



Going Global Response

September 30th, 2013

Presented by the University Students' Council President and Vice-President Internal on behalf of the undergraduate student body of Western University for the consideration of the Senate

INTRODUCTION

The University Students' Council commends the Senate Committee on University Planning (SCUP) for developing an exciting final draft of a renewed strategic plan for the university. The USC is very pleased that the draft includes many ideas we put forward during the stakeholder engagement process; we look forward to the final version and the discussions to follow regarding implementation of the plan.

To assist SCUP with final refinements of the plan, we will expand upon the submission we made during the first phase of consultations. We offer three priorities that reflect undergraduate students' highest needs, and some brief commentary regarding Principles and Values.

PRIORITY 1: EDUCATING THE WHOLE PERSON

The USC is very excited by the commitment to “educate the whole person.” The “attention to wellness of the mind, body and spirit” and the availability of “curricular, co-curricular, extra-curricular and student support programming” will provide a more enriching learning experience for students, which will increase persistence and engagement.

We recommend splitting this concept into two priorities, as we believe educating the whole person and supporting the whole person are related, but different concepts.

We have some specific recommendations related to educating and supporting the whole person, which we have detailed below.ⁱ

Inside the Classroom Learning

- Integrate more collaborative and active learning opportunities.

Learning at Western must go beyond the traditional lecture format and present students with opportunities to interact more closely with each other and with faculty. Opportunities such as service learning, discovery learning, project-based learning, peer teaching, and case-based learning should be integrated into teaching methods across disciplines. Using a multitude of teaching methods has been demonstrated, by George Kuh and others, to result in a more effective and engaging learning experience for students.

Articulation of university-level learning outcomes will be a very positive step towards encouraging more innovating methods of instruction and assessment, and we look forward to this framework being developed in the years ahead.

- Guarantee a small classroom or seminar experience in first year and a 'capstone' project in final year for all students.

An enriching first year experience is critical to improving persistence and graduation rates; a seminar or small class environment has been demonstrated to be a useful strategy to connect students to their new environment and build a sense of community.

A final year thesis project or lab project would allow students to apply the full breadth of learning gained during their undergraduate studies. Such an experience would also model faculty-student interaction at the graduate level, which would encourage more students to pursue graduate work and better prepare them for those studies.

- Continue developing excellence and innovation in teaching and learning.

Western should be commended for the introduction of Teaching Fellows, but must continue to be a leader in encouraging excellence in teaching. This can be achieved through enhanced training and incentives to encourage faculty to experiment with teaching methods, and to use more technology in the classroom to facilitate deeper student engagement. We also believe that effective teaching should be an important component when making tenure decisions, and when hiring new adjunct faculty.

Broader Learning Environment

- Support for student business and social incubators.

Incubators connect students with faculty, local advisors, and resources to assist in the development of business ideas, or ideas that could have a positive social impact. Incubators enhance classroom learning and provide an enriching experience for students. An incubator would also allow Western to play more of a leadership role in London's economic and social development, while also helping to retain the next generation of business and non-profit leaders in the community after graduation.

The USC is a founding partner of BizInc, a student business incubator on campus. We hope to work closely with Western to sustain and grow the concept to ensure it reaches its full potential.

- Coordination and collaboration amongst campus partners who offer experiential learning opportunities.

Many areas of the university, including the University Students' Council, offer volunteer and experiential learning opportunities. All of the partners should come together to develop a coordinated strategy to expanding the size and quality of volunteer opportunities on campus, and take a unified approach to defining and tracking learning outcomes.

- Introduce a comprehensive undergraduate research program.

Research at the undergraduate level would strengthen the academic culture of the institution and encourage more undergraduates to pursue graduate level work.

Undergraduate research programs are very prevalent at American universities but have not yet become a standard in Ontario. As such, introducing a comprehensive undergraduate research program provides Western with an opportunity to differentiate itself from peer institutions.

- Expand international learning opportunities.

It would be a visionary goal for Western to guarantee an international exchange experience for every undergraduate who wishes to pursue one. Exchanges expose students to different cultures, different teaching methods, and helps them grow personally, academically and professionally. If Western wishes to foster global citizenship, it must set bold targets to expand international learning opportunities.

- Expand opportunities for student participation in university governance.

Student leaders today will be our business, community and political leaders of tomorrow. Providing more opportunities for students to participate in formal governance opportunities will help Western foster stronger citizenship and better prepare them to have an impact in their communities after graduation. The City of London has recognized this, having recently created positions on City Council's citizen advisory committees specifically designated to students.

Students do have many opportunities at Western to participate in governance through their students' councils, the Senate, and the Board of Governors, but those opportunities should be expanded to allow more students to pursue these leadership opportunities.

PRIORITY 2: SUPPORTING THE WHOLE PERSON

Enhanced Student Services

- Unified vision and enhanced coordination of student services on campus.

Student services are essential ingredients for student success. They build community, support wellness, and help students through the ups and downs associated with undergraduate life.

