

Towards 2030: The View from 2012 - A Framework

Over a two-year period, beginning in early 2007, the University of Toronto community deliberated on how to build on its past achievements and strengthen its position as one of the world's leading publicly-assisted universities. *Towards 2030: A Long-term Planning Framework for the University of Toronto* was approved by Governing Council in October 2008. http://www.towards2030.utoronto.ca/files/LongTerm_Planning_Framework_Oct_2008.pdf

Four years on, much has happened, both at the University of Toronto and in the world. *Towards 2030* used the word 'sobering' with respect to the then-current state of funding from the Government of Ontario. We are even more sober today. Undergraduate per-student funding in Ontario is the lowest of any of the provinces; the global market collapse in 2008 has had deleterious effects on public sector defined-benefit pension plans; and the economy remains volatile. This economic uncertainty has understandably been accompanied by some anxiety on the part of students, staff and faculty. Undergraduate students worry about modest but steady tuition and fee increases, although for most Ontario students significant relief has come with the Province's \$1600 Tuition Rebate. Undergraduate and graduate students worry about the job markets they are moving into. Staff and faculty are concerned about the demoralizing critiques of universities from the media and government, along with public policy discourse about how Ontario universities need significant 'reform.'

It is time to see what progress the University of Toronto has made in the last four years and to assess the new and ongoing challenges and opportunities that lie before it. That is the task of *Towards 2030: The View from 2012*. It is the culmination of eight months of engagement with the University of Toronto community, initiated by the Provost in August 2011. Over 40 meetings were held – a Town Hall on each of the three campuses and sessions with faculty, students, staff, governors, academic administrators, and alumni. Submissions were also made in writing. Participation was lively and passionate – the strong commitment to this great University was apparent at every turn.

The core message is heartening: despite our heavily constrained resources, the University of Toronto is respected as one of the world's best research-intensive universities, rivalling both the great private universities of the United States and the ancient public universities of Britain in quantity and quality of research and in educational offerings. Here is how the message was expressed by first, a faculty member and next, an alumnus:

'The University of Toronto's faculty is among the most productive in the world in terms of generating new scholarship and knowledge, and among the most cited, and our students are the envy of our colleagues across Canada. Many of our departments, including my home department, are among the best in the world in their disciplines.'

'The University of Toronto is the pre-eminent university in Canada by many measures: number of students, research productivity, breadth of teaching programs, library resources and it ranks as a significant research and teaching

university globally. It is a public university with private peers, which itself is an extraordinary achievement given the funding challenges in post-secondary education in Canada and in Ontario, in particular. The University also comprises three campuses in one of Canada's largest and most diverse urban areas. Undeniably, the University is an important post-secondary institution. But the University of Toronto is not only that. It is also one of the nation's most effective means to achieve Canadian aspirations of an egalitarian, globally aware, technologically sophisticated society that sustainably harnesses our wealth in natural resources and human potential for the prosperity and betterment of all.'

These are heartening words, but they also bring into sharp relief the duty that the University of Toronto community has to not just maintain, but strengthen the institution they have inherited.

Meeting the Goals set out in *Towards 2030*: Progress to Date

Much time and attention in *The View from 2012* deliberations was paid to the great strides taken in meeting specific goals set out in *Towards 2030*. The following are merely some of the highlights, with many more achievements set out in detail in the full document.

- Significant advances have been made in the recruitment and admission of first-entry undergraduates, including an overhaul of recruitment and admissions materials and processes and a new structure for enrolment management. These efforts have been rewarded with an increasing number of excellent applicants to the University of Toronto, with more of them making the University of Toronto their first choice, and with a marked increase in the numbers of students from the rest of Canada and, especially, the rest of the world choosing to attend the University of Toronto.
- A number of excellent bridging programs for international students have been put in place, building on the success of *Greenpath* at University of Toronto Scarborough. These bridging programs provide international students the wherewithal to succeed in their studies at the University of Toronto.
- Real improvements have been made in the first-entry undergraduate experience. Much excitement has been generated, for instance, about the expansion of our first year foundational programs – the 'One' series of programs. (<http://discover.utoronto.ca/one>) They, along with many other excellent initiatives, enable the University of Toronto to offer one of the very best first years in the country.
- The University of Toronto is now even more of a leader in having its finest researchers teach across the whole spectrum of the undergraduate and graduate curriculum. Canada Research Chairs, endowed chair holders, and other award-winning researchers are in the classroom with undergraduates, often in the first

year. In 2011 a successful mechanism was put in place – the *Undergraduate Course Development Fund* – to encourage professors in the professional faculties, such as Social Work and Law, who normally teach only graduate students or second-entry undergraduates, to teach in the early undergraduate years.

