



BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Strategy & Planning Committee (S&P)

Minutes of the Public Session of the Meeting of February 6, 2024

2:00 p.m. to 3:14 p.m. Videoconference

Members: Eric Agius (Chair), Ahmad Barari, Laura Elliott, Matthew Mackenzie, Peter Marchut, Lisa McBride (Vice-Chair), Steven Murphy, Michael Rencheck, Hannah Scott, Emily Whetung-MacInnes

Regrets: Mitch Frazer,

Staff: Kirstie Ayotte, James Barnett, Nicola Crow, Krista Hester, Les Jacobs, Lori Livingston, Jennifer MacInnis, Brad MacIsaac, Sarah Thrush

Guests: Chelsea Bauer, Mikael Eklund, Joanne Nickle, Dwight Thompson (guest Governor)

1. Call to Order

The Chair called the Public session of the S&P meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. and read aloud the Land Acknowledgment.

2. Agenda

Upon a motion duly made by M. Mackenzie and seconded by L. Elliott, the Agenda was approved as presented, including approving and receiving the Consent Agenda and its contents.

3. Conflict of Interest Declaration

No conflicts were declared.

4. Chair's Remarks

The Chair began by reminding Committee members of some meeting protocols, and Public session attendees were welcomed though were noted unable to participate or engage in the meeting. He continued by congratulating team members for recent awards: President Steven Murphy for the King Charles III Coronation Medal, Dr. Barbara Perry for the Order of Canada, and Chancellor Mitch Frazer for also receiving the King Charles III Coronation Medal. He acknowledged Black History Month, with the theme "Black Legacy and Leadership," and highlighted Ontario Tech University's launch of the Black Youth Visionary Program on February 25th, noting that the program, supported by Scotiabank, is in conjunction with the University's first-annual Black Student Showcase. He encouraged Committee members to engage with

learning opportunities throughout the month and invited President Steven Murphy for his remarks.

5. President's Remarks

The President highlighted the University's ongoing efforts amid the challenging fiscal reality in Ontario, a situation shared by many regions globally. The President also updated the Committee on his progress to date of getting out to all Faculty Councils and Administrative Units to talk to everyone about the current context and how the University is responding.

He discussed the impact of a 10% tuition cut and freeze since 2019, compounded by rising inflation. He noted that the Province, rather than increases in base-funding as recommended by the Province's Blue-Ribbon Panel, is providing one-time funding instead, complicating long-term planning. He emphasized the uncertainty of future funding and stressed the need for the University to take control of its own destiny by focusing on unique, high-quality programs that target diverse learners across age groups.

He also mentioned the impact on the international student sector, with the University's international enrollment at 9%, below the target of 15%, and noted the need to resuscitate "Brand Canada" due to the international student situation and the processing delays for visas.

He underscored the importance of adapting to the evolving educational landscape, where offering lifelong learning is essential, and ensuring high quality in all formats – whether in-person, online, or hybrid. The President addressed the outdated universities' business model, calling for a challenging of assumptions including rethinking of delivery methods, such as incorporating professionals with a lifetime of experience to teach specialized programs. He emphasized flexibility and nimbleness in the University's approach. He also stressed the importance of job readiness, advocating for more internships, co-ops, and creative industry collaborations to ensure students are prepared for the workforce. He confirmed he will elaborate on these themes at the upcoming Board Meeting, focusing on how the University will shape its future in an uncertain environment.

6. Strategy

6.1 Student Recruitment and Success* (D)

L. Livingston discussed the Annual Report, noting at the outset that this year she has combined Student Recruitment and Success into one report. She highlighted the University's commitment to supporting student success throughout the recruitment-to-alumni lifecycle and the ethical obligation the University has to support the success of students once they are admitted to their degree programs.

She outlined a multi-pronged recruitment strategy focused on domestic, international, and digital efforts. Despite increased competition in domestic recruitment, the

University has seen a 70% rise in applications over the past five years, with confirmations up 1.5% as of today for the 2025-2026 academic year – final confirmation numbers will be known in June. She noted ongoing challenges in international recruitment due to restrictive policies but emphasized its importance in maintaining cultural diversity on campus and how essential it is in supporting graduate programs and faculty research.

