

Provost's Report on the Brock University Integrated Strategic Planning Process

Note: This document represents the opinions and viewpoint of the Provost and VPA and has not been endorsed or approved by Senate or the Board of Trustees.

Introduction

The notion of planning may seem antithetical to one of the key objectives of the university – open and free inquiry bounded only by the limits of the imagination inherent in a community of scholars. In reality, however, the notion that a public university, modern or otherwise, exists as a social institution in a vacuum untouched by the social, cultural, political and economic environment within which it is located is entirely mythical. Public universities have always been embedded in historical, political, economic and social communities that play significant roles in defining the character, role and structure of the academy. Moreover, these communities have a legitimate expectation that their universities provide a sense of vision, mission, values, priorities and relationship to the larger society. This is true of Brock University, founded in large part as the result of sustained community pressure to have a university in the Niagara Region, and the subsequent support from many sectors of the community. The idea of the University that originated within the Niagara community was given materiality by local businesses, labour unions, community groups, and individual citizens who dug deeply into their own pockets in order to ensure that their University would become a reality.

Brock University's Historical Context

Brock University's first half-century of existence saw it grow from fewer than 150 students at the foot of the Niagara Escarpment to a comprehensive university with over 18,000 students atop the Escarpment, where it sits as the only Canadian university to be located in a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization International Biosphere Reserve. Brock has grown from a small, community-based university to a global force in research and education. In doing so it has been remarkably successful at developing the breadth of excellence that is necessary to allow a modern university to thrive and to maintain its ability to give back to a deserving community; however as the second decade of the 21st Century unfolds and Brock nears its Jubilee Anniversary it faces new challenges.

Changing Times

Brock University emerged in the context of the Post-WW II era of prosperity and expansion when virtually every sector of North American society experienced several decades of growth and expansion, characterized by a massive infusion of resources into the public sector,

including education. For the university sector the Post-War era was one of growing student demand, new research opportunities and relatively abundant funding to support a variety of new initiatives. The result was mostly unplanned and opportunistic growth and expansion. It is safe to say that during this era neither the private nor public sectors were characterized by systematic institutional planning or sustained attention to governance. By the mid-1970s, however, changes were afoot as the capacity of governments to sustain high levels of spending began to diminish just as new competitive pressures emerged across increasingly globalized economies. Financial instabilities, global competition, governance failures in several major financial institutions, increased mobility of capital and labour, and systematic deregulation along with receding state and public sectors characterized the last decades of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st. The economic collapse of 2008-09 proved to be something of a final straw.

Of particular importance to the Canadian university scene are the post-2008 provincial and federal fiscal situations. Several decades of growth and opportunity in the public sector have been replaced with declining funding accompanied by more regulation and oversight. Seen in this light what I call the recent 'Ontario narrative', stimulated by the work of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, should come as no surprise. The issues have now become system sustainability, accountability, the efficiency of the funding regimes, homogeneity versus differentiation, and the potential necessity of government action if the university sector proves itself to be incapable of reform.

Strategic Planning at Brock University

Long-term planning is not new to Brock. In the fall of 2000 a President's Long-Range Planning Committee was established in order to follow up on recommendations made by the *1999 Final Report of the President's Task Force on Planning and Priorities*. In March 2002 the President's Long-Range Planning Committee released its *Interim Report: Consultation with the Community*. The Committee received significant community input to that *Report*, as well as its *2003 Preliminary Report* culminating in the *Final Report 2002-2003*. The 2002-2003 document contained over 35 recommendations under the following headings: Teaching and Learning; Graduate Studies and Research; Programming; The Physical Campus; Brock and Community; and Institutional Planning. The next major planning document, *Brock 2014, Knowledge, Engagement, Transformation: An Academic Plan for Brock University*, was released by the Provost in 2008. *Brock 2014* articulated the University's Values, Vision, a planning framework and articulated five Academic Directions focusing on: Research; Quality Undergraduate Education; Graduate and Professional Studies; Interdisciplinary and Cross-disciplinary Teaching and Research; Community Service to Niagara and beyond. The fate of

Brock 2014 was, however, bound to a series of non-academic factors that were to have significant academic implications.

Budgetary Context and Developments

In 2003-04, during a period of institutional growth, a decentralized budget development process was initiated. A series of balanced budgets followed, lasting through 2006-07; however that year it became apparent that rising costs and declining government revenues had created a structural deficit. One-time reserves allowed the University to balance the budget in 2006-07; however in 2007-08 the University was forced to engage in budget reductions to supplement additional transfers from the accumulated operating surplus in order to balance. In 2008-09 the budget was balanced on the basis of one-time funds from unanticipated grant revenues and remaining operating surpluses; however the next fiscal year began with a base budget structural shortfall of \$12.6 million creating a situation that required urgent attention given the forecast that, without action, the accumulated operating deficit would increase to more than \$90 million by the end of 2012-13.