- The University of Toronto’s commitment to being accessible to students, regardless of their financial means, has been upheld despite budget pressures. In 2010-11, the University provided \$61.5M in needs-based student aid, compared to \$58.3M in 2009-10 and \$56.3M in 2008-09. ‘Effective tuition’ – the tuition students actually pay - is an important notion and can be captured by the fact that 50% of our undergraduates receiving OSAP pay 50% of the posted tuition rate. The rest is covered by bursary and scholarship support.
- The University of Toronto has continued to hire new faculty and hire exceptionally well. As universities elsewhere freeze or slow down their recruiting, an opportunity to attract exceptional faculty members presents itself. These new recruits are the future of the University.
- Research, honours, and rankings are extremely strong. Although no ranking instrument is perfect, collectively they speak to something important. In 2011 the University of Toronto, as a whole, was ranked very highly worldwide by the various internationally respected bodies: 19th (Times Higher Ed), 26th (Shanghai), 9th (HEEACT), 23rd (QS), 3rd (ScImago). Times Higher Education’s *World University Ranking* grouped the University of Toronto with Stanford, UC Berkeley, UCLA, Cambridge, Oxford, and the University of Michigan as the only institutions in the top 25 in all 6 broad disciplinary areas.
- The University’s unique tri-campus structure is providing strong, broad, and distinct research groupings across the university, bound together by one identity and a set of genuinely tri- or bi- campus graduate programs and departments. The Mississauga and Scarborough campuses are transforming themselves into impressive mid-size comprehensive universities, putting forward bold and exciting plans that will make our three campuses an even more important part of the success of the University of Toronto.
- The collegiate structure on the St. George campus is evolving so as to provide students with small, distinctive academic and co-curricular homes.
- An unprecedented graduate expansion has been managed well, given the scale of the project, with the addition of 1848 masters and 680 PhD students to the University. This expansion is important, as the landscape of higher education is changing rapidly, with many students looking for high-quality professional masters programs in a wide array of disciplines with excellent and meaningful employment outcomes. The University of Toronto has been responsive to that societal need, with 83 professional masters programs in existence or in the planning process.

- The University's new transparent budget model has served it exceptionally well during these difficult times, making it possible for divisions both to find efficiencies and increase revenues. Indeed, the enormous positive progress summarized throughout the document is in large part due to the dynamism of the new budget model.
- Substantial progress has been made in innovation, with a spike in disclosures and start-up companies and huge growth of student entrepreneurship programming on the campuses and at MaRS.
- The University of Toronto is more global than ever and that globalization has accelerated in the last few years. Students have more opportunities for international experience, excellent international partnerships are being built both institutionally and individually and, and relationships with universities in Asia, Brazil, and India, and elsewhere have been ramped up.

New and Continuing Challenges

The view from 2012 is, on the whole, extraordinarily positive. That is not to say that the University does not face considerable challenges. It has been hit by a tidal wave of economic troubles and will continue to thrive only if these challenges are clearly understood and well-managed. The following are amongst the most serious.

- Per student funding for undergraduates from the Province of Ontario is the lowest in the country. Without some relief on this front, it is hard to know how the future can unfold well.
- There is likely to be continued volatility in the ebb and flow of economic circumstances over the next years. The University needs to be able to respond appropriately when these short cycles buffet it. The current challenge is the shoring up of the pension plan, which, like almost all public sector defined-benefit pension plans, is in serious deficit. This deficit is partly, if not largely, an artefact of low interest rates.
- The University of Toronto faces a major obstacle in recruiting international graduate students. The Province of Ontario, unlike some others, does not provide grant funding for international graduate students – it does not even provide coverage for health care. Extraordinarily strong applicants are being turned back, across the whole of the University, as divisional and departmental operating budgets cannot support significant numbers of international graduate students. Without these students, we lose the opportunity to enrich our student body, our research and reputation, our programs, the educational experiences of our domestic students, and the talent pool in the province and the nation. New ways to

secure funding for these students are urgently required. To this end, the University announced, in October 2011, a special matching fund of \$6M and then in January 2012 a further \$4M pool of departmental matching funds to enable faculties and departments to raise endowments to support international (and other) PhD students.

