

Provost's Advisory Committee on Building a Resilient University of Waterloo

Background and Context

The University of Waterloo is a student-centric, people-focused institution committed to twin missions of excellence in Academics and Research in the context of a thriving on-campus presence. Through the vigorous pursuit of these missions with unique approaches, the University serves and helps shape society in many ways.

By advancing our core mission commitments in Academics and Research together with our strong differentiating commitments in co-operative education and other forms of work integrated learning, innovation, application, and entrepreneurship, we have continuously demonstrated the value of the University of Waterloo as an integrator with society. Through these powerful channels we are both in touch with understanding the evolving needs of society, and committed to meeting those needs.

Our commitment to development of talent to compete in a global market includes providing access to necessary and marketable skills while completing a degree. Thus, we strive to combine talent development through excellent academic programs with: work and application experience; entrepreneurial opportunities; digital skills building and adapting to new digital tools shaping the economic and societal future; and personal development. We enable learners before, during, and after formal programs and degrees and are committed to lifelong learning; building fluid models of lifelong learning (upskilling and reskilling in an ever-evolving economy). Similarly, our intense focus on research for global impact supports cutting edge insights on humanity and innovative and entrepreneurial approaches to address the greatest challenges facing society.

This is a complex undertaking and can create numerous invaluable benefits, but also challenges of co-ordination, alignment, and efficiency for the organization, as well confusion anxiety and stress to our students and employees through the abundance of choice and attendant individual calculation of opportunity costs of what and how much can be pursued with both rigour and care. Thus, we also strive to be sensitive to the community we are creating and being supportive of our students, staff, and faculty.

Having recently gone through a long and successful period of growth and diversification that has transformed the University in many ways, we must realize that to adequately build a strong foundation for our next period of transformation, the University of Waterloo will need to understand and commit to changing some of our foundational ways of operating.

Many of our traditional processes, policies, structures, organizational features and ways of working have functioned adequately, but with the growth and transformation of the Institution have not kept pace with the updating and integration that will be necessary to

create the cross-institutional co-ordination and efficiency desired by the community of the current University of Waterloo, and to build the foundation for realizing the vision of short/medium and long-term transformation of the University.

The Strategic Plan of the University of Waterloo positions us well to lead in this transformation.

The Strategic Plan of the University of Waterloo focuses on three themes

- Talent development
- Global Research excellence
- Strong supportive and sustainable communities

Many of our current Strategic Plan priorities call for greatly enhanced cross-institutional cooperation, interdisciplinarity and de-siloing.

As we continue to implement a wide variety of initiatives driven by the strategic plan, there is agreement on a cross-institutional focus on four immediate short-term areas of cross-cutting priority:

- 1. Enhancing the student experience, particularly through coordinated approaches to wellness and thriving, and differentiating our approaches (for Undergraduate, Graduate, etc.)**
- 2. Promotion, building and sustenance of a culture of equity diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism**
- 3. Promote indigenization of campus, programs, processes and policies and enhance relations with local communities at an institutional level**
- 4. Strengthening a widening array of interdisciplinary programs and opportunities in research and education, with focus on the enabling factors for greater collaboration within and across Faculties and centres/institutes**
- 5. Refining Waterloo's internationalization agenda, through education, research, and service**

It is important to work across the institution and to allow this work to happen with less friction than currently exists. Achieving this function in ways of operating will allow us to reach our short-term cross institutional goals now, the many other cross institutional goals for our medium and long-term priorities, and ultimately for our future of Waterloo at 100.

Even pre-pandemic, the need for elements of this foundational work was well know, but like many complex organizational challenges was navigable, and only intermittently and episodically acknowledged, while not addressed systematically because of the variety of interesting and successful initiatives and opportunities that exist to attract the institutional focus and attention. However, the pandemic has been a galvanizer of our attention to operational co-ordination and strategic importance. Indeed, the greater context of the leadership importance of universities in general, and the University of Waterloo in particular, as essential, relevant, functional, and sustainable structures in society have been exposed and tested by the challenges of the global pandemic. Of course, many of the challenges faced by universities have been shared widely across: the

PSE sector, government, industry, and society in general. There is a real opportunity for us to harness the lessons learned from the COVID experience and our responses to it, in order to improve systems and processes to better contribute to overcoming our ongoing shared challenges of many different sorts in the transformative co-evolution of the University of Waterloo together with other universities, government, industry and society.

