

## **MY VISION FOR A SECOND TERM: JULY 2025 – JUNE 2031**

Over my nearly four years as President, thanks to incredible vision and support from an excellent leadership team, countless colleagues, and community partners from across the province, I believe that notable, important progress was made in several areas.

I arrived in July 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before that, I had visited Regina only twice: in 2015, when undertaking an institutional review of Briercrest College, in nearby Caronport; and in October 2017, stopping for a night while driving with our son when relocating from Mount Royal University in Calgary, where I served as Dean of Arts for nearly six years, to Corner Brook, Newfoundland, to assume the role of Vice-President, responsible for managing Memorial University's Grenfell Campus, where I remained until June 2021.

Previously I had spent 17 years at the University of Ottawa as a Professor of History, and among other administrative roles, as Department Chair and as founder and Director of the Centre for Experiential Learning. In each place, as here in Regina, I immersed myself in the university and the wider community, forging numerous friendships, and learning about the institution's history, culture, leadership, and many accomplishments. This has better enabled me to calibrate how my experiences elsewhere – at universities that were both research- and teaching-focused, with robust graduate programs or as undergraduate-centred – could contribute to the University of Regina's success.

I feel extremely fortunate to work at such a dynamic, supportive university, which, after 50 years of independence (among other recent achievements) has attained record enrolment and research funding, and is a national leader in numerous areas. In addition, my family and I count ourselves fortunate to live in a place with a very strong and authentic community ethos, something I have come to learn and deeply appreciate as being emblematic of the province itself.

I arrived at the University of Regina at a challenging time. The campus was virtually empty due to the pandemic, whose impact occupied more than my first year as President. Enrolment had dropped; the University's deficit was well on track to an all-time high; student satisfaction had declined; research funding was low for our size/scope; broad consensus was that we lacked institutional identity; for several years, our ranking in the *Maclean's* comprehensive university category stood at 15 out of 15; and we faced the challenge of keeping the campus safe and united as we navigated our way through the controversies of mask and vaccine mandates and determining the appropriate time to resume in-person activities as before.

Nearly four years later, much work is still required in some of these areas. Most recently, with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's (IRCC) cuts to international student numbers, and provincial government funding remaining fixed, significant challenges remain, including, of course, budgetarily. That said, with significant contributions from across the University, the past four years have witnessed positive recalibration, better positioning us to build upon success.

Within two years of my starting as President, we achieved record enrolment, exceeding 17,000 students in the Fall 2024 term. We settled four multi-year collective agreements. With new incentives, research funding topped \$50 million annually. Recent surveys demonstrate increased student satisfaction, both among domestic and international students, with the latter registering a plus 23 net promoter score in the most recent Canadian Bureau of International Education survey. Employee engagement surveys were introduced with subsequent strategies to improve results, and our most recent scores compare well to other Canadian universities that share such data.

Important and arguably transformational investments have occurred, such as: establishing a Centre for Experiential and Service Learning; opening the new Brad Hornung Accommodations Test Centre and expanded Wellness Centre; reinventing the food services model (as this was a major source of dissatisfaction); renovating the badly dilapidated Ad-Hum pit (that was inaccessible to those with mobility issues); and establishing marketing pillars, an institutional theme/tagline, and a totally revamped, more engaging, and (as indicated by flowthrough analysis) more successful website.

Although still modest, improvements have been achieved in our institutional rankings, and in this respect, we are now testing ourselves in new areas, namely, starting three years ago in the Times Impact Rankings that benchmark universities worldwide according to the United Nations' 17 Social Development goals. We established the University's first Indigenous Engagement Strategic Plan, a University Safety Charter, and a Learning Management System Strategic Plan. We are introducing comprehensive policy guidelines on Indigenous identity substantiation, are pursuing an identity partnership agreement with the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan, and have established strategies on Indigenous recruitment, retention, and ethical research. Also of significance is our forthcoming hosting of the 2025 National Building Reconciliation Forum in partnership with First Nations University of Canada, with whom we have recently signed a new Academic and Administrative agreement, as we did the previous year with respect to fee sharing with both Campion College and Luther College.

