedures. Researchers are now required to submit a risk assessment form enabling them to be ready to conduct their work as public health restrictions are eased.
- A subcommittee of the Council Committee on Research has been preparing a plan for relaxing restrictions on research activities through a gradual, phased approach consistent with provincial health guidelines. By the time of the Board meeting, the Office of the Interim Vice-President (Research) will have done an assessment of existing research restrictions in light of the provincial pandemic situation to determine how the plan might move forward. This effort is co-ordinated by the Ministry with sector partners.
- In the meantime, the Office of the Interim Vice-President (Research) and the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) have

undertaken a number of initiatives to support researchers. Three virtual Town Halls were held for faculty to ask questions and/or voice concerns about how the measures put in place to protect health and safety are slowing or halting research plans. A document detailing support available to faculty for adapting research plans to the realities of the pandemic was prepared and distributed. FGSR held two virtual town halls specifically to address concerns of graduate students, and the Research Office has been holding weekly virtual drop-in sessions to answer questions related to applying for research funding as the Tri-Agencies and other funding organizations adjust their procedures and timelines in light of COVID-19.

Other units on campus played critical roles as the University by necessity changed the way it provides academic supports to students and others:

- University Advancement and Communications (UAC) set up a COVID-19 communications centre to coordinate responses to inquiries from students, faculty, staff and the general public. This included providing updates to campus and the media about the status of the academic term. Together with Student Affairs, UAC also developed a fundraising campaign entitled “The Need is Great” to help students in financial difficulty.
- Student Affairs worked on many fronts to provide support for students. The unit temporarily reassigned nine staff members to process applications to the Student Emergency Fund. Counselling Services moved appointments online via “Zoom for Healthcare,” allowing staff to serve students at a distance during an especially stressful time. Housing Services remained open for approximately 340 residents (many of them international students) who could not make other living arrangements, and Luther College provided food services to those students when Chartwells suspended operations. Academic Advising has held telephone and Zoom appointments with hundreds of students, and the ta-tawâw Student Centre continues to provide services and Elder access to Indigenous students at a distance. The Co-op and Internship Office has remained in contact with local, provincial and national employers to facilitate work opportunities for students wherever possible. The Sexual Violence Prevention and Response office has remained available to students and is developing training webinars. The Centre for Student Accessibility processed exam accommodation requests for students and advised instructors on providing accommodations in a remote delivery environment.
- UR International has continued to support international students and manage the University’s international partnerships during Winter 2020. For example, all Global Learning Centre services are being offered remotely 16 hours per day, Monday through Friday, to assist students

with their academic, non-academic, immigration and personal matters. The emergency toll-free line is also available 24 hours per day, 7 days a week. The Study Abroad and Global Mobility office assisted outbound domestic exchange students with their safe return to Canada, and worked with partner institutions to ensure that these students had access to adequate support systems and necessary facilities for their remote learning to complete their programs. UR International also remotely maintained contact with partner institutions to ensure that their students' needs at the University of Regina were being met.

Board members will understand that all of this merely sketches some of the work University of Regina faculty and staff did to ensure that students were able to complete the Winter 2020 term. I am tremendously proud of the way in which the entire institution pulled together for a common cause, and rose to the occasion when the pandemic threatened to derail the progress of more than 16,000 students.

### **Academic continuity for Spring/Summer 2020, Fall 2020, and Winter 2021 terms**

In accordance with public health guidelines and in consultation with the Ministry and postsecondary partners, in late March the University decided to deliver the May-August Spring/Summer 2020 term remotely. Since that time, faculty and staff have been doing a great deal of work to ensure academic continuity for Spring/Summer and subsequent academic terms.

- ARC continued its operations and created several subcommittees to address specific issues related to the continuing remote delivery of coursework in Spring/Summer and possibly Fall 2020. The Instructor Support subcommittee has been developing a variety of resources to assist those who will be teaching at a distance through online and Zoom modalities. The Academic and Student Services Support subcommittee has been developing corresponding resources to help students who will be learning remotely, and will ensure that incoming students for Fall 2020 have supplemental academic support if necessary. The IT subcommittee has been creating a dedicated Spring/Summer 2020 area of the website to house teaching and learning resources and assist instructors and student with technological needs.
- The Flexible Learning Division has been offering a series of Zoom-based webinars and drop-ins to help Spring/Summer teaching staff design their courses for remote delivery.
- The Centre for Student Accessibility is processing accommodation requests from students to ensure their needs are met in Spring/Summer classes.