She also mentioned the University's partnership with Border Pass to expedite application processing and the University's ongoing efforts to diversify international markets. She highlighted digital recruitment which has become increasingly important, noting that the University generated over a million impressions through targeted campaigns and commended J. Stokes, the Registrar, and the Recruitment Team for their dedication, strategic initiatives and multiple recruitment events.

In response to a question about standout strategies, L. Livingston explained that no single approach dominates, as success depends on a combination of efforts. She emphasized the increasing importance of personalized experiences, such as virtual visits and individual campus tours, with 500 virtual visits last year, and this year 600 visits. She agreed with the value of student-to-student interactions, especially in the post-COVID era, when students place high value on the on-campus experience. She acknowledged the growing influence of podcasts among high school students and mentioned that the University's Academic Advising department hosts weekly podcasts. In response to a question, she expressed interest in exploring opportunities for sponsorship or participation in more widely listened-to podcasts, particularly those popular with high school students.

L. Livingston explained that the University employs both centralized and Faculty-based recruitment strategies, with individual faculties conducting regular recruitment activities. She acknowledged that faculty involvement, especially through discipline-specific discussions, is effective with high school students. In response to a question on offering tuition reductions for senior citizens, she addressed the challenges of offering such reductions, and highlighted current options available such as micro-credentials, and certificate programs.

Regarding a question on differentiated growth, she noted that each Faculty has distinct growth opportunities, attracting diverse types of applicants, including domestic and international students, as well as high school, mature, and career learners.

Moving onto retention, L. Livingston re-emphasized the University's ethical obligation to support student success, noting the increasing complexity of students today. Key highlights included a significant rise in student financial aid, with OSAP funding increasing by over \$13 million year-over-year, reflecting both higher student need and higher student enrollment numbers. She also mentioned the revamped student orientation with kudos to M. Bluehardt for her work in this regard, which now includes separate programming for new and mature students, along with parent and supporter information sessions. The Learner Enhanced Academic Program (LEAP) has also

been successful, with about two-thirds of students at risk of suspension being retained.

Overall, undergraduate student retention rates have improved, with first-year retention increasing from 81% to 84% and upper-year retention rising from 91% to 95% over the past four years.

In response to concerns about students struggling with math and physics due to disruptions during the COVID years, L. Livingston acknowledged the issue and mentioned existing support programs, including study halls and the LEAP program. She also highlighted the U-prep program and suggested combining it with other initiatives to create a pre-university offering for students. While she noted that success rates in these programs are tracked, data on whether COVID-affected students are experiencing more challenges than those from prior years has not yet emerged.

6.2 Strategic Discussion: Campus Master Plan Update* (D)

The Chair introduced the Strategic Discussion and invited B. MacIsaac to present the Campus Master Plan Update. He also encouraged Committee members to think about any feedback they may have on the Plan's Vision and planning principles whilst listening to the presentation.

B. MacIsaac outlined the Campus Master Plan (CMP) refresh, focusing on changes over the past 10 years and future needs. He noted that this will not be a full review as the CMP already has established principles. The plan will be updated in three phases: reviewing land changes since 2015 by April, refining phasing in the summer, and holding consultations in September and October, with a Board presentation in November. It will consider all locations, including Oshawa, Whitby, and downtown Oshawa. The refresh will prioritize building locations, public open spaces, and active transportation, while seeking community feedback on valued spaces and areas for improvement. The goal is to transition from the overall scope of the previous plan to more practical implementation, ensuring the campus grows effectively over the next decade.

The Committee then engaged in a fulsome conversation on the CMP refresher during which B. MacIsaac clarified that public open spaces on University property are intended to be welcoming to the community for activities like walking along trails if they are used appropriately. The spaces are private property but open to the public under certain conditions and acknowledged that better wording may need to be considered.

