
Mission and Core Values
2020–2025 Strategic Plan
Strategic Pillars
Moving Our Plan Forward

RECREATION AND LEISURE STUDIES

STRATEGIC PLAN

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UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

Department of Recreation
and Leisure Studies

LAUNCHING THE PLAN



Welcome to the strategic plan of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies (RLS) at the University of Waterloo. We launched this plan following our department's fiftieth anniversary, an exciting time of rejuvenation and renewal as we push forward with our evolution as the preeminent department of its kind.

RECREATION AND LEISURE STUDIES

STRATEGIC PLAN

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Since its inception in 1967, RLS has developed into a vibrant academic unit with rich programs of study and world-class research. RLS has always pursued academic excellence through interdisciplinary scholarship, innovative pedagogy, and creative methods of exploration to address issues and opportunities of relevance to Canada and the broader global society. As it was over half a century ago, RLS remains committed to the advancement of quality of life. Moreover, RLS continues to lead and find solutions for society's greatest challenges. Looking to the future, RLS aims to leverage this plan, not to maintain the status quo, but rather to propel the department forward toward greater impact.

Our intentions are bold. While our international rankings confirm our place among the finest allied programs in the world, leadership, we know, requires purposeful action. Leadership demands that we build on our existing foundational strengths to take us to new heights. As this plan makes clear, we will pursue excellence through high-impact teaching practices and meaningful student experience; carrying out relevant research; supporting a flourishing culture and thriving team; and engaging with community and establishing meaningful partnerships. Today's rapidly changing landscape does not allow us to rest on our past achievements. We want to have an even greater impact. This plan is our public declaration of what the world should expect from RLS over the next five years, and it sets the course for another 50 years of success.

With this in mind, our plan is multi-layered. Some of the objectives envisioned here can be implemented immediately; others will unfold over the course of the next five years. Either way, our plan is meant to empower and enable every member of RLS to contribute toward achieving its desired outcomes. Its implementation depends on all of us to take action. Together, we will push this great department to a place of unprecedented leadership. Together, we will build a better world.

MISSION

Our commitment and ambition are anchored in a mission and foundational core values that guide our vision and direction into the future. Our mission is our fundamental reason for being. It is broad, enduring, and inspirational:

**WE LEAD THROUGH OUR
CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF
LEISURE, BROADLY DEFINED,
AND ITS RELATIONSHIP
TO INDIVIDUAL AND
COMMUNITY WELL-BEING.**



Our core values are fundamental principles of our department that guide our behavior and help us understand what matters in our day-to-day actions at work. RLS commits to the following core values as it strives to make a positive difference in the lives of our students, staff, faculty, alumni, and community partners:

CORE VALUES

EXCELLENCE

We focus on excellence every day. We strive for high standards in teaching, research, and service. We recognize the contributions of our team in these areas.

COMMUNITY

We care for one another and treat each other with respect. We are inclusive, supportive, kind, and fair in our interactions with others.

COLLABORATION

In working together and with community partners, we care about diverse voices. We are curious and explore different perspectives in an open-minded and respectful way. We work together to seek innovation in our work.

AUTONOMY

We value flexibility in our work that allows us to be responsive and nimble. We have the freedom to explore, think, and innovate. We are inspired by creativity and curiosity in our work.

COURAGE

We are courageous and bold. We create new ways of looking at the world and challenge existing practices and approaches to find inspiration in what we do.

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STRATEGIC PLAN

The following strategic plan includes the vision, strategic pillars, strategic objectives and initiatives for the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies. These areas create the pathway forward over the next five years. Our vision aspires to capture the future state of the department. It intends to be directional and serve as a guide for choosing current and future courses of action.

VISION

**ADVANCING WELL-BEING
THROUGH LEISURE TO CREATE
A JUST AND HEALTHY WORLD.**



STRATEGIC PILLARS

Our strategic pillars represent key opportunities for transformational change in how we work.

