



Friday, 13 February 2009

OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL

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To members of University Council:

I am writing to you regarding this year's University Council. As you know, I spoke to the University Community in September regarding our budget situation. The presentation can be found at <http://www.queensu.ca/principal/speech/reporttothecommunity.html>. Since then, the Vice-Principals, Deans and I have been working very hard to meet these financial challenges (for details, see <http://www.queensu.ca/principal/financialupdate.html>). I will be making a second presentation on our progress before the Senate meeting on February 26th. Please watch my website for details.

Part of our strategy has involved moving to a three year planning horizon in order to give us the time to review and re-engineer our processes. However, we also need to plan on an even longer basis. It is in that light that the theme for this year's University Council will be *Queen's in 2020: Tradition and Change*. My goal is to engage with Councillors in discussion of where we see Queen's moving over the next decade and to draw on your experience and advice as we plan for the future.

Clearly, this is a vast question. As a result, we have made some changes to the structure of Council this year. Instead of making my State of the University address at Council, I will be presenting it at Senate in late April. Like my September presentation, this will be available on the web, so you will have the chance to read and digest it before we meet. We will also provide paper copies for those Councillors without access to the web. This earlier presentation will allow us to set aside the first hour and a half of Council for a Question and Answer session with me and the Vice-Principals. After the Q/A session and a short business session, we will spend the last part of the morning laying out the theme session. To allow Councillors to do their homework on these issues, we are also setting up a website to bring together a collection of background material.

In order to focus on specific facets of planning, we have isolated three areas for special attention:

- 1) *How will we fund our activities in years to come in light of ever-declining provincial revenues?*

We have seen over the past decade a significant relative decrease in government funding. Rising tuition fees have helped to make up the difference to some extent, but

the fact remains that, like many of our peers in Ontario, we have an ongoing and increasing discrepancy between our sources of income and our expenses. We are beginning to address this issue in our budget planning process, but we need to look at it longer term as well. Fundraising will form part of the equation, but we need to take a hard look at our way of doing business in order to reduce relative costs and increase revenues.

2) *What will our teaching, learning and research environment look like?*

There is clear evidence that the traditional learning environment based on small classes and intense interaction between faculty and students is at risk. Class sizes are rising and we are running out of space for some of our larger courses. At the same time, students now have expectations of ‘virtual’ access to teaching materials and instructors. By many external measures such as the *National Survey of Student Engagement*, we have a better level of engagement with students than many of our peers, and we should be proud of this. However, it is clear that the students of 2020 will learn in quite different ways. We need to be prepared for that. We also need to rethink the relation between teaching and research. Like a small number of our peers, we are good at both teaching and research, and the mapping of these will require considerable thought if we are to maintain this special status.

3) *What will our student, faculty and staff populations look like?*

Demographic predictions already show that over the next decade we will be seeing the combination of an aging population – including the departure of a significant proportion of teaching and support staff, increasing demand for postsecondary education, significant increases in immigration, and other factors. In light of these, we will need to rethink issues of staffing, sources of our student and faculty populations, and issues of diversity and training.

Each of these three areas will be dealt with in a separate session. Each session will bring together around 50 Councillors and will be chaired by one or two senior members of the administration. The session on funding and budgets will be chaired by the Vice-Principals for Operations and Finance and Advancement; the session on teaching, learning and research will be chaired by the Vice-Principals Academic and Research; and the session on demographics will be chaired by the Vice-Principal Human Resources with assistance from the University Registrar’s Office.

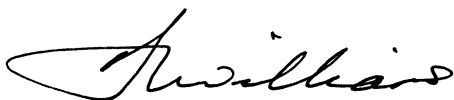
In order to assure the best match between Councillors’ interests and expertise and the various sessions, we will be sending out as part of this year’s Registration Form a checklist where we ask you to rank the three sessions by the degree of your interest. We will use this to attempt to place you in a session which best matches your preferences. We will also pass the lists to the various Vice-Principals so that they can provide members in their individual sessions with specific background information.

The sessions themselves will run from 1:30 to 4:30. Each will begin with a presentation by the Vice-Principal to focus on a small set of issues and specifically on three areas requiring special attention. The 50 participants will then break into three groups of 15 or so to focus intensively on three sub-issues, under the guidance of members of the VP's portfolio and with circulation of the VP among the three groups. I will also be circulating among the groups. The sub-groups will work for two hours, leaving a half hour for the 50 participants to come together to share their findings. On the basis of this, the Vice-Principals will identify a small number of key recommendations for presentation at the end of the day. After Council, they will also generate an electronic summary for dissemination to all Councillors.

The day will close with a return to a plenary format for brief discussion of the findings in each area.

I am very excited about this opportunity to engage Councillors in planning for our future and I look forward to meeting with you in May.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Williams', with a stylized, flowing script.

Tom Williams
Principal and Vice-Chancellor