In response to concerns regarding the availability of food services on campus, B. MacIsaac noted that food services will be factored into the CMP only as a high level planning ratio of total space proposed. The implementation will be more of an annual review focusing on the challenges with food services which stem from funding

constraints, making it costly to extend hours. He noted that the University continues to work on improving food services but struggles with their financial sustainability.

B. MacIsaac agreed on the importance of integrating industry partnerships into the CMP, acknowledging the President's focus on industry collaboration. He suggested that future buildings could include spaces for both industry partnerships and academic activities, and that this could be highlighted either with a dedicated section or enhanced mention within the CMP principles. He also recognized the potential of using external business spaces for experiential learning and expressed interest in incorporating this idea into future planning, moving beyond the traditional focus on university-owned spaces and acknowledged the challenge of prioritizing the 17 principles in the CMP. He mentioned that a criteria sheet is used when determining the location of new buildings and noted that some principles have been merged to create more focus. He agreed with the importance of prioritization and will consider it further during the summer consultation process.

A comprehensive discussion focused on the proposal of creating an AI Data Centre with a super-computer powered by nuclear energy from nearby Darlington or Pickering sites, emphasizing that this initiative could attract industry, foster partnerships, and shape the CMP with an emphasis on innovation. B. MacIsaac acknowledged the idea, noting that the 2015 CMP included spaces for academic and industry collaboration. He expressed interest in further exploring this concept and potential industry partnerships. He also stressed the importance of out-of-the-box thinking in this planning process, citing the President's encouragement of innovative ideas and shared an example of a student design project where students reimaged campus spaces, with plans to continue such engagement. He recognized the need to challenge traditional University planning approaches and expressed a commitment to incorporating more creative and unconventional ideas moving forward.

The President added that future discussions focused on planning spaces for industry-related activities and labs, with an emphasis on anticipating future needs. He mentioned efforts to secure funding for an AI Data Centre powered by nuclear energy, prioritizing energy efficiency while meeting high computing demands and emphasized the importance of collaborating with both industry and government, not only to attract future partnerships but also to demonstrate the University's innovative and forward-thinking approach to growth. This collaboration aligns with the goal of building spaces that meet industry needs and foster future advancements.

7. Planning

7.1 Board Retreat Planning* (D)

The President noted that the upcoming Board Retreat will focus on AI, exploring its role in both student programs and University operations. A key topic will be an early-stage partnership with Lakeridge Health, which is already showing promising results and highlighting the bridge between industry and academia. The retreat will also address the governance of AI, with the Board considering important issues such as

ethics, data management, algorithmic bias, and cybersecurity as AI becomes more integrated into the University's functions.

N. Crow added that the upcoming Board Retreat aims to provide the Board with a foundational understanding of AI's potential and its governance role at the University. It will cover current AI projects, governance and ethical considerations, and how the Board can engage, including key questions to ask. The session will build on prior strategic discussions and identify action items for the 2025-2026 workplans. There was a suggestion that risk considerations also be incorporated within the session.

N. Crow suggested considering the renaming of the upcoming Board Retreat to a "Board Advance" to better reflect Ontario Tech University's forward-thinking, visionary approach. She noted that the term "retreat" might imply a backward focus, while "advance" aligns more closely with the strategic and growth-oriented discussions planned and sought feedback from the Committee.

The Committee discussed shifting from a "retreat" to an "advance" to better reflect a forward-thinking approach, particularly regarding AI and Ontario Tech's future. The group agreed that this terminology aligns with the emphasis on building from past successes while focusing on strategic progress. There was also recognition of the importance of incorporating reflection on past actions as part of the planning process. The majority position was to embrace a term that balances both reflection and forward movement.

8. Significant Project and Contract Oversight

The Chair noted that there were no items for discussion.

9. Consent Agenda* (M)

9.1 Minutes of Public Session of Meeting November 14, 2024* (M)

The Chair confirmed that the contents of the Consent Agenda were approved and received under Agenda Item #2.

10. Adjournment

There being no other business, and upon a motion duly made by M. Rencheck, the Public session of the S&P meeting adjourned at 3:14 p.m.

Kirstie Ayotte, Assistant University Secretary