These cross-cutting thematic areas enhance our academic impact in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. Our vision and objectives will be achieved through the following strategic pillars:

PILLAR 1

EXCELLENCE THROUGH HIGH-IMPACT TEACHING PRACTICES AND MEANINGFUL STUDENT EXPERIENCE

PILLAR 2

RELEVANT RESEARCH

PILLAR 3

FLOURISHING CULTURE AND THRIVING TEAM

PILLAR 4

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

Strategy also includes strategic objectives and initiatives. Strategic objectives broadly define our strategies to support our achievement of the vision. Strategic objectives are approximately three years in length, more tangible in nature, and require year-by-year initiatives to achieve them.



EXCELLENCE THROUGH HIGH-IMPACT TEACHING PRACTICES AND MEANINGFUL STUDENT EXPERIENCES

PILLAR 1

With an already solid foundation in place, RLS will build on our program goals to prepare students for their future careers while teaching them to think critically, excel in their chosen fields, embrace the importance of lifelong learning, and engage with the constantly changing and increasingly diverse world around them. To be a program of choice for undergraduate and graduate students, RLS must provide an academic and university experience that positively transforms our students' abilities, understanding, and impact on the world. Accordingly, we will ensure that learning experiences in our department are of the highest quality, accessible, and based on a practice of continuous improvement and innovation in teaching. RLS will support learning environments that transform our students, nurture their talents, expand their knowledge and skills, and enable their success. In RLS, we will strive to answer students' intellectual and professional aspirations by working with external partners and alumni to enhance learning experiences across our program plans. We will seek and sustain students' capacity for success. We will commit to creating opportunities for our students to feel more included, engaged and better supported during their time at Waterloo.

OBJECTIVE 1

Advance curricular innovation for each undergraduate academic plan through equitable and affirming experiential and work-integrated learning.

Lead: Associate Chair of Undergraduate Studies and Undergraduate Committee

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES YEAR 1:

- > Identify issues and opportunities related to undergraduate curriculum.
- > Identify relevant partners and processes to advance current and potential academic plans.
- > Identify potential future programs and growth opportunities.
- > Highlight and promote curricular innovations by RLS faculty.
- > Re-evaluate Learning Enhancement Funds allocation.
- > Develop a strategy to enhance co-op experience and retention.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES MOVING FORWARD:

- > Develop Community Consultation Panel for each undergraduate academic plan.
- > Promote established relationships with external organizations.
- > Advocate for innovative pedagogy and teaching supports, including ongoing systems, nimble process, classroom design, and technology. Consider in consultation with CTE liaison and Teaching Fellows.
- > Explore models of research engagement for undergraduate students.
- > Refine plan level learning outcomes for all undergraduate degree programs.
- > Explore hiring a staff person dedicated to supporting experiential learning opportunities.

OBJECTIVE 2

Review and evaluate all graduate programs.

Lead: Associate Chair of Graduate Studies and Graduate Studies Committee

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES YEAR 1:

- > Identify issues and opportunities related to graduate curriculum.
- > Develop faculty group and consultation panel for evaluating coursework Master of Arts degree program.
- > Identify relevant partners and processes to advance current and potential academic plans.
- > Explore an online coursework Master degree program.
- > Identify potential future programs and growth opportunities.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES MOVING FORWARD:

- > Refine plan-level learning outcomes for all degree programs.
- > Explore online options for course offerings.

OBJECTIVE 3

Enhance wellness and sense of belonging among students.

Lead: Associate Chairs and Respective Committees

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES YEAR 1:

- > Review the President's Advisory Committee on Student Mental Health Report and identify departmental priorities to enhance the well-being of students.
- > Partner with Campus Wellness and Teaching Fellows to help identify ways the department can advance the principles of the Okanagan Charter.
- > Explore ways to strengthen the circle of care within the department.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES MOVING FORWARD:

- > Identify and facilitate training opportunities for faculty and staff related to student wellness to commit to becoming an informed, educated departmental team.
- > Explore new ways to enhance student engagement and connection to the Department.
- > Make a conscious, focused effort to learn about the lived experiences of diverse students and how best to build a sense of belonging that is rooted in deep understanding and awareness of their needs.