- The Registrar's Office has been developing appeal guidelines for students who believe their Winter 2020 academic performance was negatively affected by COVID-19. Looking forward, the Registrar's Office is also developing new admissions guidelines for Fall 2020 given changes to final grades at the University, at other postsecondary institutions, and in high schools.
- FGSR has implemented a series of measures to help graduate students make progress in their programs through Spring/Summer 2020 and beyond. These measures include a four-month extension of time to program completion, provisions for international graduate students to register and take classes from their home nations (per changes in federal policy), and the creation of two options for students who are unable to make progress in their programs due to COVID-19: a waiver for those who are required to register due to University policy, and a "zero credit hour," zero-tuition course for those who are required to register for external factors such as scholarships.
- UR International is working to meet the needs of both existing and prospective students. The unit provided a list of all international students (including their home countries and home registrations) to the Deans so that Faculties may work with instructors to explore options for teaching students who may be in different time zones. Staff are also communicating with prospective international students to notify them about any updated travel restrictions and exemptions as well as health and safety guidelines from the Government of Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and the Government of Saskatchewan. The Student Services team is also verifying the registration eligibility of all new graduate and undergraduate students who are currently outside Canada and meet immigration requirements.
- Student Affairs will accommodate the approximately 200 students who will live in residence during the Spring/Summer term.
- Enrolment Services continues working closely with high school counsellors, staying in contact with students and parents, conducting student appointments at a distance, and planning online recruitment and orientation events in anticipation of the Fall 2020 term. In late April I met via Zoom with more than 60 counsellors to outline the University's plans for supporting new students.
- Following public health directives, the sector decision on course delivery for Fall 2020 will be made by mid-May. In the meantime, under the direction of the Provost, the Interim Vice-President (Research), and the Vice-President (Administration), we continue to explore a variety of scenarios for operational, instructional and research activity in the fall term. This planning includes the Provost's creation of an Academic Incremental Re-start working group (AIR) to explore a hybrid model that

could see remote delivery of large-scale classes together with a smaller-scale presence of students on campus where permissible.

- As noted above, decisions on the gradual reduction of restrictions on academic research for Spring/Summer will also be made in accordance with provincial public health guidelines.

## **Operational continuity across the University**

As the pandemic grew in scope in China and around the world throughout January and February, the Emergency Management Committee (which includes staff from the Health and Safety unit of Human Resources) monitored the situation and took preliminary steps to protect the University community. This included cancelling all centrally organized trips to China, requiring risk mitigation plans for research trips to that country, and issuing updated COVID-19-related information to faculty, staff and students.

At the end of February the Emergency Management Committee created two working groups - the Academic and Research Continuity working group (whose activity is outlined above) and the Operations Continuity working group.

Throughout March and April, the Operations Continuity working group oversaw a large number of operational changes designed to align with developing public health guidelines, protect the University community, and support the academic mission by ensuring that essential services continued.

Preliminary activities in early to mid-March included:

- Evaluating the stock of sanitation-related supplies such as gloves, masks, and cleaners, and sourcing additional material as required;
- Ensuring that computing and network infrastructure was robust enough to accommodate hundreds of employees and thousands of students working remotely;
- Keeping the unions apprised of changes to the work environment;
- Ensuring payroll functions could be completed remotely;
- Cancelling or postponing public events, including the June Convocation;
- Closing Allied Health services and ceasing non-credit programming such as swimming lessons; and
- Providing COVID-19 specific training for custodial and Residence Services staff.

