

STRATEGIC PLAN

RENISON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

2024 - 2027



RENISON
UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE

AFFILIATED WITH THE **UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO**

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TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

With gratitude, we acknowledge that Renison University College is located on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Hodinohsyó:ni, and Attawandaran (Neutral) Peoples, which is situated on the Haldimand Tract, land granted to the Six Nations that includes ten kilometres on each side of the Grand River from mouth to source.

Our active work toward reconciliation takes place in all corners of our campus through research, learning, teaching, community building, and outreach.

We are guided by the work of our Anti-Racism and Decolonization SpokesCouncil, and the University of Waterloo [Office of Indigenous Relations](#).

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Post Covid we are experiencing seismic shifts in the tectonic plates which hold up the world of higher education. Notable among these are: funding challenges; the moral imperative we affirm in re-making our world with an EDIA lens; the desire among students for greater diversity in learning modes; the impact of AI on teaching, learning and evaluation practices; the rapidly evolving demographics of migration and population distribution across the globe in the wake of war, climate change impacts, and economic imbalance including a lack of food, housing, and personal security for many.

What time is it in the world of higher education? If we read the signs of the times around us, we must say- It's time for change. It is a well-tested maxim that the only constant is change. And yet change is one of the most challenging of human experiences to embrace. University systems are not designed for rapid and constant change. However, adapt we must, if we are to respond to the challenges named above in a meaningful way.

The image of the oak tree and the willow comes to mind. The oak tree lives on average 100-300 years. A willow, on the other hand, lives only on average 40-70 years. When I consider the university sector, I associate it with the mighty oak: deep roots, strength, constancy, stability. However, as we know, in a raging storm, the ancient oak is more likely to split and be uprooted than the willow which bends rather than breaking. The willow is flexible and open: the wind blows through it and not against it. Its strength lies in its flexibility. As attached as I am to the oak, I understand these times call us to the willow; these times call for strength manifest in adaptive change rather than stability and old forms of power.

One of my most treasured possessions is my father's old desk- it is made from very heavy oak. Moving it is an enormous challenge. No one would build a desk to last for generations from a willow. However, the willow is perfectly suited for the weaving of a basket. Baskets are easily transportable, easy to carry and can carry a lot! The stronger university/university college today will be one which can, and chooses to, evolve through adaptive change. This will mean a re-imagining of educational, inter-personal, structural, and financial models. Strength through flexibility must be our mantra.

The Strategic Plan which follows has been a broadly and deeply consultative process which has involved all sectors of the Renison community. In it, we find a strategic confirmation of our understanding of the Renison mission. It intentionally does not elaborate the specifics of an operational plan- that is not its purpose. What we understand, however, is that the operational plans which will be needed to express this articulation of mission and goals will demand flexibility, adaptive forms, risk, and creativity to realize our goals and become the Renison of the future. In short, this Strategic Plan provides the foundation upon which adaptive change can and will be made. I do entirely trust that the inherent creativity which flourishes at Renison will inspire the realization of our mission in a new way, for the already here new day.



Wendy L. Fletcher
President and Vice-Chancellor
Renison University College

MEETING THE MOMENT CHALLENGES WE FACE & OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

As Renison looks toward the coming three years, we also reflect on the internal and external challenges and opportunities ahead of us. Being deliberate in how we approach these challenges and opportunities allows us to better prepare and respond to them. It also allows us to take advantage of the opportunities that may be presented by these challenges. The combination of challenges and opportunities creates a unique moment in time for Renison. Meeting this moment with determination, tenacity, and optimism will allow Renison to be more prepared as we boldly step into our future.

Funding

Renison shares the funding challenges experienced by other Ontario post-secondary institutions. The Ontario Blue Ribbon Panel Report tabled recently identified the 2019 tuition rollback and subsequent tuition freeze as a significant factor undermining the fiscal sustainability of universities. Ontario universities currently receive one of the smallest per capita grants for domestic students of any province in the country. The result is that nearly 50% of all Ontario universities, including the University of Waterloo (UW) and Renison, are currently reporting significant budget deficits.