PILLAR 2

PILLAR 2

RELEVANT RESEARCH

Our research focus is central to our identity. Grounded in strong theoretical and methodological foundations, RLS will continue to support mentorship, scholarship, curiosity, and creativity. We will continue to encourage diversity in perspective and approach, and empower our people to be bold and make imaginative leaps toward as yet undetermined futures. We will continue to leverage our interdisciplinary strengths to enhance faculty and student research impact. All told, we derive strength from the pursuit of complex ideas, the value of multiple perspectives, and a commitment to scholarship and research that asks the difficult questions needed to create a better future for everyone.

To build on our strengths, we need to expand the reach of our message. Efforts to promote our research and disseminate it, including leveraging social media platforms, will expose new audiences to the important work we do. We also need to engage in a process to see where our interests are aligned to harness our collaborative potential. Where critical mass exists in areas of scholarship, we can work together to heighten the opportunities for collaboration to enlarge our thinking, open up funding opportunities, and increase our collective research impact.



OBJECTIVE 1

Promote our scholarship in ways that make our work more accessible, relevant, and essential to students, faculty/staff, alumni, general public, and other fields.

Lead: Executive Committee

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES YEAR 1:

- › Facilitate and promote ongoing sharing of research in multiple venues.
- › Raise the profile of RLS research through social media.
- › Identify constraints on faculty research support and identify potential solutions.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES MOVING FORWARD:

- › Strengthen ties with media sources for research dissemination.
- › Explore strategies for leading open access scholarship in our fields of study.

OBJECTIVE 2

Identify and leverage areas of strategic strength.

Lead: Department Chair

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES YEAR 1:

- › Identify Strategic Research Groups and develop their mandate, aims, and objectives.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES MOVING FORWARD:

- › Explore and leverage resources to enable success of faculty.
- › Explore ways to promote and support student research.



PILLAR 3

PILLAR 3

FLOURISHING CULTURE AND THRIVING TEAM

We envision a bold future built on our tradition of excellence that will require us to harness our amazing people's talents to be world-class in every dimension of our core purpose. Undoubtedly, our most powerful asset is our people: our faculty members who lead our teaching and research; our remarkable undergraduate and graduate students who learn and inspire us; our alumni who represent RLS around the globe; and our staff, administration, and community partners. Together, these stakeholders make RLS a diverse department in which we thrive as individuals, peers, and citizens.

This plan reflects our commitment to our health, learning, and success, without which we cannot fulfil our collective potential. We want to inspire the very best in our people, and recognize the importance of maintaining a flourishing culture to support the individuals and the communities with whom we work. We will promote a culture that enhances well-being and mental health, fostering connections and resilience across students, faculty, and staff. We will champion diversity and ensure it is better reflected in our personnel and student body, for diversity enriches us all and exposes us to a broader range of perspectives. And we will develop the skills of potential leaders from our incredible talent pool to prepare them for future leadership positions. There are good examples of our positive culture, to be sure, but we must continue our efforts to make even more progress.

OBJECTIVE 1

Cultivate vibrant relationships and a culture of well-being for faculty, staff, and students.

Lead: Executive Committee

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES YEAR 1:

- › Host an intentional social event each term.
- › Create a broader awareness of opportunities for improved self-care and well-being for faculty, staff, and students.
- › Use communication tools/platforms to better promote all forms of success/academic excellence.
- › Promote awareness of policies that support work/school/life balance.
- › Evaluate current and future staffing needs of the department to promote staff wellness and advancement.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES MOVING FORWARD:

- › Participate in advocacy for life-work balance issues (UW/government).
- › Identify, clarify, and communicate processes for addressing student, faculty, and staff concerns with respect to their well-being.
- › Enhance student life for undergraduates and graduates.
- › Revisit addendum for faculty performance evaluation regularly.

