The University of Victoria is a university of choice for talented faculty, staff and students from across Canada and around the world. Our university’s strength lies in the special combination of talented and dedicated people working in a collaborative and collegial environment, and our institutional success is a result of your efforts and accomplishments.

The strategic plan articulates our overarching vision to achieve academic excellence, characterized by the integration of scholarship, teaching and learning, and real-life involvement—all with the goal of contributing to individual and social betterment. In my communications on and off campus I have emphasized certain areas of focus and strategies that continue to propel us towards that vision [see, in particular, my 2014 report on my campus conversations uvic.ca/president/activities/talks/ConversationsReport2014.pdf].

The following are some reflections on progress in the context of those specific areas of focus.

**Excellence in graduate and undergraduate education**

Together we continue to enhance excellence in graduate and undergraduate education by focusing on the quality of instruction, the integration of research and teaching, and the creation of opportunities for experiential learning. This focus on excellence in teaching and dynamic learning continues to strengthen. Its foundation is the commitment and expertise of individual faculty and staff, and it is further fuelled by an appetite for innovation which I encounter across campus. I have seen it reflected in emergent departmental and faculty plans, and championed by our University Senate, the Provost and her team, as well as deans, chairs and directors.

I have been gratified in my many encounters with students to hear about the high levels of satisfaction with their programs, their very positive interactions with their professors and staff, their passion for research and creativity, and the many opportunities they have to apply their learning through a research experience or in the community or workplace. Opportunities for student research and experiential learning have been dramatically increased in all areas and we are close to our goal of offering every student such an opportunity. Many departments are actively engaged in departmental and curriculum reviews and are also developing program-specific learning outcomes following on Senate’s adoption of university-wide learning outcomes. The anecdotal evidence I hear in my interactions with students is confirmed in the student surveys we undertake, which demonstrate a high
degree of satisfaction with their learning experience. We know, of course, that there are areas where there is upside potential to enhance student engagement and learning, but we are known across the country as a place that successfully combines research excellence with student-centredness.

**Enhancing support for student success**

Enhancing support for student success more broadly is an ongoing priority and we can count a number of recent initiatives in orientation, advising, academic support services and mental health services. We are providing additional support for international students, including through the academic areas with high international student enrolments. I launched student mobility initiatives, with new donor-supported funding, to expand international learning opportunities for our students. In addition, the Provost is leading a process to build on our commitment to support access and success for Indigenous students. This is a long-standing priority under our Strategic Plan and its urgency was emphasized in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The completion of CARSA—on time and on budget—signifies a strong commitment to active and healthy living for our entire community and brings our athletics and recreational facilities up to date and up to the calibre of our academic facilities. We have increased graduate and undergraduate student financial assistance and are reviewing the best way to administer that funding. And we will continue to advocate for a competitive provincial graduate fellowship program. As a destination university for so many off-island and out-of-province students, UVic recognizes the particular importance of improving existing student housing and developing a plan to expand capacity and enhance on-campus amenities, activities and environment (all of which will also be further addressed in the revised Campus Plan).

**Building on excellence in research, scholarship and creative activity**

We continue to build on excellence in our research, scholarship and creative activity. Our university attracts extraordinarily talented faculty and students who together create a vibrant intellectual community. Reputational indicators such as rankings, funding inputs, and scholarships and awards confirm our standing as one of Canada’s most research-intensive universities. A glance at the headlines on almost any day of the week confirms that this research is addressing issues that matter and provides significant societal benefit and impact.

Under the leadership of the Vice-President Research, a Strategic Research Plan is being developed through the intensive and enthusiastic engagement of on- and off-campus stakeholders. The Strategic Research Plan, and the process leading to its development, helps us to determine how we can enable, support and strengthen our research, scholarship and artistic endeavours, while also identifying areas of demonstrated global excellence and positioning us for future opportunities and potential partnerships. Coincident with the development of the Strategic Research Plan, an external review of the Office of Research Services indicated how this highly functioning office could be further optimized in support of the Strategic Research Plan. The draft Strategic Research Plan will be available to the campus community for review and feedback from 14 September to 9 October through the SRP website.

**Assembling and aligning resources**

We find ourselves in times of continued economic restraint. Nevertheless, through the efforts of many people and a careful and integrated approach to planning, we have had some success in
assembling and aligning resources in sustainable ways that most effectively support our mission. While the provincial operating grant has been reduced in each of the last three years, success in other areas (especially strong student enrolments) have permitted a number of new strategic investments. The BC government has indicated that we will receive funding for increased compensation costs over the next several years, thus helping to offset one of our most significant inflationary pressures. Our researchers have been very successful in granting competitions and several years’ funding was secured for major research infrastructure, specifically for our ocean observatories. Our fundraising efforts—apart from CARSA—met their target for the year; and the deans, the development team and I have set higher targets for next year.