Tremendous strength and expertise exists within the Student Success Centre, Student Health Services, Student Development Centre, Residence Engagement, Campus Recreation, and the University Students' Council – what we lack is a unified vision to serve students from their first year through to their last, and a coordinated approach to tie those strengths together into a more effective whole.

Western must implement a 'No Wrong Door' approach to student service, so that a student can be connected with supports, even if they've technically approached the wrong service. No student should fall through the cracks. This will require strengthened collaboration and good will between all support services, including those offered by the USC, to better support students.

- **Enhanced supports for transition into first-year and for transition leading up to and after graduation.**

According to research done by Kuh and others, orientation programming focused on transitioning first-year students to their new community has a positive impact on persistence and graduation rates. Western must continue to offer a comprehensive orientation program for first-year students, and the USC and Western must work together to ensure that the program continuously improves and responds to the changing needs of first year students.

Much focus is placed on first-year orientation, but less focus is placed on transitioning senior students leading up to and after graduation. We are pleased to see a commitment to embed career planning within the curriculum. We recognize and appreciate that the traditional focus of a university is scholarship and not job market preparation, but a majority of undergraduate students have an expectation that they'll be supported in finding their first job, particularly in today's challenging youth job market.

- High quality and accessible health and wellness services.

Most students require generalized health services while at Western and prefer the convenience of on-campus healthcare services rather than going off-campus, or returning to their home community for care. But a significant number of students also require specialized care, particularly to address mental health and addiction issues. According to a recent study, almost 15 per cent of student will be diagnosed with a mental health condition – many mental health issues go unreported, so the actual number of students is likely higher.

Health services on campus must take a holistic approach to health, and be able to work together as a team to ensure students' mental and physical wellness is maintained. Ensuring a focus on public health education as a preventative measure will ensure fewer students are victims to health crisis situations.

- Services to support international student success.

As Western grows international student enrolment it must ensure the unique needs of international students are well taken care of when they arrive in Canada and on campus. International students require an array of enhanced services to help them settle, including supports that meet their cultural, religious, housing, and health and wellness needs. It isn't enough to attract more international students to study at Western; we have a responsibility to ensure they have the supports they need to thrive and persist through to degree completion.

PRIORITY 3: AFFORDABILITY OF THE UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE

The USC appreciates the fiscal pressures that Western faces, and recognizes that finances will continue to be challenging in the years ahead. But students face fiscal pressures of their own; many are struggling to make ends meet and are taking on high levels of debt to finance their education. We know that the university takes the affordability challenges students face seriously through its investments in needs-based bursaries and other programs, and this must remain a priority for the university in the years ahead.

Continued focus on needs-based bursaries

- Make bursaries a focus of fundraising efforts.

There are many priorities competing for fundraising dollars, but we hope that needs-based bursaries near the top of the priority list. Students who feel supported today with the costs of their education are also more likely to be motivated donors in the future, so it is good stewardship of future alumni.

Continue to reduce social and culture barriers

- Expand support for early outreach programs.

The University has made great strides in addressing accessibility issues for indigenous Canadians. Most young people make the decision to attend post-secondary education during primary school, so we encourage the university to explore strategies of reaching out earlier to students from underrepresented demographics.

INSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

The USC supports the inclusion of institutional principles and values as part of the "Going Global" plan; this is a progressive step for our university. We have four small suggestions related to the values.

- **Safety and Respect.** We believe this value to be two distinct concepts. Respect can help promote a safe campus, but it is also an important behavior between campus community partners such as the USC and the administration, and between individuals. Respect encourages members of the campus community to accept each other for individuals with their own lived experiences. It encourages students, faculty and

staff to be accepting of all gender identities, sexual orientations, races, classes, ages and abilities, among others.

We also believe all members of campus should feel safe while on campus. As a campus, we should encourage a dialogue about concerns affecting safety on campus and find ways to prevent these concerns.

- Openness. We are pleased with the commitment to encourage broad participation in decision-making, and we also understand that the community should respect decision-making processes. We suggest that value should go beyond 'encouraging' participation, but also respecting and valuing the feedback received.
- Social Responsibility. The university has the potential to provide leadership in more than just economic development. We encourage the university to include leadership in social and cultural acceptance, and environmental sustainability.
- Accountability. We believe accountability to stakeholders is a core value to our institution. The university should be, additionally, held accountable to the quality of the support for students.

CONCLUSION

The USC would like to thank the Administration and SCUP for their hard work; your vision for the future is exciting. The USC is part of the campus community, and as such looks forward to working hard to support the accomplishment of the priorities within the plan. Undergraduate students are looking forward to making *Going Global* a success.

Our primary goal is to ensure the university balance the many institutional priorities with the need for a renewed focus on the undergraduate experience.

ⁱ Some of our recommendations have been adapted by a comprehensive policy paper written by the University Students' Council for the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA), "Student Success and the Future of Quality Education." The paper is available here: <http://www.ousa.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Student-Success.pdf>