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To successfully implement our short and medium-term strategic goals and to enable a long-term vision for a vibrant and thriving campus of the future, there is a need to more comprehensively address foundational organizational, planning, and operational features that currently present some impediments for this transformational approach. Cross institutional and inside unit coordination is needed, requiring resilience in the face of ongoing challenges as we continue to offer most of our academic programming predominantly in person. While some of this work was underway prior to COVID-19, there is opportunity to gather and apply useful lessons learned in areas across the Institution from the COVID-19 experience, and our responses to it.

To address this need, a *Provost's Advisory Committee on Building a Resilient University of Waterloo* will be commissioned. This committee will be Chaired by Mary Wells, Dean of Engineering and Co-chaired by Norah McRae, Associate Provost, Co-operative and Experiential Education (CEE), and Jeff Casello, Associate Vice President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs (GSPA).

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Chair and Co-Chairs of the committee will first work with the VPAP as an Executive committee to further articulate these terms of reference, and to discuss: the resource needs of the committee; the size and structure of the committee; and accountabilities, timelines, and other logistics. The core committee will be populated with leaders from broad portfolios of the University with insights on policies, guidelines and procedures in key capacities.

The committee will in turn undertake broad consultation with existing bodies such as Executive Council, the Council of Academic Leaders, Deans Council, Info Group, and with constituencies in groups across the university.

Rather than functioning in isolation, the core committee will identify opportunities for deep work and distributed workload through subgroups commissioned with appropriate membership to take on specific tasks or projects within identified scopes of work. For instance, the Workforce Planning Committee has been identified as a subgroup with an immediate mandate of defining guiding principles of the future of work and providing recommendations on work options that align with those principles.

To ensure coordination and avoid the duplication of efforts, the Committee will be an integrator and amplifier of important efforts currently underway and will identify gaps and initiate action as the originator of new activity.

The committee will be aware that there are numerous other processes underway addressing aspects of interest that intersect with the scope of this committee. For instance, the university is undertaking a review of its budget model and processes and is seeking to build an integrated planning process to bring together academic planning, academic support planning, infrastructure planning, capital planning, and human resources/hiring planning with the budget planning process. In addition, a number of other individual and specific reviews and advisory projects are underway, such as the data as a strategic resource project, continuous improvement projects, admissions review process project, digital learning strategy, and workforce planning processes. The committee will seek to learn from these other committees and processes and to support their work; hopefully distilling best practices and outcomes for general application to other specific issues in the distillation of aligned recommendations.

Recognizing that the Strategic plan, and other visioning processes are underway, including the futures framework, the committee will focus on identifying and reconciling our foundational operational and process current states with what will be required structurally to drive our strategic objectives forward and enable the future success of a vibrant University of Waterloo. The committee will also recommend alignment with communications to ensure broad understanding across the University for the required foundational operational and process shifts.

A broad understanding and perpetuation of the shared vision, mission, values, and priorities of the institution across its many levels of organization and stakeholder communities is desirable and should be a focus of the team's work in both process and outcomes, as it will ultimately drive what we offer and how we offer it through a predominately on-campus experience.

Any recommendations regarding the building of the University of the Future will be aligned with the principles of our mission and will be focused on enabling our current and future cross-institutional focus areas.

The plans/recommendations developed must focus on the desired outcomes of ensuring:

- Modernized processes, procedures and policies that bring transparency, order, efficiency, and opportunity to support the goals and priorities of the Institution, while maintaining standards of quality.
- Frameworks for operating that incent formal and informal interdisciplinary and cross institutional approaches and outcomes desirable in our academic and research missions by reducing existing burdens and barriers and not creating new ones.
- Both short and long-term challenges to the new normal are scoped and addressed.
- Structure and organizational clarity, and synergy. Lessons emerging from non-canonical working structures/working across traditional boundaries and structures, and suggestions for enhancement. Focus on networks, shared

responsibilities and accountabilities for outcomes/impacts—shared priorities, shared incentives, and shared accolades, as an alternative to traditional line responsibility organizational structures only. The Committee will have a lens of why things are done the way they are when there are alternative more efficient and clear ways.