In an effort to minimize the potential academic implications of the actions necessary to address the structural deficit and budget shortfall, a multi-year recovery strategy was developed and approved by the Board of Trustees for implementation in 2009-10. The budget plan was initially based on revenue enhancements and/or expenditure savings target of about \$7.5 million or five per cent in each of the next four years. Subsequent changes to revenue patterns due to increased admissions and retention coupled with other revenue enhancements and expenditure constraints resulted in targets that were less than those initially envisioned, however, the overall environment was not conducive to bold initiatives to move the *Brock 2014* forward in a substantial manner.

An additional budget related issue emerged during this period. There was a sense among the Decanal leadership group that the 'historical budget model' had outlived its usefulness in light of the increasing complexity of the Institution and its expanding range of undergraduate and graduate programs. As a result an ad-hoc committee was established to explore alternate budgetary models with particular attention to some form of an activities based budget model. The Committee produced a series of reports or versions of a Brock Resource Allocation Model (BRAM). Although the Committee membership has changed, the project remains vitally important as is noted below.

Brock's opportunistic and relatively unplanned growth had created relatively autonomous academic units with the attendant lack of institutional purpose or mission clarity other than continued growth. The lack of coordination and common focus that characterized the efforts of various units to develop strategic plans in the context of the *Brock 2014* are testimony. The Senior Administrative Council met in the fall of 2009

to discuss the future academic directions and the fiscal situation at Brock in the context of the changing external environment. Key elements of the internal and external environment were identified as the ‘Ontario narrative’ of differentiation, accountability, efficiencies and funding regimes and the on-going internal budgetary situation. The meeting produced a wide array of alternatives with regard to revenue enhancement and cost containment; however a sense of unity and coherence in terms of Institutional direction was lacking. As a result SAC charged the Provost and Vice-President Academic with the task of developing an institution wide Strategic Integrated Plan.

Strategic Integrated Planning 2010-Present

Based on an analysis of a variety of past planning documents the Provost developed an initial draft of what would become the *Integrated Strategic Plan*. In excess of 60 meetings were held including a number of town-hall sessions, plus meetings with all Senate Committees, the Board of Trustees, Brock University Students Union, the Alumni Association, the Graduate Students Association, external community representatives and a Special Meeting of Senate. In December 2010 Senate approved in principle the academic direction articulated in the *Integrated Strategic Plan (ISP)*. The Board of Trustees followed suit in January 2011.

Brock University Integrated Strategic Plan

Vision

Brock University envisions itself as a dynamic post- secondary educational institution that:

- Makes a difference in the lives of individuals in our Brock community, the Niagara region, Canada, and the world.
- Demonstrates leadership and innovation in teaching and learning across disciplines.
- Extends knowledge through excellence in research, scholarship and creativity.

Mission

Our academic mission is to nurture and support our faculty and students in the discovery of knowledge through exemplary scholarship, teaching and learning. We provide undergraduate and professional education of the highest quality, while continuing to expand graduate programs that are integrated into Brock’s growing reputation for excellence in research and innovation.

We provide a transformative experience for our students inside and outside the classroom by helping to develop their full potential as creative, educated citizens in a global community.

Brock University works to enhance the economic, social, cultural and intellectual lives of the communities around us — Niagara, Ontario, Canada, and beyond — and to demonstrate the vital ways in which we contribute to the betterment of society in the 21st century.

Values

Brock is committed to seven core values that inform and strengthen our actions.

- Integrity and respect
- Freedom of thought and expression coupled with academic responsibility
- Unique student experience
- Innovation
- Accountability and stewardship
- Sustainability
- Generation and mobilization of knowledge

Strategic priorities

The Brock University community is committed to seven strategic priorities:

- Ensure Brock is a preferred place to work and study.
- Support Brock's undergraduate student-centred focus while maintaining excellence in graduate education.
- Foster excellence in research, scholarship and creativity.
- Serve the social, cultural and economic well-being of the University, as well as the local, national and global communities.
- Encourage transdisciplinary initiatives.
- Promote internationalization.
- Practise accountability, fiscal responsibility, and stewardship.

Implementing the Integrated Strategic Plan: Priorities to Actions

In a complex and decentralized institution such as Brock, local or Unit level specific Strategic Plans are key components of the successful operationalization of the *Integrated Strategic Plan*. While the overall *Plan* articulates the institution's vision, mission, core values, and strategic priorities, the actual implementation of the University-wide Plan necessarily takes place at the Faculty and Unit levels. While the *Integrated Strategic Plan* indicates university-wide protocols and processes, each Unit utilizes processes, procedures and protocols that are appropriate to its history, structure and function to develop and administer its Strategic Plan.