Also of note was a new Academic Plan, Research Plan, Sustainability Action Plan, EDI Action Plan, Strategic Enrolment Plan, and the signing of the Scarborough Charter to combat anti-Black racism. In 2024-25, we have celebrated our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an independent degree-granting institution, for which we have held approximately 70 successful and often large events that will be capped off in fall 2025 with our University's first-ever hosting of the Vanier Cup national championship football game, this being only the second time in the competition's history that it will be held on the prairies.

The next six years portend numerous opportunities to achieve even greater success and institutional status. What I lay out below are goals that, to varying degrees, will be pursued over several years.

Going forward, we must be ambitious and aspirational, but also tempered with realism, based upon the typical scope and pace of change within a collegial governance framework, the respect for which is essential to obtain University-wide buy-in and success. There is no one thing, or silver bullet, or north star, to pursue. The University of Regina is a large and complex organization, with more than 120 undergraduate and 80 graduate programs, and a multitude of essential administrative and support services. Investing in the fundamentals of what makes for a great university – teaching, research, student services, and educational infrastructure – will remain core so that we continue to build our capacity, profile, student satisfaction, retention, and myriad other components that together enhance reputation, and with that, attract more and highly qualified students.

Overall guidance during a second presidential term will derive from a new institutional Strategic Plan. Preparation for this began in January 2025, as the present plan expires at the end of this calendar year. It was decided to pursue a longer-term visionary document guided by the principle of *what we want to be* rather than *what we want to do*, the former being aspirational, the latter operational. With Dr. Aziz Douai, Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, as Chair of a Strategic Plan Steering Committee comprising both faculty and staff, robust consultations will occur with internal and external stakeholders, with the goal of having the Board of Governors approve the new plan by Spring 2026.

Such a plan must:

- Address our opportunities for national and international leadership, namely in areas where we have, or are quickly establishing, institutional strength, such as in mental health, energy transition, and Truth and Reconciliation;
- Address our ability to responsibly utilize Artificial Intelligence;
- Account for the employment of other technologies such as Virtual Reality to expand our scope;
- Address space-related challenges, especially to advance our research enterprise;
- Further professionalize and enhance our abilities in government relations;
- Expand experiential based education; and
- As appropriate, embrace curricular reform to better attract, serve, retain, and graduate students.

We will also need to enhance support for graduate-level studies, including by concretely recognizing the time necessary to offer supervision, and to successfully pursue infrastructural improvements that better support research/scholarship. We will also benefit from forging new partnerships to increase capacity. This will involve enhancing student pathways, such as with Saskatchewan Polytechnic, as well as with other institutions (including Saskatchewan regional colleges), for example by maximizing remote, hybrid, and hyflex course delivery. We must expand inter-university collaboration through block transfer credits, internationally and locally, one example being our efforts, along with the University of Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan Polytechnic, to establish the Global Institute for Energy, Minerals and Society, under which a province-wide curriculum to serve an emerging nuclear energy sector will be pursued. Improvements to Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition, as well as increased supports for adult learners and Indigenous students, are also important to grow our recruitment yield rates, student retention and time to graduation.

Such progress will need to be accomplished in an environment where, it is likely, public funding for universities, and other streams of revenue, namely from overseas admissions, will become more challenging. Additionally, domestic recruitment will likely see increased competition, especially with the decline in international enrolment. There also appears to be an increased trend of high school graduates entering fields that are vocationally oriented and have shorter pathways to obtain credentials. Moreover, governments appear increasingly disposed toward institutions that are making, through their programing, a direct link to current labour force needs.

In such a context, we need to generate sources of revenue beyond tuition and government funding. For that reason, another aim of a second term will be to develop and execute development plans for long-vacant university land. This will be undertaken in a collaborative manner with both internal and external stakeholders, prioritize the needs of University of Regina students, respect surrounding communities, and demonstrate our institutional commitment to environmental stewardship.