To position the work of the committee in the current operational reality of UW acknowledging the transition back to on-campus activity and to bring depth to focus, three phases of Building a Resilient University of Waterloo may be considered. The three phased approach will not pause work underway but will integrate and amplify ongoing activity. The urgency of COVID-19 recovery and other initiatives is anticipated to benefit from a more coordinated interface.

- 1. Return to Campus and Workforce Planning**
- 2. Identify Innovations and gaps learned from COVID-19; leverage opportunities and address gaps to augment our pre-pandemic knowledge of innovations and gaps in our function and operations**
- 3. Build on Innovations, train for further resilience, and create a flexible and vibrant campus**

As the Chair and Co-chairs will be asked to develop workplans, the following are not intended as exhaustive lists, but will offer high level understanding of key activity and anticipated outcomes.

- 1. Return to Campus and Workforce Planning**
(Already well underway with successful F2021, W2022 and planned S2022 terms with significant in person academic and research work, and service delivery)
 - Continue to identify and address impediments that contribute to sensitivities of students, staff, faculty in full return to their in-person activities re: academics/instruction/classrooms, research spaces, office/desk spaces, health concerns, family arrangements, social/behavioural anxieties and concerns, general planning, and change/planning fatigue, etc.
 - Clearly establish what the new norms are regarding space, personal space, meetings, hygiene/health and safety, decorum, and basic norms around work/learn environment.
 - Throughout Summer 2022, continue with workforce planning and execution of return to work on-campus plans and with ongoing planning for the subsequent phases of focus ahead through late 2022 and 2023 and beyond.
- 2. Identify Innovations and gaps learned from COVID-19; leverage opportunities and address gaps**
 - The team will work with academic and operational leaders to identify positive COVID-19 adaptation and recovery-related innovations (e.g., innovative teaching/academic practices, online/hybrid service delivery models, effective communications, new non- canonical working groups focused on cross-unit issues or outcomes, etc.)

- Leveraging awareness of positive innovations and learnings/lessons identified before or because of COVID-19 will inform renovation of a variety of operations, student services, academic programs/development, student, staff, and faculty development and supports, etc.
- In addition to the positive learnings from pre-COVID and COVID, the team will work with leaders to identify the gaps and inefficiencies that have been revealed pre-COVID and through COVID-19 in academic and operational areas that need to be addressed to provide the foundation for transformational change (e.g., infrastructure and space management, IT systems and infrastructure, academic integrity related issues, policy and procedural inefficiencies/inadequacies/deficiencies, financial vulnerabilities and risk management, Digital Learning Strategy void, teaching technology/instructor training gaps, graduate students as student and as employees dichotomy, etc.), student and employee group relationships, creating culture – in-person environment/remote environment, etc.).
- An important task is the sharing of information across units so that the best practices and experiences can be integrated and incorporated where possible across units to best act on opportunities and alleviate challenges in operations and academics. Ultimately, practices and policies should be revised to facilitate best applicability and utility for current conditions and aspirations, and to help prepare for future challenges.

Implementation will begin for key elements in 2022/2023 academic year but will be ongoing.

3. Build on Innovations, train for further resilience and create flexible and vibrant campus.

- Grow consensus around new teaching, research, work, and operational/organizational practices. Iterate as necessary, address concerns, aiming to build engagement and culture as a result of the process/approach taken, as well as the positive outcomes.
- On the basis of growing consensus and culture change, advance revised and new policies and procedures, and develop plans and planning processes helpful for dealing with current and possible future operational threats.
- Adapt procedures to allow for greater flexibility (courses, staff, work, workspace, etc.) and to improve on gaps identified for sub-optimal procedures/practices (workflows, digital strategy and automation, eliminating redundancy and internal friction, systems and data integration, etc.
- Adopt planning tools suitable for regular review and revision to mitigate strategic and operational risks.

Continuing timeline, building on implementation of work beginning in 2022/2023 academic year, but will be ongoing.