



**BOARD OF GOVERNORS**  
**Strategy & Planning Committee (S&P)**

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**Minutes of the Public Session of the Meeting of May 11, 2023**  
**2:00 p.m. to 3:52 p.m. Hybrid**

**Attendees:** Lynne Zucker (Chair), Eric Agius (Vice-Chair), Ahmad Barari, Kevin Chan, Laura Elliott, Mitch Frazer, Matthew Mackenzie, Steven Murphy, Michael Rencheck, Joshua Sankarlal, Jim Wilson

**Staff:** James Barnett, Sarah Cantrell, Krista Hester, Les Jacobs, Lori Livingston, Brad MacIsaac, Kimberley McCartney, Ade Oyemando, Lauren Turner

**1. Call to Order**

At the request of the Chair, the Vice-Chair chaired the meeting.

The Vice-Chair called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. and read aloud the land acknowledgement.

**2. Agenda**

*Upon a motion duly made by M. Mackenzie and seconded by S. Murphy, the Agenda, including the contents of the consent agenda, was approved as presented.*

**3. Conflict of Interest Declaration**

There was none.

**4. Chair's Remarks**

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and welcomed members of the public and guests. The Chair provided highlights from the successful Strategic Retreat for the Board of Governors held in the morning, including solidifying brand identity and key messages, and engaged discussions about ways to increase the Board's impact on the University. He then commented briefly on the agenda before the Committee and encouraged all governors to engage in discussions.

**5. President's Remarks**

The President provided an update on the work of the Blue-Ribbon Panel, noting that submissions to the Panel close tomorrow. He advised that the University has made its voice heard through the Council of Ontario Universities' (COU) submission as well as the submissions of non-higher education organizations invited by the Panel. He provided a summary of the value that Ontario Tech brings

to the province and the need for a more sustainable financial model in a province that ranks last in the country in investment in post-secondary education.

## **6. Strategy**

### **6.1 Integrated Academic Research Plan**

The Provost presented the 2023-2028 Integrated Academic Research Plan (IARP) noting that it is the third iteration of the plan in this format. She described the evolution of the IARP, highlighting improvements in metrics, quantification, and the introduction of a 5-year timeframe. She described the consultation involved in the creation of the IARP. In response to a question seeking more detail, she advised the Committee that there were two town halls with attendance in excess of 110 people and solicitation of written feedback via a website. She noted that feedback was voluminous and provided some examples of recommendations (e.g., the inclusion of the concept of a “safe workplace”) that were accepted and others that were not.

A Committee member expressed concern about the 5-year timeframe of the IARP, citing upheaval such as artificial intelligence and a general period of change in higher education as reasons against it. In response, the Provost advised that while the IARP has a 5-year horizon, it may change during that timeframe; she noted that the robust metrics that accompany the IARP will inform year over year responses. S. Cantrell commented on the importance of stability and clarity about the University’s direction, noting that a plan with a shorter time horizon can be unduly impacted by exigent circumstances. She went on to highlight the benefits of a longer-term plan for advocacy with the provincial government. In response to continued concern from the Committee member, the Provost explained why the first two iterations of the IARP were 2-year documents. She acknowledged that the University will operate in a context of disruption, but expressed the view that the strong set of metrics will hold the University accountable while allowing for adjustments. She also noted the financial challenges that the University will be facing in two years, expressing the view that a plan that takes the University beyond that point is preferable to attempting to create a new plan in the context of a financial deficit. In response to a comment, the Provost reaffirmed that the University could pivot during the 5-year lifespan of the IARP and that metrics will be monitored diligently. The Chair expressed support for a 5-year timeframe, noting the importance of a long-term anchor for the University’s year-to-year strategies and plans.

*Upon a motion duly made by M. Mackenzie and seconded by M. Rencheck, the Strategy and Planning Committee endorsed the 2023-2028 IARP to the Board of Governors for approval.*

One Committee member opposed the motion.

