



PRESIDENT'S LIBERAL ARTS ADVISORY GROUP

FINAL REPORT

NOVEMBER, 2016

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ORIGIN AND MANDATE

The President's Liberal Arts Advisory Group was created in the fall of 2013 at the University of Regina in the context of discussions taking place both at the University and in the wider academy about the future of liberal arts education. These discussions were of particular interest to President and Vice-Chancellor Dr. Vianne Timmons because of the University's long tradition of – and continuing commitment to – the liberal arts. In light of nation-wide declining enrolments in liberal arts courses and perceived public misconceptions about the relevance and utility of liberal arts programs, President Timmons created the Advisory Group with the following objectives in mind:

- To consult periodically with others both on campus and in the larger community regarding the University's liberal arts programs in the Faculties of Arts, Science and Fine Arts, as well as related courses and programs offered in other Faculties such as Education;
- To advise the President on potential initiatives designed to enhance the liberal arts foundation of the University as well as potential initiatives to address the relevance of the liberal arts to the community; and
- To respond to proposals from the campus community on promoting the liberal arts.

MEMBERSHIP AND MEETINGS

Per the Advisory Group's Terms of Reference, membership consisted of:

- The President and Vice-Chancellor;
- 3 faculty members recommended by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts;
- 2 faculty members recommended by the Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts;
- 2 faculty members recommended by the Dean of the Faculty of Science;
- 2 faculty members recommended by the Dean of the Faculty of Education; and
- 1 faculty member from each of the Federated Colleges, recommended by the respective Federated College President.

Resources in place to assist the Advisory Group in its work were the Senior Researcher to the President and the Executive Administrator to the President.

During the Advisory Group's operation from the Fall 2013 semester to the Winter 2016 semester, the following faculty members served at various times as members:

President and Vice-Chancellor:

Vianne Timmons

Faculty of Arts:

- Philip Charrier, History
- Jim Farney, Political Science
- Medrie Purdham, English

Faculty of Fine Arts:

- Randal Rogers, Fine Arts
- Christine Vanderkooy, Music

Faculty of Science:

- Janis Dale, Geology
- Augustin-Liviu Mare, Mathematics and Statistics

Faculty of Education:

- Lacey Marie Brogden, Le Bac
- Marc Spooner, EPSY

Campion College:

- Anna Mudde, Philosophy and Classics
- David Meban, Philosophy and Classics

Luther College:

- Mary Vetter, Biology
- Phil Sevigny, Psychology

First Nations University of Canada:

- Jesse Archibald-Barber
- Shannon Avison

Between Fall 2013 and Winter 2016, the Advisory group met approximately three times per semester (excluding the Spring/Summer semester each year), depending on the availability of members.

PROMOTED EVENTS

Over the course of its existence, the Advisory Group organized several events designed to promote the liberal arts and generate campus discussion on their role and value in a contemporary university education:

- In January 2014, an event entitled “The Liberal Arts at the University of Regina: Looking Back and Looking Forward” was held to commemorate the December 1963 creation of the “Education Policy for the Liberal Arts,” more commonly known as the “Regina Beach Manifesto.” At the event, Professor Emeritus Dr. Jack Boan, one of the authors of the document, provided his perspective on the creation of this document that was so critical in determining the liberal arts foundation of what would become the University of Regina. Dr. David Helfand, President and Vice-Chancellor of Quest University, provided an example of how the liberal arts can be the primary focus of a modern university. In addition, Dr. Philip Charrier (Department of History), Dr. Shauneen Pete (Faculty of Education) and Dr. Sean

Tucker (Faculty of Business Administration) participated in a panel discussion on the importance of the liberal arts in a university education.

- In March 2015, Dr. Ellen Kennedy, founder and Executive Director of World Without Genocide and adjunct professor of law at William Mitchell College in St. Paul, Minnesota, delivered a lecture entitled “The Armenians, the Holocaust, and Rwanda: Where Was Empathy?” In her lecture, Dr. Kennedy argued that a liberal arts education in subjects such as literature, psychology, journalism, sociology and political science is crucial to giving people the tools to understand themselves, understand others, and fully develop the empathy that is required to live together peacefully in the world.
- In March 2016, Dr. Harvey Weingarten, President of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario and former President of the University of Calgary, gave a public lecture entitled “Whither Liberal Arts Education?” In his presentation, Dr. Weingarten outlined the need to better communicate – and potentially measure – the skills gained through a liberal arts education in order to ensure that employers, funders and students are aware of the benefits and importance.
- In April 2016, the Advisory Group held its final public event – a lecture by Dr. John Ralston Saul entitled “Learning how to think, learning how to be: Reimagining the role of the humanities in Canadian universities.” In his lecture, Dr. Saul discussed how the traditional role of the liberal arts in society – to inspire original thought and foster impassioned discussion on a wide variety of issues – will always be important in preserving and enhancing our quality of life.