Among the actions indicated in the *ISP* was the creation of an oversight committee to take responsibility for the implementation and future development of the *ISP*. Both Senate and the Board of Trustees approved the creation of a joint Senate Board Integrated Planning Committee (henceforth Integrated Planning Committee or IPC) composed of the Governance Committee of Senate and the Executive Committee of the Board. Additionally, the *ISP* called for revisions of the strategic plans of the various administrative and academic units to ensure a measure of consistency and integration to Institutional purposes and goals.

In June 2011 the IPC approved a document titled *Brock University Integrated Strategic Plan: From Priorities to Actions*. The document restates Brock's Vision, Mission, Values and Strategic Priorities, but

focuses on the presentation of a matrix to be used by various academic and administrative units to plan and illustrate their roles in the realization of the Integrated Strategic Plan. The matrix requires Units to provide Strategic Actions, Measures of Success, Timelines, and Incremental Budget Implications linked to the Strategic Priorities in a manner that documents the Unit's contributions to the University and the Unit's Strategic Plans. Throughout 2011-12 academic year various Units, both administrative and academic, presented initial information on their progress in terms of revision and up-dating their local Strategic Plans as well as preliminary information with regard to how they are operationalizing University-wide and local priorities. Due to a variety of circumstances, including transitions in decanal offices, not all academic and administrative Units were able to report to the IPC during the 2011-12 academic year.

An initial difficulty that Unit leaders were encountering was related to the fact that the seven Strategic Priorities are, by necessity, high level and somewhat abstract. In order to address this and other issues, the Senior Administrative Council held its first annual planning retreat in December 2011. An important objective of the Retreat was to begin to put some 'meat on the bones' of the Strategic Priorities. It was important for Units to have a basis for thinking about just how their work and efforts contribute both to the realization of the Integrated Strategic Plan and the on-going business-as-usual work of their unit. The Retreat considered various possibilities for advancing each of Brock's seven Strategic Priorities and developed high level 2011-12 Objectives that various Units would seek to accomplish in accordance with the reporting requirements of the IPC's *Priorities to Actions* document. The outcome of these discussions was the first iteration of this year's university-wide objectives for each of our Strategic Priorities:

Strategic priorities and Objectives

1. Ensure Brock is a preferred place to work and study.

Objectives for 2011-12

- Continue to enhance the reputation of Brock University
 - Improve effectiveness and efficiency of our services, processes and policies with special attention to the Library, Information Technology Services, Student Services and Human Resources.
2. Support Brock's undergraduate student-centred focus while maintaining excellence in graduate education.
 - Attracting high quality undergraduate and graduate students.
 - Ensure that our curriculum and pedagogy are relevant and innovative thereby graduating alumni who are knowledgeable and engaged.

3. Foster excellence in research, scholarship and creativity.
 - Foster a culture of leadership and excellence in research, scholarship and creativity.
 - Enhance Brock's research and scholarly reputation and profile
4. Serve the social, cultural and economic well being of the University, as well as the local, national and global communities.
 - Partner with the community to create initiatives that effect real change, innovation and prosperity that benefit Niagara.
5. Encourage trans-disciplinary initiatives.
 - Select and support new trans-disciplinary institutes.
6. Promote internationalization.
 - Promote Brock as a welcoming, receptive destination for international students and scholars.
 - Focus and build on trans-disciplinary international partnerships.
7. Accountability, fiscal responsibility and Stewardship.
 - To streamline and be efficient in the payment processes to and from the university for donors, community clients, vendors and faculty, staff and students.
 - To implement a new financial system that will improve the efficient and effective recording, on-line access, reporting and compliance of the University's financial transactions.

Integrated Planning Committee 2011-12 Activities

The IPC held a series of meetings throughout the 2011-12 academic year at which various administrative and academic units presented preliminary information with regard to the on-going revisions of the local or Unit Strategic Plans as well as some indications as to how the Unit was contributing to the seven Strategic priorities of the University. It is important to note that as of June 2012 the process is incomplete.

Next Steps

In order to complete the planning and accountability potentials of a fully developed integrated planning approach, we need to attend to a number of vital actions including:

- The completion of all Unit (both administrative and academic) Strategic Plans, including the matrix requirements in the *Priorities to Actions* document.
- Investigating the integration of the core elements of the *Integrated Strategic Plan* into on-going discussions regarding the Brock Resource Allocation Model in order to link resource allocation with the University's strategic academic directions.

- The establishment of concrete dashboard measures in order to provide both Senate and the Board of Trustees with the necessary information that is appropriate to their governance roles.
- The articulation of academic priorities drawn from the Strategic Plans of the Faculties and reported to Senate.
- The continued promotion and support of Faculty based pedagogical and program innovations to support the University's academic priorities.
- The development of an Enrollment Management Plan to support the academic priorities of the University and the Faculties.