The coming years will have us launch a multi-year comprehensive fundraising campaign. Much of the groundwork for this has been set, such as through recent efforts to better define the University through the “Go Far, Together” marketing campaign that identified three institutional pillars: Leaders in Experiential Education; Health and Wellness; and Partners in Reconciliation. Consultation has occurred with University leadership and external stakeholders, and compelling stories are being crafted to advance more intensive efforts in 2026. This campaign promises to leave a powerful legacy, building on other recent successes such as notable funding raised for our new Chancellor’s Community, and to support mental health research and groundbreaking work to advance energy transition.

We must develop a more sophisticated recruitment and enrolment strategy. Work has started to: better calibrate our recruitment efforts in Saskatchewan and environs to enhance yields; better tailor messaging to specializations in major high schools and communities from which we recruit; build wider recognition of new articulation and block transfer agreements as well as our recent implementation rebating the costs of up to two dual credit courses so long as the student registers at the University of Regina; and develop more effective planning on the distribution of scholarships so that we maximize attracting students who, otherwise, would likely not attend the University of Regina.

We must further diversify our international enrolment to reduce vulnerability to global events such as political complications that have occurred with principal countries from which we now attract students. Work has progressed in new markets where we have achieved some success, one example being in Vietnam. Such efforts must continue, including through implementing incentives – for instance, the recent creation of the International Scholars of Distinction that leverages our perennially low occupancy in dormitories by offering annually to 150 exceptional international undergraduate students, free room and board for a maximum of four years. Analysis will be undertaken of the cost per student recruited from different countries, their visa approval rates, whether they enroll in certificate, diploma, or degree programs, their graduation rates, aggregate default payments, and other factors that will better help us understand and thus improve our ability to attract talented students and our cost/revenue ratio.

To better serve students, we need to continue considering the means by which we offer qualifications. In some areas, students – by virtue of their enrolment and retention – are questioning the investment of a four-year commitment, or are not remaining engaged enough to complete the requirements of their chosen field of study. Recent years have seen the introduction of innovative, and already proven successful, academic initiatives such as the creation of now highly sought after qualifications in Creative Technologies and Design, establishment of a Digital Marketing diploma, the revamping of the journalism program into an interdisciplinary Communications degree and, in partnership with the First Nations University, an Indigenous stream in journalism. Also significant, and perhaps a model for adoption elsewhere, is the recently introduced three-year interdisciplinary Bachelor’s degree joining the Faculties of Arts, Science, and Media, Art, and Performance. A further path to consider is that of three-year degrees with an applied microcredential specialization, making those who do not pursue an Honours credential more career ready while also retaining the University’s *raison d’être* of providing a well-rounded education.

We must continue championing experiential learning with the aim that this be included for every University of Regina student as they pursue their qualification; currently we stand at some 70 percent. Such pedagogy deepens learning and engagement and better equips students to link theoretical knowledge with real world applications. Equally important is to identify areas with a low retention rate and initiate reforms that, while ensuring learning outcomes, minimize blockages, frustrations, and student abandonment.

Another priority is to make further progress in attracting, retaining, and graduating Indigenous students. This will require more effective recruitment and retention of Indigenous professors and staff, improving Indigenous student support programs, more significantly incorporating Indigenous knowledge into a wider array of courses, and enhancing curricular pathways to better serve Indigenous learners. We need to expand Indigenous aesthetics on campus so that Indigenous students, faculty, and staff more fully embrace the University of Regina as their academic and workplace home. We must advance toward meeting our institutional target of 10 percent of eligible spending (meaning outside of salaries and other costs where there is only one supplier, such as for energy) on procurement from Indigenous sources, meaning those owned by or more than 50 percent controlled by Indigenous persons or groups.

Having a workplace representative of diversity, based upon not only race, but also factors like disabilities and gender identity, will also constitute an objective. We have made progress, but in several areas, including in University leadership, we still fall short of provincial benchmarks and in reflecting our student population.

