

## **UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE**

### **2015 FIAT LUX ADDRESS**

Michael J. Mahon, Ph.D., President & Vice-Chancellor

Good Afternoon and welcome to the 2015 Fiat Lux Address. It is my pleasure to be here today and I would like to thank you for taking the time to join me. Welcome to those joining us online as we stream this address to our northern campuses.

Welcome to our new chancellor Janice Vazari. Many of you know Janice. She and her husband Glen make their home here in Lethbridge. Janice is the first graduate of the University of Lethbridge to serve as Chancellor and we are very pleased to have her here today.

Welcome to the 2015-16 Academic Year! To all the new faculty and staff joining the U of L family this year, thank you for making the University of Lethbridge your university!

To those of you back for another year, welcome and thank you for all you do to make the University of Lethbridge shine. I look forward to meeting with all faculty councils and major administrative departments later this fall and into the new year.

I know I have said this before, but wow, what a difference a year can make. As you all know, earlier this year Albertans elected a new government – a surprising event considering our Province's political history. The NDP platform promised accessibility, quality, predictability and sustainability. Our Strategic Plan is built upon these same values and we look forward to working with our new government to further strengthen our University for the benefit of our students and the communities we serve.

Seventy of the 87 MLAs elected are brand new to the legislature. Impressing on them the important contributions made by our alumni, faculty, staff and students to the communities we serve, as well as the opportunities that lie ahead, is an important task and needs to be one of our top priorities.

The story we're telling about our university – the same one we've been telling for years – is firmly rooted in our core mandate and values. Destination 2020 continues to guide us forward. We've seen great success by committing to the values outlined by our strategic plan and using them to focus our community. Every faculty, department and unit at this university has an important role to play, and a lot has been accomplished in the past year.

I would like to touch on a few highlights and provide you with some of my insights on moving forward:

### **Enrolment**

This is an exciting year as we welcome one of the largest groups of students in our history. This fall there are **8,453** registrants at the University of Lethbridge. This is a **2.8%** increase from Fall 2014 and **1.3%** higher than our target. It is an incredible achievement and I encourage you all to keep up the good work!

Last fall we reported a 2% decline from 2013. We had reason to be concerned, especially considering the numbers lost due to the closing of the Edmonton campus. In the face of this difficult situation, our campus community pulled together and I would like to thank everyone for their efforts on this front.

On the undergraduate side, our new High School registrants are up over **18%** from last year. And while we are celebrating this achievement, we must also recognize the change in our student population. It's a good change – one we have been working hard to achieve – but it means the needs of the majority of our students are different than what they once were. Because of this, they require the supports of our community more than ever.

As you all know, the transition from high school to a post-secondary setting takes some adjustment. I would like to applaud the efforts of all of you – student services teams, counselors, health centre physicians and staff, advisors, residence assistants, caretakers and all other faculty and staff for the supports that you provide to our students.

Your hard work is paying off because our persistence rates are increasing. The overall retention rate at the U of L is up **1.9%**, an almost unheard of feat for universities like ours. This is a measure of success we should be very proud of! The programs and initiatives that you have put into place provide students at the U of L with the insight, knowledge, skills and experiences necessary to be successful throughout their academic and professional careers.

Another way we know of to enhance retention is through student residences. For this reason, we have targeted 20% of our Lethbridge student population to live on campus. We are currently at approximately 13% so we need to add another 530 beds on campus to reach our target. Ideally we aspire to increase our on-campus beds by 1000 in the not so distant future.

We also hosted a very successful New Student Orientation this year. I would like to commend all who were involved in NSO. More than 2,000 students and parents registered to attend this year's welcome – the largest group ever. The formal

Commencement ceremony, introduced last year, kicked off two days of activities that included everything from an introduction to liberal education to a campus-wide scavenger hunt.

Another significant group of new students have joined our University by starting their classes at the Calgary Campus. Targeting primarily adult learners taking classes in evenings and on weekends, more than 2/3 of the students are working full-time. This has created an experience and opportunity that didn't exist 20 years ago.