OBJECTIVE 2

Increase diversity in the department.

Lead: Department Chair

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES YEAR 1:

- › Commit resources to improve representation of diverse identities in speakers and recruitment materials.
- › Create a committee to develop and implement a department-specific approach to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations.
- › Develop relationships with Indigenous communities on campus and beyond with the intent of Indigenizing the Department.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES MOVING FORWARD:

- › Hire Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Colour faculty and staff.
- › Coordinate continuing education on matters of equity and inclusion.

OBJECTIVE 3

Develop a culture that fosters leadership capacity among faculty, staff, and students.

Lead: Executive Committee

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES YEAR 1:

- › Explore and identify opportunities for dynamic student leadership development opportunities (i.e., Student Success Office, professional associations, research networks).

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES MOVING FORWARD:

- › Explore best practices on campus and at other institutions for academic leadership development.
- › Staff cross-training, succession planning, and absence support.
- › Encourage awareness of leadership training and support opportunities.
- › Identify supports needed by faculty in leadership positions to thrive in their roles.

PILLAR 4

PILLAR 4

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

The wicked problems we face as a society call for collaboration, listening, and a capacity for perspective taking. Accordingly, RLS sees the extraordinary value of collaboration in our academic endeavours. In a world characterized by complex societal challenges and heightened public expectations, community engagement and partnerships forge the conditions required to coalesce people, ideas, and actions, even where these efforts challenge our own departmental norms. We will work hard to remove barriers and, where appropriate, establish mechanisms to encourage further and sustained collaboration. In many ways, the outcomes of our work will be seen in how the world is changed for the better through contact with RLS.

We aim to work with strategic partners to find solutions to shared problems. We engage with diverse partners to conduct and translate learning and research into evidence-informed policy, improved professional practices, changed attitudes, and healthier, more compassionate communities. Through these efforts and more, we will continue to grow as an academic unit that endeavours to create and disseminate

knowledge and scholarship to advance individual and community well-being. We will work with Alumni Relations with targeted efforts to broaden and deepen engagement through experiences that cultivate pride, empower personal growth, support professional development, and enable contribution. We will seek to earn support and trust from our partners because of the quality of our work and the benefits we bring as a leading academic unit founded on more than 50 years of excellence in teaching, learning, research, and service.

OBJECTIVE 1

Strengthen departmental brand.

Lead: Executive Committee

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES YEAR 1:

- > Consult with Marketing and Undergraduate Recruitment (MUR) about changing the department name.
- > Consult with MUR about the titles for undergraduate and graduate program plan names.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES MOVING FORWARD:

- > Develop a strategy to communicate brand value to key stakeholders.
- > Engage constituents in department (re)branding efforts.

OBJECTIVE 2

Nurture strong reciprocal community and alumni relationships to give back and ensure departmental relevance.

Lead: Executive Committee

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES YEAR 1:

- > Identify key professional, academic, campus, and community groups with which the department ought to establish strategic relationships.
- > Identify and support faculty members as liaisons with strategically identified associations.
- > Build and maintain respectful relationships with Indigenous communities on and off campus.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES MOVING FORWARD:

- > Educate faculty about LinkedIn and its uses/features for alumni engagement and networking.
- > Partner with Alumni Relations to host an annual event(s) to foster connection to the department and alumni networking.
- > Identify opportunities to sustain meaningful relationships with alumni and promote learning over their lifetime.

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MOVING OUR PLAN FORWARD

We will continue to seek input from students, faculty, staff, alumni, and partners as we press ahead with this plan.

We will track our progress against the objectives of our strategic plan and will check and revise our direction and focus in response to changes both within and beyond the department. Ongoing discussion around prioritization, dependencies, and capacity will be critical. We commit to ensuring that our people and teams are appropriately supported and connected in the various initiatives that constitute this strategic plan.

We have chosen a bold and ambitious course as RLS enters its next 50 years. We are confident that through building on our remarkable past, we can lean into new challenges and an exciting future.

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