- The University of Toronto is a research powerhouse. But in Canada, federal contributions to the institutional costs of research are amongst the lowest in the world. The federal indirect costs program provides support to the University of Toronto at a rate of 17.8%, whereas the true institutional cost of research is estimated at 50%. Peers in the US, the UK, and the EU receive between 40-60%. The University of Toronto contributes \$35M of operating funds every year to close this gap as best it can. Vital equipment replacement and outdated labs threaten to constrain the recruitment and retention of the best researchers.
- UTM and UTSC are moving towards somewhat greater autonomy – as *Towards 2030* put it, towards comprehensive universities in their own right. Challenges will arise in finding the equilibrium between differentiation and growth on the one hand, and preserving the University's identity and coherence on the other.
- The University of Toronto community is large and complex. Communication between the administration, faculty, staff, and students is an area that requires sustained attention and improvement.
- The University of Toronto's expansion of graduate education must continue to reflect our academic strengths, the pool of talented applicants, the demand for our graduates, and our capacity to maximize the resources offered by the Provincial Government.
- The University of Toronto, along with other bodies of higher learning, faces challenges when it comes to making necessary internal structural change. Academic missions evolve over time and it is imperative to be able to achieve change, renewal and revision where necessary. Divisional attempts at restructuring can be difficult and have sometimes, but not always, sparked controversy. Processes must be put into place so that when academic and budgetary rationales coincide, divisions are enabled to change their shape through broad and deep consultative processes.
- Divisional and central mechanisms need to be strengthened so that excellent faculty members are encouraged to apply for tri-council funding, on which the distribution of many federal goods, such as Canada Research Chairs, depends.
- University of Toronto alumni express pride in their alma mater and they contribute much to its continued success. More attention, however, must be paid to strengthening this relationship and on creating additional and rich ways for alumni to play a role in shaping the University's future.

- The University needs to be resolute in untangling administrative responsibilities while ensuring that each of its three campuses and many divisions has a powerful identity and voice in the evolving structure. It needs to continue to employ the budget model so as to find further efficiencies and multi-divisional clusters for administrative functions such as human resources and IT support.
- Space challenges are omnipresent. The University's continued pursuit of excellence in research and teaching requires access to an increasing amount of outstanding space and it needs to be even more imaginative as to where and how it obtains it.
- The University of Toronto must continue to harness its innovative research in inventive ways to ensure it contributes to economic growth and social good.

Continuing on the Course of Excellence

It is a remarkable credit to the entire institution that, despite having to cope with annual special pension payments in the tens of millions, despite the nearly two decades of flat-lining of per-student undergraduate funding from the Province of Ontario, despite the grossly inadequate contribution of the Federal Government for the institutional costs of research, the University of Toronto has managed to stay on course to strengthen its position in research, attract even better students, and improve the educational and co-curricular experience for those students.

One thing is clear. If it is to meet its challenges - if the University of Toronto is to continue to be one of the world's best universities - it needs to have the autonomy to make choices. It needs to communicate with the public and with government about the value of higher education as well the extraordinary productivity of the University of Toronto.

No one should think that the next few years will not be difficult. The view from 2012 is, however, that the University of Toronto will continue to move forward in the right direction. The fact that extraordinary progress has made towards the goals articulated in *Towards 2030* during a time of pressing financial challenges speaks volumes about the depth and the excellence of the University's faculty, students, staff, alumni, friends, and programs. The view from 2012 is that, despite the pressures it will face in the coming years, the University remains well-positioned and committed to taking advantage of and, indeed, making its own opportunities.

It is important to note that universities will be around long after the current economic challenges subside. The University of Toronto has a responsibility to secure its long term strength by maintaining its commitment to its vision, and not being thrown off course by transient, if significant, fiscal realities. Against the economic odds, the University of Toronto has not only remained steadfast on the path set for it by *Towards 2030*, but in many ways has exceeded the particular expectations articulated there.

As the University of Toronto works through its current challenges, it is also important to be reminded of its deep accomplishments and record of success in both teaching and research. The value of the University to Canada and the world was demonstrated again with the recent release of the 2012 *World Reputation Ranking* from *Times Higher Education*. In a survey of 17,554 published scholars from 137 countries, conducted for the British publication by Ipsos Research, the UofT ranked first in Canada and 16th in the world. Clearly, colleagues in all parts of the globe recognize the importance of the work done at the University of Toronto. We must recognize and celebrate it ourselves.