This fall, Calgary boasts a **2.6%** increase in enrolment with 795 students. Working with our Campus Alberta south partners, we continue to offer laddering opportunities with Bow Valley College, Olds College and Athabasca University. In addition to the Bachelor of Management currently offered, the Faculty of Fine Arts has hired a full-time instructor and now offers the New Media minor in Calgary. Two very successful sections of Education 2500 were offered there over the summer, and three Master of Science in Management students are working from offices on the Calgary Campus as they pursue their graduate programs. Other Faculties are considering new program options as well and we are excited about the opportunities.

It is essential for us to continue to evolve as a comprehensive university. This of course is predicated on our success in attracting and retaining graduate students. We have offered graduate programming for more than 30 years but in the last number of years our shared commitment to graduate students has really come into focus. Our continued success as a comprehensive university and our success with our research and creative activities must be tied to the creation of graduate opportunities. To accomplish this, we must be actively seeking, within all academic areas of the university, to create graduate opportunities.

I would like to acknowledge those who have worked very hard over the last year on a number of the initiatives introduced in prior Fiat Lux Addresses. We have made great progress on these initiatives and I'm pleased to provide a brief update on each.

### **Liberal Education Revitalization**

General Faculties Council approved the implementation of a proposal for the Integrated and Collaborative Liberal Education Revitalization Strategy last December. A proposal to change the title of the General Liberal Education Requirement list (affectionately known as GLER) to Liberal Education list was approved by GFC in June and a proposal for that list to be inclusive of all Faculties as of May 1, 2016 was also approved at that time.

I would like to once again thank the Lib Ed Revitalization Team for all their hard work. I would also like to commend them for their foresight in creating the new Friends of Liberal Education Fund at the University. A significant gift has already been made to the fund and the proceeds will be going to support students and opportunities for the continued growth of liberal education at the U of L. I encourage everyone to learn more about this fund and what liberal education means on our campus.

Members of the committee have been meeting with faculty and advisory councils as well as administrative units to build awareness and to educate the campus community about this foundational element. They have been busy promoting liberal education at campus events and this fall Liberal Education 1000, a dual credit course, will be delivered at Lethbridge Collegiate Institute, helping share the benefits of liberal education with a high school audience. This is one of two dual credit courses being delivered by the University of Lethbridge and is the first time a comprehensive

academic research institution is conducting academic intensive dual credit courses in our province.

### **FNMI Initiatives Update**

Another group that has been busy this past year is the Aboriginal Education Committee. Last December, the interim First Nations, Métis and Inuit Gathering Place in the Paterson Centre was opened and gifted a new name by Elder Wilton Goodstriker. The centre's new name is likaiskini (E-KESS-KIN-EE), named after Dr. Leroy Little Bear, and is Blackfoot for Low Horn. It speaks to the stance of a charging buffalo, its head down and horns low to the ground. Elders Andy Blackwater and Bruce Wolf Child explained that education is the new buffalo, deeply valued and the way to the future, making the name very appropriate.

In 2014/15, the generosity of a donor helped expand the Aboriginal Student Orientation Program. The new funds enabled additional fall orientation activities for FNMI students, increased involvement of Elders during Native Awareness Week, and a Convocation celebration and Round Dance for graduating FNMI students and their families. I am proud to say this gift has been renewed for the upcoming year, which is great news, especially with FNMI enrolment up **8.1 %** from last year!

Additionally, many of you know, the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. We have started to consider the implications of the report by reviewing our existing activities in relation to its recommendations and planning for long-term support of these recommendations.

## **Internationalization Strategy**

Last fall I mentioned work was underway regarding the restructuring of international activities here at the University of Lethbridge. Since then, a new department and International Advisory Committee have been created, and an Internationalization Strategy with four primary areas of excellence has been developed. Those areas are: International Strategic Enrolment Management; International Partnership and Student Mobility; International Research and Faculty Engagement; and Internationalization at Home.

These priority areas have helped guide international enrolment targets, define primary recruitment markets and opportunities for intercultural and language exchanges between Canadian and international students, and have led to a number of new partnerships like the one with Gakushuin Women's College in Tokyo, Japan which has yielded over 100 short-term program students studying in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program, five exchange students, and a joint video conference course delivery call ASIA 1850.

## **Research**

And what a year it has been in the area of research! This has been the most successful year in our institution's history in terms of new NSERC funding. We had an 81% NSERC Discovery Grant success rate. We received 20 Discovery Grants and 2 Discovery Development Grants for a total value of \$3.1million. The grand total of new faculty funding announced from NSERC this year was nearly \$3.5 million – a 50% increase over 2013-14.