Once the province enacted more stringent public health guidelines and the University moved to the remote delivery of classes for Winter 2020, the

Operations Continuity working group implemented additional steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 while continuing essential operations. These included:

- Developing and enacting provisions for staff to work at home remotely wherever possible;
- Discouraging the public from visiting campus, and encouraging students to move out of residence if possible;
- Reducing the number of washrooms and building entrances available to those remaining on campus;
- Ensuring that essential services such as custodial work, campus security and heating and maintenance were maintained; and
- Revising Financial Services and Human Resources practices including end-of-year deadlines.

We have thus have maintained core operations of the University during an unprecedented time. These, of course, have been instrumental in providing academic continuity for our students, teaching staff, and researchers.

As a sector decision is made regarding Fall 2020 and the province's phased-in approach to easing COVID-19-related restrictions takes shape, the Operations Continuity working group will continually assess and quickly enact measures required to ensure that the University is well-positioned to meet its teaching and research obligations.

## **Budget planning**

As the pandemic began to spread across the world, we worked on a proposed 2020-21 budget for the Board's consideration. Preliminary work included:

- Based on the 2020-21 Operations Forecast, budget managers provided their written budget submissions in January, and subsequently presented them at meetings attended by the President's budget advisors, other budget managers, and members of the Council Committee on Budget.
- Additionally, the first of three budget town halls was held at the end of January to present information, answer questions, and receive suggestions from the campus community. Several consultations were also held with Deans' Council.
- The Council Committee on Budget then met several times to evaluate the budget submissions and provide advice to the President. In recent years this advice has been important in the preparation of the budget, particularly with regard to allocation of new positions.

The pandemic then upended the University's consultative process:

- Previous budget assumptions and requests were rendered obsolete. In addition, the Government of Saskatchewan announced that because of the province's uncertain economic situation, the budget document tabled on 18 March would outline expenditures but not revenues. Notably, however, the sector received a 1% increase in the operating grant, a clear indication of the province's support of postsecondary education in extremely difficult financial times.
- Due to significant unpredictability around the revenues and expenses of the University, the Council Committee on Budget ceased ranking budget priorities, further town hall fora were cancelled, and the budget advisors to the President met to discuss the best approach given the new realities imposed by the pandemic.
- Although the coming year may see revenue challenges, the budget advisors believed these effects would be short-term and could be absorbed without making long-term budget expenditure decisions. It was therefore decided to develop a *status quo* budget, which I approved for consideration by the Board. That proposed budget is included in the material for our May meetings. Notably, it recommends no tuition increase for the first time in more than a decade.

### **Strategic plan launch and implementation**

Once the Board approved the University's 2020-25 strategic plan at the March meeting, we began to envision its launch. Within a few weeks, the pandemic changed that.

- The formal launch, originally scheduled for early April, was postponed until the provincial government is able to relax social distancing measures that restrict the gathering of large groups. The launch is now tentatively being planned for the fall;
- The University must focus on academic and operational continuity during the pandemic, including the impact on teaching, research, and enrolments of potential successive waves of infection later in the year.
- Prior to the fall, we will prioritize aspects of the plan for implementation once the pandemic abates and operations at the University normalize.
- In the meantime, final editing of the document is taking place to ensure accuracy and consistency, and University Advancement and Communications is overseeing the graphic design process in advance of the launch.

## CELEBRATING OUR UNIVERSITY

*This report highlights some faculty, staff and student successes as well as some other notable campus events since the last Board meeting.*

