



# University of Toronto TORONTO ONTARIO M5S 1A1

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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

**TO:** Members of the Governing Council

**SPONSOR:** David Naylor, President

**DATE:** March 16, 2006 for March 23, 2006

**AGENDA ITEM:** 6

**ITEM IDENTIFICATION:** Creation of the Position of Assistant Vice-President, Strategic Communications

## **JURISDICTIONAL INFORMATION:**

Under the Policy on Appointments and Remuneration, the Governing Council reserves to itself the creation and appointment of certain University Officials on the recommendation of the President.

## **PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN:**

Following the departure of Susan Bloch-Nevitte as Director of Public Affairs in April 2004, the University of Toronto has relied on external consultants to help manage strategic communications. An external review of communications and public affairs was undertaken by Mr. Peter Donolo and submitted in early 2005. Mr. Donolo recommended the restructuring of communications so as to expand this portfolio and situate it within Government and Institutional Relations. The departure of Jon Dellandrea as Vice-President and Chief Advancement Officer in June 2005 was associated with a review of the Division of University Advancement (DUA). The review underscored challenges in communications and public affairs, while acknowledging the very considerable strengths of the Division and its contributions to the University.

## **HIGHLIGHTS:**

After extensive internal consultation, I have concluded the following:

1. A new position, Assistant Vice-President, Strategic Communications, should be created.
2. The position should be associated with restructuring of communications within DUA, and the primary reporting line should be to the new Vice President, University Relations when s/he is recruited.

In the remainder of this memorandum, I elaborate on goals for the new portfolio and the desired attributes of the new AVP.

## Goals for Strategic Communications

There are at least six related goals that require a new approach to strategic communications:

- i. Shifting the U of T brand, internally, to highlight the quality of our student experience inside and outside the classroom, and to promote related culture change in the community.
- ii. Shifting the U of T brand, externally, so as to mitigate those negative aspects of our image that occasionally prevail (viz. impersonal, academically exacting to the detriment of co- and extra-curricular life, research-focused to the detriment of teaching, and relatively less committed to undergraduate education as opposed to graduate and professional programs).
- iii. Advocating for long-term policy shifts in post-secondary education, including:
  - a. Changes in funding and allocation formulas from provincial and federal governments,
  - b. Tuition reform,
  - c. Student aid reform,
  - d. Reform and expansion of research funding.
- iv. Undertaking more international student recruiting in carefully segmented markets.
- v. Advancing the University's broader international reputation, in order to facilitate international recruitment of students and faculty, as well as collaboration with governments, industry, and sister institutions abroad, concurrent with improvements in global university rankings.
- vi. Laying the groundwork in public and alumni awareness for the launch of a new campaign in 18 months to two years, with particular emphasis on alumni outreach.

Taken together, these goals require a new kind of approach to strategic communications at the University.

### 1. ROLES OF A CENTRAL STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS UNIT

The current Public Affairs Unit, in DUA, should in fact operate as a "Strategic Communications Unit" responsible for internal and external communications matters, not just public affairs.

A Strategic Communications Unit, built on the existing Public Affairs Unit, would have three roles at the University.

#### i. An External Role

- Serving as the University's bridge to major media;
- Serving as a bridge to alumni and to new constituency and advocacy groups outside the post-secondary education sector, including business groups, think tanks, and other groups that can contribute to shaping public perceptions.

#### ii. A "National" Role

- Managing communications issues that have a University-level agenda, by:
  - Leading or sharing leadership in the brand-development effort;

- Leading in focusing the faculty and staff culture on the student experience;
- Leading in focusing students on opportunities to enrich their experience;
- Managing public issues for the University;
- Serving the Senior Administration, i.e. President, Provost and portfolios reporting to them.

### iii. A "Federal" Role

- Coordinating the communications activities of various divisions to create mutual advantage and increased efficiency.
- The central unit can help mitigate the fragmentation of our audiences by coordinating communications efforts across the University. This is of particular importance with regard to University-wide messages about the student experience.
- This unit can help build operational bridges between different communications efforts across the University to the degree possible.

## 2. LEADERSHIP OF UNIT

In this structure, the Strategic Communications Unit would be led by an Assistant Vice-President, Strategic Communications.

(S)he would be a member of PVP and "Principals and Deans", and available to participate in any other committees designated by the President or Provost.

(S)he would be a direct report (solid-line) to the incoming Vice-President (University Relations).

Critically, (s)he would also need a dotted-line relationship with the President. It would be essential for the AVP to be able to communicate directly with the President on matters of internal and external communication that are important, and to receive guidance and instructions directly from the President as necessary. This is essential to ensure that strategic communications inside the University and outside the University reflect Presidential priorities as closely as possible, particularly under the rapidly changing circumstances of this portfolio.

The AVP will need to be an individual with substantial strategic communications experience, ideally from a journalistic and/or corporate communications background, with the ability to bridge private for-profit and not-for-profit and public sector perspectives. Managerial experience, and a deep knowledge of government relations are essential. Some meaningful understanding of marketing is also important.

## 3. KEY OPERATING RELATIONSHIPS

### i. A More Formal Relationship With Divisions

- The Strategic Communications Unit would have a more formal relationship with communications staff in each of the divisions than currently exists between public affairs and the divisions.

- A number of observers have suggested that this structure be based loosely on the model that integrates fundraisers across the campus under the joint leadership of their Division heads and the Vice-President, Advancement. In fact, the structure could specify an operating, non-administrative report (a "dotted-line") from the head of communications in each division to the AVP Strategic Communications, with a solid line between them and their Principals, Deans, or in the case of alumni communications, their Vice-President.
- This operating, non-administrative report would allow the AVP communications to work with Divisional heads in building more robust collaboration among their efforts, and between the divisions and the centre.

#### ii. Close Relationships With Other Central Functions

- Through the AVP, the Strategic Communications Unit would have close operating relationships with all PVP portfolios.
- It could expect to have particularly close working relationships with Vice-Provostial staff in Student Affairs and Faculty Affairs, and with Vice-Presidential staff in Advancement, Government Relations, Business Affairs, Research and Human Resources.

#### 4. ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL AND STAFFING

Reporting to the AVP would be individuals with lead roles in different forms of communications that are particular to the University environment and vital to the administration's goals, such as internal communications with students, internal communications with faculty and staff, media relations, and marketing services.

In one scenario, these managers (excepting the Director of Marketing Services) would deploy a common pool of communications staff to deliver strategies designed differently for different audiences. This pooling approach would give staff the opportunity to develop a uniquely broad range of communications skills and to be mentored by a wide range of expertise.

Alternatively, the managers could assume responsibility for staff specifically assigned to their portfolio. In either scenario, we would plan to deploy the existing pool of public affairs staff into this new model.

#### 5. GOVERNMENT RELATIONS: AN ASSOCIATED GROUP

The Strategic Communications Unit, via its Assistant Vice-President and Media Specialist, would coordinate closely with Government Relations. Its role here would be to develop communications strategies - including media and constituency building strategies – that directly advance Government Relations goals.

The Strategic Communications Unit would also help the Government Relations unit frame critical issues in such a way that they motivate government action at both a political and public service level.

**FINANCIAL AND/OR PLANNING IMPLICATIONS:**

The relevant incremental resources will be for the AVP Strategic Communications, including salary and administrative support. Some director/manager hires will also be needed. Both extant salary lines and new funds will be marshalled to this end.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Be It Resolved

**THAT** the creation of the position of Assistant Vice-President, Strategic Communications, be approved.