Presidential Review 2017

Stewardship Statement

Submitted by Jamie Cassels, QC

1 March 2017

University of Victoria
Leading and serving the University of Victoria for the past three and a half years has been a great privilege and pleasure. I welcome the opportunity, as requested by the committee, to provide the following self-assessment and stewardship report, crafted to respond to the position description and to the appointment criteria developed by the committee.

My understanding of the strengths and commitments of our university has guided my leadership and I am proud of what we are accomplishing together. UVic is a national and international leader in many areas of critical research, creative endeavour and innovative pedagogy. Our faculty are committed and inspiring teachers, whose impressive research impact is felt locally and around the globe. Our staff are notably dedicated to advancing the institution and supporting the best possible student experience. Our students are extremely talented and high performing and drawn from diverse backgrounds from across Canada and around the world. At UVic they encounter a research-enriched education complemented by applied, clinical, and work-integrated learning opportunities. By international standards UVic is among the best.

History and the influence of place have shaped some of UVic’s distinctive features. Located in a smaller urban centre on Vancouver Island we are a destination university with three quarters of our students coming from outside the immediate region. UVic is large enough to offer a wide variety of programs and to have an international reputation, but small enough to offer a human-scaled and collegial environment for students, staff and faculty. Our university has a deep commitment to community engagement, socially responsive and environmentally oriented research, and the development of a global outlook. Our commitment to reconciliation between Canada’s Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and enhancing the educational opportunities and success of Indigenous students, is recognized nationally and internationally.

PAST STEWARDSHIP: ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

Upon assuming the presidency in 2013 I undertook a six-month listening exercise with faculty, staff and students in an effort to define priorities for our university and myself. This resulted in the “Report to the University Community on Campus Conversations” http://www.uvic.ca/president/activities/talks/ConversationsReport2014.pdf

In reviewing that report, I see that it has indeed served as a reliable roadmap for the past three and a half years and together we have made substantial progress in relation to its directions. It set out a variety of priorities and strategies organized around a few principal aims:

- focusing and building on our strengths;
- developing robust and transparent planning and governance processes;
- aligning resources and priorities; and
- communicating and engaging more effectively both internally and externally.

Focusing and building on UVic’s strengths

We have indeed continued to sharpen and emphasize the priorities outlined in the strategic plan, and further articulate and build on our strengths. Examples include the tremendous emphasis that our faculty and staff place on excellence in teaching and the student experience and new initiatives to further expand the breadth of experiential and research-enriched educational
opportunities. Co-op placements have increased substantially. We have created new international placements and internships and an Indigenous co-op program, we have increased opportunities for field schools, service and community engaged learning, and developed and committed to an understanding of the learning outcomes, competencies and skills that we want every student to acquire in order to succeed in a rapidly changing world.

Last year we finalized our new International Plan with associated strategies to further enhance international research, education and two-way student mobility. I took the opportunity at that time to create the “President’s Beyond Borders Fund” to communicate how important internationalization is and to provide support for student mobility and knowledge exchange.

Most recently, we have finalized our first Indigenous Plan setting out our goals and commitments for playing our important part in the national project of reconciliation, decolonization and enhancing Indigenous student success. This is a notable point in our history and for me personally, as it is part of a career-long commitment to leveraging our university’s strengths for the benefit of Indigenous students and communities. I have restated that personal and institutional commitment in our response to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, and after taking the Indigenous Cultural Acumen Training (ICAT), I asked that it be resourced and scaled up to achieve campus-wide impact. We have achieved excellent growth in Indigenous student enrolments and success at both the undergraduate and graduate levels and I have benefited from meetings with Indigenous community representatives and leaders to learn how we can further align our strengths with community priorities and I am devoting substantial energy to obtain the resources needed to support new and responsive programs. [http://www.uvic.ca/president/activities/talks/TRC_PresStatementUpdate_2015-10-30.pdf](http://www.uvic.ca/president/activities/talks/TRC_PresStatementUpdate_2015-10-30.pdf)

In relation to research and creative activity, our faculty and students stand out in a highly competitive environment for funding, dissemination and impact. Our new Strategic Research Plan, approved in 2016, provides an overarching and inclusive account of our dynamic capabilities, and sets out strategies to further support and advance excellence and impact. It emphasizes our goal of integrating research and education by supporting a strong research culture within every academic program, while also describing areas of dynamic capability where we have achieved, or have the potential to achieve global standing. The Plan emphasizes the important goal of enhancing and optimizing the provision of supports and services to ensure that our researchers are positioned for even greater success.

As UVic has continued to evolve its research profile I am pleased that we have achieved the goal I set to recalibrate the proportions of graduate to undergraduate enrolments to move towards a mix that better reflects our status as a research intensive university.

