



President's Report to Senate and the Board of Trustees  
Jack Lightstone - September 2012

First and foremost, I would like to welcome all Senators and Trustees to this new session of Senate and the Board for the academic year 2012-13. To new Senators and Trustees, my heartfelt thanks to you for taking on this responsibility for the governance of Brock University. Your efforts, insight and expertise will serve Brock well.

For faculty, staff and students September is the beginning of a marathon, not a sprint, from now until spring convocation. I wish all faculty, staff and students the very best as they commence this busy year.

In many ways, this is (another) watershed year for Brock. Significant developments, driven by both internal and external (largely government-related) circumstances, are on our collective plate. And the purpose of this first report of the academic year 2012-13 is to say something of those developments and the circumstances that affect them. What follows, then, is a topically organized list with some accompanying commentary for each item. For reasons that will be self-evident, I shall devote an inordinate amount of time to the first few matters.

**1. STRATEGIC PLANNING, STRATEGIC MANDATE AGREEMENTS AND THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT'S DISCUSSION PAPER**

Strategic planning is an ongoing process, as it should be. I like to define strategy as the way one navigates through current and medium term opportunities and threats in order to make expeditious progress towards long-term goals. Our long-term goals were defined at the end of the 1990s and recalibrated in 2008 in *Brock 2014*. The most prominent among those goals are:

- continuing to provide student-centered and learning-focused educational experience for our students
- making research and graduate education pervasive activities across the University
- internationalization of our activities
- expanding the range of co-op education in our offerings
- increasing our enrolments to make us a mid-sized institution
- through partnerships with others, becoming a driving force in the development of the communities around us, economically, socially and culturally.

By way of reminder, two "strategic" documents were extensively discussed by Senate and the Board in 2010-11. One of these documents was an *Integrated Strategic Academic Plan* that laid out a number of general strategic academic priorities and the other, *Taking Our Own Tack*, was a document outlining an overarching strategy for the short and medium term. In 2011-12, a Senate-Board Committee served to provide for the translation of these general priorities and overarching strategies into specific actions and initiatives in the Faculties and other key support units, while at the same time, a number of institutional-level strategic actions were undertaken. Work in the former will continue this year (and there is still much to be done in this regard), while implementation of the latter is already underway. The latter comprises three main strategic elements:

- 1) Identify up to five themes, aligned with critical issues facing the communities around us, that will provide the focus for:

- (a) five newly-funded trans-disciplinary research institutes with the evident potential to be world-class academically and transformative for the communities around us, and
- (b) the continued expansion of our academic programs, especially, but not limited to new PhD programs.

- 2) Add to our tried and true methods, innovative approaches to our pedagogy and course scheduling that respond to the needs of our 21st century, actively-engaged learners.
- 3) Partner with others in the communities around us to build effective institutions and networks that drive development of those communities generally, and focusing particularly upon economic development through incubation, innovation, and support for entrepreneurship, start-ups and SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) in the Niagara Region.

These three strategies were intended to help us navigate a number of immediate challenges and opportunities in continuing our progress to our long-term goals. Among these challenges and opportunities was the self-evident need to define for ourselves and negotiate with the provincial government a “differentiated” stance for Brock within the family of post-secondary institutions in Ontario. For our purposes, such a “differentiated” stance must, among other things, win for us the recognition of our continued aspirations to develop as a locus for research and graduate studies, in addition to offering particularly compelling learning experiences for our students, both undergraduate and graduate.

Events spearheaded by Queen’s Park over the last three months have proven the necessity for (and, I hope, the wisdom of) an institutional-level strategy as outlined in the three component elements earlier. At the end of June, Minister Glen Murray together with Minister Dwight Duncan announced two interrelated initiatives, both with very short timelines, namely the summer months. One was an expedited consultation process to receive feedback on a discussion paper entitled: *Strengthening Ontario’s Centres of Creativity, Innovation and Knowledge (Attachment #1)* and the second was the submission by each institution to the Minister by September 30, 2012 of a draft Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA). It is fair to say that each SMA must effectively telegraph at least two things: how the institution sees its differentiated position within the Ontario network and those pedagogical innovations that effectively address a sizable proportion of the issues broached in the government’s discussion paper. Moreover, the Minister has subsequently announced that after receiving commentary from HEQCO on each draft SMA, he will move quickly to select a handful of colleges and universities with which he will work in a preferential manner. In doing so, he will dispense \$30 million in 2013-14, and \$60 million in 2014-15 (perhaps for a larger subset of institutions).