Our practice of integrating our planning processes enhances budget transparency as we align resources with priorities. Like many other universities, we have been seeking ways to support optimal decision-making: What kind of information do we need to make good decisions? What should we be measuring? How are we going to measure? How do we then use all that information at different levels to make good decisions? Enhanced planning tools have now been developed to define and articulate key planning indicators clearly and to measure results and outcomes. This fall will see their trial implementation. As a companion project, the Provost and VPFO will be consulting with budget decision-makers to review our budget processes to see if there are further ways in which they can be fine-tuned to provide better support, clarify roles and responsibilities, improve incentives and support the best planning and decision-making.

Our 2003 Campus Plan is under review and a first draft of the updated plan will be available this fall. I encourage you to provide your input through one of the many avenues that will be available on campus, in order to ensure that the Campus Plan reflects our academic priorities and our vision of stewarding our resources in a sustainable manner. Your input is critical as the updated Campus Plan will guide development on campus for the next 10 years with longer-term considerations for the next 25 years. The vision and principles set out in the Campus Plan will also guide the regular formulation of five-year capital plans.

Strength in people—building a collaborative environment

I started this update by restating my strong conviction that our university’s strength lies in the special combination of talented and dedicated people working in a collaborative and collegial environment. We have experienced much success in the recruitment and retention of faculty, students and staff these past few years, and UVic is known around the country for its extraordinary learning and working environment and a shared commitment to delivering on our mission. I believe that reputation is well-deserved, and I would like to thank every member of our campus community for building that environment and contributing to the atmosphere that encourages individual achievement, collaboration and respectful discussion—even when we exchange strongly held views. It would be hard to overestimate the value of this strength. One outcome and demonstration of this is the successful conclusion of a number of collective agreements—most notably the first collective agreement with the Faculty Association. This five-year agreement is very promising for the further development of our collegial environment. We were also able to make progress on the commitment in my earlier report to achieve some improvement in relative faculty salaries. I would like to congratulate and thank all those who worked hard to make this happen. We also just concluded a revision of our Employment Equity Plan, which confirms our commitment to equity, fairness and a healthy environment, clarifies roles and responsibilities and will guide us as we work towards our common goal of being the best university we can be.
Another significant achievement this part year was the thorough review of our internal communications practices, systems and mechanisms. With UVic Communications and Marketing in the lead, a committee representing academic and administrative units conducted the analysis and made a number of recommendations, which are already being implemented. The VPs’ regular Campus Updates are popular and serve a very useful purpose in promoting understanding and participation in planning and collegial governance. Deans and administrative leaders are actively engaged in new internal communications initiatives, and a new biweekly Campus Checklist was initiated last fall.

Similar progress has been made in the area of external communications. Thanks to the assistance and participation of literally thousands of staff, faculty and students, we now have a sharpened narrative that explains the “UVic Edge” in a clear, consistent and compelling way. This contributes importantly to the development of reputation, recruitment strategies, resources, and relationships with alumni, research partners, donors and governments. The UVic Edge is a way of authentically communicating our commitment to our students and communities and the particular strengths we bring to delivering on that commitment.

And onwards

For this current year I will continue to emphasize excellence in research and teaching and their integration in a right-sized highly functioning organization. I will continue to focus and emphasize the priorities outlined in the Strategic Plan, Campus Conversations report and the 2015 Planning and Budget Framework and ensure that appropriate tools and processes are put in place and are implemented. Connecting with the campus community and strengthening our sense of community and social responsibility remain personal priorities, along with ensuring robust and informed governance oversight of our university through Senate and the Board. As President I will of course also continue to represent UVic externally, sponsoring our community-university engagement, engaging in resource development and stewardship, and enhancing UVic’s profile in our region, nationally and internationally—with individuals, community and social organizations, business enterprises and governments at every level. As is common at this stage of a presidency, these activities will attract a somewhat greater portion of my time and energy.

I am confident in the continued success of our university and I count myself very fortunate to work with you all.

Opening the discussion

In our conversation on 6 October, I would like to hear from you and discuss what you would like to see as our university priorities for the coming year and years as well as your suggestions on how to reach our strategic goals. In the meantime, I would appreciate it if you would send me suggestions—questions or issues you would like me to address—for my brief presentation and our discussion; please send them along to pres@uvic.ca. I can’t promise to address every question in the time available, but I will certainly do my best to cover major issues and themes. Your feedback and suggestions are always important to me.

I look forward to our conversation on 6 October and to working with you in the years ahead.