Success in research drives innovation and reputation. Recent years have brought improved results in obtaining Tri-Agency funding, industrial partnerships, commercialization of scholarship, and advancing patents. In 2024, external funding obtained by University of Regina researchers topped \$50 million, an all-time record. That same year, incentives were introduced for faculty who successfully pursued Tri-Agency funding. To increase the number of approvals, we plan to expand these incentives, including by financially encouraging resubmissions in cases where Tri-Agency reviewers recommended approval but, due to government budgetary constraints, funding could not be provided. By the time my second and final term ends, I would aim to have the University attract \$70 million in annual external research support. Through Tri-Agency rebates for indirect costs, this will enable further reinvestment into purchasing equipment and renovating space as necessary, and will build greater capacity to attract high-quality personnel. To draw and support more graduate students – another key component of a vibrant research culture – we must also develop a system to appropriately recompense professors for high levels of graduate instruction.

Reflecting the new, more prominent home for the Centre for Teaching and Learning, now located on the ground floor of the Administration-Humanities Building, we need to enhance the Centre's capacity to provide more professional development, financial support for teaching-related initiatives, and mentorship such as through teaching triads and more fulsome support for graduate student teaching assistants. The University of Regina was the driving force in establishing, in 2023, the Lieutenant-Governor's Award for Post-Secondary Teaching Excellence. We must build on this, such as through success in the national 3M Teaching Fellowships, an award a University of Regina professor has not received since 2000, even though many colleagues are undoubtedly serious contenders.

In 2023, we created the position of Chief Governance Officer and hired a full-time Government Relations Advisor. This brought more consistent messaging and fulsome reports to governments at all levels, and established a clear liaison point for government ministries to obtain needed information in a timely manner. It will be important to increase capacity in this area, not only to further enhance and more effectively structure relations with governments, but also to better pursue funding opportunities, several of which we have missed because of lack of internal capacity in this area.

Another priority is to improve the generation of timely, comprehensive, and trusted data. In 2016, the University purchased a Cognos system and established a senior management role to govern data. The system purchased proved too complex, and required expensive ongoing updates. The management

position was eliminated in 2019, and, the next year, data governance was decentralized. Different parts of the University began providing ill-coordinated and inconsistent statistics. There must be stronger oversight and resourcing to provide better understanding of patterns and projections, such as future enrolment – including the likely breakdown of those pursuing certificates, diplomas, or degrees in each Faculty – that can be presented on easily understood dashboards.

In 2025, we reached a new cost-sharing and governance agreement with the University of Regina Alumni Association (URAA). Previously, the University, despite providing most funding and administrative support to the URAA, had little financial oversight over the association – an arrangement that did not correspond to the norm at nearly every other university across Canada. Based upon the new agreement, and an excellent relationship with the URAA (on whose Board I sit as an *ex officio* member) we are honing strategic directions. We have set and are making progress toward reaching growing targets on alumni engagement and events. Such progress must continue, not only among graduates living in Canada, but also internationally, as we have not adequately connected with our many distinguished alumni living around the world, many in places which University personnel, including myself, visit in the course of our work.

We must loudly celebrate our achievements – in research, awards, student support/satisfaction, and among alumni – to raise our institutional rankings. Prospective students, their parents, and institutions (both high schools and universities) consider rankings. Over the past couple of years, we have seen modest improvements, and in some parts of the University, we are among the top ranked in Canada. Such recognition helps us recruit excellent students who, as highly qualified personnel at the graduate level, enhance our professors' ability to attain major grants, and make us more attractive for external investment, both public and private. A second-term goal is that the University of Regina gain greater recognition – of its success with research, teaching, community outreach, student support, and sustainability efforts – particularly in the Times Higher Education, Times Impact, QS, and *Macleans* rankings.

It has been my great privilege to serve as President and Vice-Chancellor. Since July 2021, through the expertise and commitment of an exceptional leadership team, and the myriad contributions and tremendous dedication of colleagues across the institution, I believe that together we have accomplished much to advance the University of Regina as a centre of scholarly and pedagogical excellence, high-impact research, community engagement, and exceptional post-secondary education for students.

It is my hope that this visioning document provides the University community with confidence that bold and ambitious – but also realistic – goals are being set for the coming years.

It would be my distinct honour to continue as University President for a second and final term, collaborating with all colleagues to achieve continued progress for this tremendous University and the broader communities that we so proudly serve.