Pandemic impact

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Renison immediately pivoted to remote work and online learning. The number of students from other countries enrolled to study at UW dropped, negatively affecting the number of students enrolled in Renison's English Language Institute. At the same time, degree programs saw an increase in the number of international students who were able to learn remotely from their home

countries. There were significant financial implications due to the closure of Renison's residence for a full year, also impacting projected revenue for food services and parking.

The overall decline in enrollment of both domestic and international students due to the pandemic has impacted Renison financially and compounded preexisting funding challenges.

Student, staff and faculty mental health and well-being

The pandemic has contributed to an increase in mental health issues and a decline in well-being amongst students, staff and faculty. The coming years will see an increase in the number of secondary students entering university who have experienced a disruption to their secondary schooling. This disruption will likely continue to impact their academic achievement, mental health, and well-being.

Student recruitment

For years, post-secondary institutions have experienced challenges to recruiting for Arts and Humanities faculties. As an Arts-related college, Renison will continue to face the challenge of envisioning the future role of our programs in relation to the STEM programs for which UW is most widely known.

Senior administration recruitment

For years now, the provincial government has frozen executive compensation. Staff and faculty salaries continue to increase while administrative salaries have not. This will worsen the challenge of hiring and retaining senior administrators.

Aging infrastructure

Post-secondary institutions across Ontario are suffering from aging infrastructure resulting from high levels of deferred

maintenance and declining IT systems. Renison facilities—including residences, public areas, student spaces, meeting rooms, and classrooms—are in need of refreshing, upgrading, and expanding.

Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action

Renison faces the challenges and opportunities created by implementing the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Calls to Action related to post-secondary education, along with the need to Indigenize and decolonize the college. This entails changes to programs, curriculum, policy, appointments, and admissions plus a cultural shift in learning and working environments. This work must be considered alongside the TRC's 10 principles of reconciliation and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Equity, diversity, and inclusion

The Ontario population continues to become more diverse, and society continues to be more inclusive of people with disabilities and those from 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. This creates both challenges and opportunities for Renison to diversify its student population and workforce, create equitable human resource policies and practices, and foster inclusive and safe learning and working environments which foster a sense of belonging. This will allow everyone to be their authentic selves, contribute their best, and get the most out of their time at Renison.

Renison has also signed the Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Higher Education. Renison will continue to implement the Charter's actions and to be held accountable for achieving concrete outcomes.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS & ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

Members of the Renison community were given multiple opportunities to provide their input into the development of the new strategic plan. This work was guided by a Steering Committee that include representation from students, faculty, staff, and administration.

Online survey

Members of the Renison community were able to provide their input through an anonymous online survey. The online survey gathered input from the following participants:

- 67 students (current or former)
- 49 staff
- 36 faculty
- 6 administrators
- 19 other members of the Renison community (including former staff, faculty, and Board members)

Small group discussions

In addition to the online survey, members of the Renison community were able to provide input through small group discussions. Discussion groups were organized by role and allowed participants to come together with their colleagues and share perspectives as part of a broader conversation.

Over 120 students, staff, faculty, people leaders, and Board members participated in these discussions. Participants included:

- 58 students
- 7 faculty
- 24 staff and instructors
- 5 people leaders
- 8 MDG members
- 20 Board members

Community Cafes

Once draft priorities were developed, members of the Renison community were encouraged to review them and provide input. The draft priorities and directives were posted on the Renison website and circulated by email to all constituency groups, including students, staff, faculty, donors, alumni, and Board members, via an online, anonymous feedback platform.

Additionally, large placards featuring the priorities were produced and posted in the cafeteria. This allowed students, faculty, and staff to engage in conversation about the process and priorities for the coming three years. In addition to the provision of sticky notes and pens, to engage directly with the strategic plan, each placard included a QR code that led directly to an online, anonymous feedback platform.

PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

The following principles guided how the Renison community was engaged to develop the strategic plan:

- **Student centred:** The consultation process centred student voices. It provided multiple opportunities for students to participate and prioritized the input received from students in the analysis.
- **Inclusive:** The language and processes used ensured the consultations were inclusive of people from diverse communities, backgrounds, and identities. Multiple methods were used to ensure that members of the Renison community were able to provide meaningful input in ways that are comfortable for them.
- **Brave spaces:** The consultations were facilitated in a way to create brave spaces in which students, staff, faculty, administration, and others could openly participate and share their input. This was done by welcoming multiple viewpoints and the full and equitable participation of people from all social identity groups and roles at the college.
- **Accessible:** Participation and accessibility were increased by reducing engagement barriers.
- **Meaningful engagement:** The feedback received through the engagement process was honoured and used to inform the development of the new strategic plan.
- **Transparency:** Renison was open and transparent in the development of the strategic plan. The process included communicating back to the members of the college community what was heard during the consultations.

MISSION

Renison aims to foster inclusive living, learning, and working communities empowered by excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service to educate and prepare highly skilled graduates for success and contribution to the world.

SHARED COMMITMENTS

Guided by our Shared Commitments and framed through our vision for a just and sustainable college, Renison is committed to ...

- Creating and sustaining a healthy workplace: We will act with integrity in our actions and choices.
- Inclusivity, equity, and fairness: We will respect each other and work towards a just environment at Renison University College.
- Operating with mutual goodwill: We will trust each other's competence and best intentions.
- Transparency, accountability, and mutual understanding: We will communicate clearly and responsibly.
- Holding the responsibilities of our roles: We will work toward our common objectives through respectful collaboration.
- Following policies, procedures, and processes that reflect Renison's Shared Commitments and Institutional Mission.

PRIORITY 1: NURTURE TRANSFORMATIVE STUDENT LEADERS

Renison's learning and living environments nurture dynamic students who flourish as purposeful individuals with the capacity to make a difference in the world.

We will do this by:

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- 1.1** Intentionally recruiting and appropriately supporting students and residents from under-represented communities. These students will then enrich the Renison environment through their diversity of culture, experience, socio-economic background, orientation, and community of origin.

 - 1.2** Continuing to develop and improve student support systems which will enable Renison to nurture student success, health, and well-being, and reflect the needs of the diverse student population.

 - 1.3** Continuing to offer and enhance training opportunities for student leaders and opportunities for peer leadership and student employment at Renison College.

 - 1.4** Continuing to strengthen our work with international students in support of the university's internationalization goals.

 - 1.5** Providing innovative courses and programs that helps to prepare students for the world in which they live.

PRIORITY 2: EMBED INDIGENIZATION, DECOLONIZATION, AND INCLUSION, DIVERSITY, AND EQUITY THROUGHOUT ALL ASPECTS OF RENISON LIFE

We value the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of our students, staff, and faculty. We will cultivate a foundation of Indigenization and inclusion, diversity, and equity that is core to our curriculum, community expectations, policies, and practices. This will help Renison move toward an environment in which everyone feels welcome, that they belong, and that they are able to contribute their best. We will also foster safe and inclusive living, learning, and working environments so that all students, staff, and faculty can thrive at Renison.

We will do this by:

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- 2.1** Ensuring our policies and practices are in compliance with the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* and supporting the full inclusion of students, staff, and faculty.

 - 2.2** Effectively addressing issues of harassment, discrimination, and inappropriate behaviours when they occur and holding people accountable for harmful behaviours.

 - 2.3** Continuing our decolonizing and Indigenization efforts. This includes the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) Calls to Action regarding higher education and developing intentional relationships with Indigenous communities.

 - 2.4** Developing and implementing a multi-year Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan that addresses future recruitment and hiring practices.

 - 2.5** Creating opportunities for students, staff, and faculty to engage with colleagues across difference.

 - 2.6** Continuing to re-assess and redistribute Renison-funded scholarships and awards to serve equity-deserving student communities.

 - 2.7** Offering unique supports that international students need to thrive at Renison and the University of Waterloo.