## 6.2 Strategic Discussion: Digital Strategy

B. Maclsaac presented the Digital Strategy, advising the Committee that it is one of the enabling plans of the IARP. The IARP sets the direction of the University; the Digital Strategy will support the trajectory of teaching, learning and research. He reminded the Committee that the network, infrastructure and security are all used and maintained in partnership with Durham College (DC); he went on to share efforts made over the past 16 months to clarify roles and responsibilities with DC. Speaking to improvements in the Digital Strategy, B. Maclsaac highlighted the move to a 4-year plan, planned improvements for student success, cloud migration, and improvements in experiential learning. He discussed input gathered from staff, students and faculty including requests for more self-service.

Mitch Frazer joined the meeting.

The Provost spoke to the impacts of the Digital Strategy in the classroom. She advised the Committee that the classroom experience depends first and foremost on sound pedagogical practices, with technology supporting that experience. She noted trends towards technology uptake at the University, citing the 90% of faculty tying courses to the Learning Management System (LMS). The LMS as a source of important data about student successes and struggles was noted, as was the importance of digital tools integrating with it. She closed by commenting on the synergies between the Digital Strategy and Continuous Learning initiatives.

B. Maclsaac then discussed cybersecurity and research. He advised the Committee that the University has been working with a working group on data strategy to ensure the safety and security of research. He noted that the majority of the University's Canadian research chairs are working on advanced digital infrastructure or incorporating digital tools.

A. Oyemando discussed user experience, advising the Committee that an interim solution for a student portal has been deployed; the University is looking for a robust system to provide students with a positive user experience. In the future, the University would like to be able to reach all students and faculty via a mobile app which will allow personalization of the student journey. She noted that moving more applications to the cloud enhances the user experience by enhancing capacity and stability of University systems. B. Maclsaac noted that while the transition from on-premise to cloud can sometimes be a lengthy experience, IT has prioritized migration of certain items each year.

Laura Elliott joined the meeting.

B. Maclsaac commented on the age of the University's infrastructure and costs associated with renovations and repairs. Taking a "cloud first" approach helps to mitigate costs, but in order to drive overall improvements, a \$3 million/year investment is recommended. He advised that future reporting will show projects

with a value in excess of \$100,000 as well as metrics which either tie to the IARP or are specific to IT.

A discussion then ensued on the Digital Strategy. In response to a question, B. Maclsaac confirmed that the Strategy can scale to align with the growth that the University is projecting. In response to a further question about budgetary pressures, B. Maclsaac advised that there are a number of governance bodies involved in budgetary decisions and that senior leaders are frequently asked which initiatives can be delayed. He agreed with the Vice-Chair's view that there will inevitably be difficult decisions and trade-offs. A Committee member inquired about the potential for the University to position itself as a centre for computing or to work with government or agencies to advance the University and the province instead of taking a reactive approach in the Digital Strategy. In response, B. Maclsaac advised that funding outside of the University's normal operating grant would be required. The President advised the Committee that the Vice-President, Research and Innovation has been conferring with the University of Sherbrooke, a Canadian leader in quantum computing, to understand their strategy.

A Committee member inquired about the stability of LMS and the risk of system outages. In response, B. Maclsaac advised that different types of outages will trigger different business continuity plans. A. Oyemanda advised that the LMS is in the cloud and the LMS provider has committed to a disaster recovery plan with less than 2-4 hours of down time. In response to a question about budget allocations for the Digital Strategy, B. Maclsaac confirmed that of the \$3 million recommended, \$1.7 million is still in flux. In response to a different question, A. Oyemanda confirmed that the digital experience platform will be new for the University; input on requirements is being gathered. In response to a concern about the potential for hidden costs or transition to purely online learning as cloud is embraced. B. Maclsaac clarified that the University does not intend to be purely online, noting the "sticky campus" strategic objective. He advised that costs are incorporated into contracts, thus avoiding surprise fees.