The template for the SMA asks us to do three things for the next 3 to 5 year period:

- 1. articulate a strategic institutional mandate;
- 2. proffer a mission and vision from our existing planning documents;
- 3. articulate three strategic objectives.

In the draft SMA that we are preparing, the three elements of our institution-level strategy outlined earlier inform our three-to-five-year mandate (Part I of the SMA) and our three strategic objectives (Part III). Part II of the SMA will contain explicated citations from the mission and vision section of our Integrated Strategic Academic Plan. The whole SMA may not exceed 8 pages.

The demand for draft SMAs did not come as a surprise as we have been predicting that this would happen since the Fall of 2010 but when the request came, it came quickly, and with a very short runway. It goes without saying, that the negotiation of our SMA with the minister will occupy a great

deal of our effort for the next number of months, while the regular work of eliciting specific strategic actions from the Faculties and academic support units continues apace.

Once a complete draft is ready (which will be just before the September 30<sup>th</sup> deadline), it will be provided to Senate and the Board. We do not know, as yet, what the government will require as a sign that the institution and the government have come to a mutual understanding about the content of the SMA. What is important is that the SMA is not our planning document in so far as we have our own planning documents and templates, which are in the form that we have determined suit us. The SMA is the government's 8-page template, defined by its own categories and agenda.

There are a number of groups who have been working steadily on our draft SMA, since the template was received in the second week of August. The Office of the Provost, has been the chief author and orchestrator, working with ORS (Office of Research Services), Student Services, Deans, members of SAC (Senior Administrative Council), the Advancement Office, Finance and Administrative Services, and the Centre for Teaching, Learning and Educational Technologies.

## **2. RESEARCH**

Much has been said about our plans for newly funded, thematic-based, trans-disciplinary institutes and their place in our over-arching, institutional-level strategy. The applications have been adjudicated by our peer-review selection committee, which was also informed by external peer review. From among the eight invited to submit full proposals, five institutes have been recommended to the President for funding. I will accept the selection committee's recommendations, although the proposals must undergo the Senate process for approval of research institutes. Moreover, the three that have not been recommended for funding should not be considered defunct as they too, were of very high quality and there may yet be other avenues for them to pursue their proposed mandates.

Six other matters will be on our agenda with regards to better supporting and developing research at Brock.

1. We must begin to actively talk about what it means to develop "a culture of research leadership", to cite the words of our VP Research, Dr. Libben.
2. We must begin to implement our mechanisms for "grant multiplication," that is, take a project proposal intended for Tri-Council and derive from it other proposals that may be directed in parallel to other funding sources.
3. We must continue to grow our capacity to aid and mentor grant-proposal writers.
4. We must continue to build a culture of accountability for grant expenditures through financial mechanisms
5. Given all our discussions about strategy and SMAs, we must revisit a Strategic Research Plan and redeposit the same for future rounds of CFI and CRC.
6. We must foster our incubator which will be commencing operations, starting small and scaling up over the subsequent two years, in collaboration with the consortium we have formed into the umbrella we have called Innovate Niagara.

## **3. PEDAGOGY**

It will be evident from our discussion about strategy and SMAs that we will begin significantly scaling up our efforts in pedagogy, innovation and scheduling. Brock spearheaded innovative pedagogies in the past, and we will do so in the future. We have recently been cited as an example of best practice in

service learning in a COU-colleagues-led study on innovative methods in teaching and learning. A number of Faculties have submitted significant proposals in these regards in the context of last Spring's budget exercise. We will have several more rounds of calls for such proposals over the course of this coming year and the following year's budget exercises, as an alternative to "one-size-fits-all", across the board cuts. A newly formed position, Vice-Provost, Teaching and Learning will devote full time effort to these initiatives as well as enhancing teaching and learning in general at Brock.

#### **4. CAPITAL PROJECTS**

As I write this report, I look forward to the official opening of the Cairns Family Health and Bio-Science Complex next week. Occupants have been in the building as of the latter part of May, although construction of two of the Complex's facilities (the level-three containment lab and animal care facility) are still incomplete and commissioning work remains to be done elsewhere in the building. It is by far the most complex building ever constructed by Brock.

As to the future home of the Marilyn I Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts, tendering will begin for the reconstruction of 198 St Paul in the Fall, with the tenders to be awarded as soon thereafter as possible. Despite the 10-month delay now expected for the city's PAC (facilities which Brock will also use), we will proceed as close to the original schedule as we can in the construction of 198 St. Paul.