PRIORITY 3: FOSTER A STRONG, INCLUSIVE, AND HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Our community is what makes Renison strong. We will continue to foster positive living, learning, and working environments where all members of the Renison community feel a sense of belonging and in which they are recognized, valued, and respected. We will foster a community that engages students, staff, and faculty and allows them to contribute fully and authentically to the work of Renison.

We will do this by:

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- 3.1** Developing and strengthening relationships with recent alumni and cultivating their engagement in events, activities, and student career development.

 - 3.2** Fostering more inclusive living, learning, and working environments in which members of the Renison community are able to participate authentically, with particular attention placed on inclusion of marginalized voices.

 - 3.3** Creating a culture that promotes and supports the emotional, cultural, spiritual, physical, and mental well-being of Renison’s students, staff, and faculty.

 - 3.4** Fostering a culture of collaboration that enhances communication and focuses on solving problems and challenges.

 - 3.5** Applying a continuous lens of environmental impact and sustainability to all operations and practices of the organization.

**PRIORITY 4:
CONTINUE TO BE AN INSPIRATIONAL PLACE OF
TEACHING, RESEARCH, AND LEARNING**

Through our unique educational programs, our students will develop the knowledge and skills to contribute positively to an ever-changing world. Renison will continue to recruit, nurture, and retain diverse top-tier employees who are committed to offering adaptive education in rapidly changing local and global contexts. Renison will also offer innovative degrees and community programs that engage the world in the social, political, linguistic, cultural, and spiritual domains.

We will do this by:

- 4.1** Strengthening and revitalizing existing programs by reviewing and refreshing content to address emerging topics.

- 4.2** Adapting and refining programming responsive to the data-informed needs of students, both current and future, in keeping with our core academic strengths and expertise.

- 4.3** Continuing to strengthen institutional capacity toward excellence in teaching, learning, and research.

- 4.4** Maintaining our commitment to serving and enriching the full student experience and ensuring that in addition to academic and professional growth, our students are able to explore spiritual, psychological, and inner maturity and development.

- 4.5** Expanding opportunities to support faculty, instructors, and students in their research and career goals and contributing to new knowledge development by sharing and advancing knowledge through a variety of communication channels.

- 4.6** Strengthening relationships with community partners to support student experiential learning opportunities.

**PRIORITY 5:
ESTABLISH INSTITUTIONAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Renison will make decisions with the long-term sustainability of its human, financial, environmental and infrastructural resources as key priorities in its effort to continue to be an inspirational and inclusive place for living, teaching, working and learning.

We will do this by:

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- 5.1** Expanding and diversifying sources of revenue, particularly in the areas of grants, fundraising, endowment growth, investments, partnerships, and program development.

 - 5.2** Ensuring that the College’s facilities, including technology infrastructure, residence rooms, public areas, student spaces, meeting rooms, and classrooms are maintained, upgraded, and expanded as necessary to meet the needs of our students, staff, faculty, and instructors.

 - 5.3** Identifying and implementing opportunities for efficiencies and optimization of processes and resources.

 - 5.4** Ensuring that our fundraising activities reflect the identified needs of the organization.

 - 5.5** Developing financial models that support the evolving strategic program directions of the organization and push them towards long-term sustainability.

WHAT'S NEXT? IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

Renison University College will bring this strategic plan to life by developing and implementing departmental operational plans for the coming three-years. These operational plans will lay out clear actions to operationalize the goals identified in this strategic plan.

Updates will be reported on Renison's website to share progress toward implementation.

As appropriate, quantitative and qualitative data will be captured and reported on. This evaluation will support further strategic planning and will help inform each of the operational plans.

Conclusion

If we have learned anything from the past few years, it is that circumstances can change quickly and dramatically. It is important that the Renison Strategic Plan has the ability to be adjusted as conditions warrant. The priorities, as set out in this strategic plan, should not change—but how we get there might. The Renison Strategic Plan is a living document and will evolve as necessary. A webpage will be dedicated to the Renison Strategic Plan that supports action items and clear measures to report both how we are meeting our priorities and how our activities and outputs have evolved to remain responsive to challenges and opportunities that may arise.