Much improved facilities and programs for recreation, health and wellness demonstrate our focus on the student experience. Similarly, enhanced academic supports, our new institutional strategy to support student mental health, and our almost-finalized policy on sexualized violence show this university’s commitment to continuous improvement of the broader learning environment. As president I have championed each of these initiatives.
Our natural and built environment is an important asset and a differentiating strength. Our new Campus Plan approved just last year, and the revised Sustainability Action Plan approved the year before, reflect the values and commitments that promote careful stewardship, while also providing a framework for the development and further animation of spaces for research and learning, recreation and interaction.

I am proud to have played a role in initiating, championing, guiding or helping to resource each of these various commitments and initiatives - though they all represent the work of many people.

**Strength in People**

The strength of the university lies in its people – students, faculty and staff. My goal has been to preserve and promote UVic’s special strengths in this regard. I have sought always to set a tone of ambition, inclusivity, collaboration and mutual respect. While a president’s duties are often away from campus, I have sought to maintain a presence on campus and to enhance two-way internal communications with students, faculty and staff in order to further emphasize these values, and promote alignment in our efforts. I enjoy these interactions very much, perhaps never more than when engaging with students through monthly meetings with each of the graduate and undergraduate student governments, and as many ad-hoc interactions as I can manage. Similarly, I interact with dozens of different faculty and staff every week, either through participation in university events or in group meetings or one-on-one – again, to the extent possible. Alumni events are always a pleasure as they serve to remind us back on campus that the work we do is appreciated and contributes to individual success and social progress – and also provide an opportunity to enlist the supporters that we need to continue that work.

More broadly, we have developed robust initiatives to promote communication and engagement, including better on-line tools, new written materials, and the well-received series of town halls and campus updates. And of course, I accept as many invitations as possible to speak at campus and community events, such as the recent and hugely successful conference on the Douglas Treaties, co-hosted with the Songhees Nation.

Recruiting talented faculty and staff is critical to the success of our university; and while there will always be strong national and international competition for the best, by the various available metrics we do exceptionally well. We successfully concluded five collective agreements in 2014, most notably the first collective agreement with our new faculty union. I meet regularly with the Faculty Association to ensure that I learn about any issues and concerns and to maintain a positive relationship.

Of great personal reward, is the opportunity to build and work with leadership teams within the university. The senior executive is made up of high achieving and dedicated leaders using an integrated, collaborative and strategic approach. Roles and responsibilities are clear and collaboration between the executive team is strong. Beginning with an annual retreat, and collaboratively developed work plans, the executive team are all delivering on their goals in a highly satisfactory manner and their teams, in turn, report high levels of trust and confidence.
The broader leadership at our university is similarly made up of talented and dedicated people. Through the monthly President’s Advisory Council meetings, interactions with Deans’ Council, leadership retreats, programs for senior administrators and other forums provide opportunities for senior leaders to discuss key opportunities and challenges, alignment of aims, and the support needed to be effective in their roles. I meet individually with every new dean, chair or director to learn about their area and their goals, and to discuss our common aims.

People thrive and achieve their best in a healthy and supportive organizational environment. I take every opportunity to communicate the importance of maintaining UVic’s highly collaborative and collegial culture, and our commitments to equity and diversity. These values are essential to the pursuit of excellence – the need to tap into the widest variety of experience, perspectives and talent and to fully achieve our mission. I meet regularly with the Director of Equity and Human Rights, and various advisory committees and I provided oversight and guidance in the development of our new Employment Equity Plan (approved in 2015) which very usefully clarifies roles, responsibilities and strategies for further enhancing the diversity of our community. I support wellness, mental health and healthy active living both through modeling those values and through presidential support and participation, for example by helping to launch our mental health initiative. My attempts to model healthy active living have produced one of my most cherished mementos to date - a humorous article and cartoon in the student newspaper entitled “Run Jamie Run.” [http://www.martlet.ca/run-jamie-run/](http://www.martlet.ca/run-jamie-run/)

**Governance**

The effective functioning of our bicameral and collegial governance processes are critical to the university’s success. I have worked with the Board of Governors and Senate to ensure that both governance bodies are engaged at the appropriate level in establishing focus and priorities, ensuring quality, and providing oversight and accountability. Both bodies (often through committees) confront the major strategic issues facing the university and contribute to the development of the plans to meet those issues. For example, both have been kept up to date on the development of the Indigenous Plan and the draft Sexualized Violence policy, and the appropriate committees are both providing advice and feedback on the development of our annual planning and budget framework. Orientation programs for new members of Senate and the Board, and UVic’s unique annual Joint Senate-Board Retreat ensure effective engagement by members and appropriate coordination between the two bodies.