### **6.3 Institutional and SMA3 Metrics**

S. Cantrell presented the Institutional and SMA3 Metrics. She discussed the dashboard, advising the Committee that a yellow rating does not necessarily indicate a problem, but rather progress towards a target. She discussed the data behind the metrics and planned education for the community. She commented on the beneficial feedback received on target setting. She noted that the IARP will, if approved, necessitate some modifications to the metrics. Speaking to the SMA3 reporting, S. Cantrell walked the Committee through the dashboard, noting metric weightings and the notional allocations of weightings in terms of dollar values.

A discussion then ensued on the metrics dashboard, colour assignments, and adequate flagging of risk. S. Cantrell advised the Committee that an effort was made to find a balance in representation with regard to financial and reputational implications. The Vice-Chair encouraged leadership to see red as a means of

getting attention, potentially the allocation of resources or support, not as a purely negative indicator. In response to a question about research, S. Cantrell advised that there are a number of research metrics that are captured in the institutional and SMA3 dashboards. The Strategic Research Plan contains a more comprehensive list of research metrics that will track performance over time. The Provost noted that the Strategic Research Plan is linked to but independent from the IARP. The IARP does not capture or duplicate what is within the SRP. In response to a final question about monitoring metrics to ensure planned changes or growth, S. Cantrell advised that the enabling plans of the IARP (e.g., strategic enrolment plan, budget plan) delineate accountabilities for leading pieces of the plan. Next steps will be to have the metrics cascaded into unit- or faculty-level plans to enable tracking of achievement of those targets and will be built into the annual review process.

#### **6.4 Annual Programs Update**

##### **(a) 2022-23 Quality Assurance Process & Program Annual Report**

The Provost presented the 2022-2023 Quality Assurance Process & Program Annual Report. The Committee expressed concern about the refusal of provincial funding for some programs aligned with the University's vision. S. Cantrell confirmed that the rationale for refusal was misalignment with the University's mission. She advised that there is concern in the sector that this signals an intent on the part of the Ministry to be more intrusive in academic programming.

Mitch Frazer left the meeting.

##### **(b) 2022-2023 Continuous Learning Annual Report**

The Provost presented the 2022-2023 Continuous Learning Annual Report. She summarized the history of the Continuous Learning unit and noted the arrival of a new Director in August. A discussion ensued about costs and revenues of Continuous Learning. The Provost committed to finding out about scholarship offerings for these programs and confirmed that the intent is for Continuous Learning to be not just self-sustaining, but profitable. In response to a further question, she advised that the unit is projected to be cost-neutral and profit-generating by 2023/2024.

#### **6.5 International Strategy Update**

The Provost presented the International Strategy Update, highlighting four strategic pillars: (i) diversifying the number of countries; (ii) support for students once they are in Canada; (iii) new recruitment strategies including market developments, partnerships, and quality assurance; and, (iv) international goals and tactical priorities including seeking new ways to open Ontario Tech to the international market. She highlighted the efforts and expertise of J. Stokes, the University's Registrar. In response to a question, the Provost confirmed that agents are compensated on a commission basis. She noted that the Auditor General's report made recommendations in this regard, and advised the Committee that the University is being careful about only releasing payment where a student is likely

to be successful at Ontario Tech. She confirmed that the University works only with reputable organizations and offshore agents.

**7. Planning**

**7.1 Endowment Disbursement Recommendation**

B. MacIsaac presented the Endowment Disbursement Recommendation, noting that it will also be presented to the Audit and Finance Committee per policy. He advised the Committee that a portion of endowed funds are used each year for student bursaries and support. The University would like to disburse the maximum amount in 2023/2024 while ensuring capital preservation.

*Upon a motion duly made by S. Murphy and seconded by M. Rencheck, the Strategy and Planning Committee endorsed to the Board of Governors the disbursement of up to \$750,000 from the University's endowed fund and unrestricted expendable sources for distribution by Financial Aid in 2023-24.*

**8. Consent Agenda**

**8.1 Minutes of Public Session of Meeting of March 22, 2023**

**8.2 S&P Annual Board Report**

**9. Adjournment**

*Upon a motion duly made by K. Chan, the public session adjourned at 3:52 p.m.*

Lauren Turner, University Secretary