### Faculty and staff success

- Since the Prime Minister of Canada called on universities to help in the nation's efforts to combat COVID-19, a team of researchers, faculty, and staff primarily from the Faculty of Science has been working to produce face shields for front line health care workers by using 3D printing technology. The team is working with regulators to ensure the face shields met proper standards. Once it has the correct approvals and have enough produced, the team will distribute the shields to the Saskatchewan Health Authority.
- Psychology professor Dr Heather Hadjistavropoulos and the University's Online Therapy Unit are offering assistance to people suffering from depression, anxiety, and panic in light of the pandemic. To access services, clients complete an online screening, which includes questions about how COVID-19 is impacting them. After the screening, a therapist from the Unit completes a telephone screening and then assigns clients to the correct course of treatment.
- Psychology professor Dr Thomas Hadjistavropoulos received a Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation (SHRF) and Saskatchewan Centre for Patient-Oriented Research (SCPOR) Grant for \$179,996. The funding will enhance the #SeePainMoreClearly campaign by supporting the creation of new content and expansion to other social media platforms. It will also allow for more focused targeting to health professionals and stakeholders and, ultimately, provide a much greater global reach.
- Yorkton and region was chosen as the area of focus for the *Interventions to Enhance Social Inclusion of Older Adults with Dementia in Saskatchewan* project, led by Dr Bonnie Jeffery, a professor in the Faculty of Social Work. The team also includes Dr Tom McIntosh, professor in the Department of Politics and International Studies, and Dr Nuelle Novik, associate professor in the Faculty of Social Work. Thanks to a contribution from Employment and Social Development Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program, this project will fund three or four organizations so they may deliver services that support greater social inclusion of older adults living with dementia, as well as their caregivers.
- On March 19, the Government of Canada announced that it would be providing \$25 million through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to fund 49 COVID-19 research projects, in addition to the 47 projects it

had previously announced on March 6. University of Regina Psychology Professor Dr Gordon Asmundson received \$400,000 in funding for his research project *COVID-19: The Role of Psychological Factors in the Spreading of Disease, Discrimination, and Distress*. He is collaborating on this research with co-principal investigator Dr. Steven Taylor from the University of British Columbia.

- Dr Bruno Dupeyron, professor and Graduate Chair with the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, wrote an article entitled “Why Trump tried to use the coronavirus crisis to ‘Mexicanize’ the U.S.-Canada border.” Published at <https://theconversation.com/ca>, it was the most-read article on the site for the week of April 6.
- Dr Gordon Pennycook, an assistant professor of behavioural science in the Faculty of Business Administration, received the Canadian Society for Brain, Behaviour and Cognitive Science’s Vincent Di Lollo Early Career Award for a research paper he co-authored. The paper found that if social media platforms simply added accuracy reminders, such as asking people to judge the accuracy of a non-COVID-19-related headline, people would be far better at discerning truth and would share far fewer false articles. This would have an immediate positive impact on the sharing of misinformation about the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Economic Development Regina asked Neil Paskewitz, Associate Vice-President (Facilities Management) to sit on its Infrastructure Recovery Committee) to help advise on how the city can overcome the negative economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Student and alumni success

- Through the Enactus program, four students from the Paul J. Hill School of Business launched a project in which they create and sell masks to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Proceeds from the sale of the mask go to Carmichael Outreach, the Regina YWCA, and the Regina Food Bank. In their first two weeks, the students raised more than \$10,000 for these organizations.
- At the University of California at San Francisco, University of Regina alumnus Dr Nevan Krogan (BSc’97, MSc’99) is leading an interdisciplinary team of more than 100 researchers from around the world as they study the interactions of the novel coronavirus on the human body at a cellular level. The team has created a map of the interactions of the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 and human proteins, and identified 69 drugs or compounds that could be used potentially to fight the virus.
- On March 6, Scott Joseph, a University of Regina Cougar and first-year student in Kinesiology and Health Studies, won gold at the U SPORTS Track and Field Championships in Edmonton for his jump of 7.73 metres,

- which broke a 45-year-old record. He was also named Canada West and U SPORTS Male Track and Field Rookie of the Year.
- Talitha McCloskey (BA'12, CPR'14) and Skylar Gerard (BCOMM'14, University of Saskatchewan) along with their mothers Gwen Keith (BEd'74, MEd'77, PGDEA'83, MEd'84) and Dr. Marlene Smadu, Vice-Chair of the University's Board of Governors, formed RaiseHER Community. The founders of RaiseHer want to provide an intergenerational community that can facilitate mentoring from women who have experienced challenges, overcome barriers, addressed discrimination, sought equity, and demonstrated strong leadership, and who could provide sound and compassionate support to women who are now experiencing some of these issues.

### **University events and announcements**

- Due to ongoing concerns with COVID-19, many University events that were to be held in March and April were cancelled. One notable exception was the 11th annual Inspiring Leadership Forum, which took place very early in March prior to the enacting of physical distancing guidelines. 830 people attended the event.