Outside of Senate and the Board, we have broadened and deepened the involvement of faculty, staff and students in the multitude of planning and policy development activities that have taken place over the past three and a half years. For example, the engagement of the entire UVic community in the positioning process that led to the Edge was quite extraordinary. Similarly, the final versions of the Campus Plan, Strategic Research Plan, International Plan and the Indigenous Plan are all the product of robust collegial and collaborative engagement.

**External communications and advocacy**

In the Campus Conversations, I indicated the need, as a destination university on Vancouver Island, for us to work harder at external communications and reputational enhancement. This is
not simply because we want others to think well of us. Our reputation, and the way we communicate about UVic, creates the background against which decision-makers view us—whether they be students and parents making choices, government officials, funding agencies, potential philanthropic supporters or other partners.

As president, I have set external communications and reputational enhancement as a high priority. I have been gratified that our external communications efforts, including the Edge positioning campaign and a broader strategy of national engagement have resulted in significant momentum and success. As part of that strategy I have, of course, personally dedicated much time and energy to hundreds of interactions with individuals and groups, meetings with governments at all levels, social and business organizations, and live and written and media communications to raise the profile and appreciation for our university and for higher education in general.

Additionally, I have been honoured on behalf of the university to accept the invitations to assume leadership roles provincially and nationally including as a member of the board of Universities Canada and Chair of its Research Committee, and Chair of the Research Universities Council of British Columbia (RUCBC). My focus in these roles has been to align universities around shared opportunities and concerns, advocate on behalf of member institutions, provide input on a number of key government reviews, assist with the development of our system-wide priorities—and of course to ensure that UVic is viewed as an important national asset. Finally, I have put energy into creating and maintaining a collaborative alliance of our five differentiated post-secondary institutions on Vancouver Island.

Resources

A major focus of my first term has been to ensure resources are developed and deployed to support excellence in alignment with our priorities. We are operating in a resource-constrained environment. Success in resource allocation depends on two things—making the most of what we have, and pursuing opportunities for additional resources. The integrated planning process led by the Provost, ensures that resource allocations properly reflect priorities and are allocated in a way to enhance quality across the institution. We have also sought to increase transparency through campus updates, robust consultations with Senate and the Board, discussions with the student societies, and by developing and utilizing the Enhanced Planning Tools in the planning process.

These processes, along with an institutional ethic of prudent financial management have not only allowed UVic to avoid cutting budgets over the past four years, but have facilitated investments in new research, academic and student-focused priorities. Examples include the development of new academic programs (most notably in Engineering), the establishment of new teaching capacity in high demand areas, support for international students and areas impacted by strong international student interest, new supports for technology, increases in student financial aid, and investments in research infrastructure and library acquisitions.

Similarly, on the infrastructure side we have achieved major improvements in our physical campus. These include the world-class facilities in the new Centre for Recreation and Special Abilities; a beautiful new wing for Continuing Studies to support the division’s programs; new
academic facilities for the School of Exercise Science Physical and Health Education; refurbished science labs and new engineering labs, among other improvements.

As president, I have had a substantial focus on ensuring government and other support for all these completed initiatives, and for further investments to prepare us for the future. On the immediate horizon and at various stages in planning and execution are projects that will address major priorities, improve existing facilities and create exciting new capabilities. These include:

- increased student housing;
- an integrated wellness services centre;
- further enhancement of science labs and other academic facilities;
- a new engineering/computer science wing to support new programs and student growth;
- new facilities in Law to support the proposed new dual degree Indigenous law program;
- improved infrastructure that will enhance UVic’s energy distribution and reduce both energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions; and
- the development of an Oceans and Climate campus at Queenswood.

Processes are also underway to enhance the value to the university of its various real estate holdings, including Dunsmuir Lodge, the Vancouver Island Technology Park, and our downtown properties – the legacy of an extraordinary gift from Michael Williams.

Successful completion of the various initiatives I have mentioned also require the assembly of new resources from government, philanthropic support, partnerships and internal capital. Success depends upon good planning, effective government relations and communications, and effective fund development programs. Progress is being made in each dimension, though we know we can do better, especially in the case of philanthropic support. The recently commissioned comprehensive assessment of our fund development programs and activities shows that UVic is in the “middle of the pack” in terms of many performance metrics, but could do much better. The report suggests a variety of adjustments and strategies to strengthen our processes and results, and we have begun to implement these recommendations, including my own increased prioritization of this in the president’s role.

In summary, our university has flourished due to the efforts of many people. There have, of course, been many challenges. Not every initiative has met with success and there have indeed been setbacks and disappointments. However, as they say, if you don’t play, you can’t win, and even our setbacks have provided us with learnings that strengthen our hand the next time around. Considering the achievements and progress of our university over the past several years, I am optimistic and excited about the future of UVic.

