

Queen's in 2020: Innovation and Change

The goal of this year's University Council is to look forward beyond the typical one or two year horizon and grapple with longer-term planning issues. We have set a planning horizon of a decade. Few things are entirely clear at that distance, but setting our course in that timeframe will help us to make any mid-course corrections in light of a set of longer-term goals.

Planning for a university must take account of many factors. For this meeting, we have chosen three:

Academic planning:

Like its peers in Ontario, Canada and around the world, Queen's is facing a period of enormous change. Knowledge is growing at an exponential pace and what and how we teach have already been influenced by that. We have seen enormous expansion of interdisciplinary domains which cross traditional academic boundaries. Our students have grown up in an environment where self-directed learning and group research are the norm. Technology has already allowed for teaching, learning and collaboration outside the framework of a single space and time.

Funding and fundraising:

The nature of our funding is also undergoing substantial shifts. Fifteen years ago, government funding represented almost three-quarters of our operating budget. It now represents less than half. Tuition fees have filled part of the gap, but further increases in fees raise crucial questions of access and equity. In a context like that, fundraising will assume an increasing importance, as will efficient management of costs and exploration of other sources of revenue generation.

Demographics:

Our faculty, staff and student populations are undergoing fundamental shifts. Our incoming class of 2020 is just entering elementary school and our new faculty of 2020 are just beginning high school. They will carry with them the values they are developing now, in a world very different from the one Councillors knew as children. The departure from the workforce of the mass of baby boomers – and the concomitant health care implications of that group – will challenge us in ways we do not yet fully grasp. Finally, population growth in Canada will more and more be driven by immigration, which will raise a host of issues around values and diversity.

Taken together, all these factors make it imperative that we think deeply and seriously about the way forward. By its composition – Senators, members of the Board of Trustees, elected members from many walks of life – University Council is the ideal group to take part in these discussions.