MEETING CONSULTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

At its meetings, the Advisory Group made it a priority to consult with others both from campus and from the larger community to learn their perspectives on the current state – and future direction – of liberal arts education. Those who met with the Advisory Group were:

- Staff from the Office of Resource Planning, who provided a ten-year trend analysis of course enrolments, faculty enrolments, and credit hours taught in the liberal arts;
- Representatives of the History Students’ Association, regarding potential collaboration on an event;
- Staff from Enrolment Services and Student Recruitment, who provided insight into the motivations and factors affecting students’ choices regarding fields of study;
- Karla Hardcastle of Northlands College in La Ronge, who spoke about the success the College has had with its Certificate in Liberal Arts program, and the role Saskatchewan’s Regional Colleges play in delivering liberal arts programming in the province;
- High school guidance counsellors, who outlined the nature of their work and discussed ways in which they could better inform their students about liberal arts educational options at university;

- Staff from UR International, who spoke about the role an Arts Certificate can play for international students seeking permanent residency in Canada;
- Members of the University of Regina Students' Union, who discussed the perspectives on the liberal arts that they hear from the students they represent;
- Faculty members from Luther College, who spoke about Luther's Voluntary Sector Studies Network as a program that demonstrates how liberal arts education can help build knowledge and skills required for the non-profit sector to flourish in Saskatchewan;
- The Presidents of the Federated Colleges, who discussed their views on promoting the liberal arts and working collaboratively with the professional Faculties; and
- The Dean of the Faculty of Business Administration, who discussed the interdisciplinary nature of research in the Faculty, how the Faculty functions without departments, and how the liberal arts play an important role in Business Administration students' education.

Through these consultations and their internal discussions, the Advisory Group explored a wide variety of topics, including:

- Enrolment challenges faced at the course, departmental, Faculty and institutional levels in the liberal arts;
- The results of polling conducted by the Faculty of Arts;
- False assumptions held by the public regarding the rigour, value and practicality of a liberal arts education;
- The fact that career preparation and liberal arts education are not mutually exclusive;
- The perceived dichotomy between liberal arts programs and professional programs, and the actual relevance of the liberal arts to professional programs;
- The dangers inherent in reducing the liberal arts to "service disciplines" for professional programs rather than meaningfully incorporating them into professional curricula;
- The role the University's strategic plan can play in upholding the liberal arts as an educational foundation for students, particularly in light of the plan's commitment to Indigenizing research and curricula;
- The potential benefit of changing program names to better reflect content and appeal to potential students;
- The delicate balance between responding to students' wants and needs and compromising the academic tenets and principles of the liberal arts disciplines;
- The need to better promote the value of liberal arts education to students, their parents, and high school guidance counsellors;

- The role social media might play in promoting the liberal arts;
- The need to ensure that funders and employers are aware of the relevance of the liberal arts and the skills developed through these disciplines;
- Challenges such as prerequisite courses and inflexible program templates that are faced by students as they pursue their degrees;
- The value of liberal arts cohorts, course bundles or a foundation year as implemented at some other universities; and
- The role experiential or service learning can play in enhancing liberal arts enrolments and demonstrating the relevance of the disciplines to the larger community.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The Advisory Group engaged with a wide variety of individuals and groups during its operation, and had robust discussions on many aspects of liberal arts education. Based on these consultations and discussions, the Advisory Group agreed that across all Faculties, a great deal of work is taking place to sustain, promote and enhance the University's liberal arts foundation.

Implementing a set of specific University-wide recommendations would in many cases be redundant, and would run the risk of causing an artificial division between the liberal arts disciplines and the other University programs in which they are so intertwined. As one member said:

Our discussions made me realize that it is impossible – and probably not helpful – to define some core of “liberal arts” that excludes other University programs. For myself, I can come up with no definition of the liberal arts that doesn't include much else. And so, I'm hoping to think more broadly about how best to do university education generally.

In short, the Advisory Group agreed that at both the Faculty and institutional levels, the University of Regina must continue taking every opportunity to value its liberal arts heritage, promote interdisciplinary teaching and research, support the work of its Federated Colleges, and effectively communicate the many ways in which a broad-based university education helps graduates develop the skills they need to contribute meaningfully to their communities.

At its final meeting in April 2016, the Advisory Group agreed that although its formal work had been completed, it would reserve the right to meet on an *ad hoc* basis to discuss issues related to liberal arts education, and to engage in what one member called “pensive, scholarly discussion with peers committed to the importance of the liberal arts as a key component of quality education on our campus.”