PROJECTED STEWARDSHIP: FUTURE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The future holds challenges as always, but even greater opportunities. The context for Canadian universities has changed substantially over the past several decades and continues to change even more rapidly. In Canada, and indeed around the world, there has been tremendous growth in the number of institutions and in student participation rates, creating a highly competitive environment for talent and resources (especially in light of an aging population profile).
Globalization and technology have changed the environment within which we operate, and the world as encountered by our researchers and students. University mandates have expanded to include new expectations around research and innovation, knowledge mobilization, social and technological innovation and community engagement. Universities are expected to offer solutions to some of our most challenging issues including global environmental, political and economic change. We are called upon to contribute to sustainable and inclusive innovation and to adapt our programs to confront issues such as the future of work for our students in light of social and technological change. We are seen to have a critical role in addressing issues of inequality, intercultural misunderstanding, declining social cohesion, and notably in Canada and especially for the University of Victoria, the goal of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

These expectations in fact define the opportunity. Universities have never been seen as more important to individual and social wellbeing. To meet the challenges, we must embrace the expectations. We must step up our ambition to pursue quality and impact in our programs of education, research and engagement. We must build on our differentiating strengths. And we must communicate UVic’s value and distinct advantages. We are well positioned to do all this, and these are the aspirations that motivate a president!

Success starts with the recruitment of the best and most talented faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds, and building new and better programs and supports that facilitate successful careers. We are looking forward from a place of great strength in terms of the talent and dedication of both staff and faculty. We must implement the goals in the Strategic Research Plan of pursuing and supporting even further excellence in research and creative activity, and also continue to strengthen supports for both faculty and staff. Very importantly, it is imperative that we all continue to work to promote UVic’s organizational culture of collaboration and collegiality, cultivate an ethic of service, and practice the values of equity, diversity and mutual respect, along with institutional engagement and ambition.

As a destination university, we are flourishing. Our student body is diverse and highly talented. For the first time in 20 years we are above our “targeted” enrolment at both the graduate and undergraduate level. Our focus will not be on growth, but on quality and diversity. To attract talented students from diverse backgrounds requires further focus on student success and building on the elements that make up our extraordinary academic environment. This includes broadening our commitment to research-enriched and experiential learning with a goal of every student, graduate and undergraduate, having a substantial experiential, international or research opportunity. It means deepening our commitment to Indigenous student success. Additionally, growing an ever more diverse and vibrant academic environment requires us to continue to focus on health and wellness, inclusive and welcoming practices, and effective support programs; and to continue expanding our residential capacity to maintain our first year guarantee and offer housing to students, the majority of whom are from away and encounter a very tight and expensive housing market in greater Victoria.

We must continue to develop new academic programs, albeit selectively, taking into account student demand, social need, the alignment of existing or planned research strength, and a sustainable resourcing strategy. For example, I am currently focusing much effort on
developing the necessary resources for very ambitious new programs in engineering/computer science and Indigenous law.

Finally, we must increase our focus on diversifying and enhancing resources both from traditional sources and from partnerships and philanthropic sources, and by optimizing resources already in place. To support these efforts we must further amplify our external communications initiatives in order to reach decision-makers and potential funders.

**A New Strategic Plan**

In order to fully address the challenges and opportunities and to achieve the goals and directions outlined above, I believe a new strategic plan is required. My priority in 2017/18, if re-appointed, is to undertake a strategic planning process for UVic. The existing strategic plan has served us very well over the past 5 years but there is an appetite in the campus community for closure on the current plan and development of a new strategic plan. The planning process will provide an important opportunity to discuss the opportunities and challenges I have outlined in this document and to work together to develop strategic directions for the next five years.

A new plan must be ambitious and aspirational. It must answer the question of what does “being the best” look like for UVic and how do we get there? I anticipate that the plan will be different. Given the extraordinary amount of specific planning we have completed in the last three years (Strategic Research Plan, International Plan, Campus Plan, Indigenous Plan, Institutional Communications Plan, etc.) I anticipate that a new strategic plan will be less detailed and operational than the existing plan. It will an ambitious framework of commitments, aspirations and directions that knits together these other plans and provides a shared narrative and compass for the next five years.

We can all share pride in what this university has achieved in its first 54 years and can be confident about our potential to accomplish great things in the future. UVic is well positioned to build on the excellence of its research and teaching, grow its reputation, and to find even more ways to work with and benefit our students, and our communities, locally, nationally and globally. I would welcome the opportunity to lead UVic for another term, and to continue to work with and for the university’s extremely talented students, faculty and staff.

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