Lobbying will continue for provincial funding to build a new facility for the Faculty of Business. Receipt of our SMA at Queen's Park is now an interim step in successfully securing that capital commitment.

#### **5. COU AND GOVERNMENT**

Public policy regarding the university sector in Ontario is in a state of rapid evolution at this point, driven by a Minister who is an agent of change and we have predicted the directions of that policy discussion quite accurately (*Attachment #2*). In this context, maintaining a strong and effective voice at COU is vital, as will be maintaining our normal lines of communication with various ministers and ministries. Advocacy for our new Business Faculty's building will also remain front and centre. Continuing to identify and capitalize on funding opportunities regionally, federally and provincially remains a high priority.

#### **6. OPERATING BUDGET**

We ended 2011-12 with our operating budget in balance, and we presented to the Board a balanced operating budget for 2012-13. This accomplishment is the result of major efforts over a number of years by all faculty and staff across the institution to wrestle a structural deficit to the mat. But as I wrote to the Board and Senate last winter, we are not really out of the woods. Market volatility and low interest rates continue to contribute to increased liabilities in the pension plan, which results in increased special payments being made from the University's operating budget. Providing our wet-lab researchers with the facilities in the form they need in the Cairn's complex adds to the operating expenses associated with our physical plant. (And in time, so will 198 St, Paul, when it is complete around 2014-15.) Finally, we are still saddled with a provincially determined funding regime that cannot keep up with normal, observed cost escalation in the PSE system. As we began to do last winter and spring, we will continue to move away from across-the-board budget "haircuts", and rely more heavily on innovation and strategic decisions around revenue generation and cost cutting to achieve a more sustainable financial situation.

#### **7. ADVANCEMENT, MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS**

This Fall we will successfully conclude our current Bold New Brock campaign—that is, we will most likely exceed our goal of \$75 million—and officially embark on an extended campaign with an announced stretch goal. At the same time we continue to transition to the cultivation of a new group of identified partners with whom we will begin growing our relationship.

Branding and communications will remain in "steady-as-she-goes" mode, highlighting the Cairn's Complex, and those working in it. Promotional and recruiting materials will increasingly highlight the Niagara region as an ideal destination in which to study, work, play and live.

#### **8. COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND RELATIONS WITH NIAGARA COLLEGE**

Innovate Niagara (the consortium of key regional organizations) will become a major vehicle for our contribution to the development of the community, as well as a major aspect of our relationship with the Region, supporting its efforts to redefine economic, development activities. Service-learning course enrollments and our undergraduate leaders program will continue to involve more students in the community, in addition to our established Experience Plus programming. We will commence planning for significantly more, off-campus offerings in the region.

Strengthening our relationship with Niagara College requires renewed effort. The number of joint projects with Niagara College has become quite substantial over the last five years, and continues to grow, albeit not as quickly as it might or it should.

#### **9. LABOUR RELATIONS**

Again this year we will be negotiating with some of our employees who bargain collectively. Before the end of 2012-13, negotiations will begin to renew collective agreements with:

CUPE 4207-1 (Part-time Instructors, TAs, etc),  
CUPE 4207-2 (ESL Coordinators),  
CUPE 1295 (Maintenance and Trades),  
and CUPE 2220 (Rodman Hall)

The government has well publicized expectations with respect to collective bargaining in the Broader Public Sector and has written to these organizations with respect to these expectations. A copy of the letter sent to Broader Public Sector employers by the Minister of Finance is appended to this report for your information. (*Attachment #3*)

#### **10. FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

Since June we have been working on the implementation strategy from the Deloitte finance-function review, and this year we will be busy implementing the recommendations on instituting more robust financial-function controls commensurate with an operation that has grown to its current size and complexity after ten years of very rapid growth. One of these changes is to become more self-aware throughout the university about further developing a culture of accountability. Hampering the implementation of such changes is our dependence on an old legacy, computerized, financial system that cannot be sustained. This year we must choose another and begin to implement it. To these ends, the University has been test-driving an open-source system in order to determine whether it can do the job for us (and at considerable savings compared with a proprietary system).

We will commence implementing some of the above changes in advance of the hiring of a new VP Finance and Administration, and some will wait for her/him to be appointed.

Finally, we have strategically made Tri-Council an active partner in the implementation of better controls and policies regarding research expenditures, as they too redefine their standards, policies and protocols. That being said, at any time we must expect a visit from Tri-Council to review our progress in implementing better controls.