I am also very excited to report the large increase in Social Sciences and Humanities funding we received this year. We received three new SSHRC Insight Grants worth

nearly \$600 thousand. Three new Insight Development Grants were also awarded – a total value of nearly \$100 thousand.

We had four successful Canada Foundation for Innovation applications. Over \$2.1 million in Innovation Funds for a Cell Signaling Interdisciplinary Research Centre, with matching funding from the Government of Alberta. We received \$28 thousand in funds from the John R. Evans Leaders Fund (JELF) Partnership program, to establish a Digital Library of Cultural Heritage Objects. We received \$81 thousand for an Ecosystem-Scale Flux System to measure exchanges of water vapor, carbon dioxide and methane from cottonwood riparian forests in southern Alberta; and \$100 thousand for the Prairie to Pharmacy project, which combines plant science and indigenous knowledge to generate cancer-fighting drugs from prairie plant extracts. Congratulations to you all.

The University of Lethbridge also received more than three quarters of the 2014-15 Major Grant and Leverage Grant funding (\$520 thousand) awarded by the Alberta Gambling Research Institute this year. And Western Economic Diversification awarded the University of Lethbridge over \$1.1 million for Synbridge, a new synthetic biology makerspace. This award enable the development of intellectual property and increase student start-up opportunities, and will result in opportunities for revenue generation through partnership with industry.

Synbridge is one of two examples of the makerspaces created as part of the new AGILITY program in innovation launched by the Office of the Vice President Research earlier this year. AGILITY allows students to gain practical experience with innovation and entrepreneurship through academic programming and access to makerspaces and a business accelerator in the coming years.

Another exciting announcement on the research front this summer was the appointment of Dr. Erasmus Okine joining us as Vice-president (Research). Dr. Okine joins us from the University of Alberta, where he has served most recently in a dual capacity as the Associate Vice-President (Research) and Associate Vice-President (Academic).

We are very excited to have Dr. Okine join our leadership team. His proven strengths will be a great addition to our team and help us continue to move forward on the research front.

### **People Plan**

People ARE the essential resource of our institution. *YOU* define our university and are our greatest strength.

Last fall, the People Plan committee held a number of World Cafés and put out an online survey to all employees to get your feedback about the work environment here at the U of L and I would like to thank those of you who participated for your comments and support. The People Plan has been drafted. It is going out for consultation to employee groups and is on schedule to go to Dean's Council with the vision to be approved by the Board of Governors later this fall. Initial implementation will begin in the New Year. I would like to thank the team of individuals involved in this process for bringing this important work to fruition.

## **The Year Ahead**

So what does the year ahead look like? For me personally, I ask what do I need to accomplish as I embark on my second term as President? When I look ahead I feel very confident of the path we are on. A path defined by Destination 2020 and the strategic directions it outlines:

1. We will excel as a comprehensive university
2. We will inspire and support student potential
3. We will promote access to quality, affordable post-secondary education
4. We will build internal community and enhance relationships with external communities
5. We will enhance the sustainability of the University

Last week I held our annual senior leaders' retreat with 36 members of our senior administration. We each shared our objectives for the upcoming year. There were a number of common philosophies and values identified. We are working to consolidate these to share with the wider campus community, but in a nutshell here are some of the common themes:

We all recognize the importance of achieving the vision and direction of our Strategic Plan and that we must undertake a deliberate and strategic approach to achieving these goals. We recognize that we are in a constantly evolving environment and that to achieve our goals we must be collaborative, build relationships, and find ways to be creative in a resource-strained reality. We know we must strive for effective communication across our campuses, be supportive and respectful of our diverse environment and that we need to elevate our priorities and push our boundaries. We need to be different and celebrate the unique nature of our institution

### **How will we achieve this?**

We will continue to consider our student population and the mix of our students on our campuses. On this front, a new Strategic Enrolment Plan is under development. It will outline the future undergraduate, masters, and doctoral student composition of this University. We know we need to continue to grow our graduate footprint. We need to do this methodically taking into consideration our strength in undergraduate numbers, primarily new high school registrants, and cultivate an environment where all our students can shine.

We will continue to evolve as a university that is experiential and diverse, encouraging student involvement at every level. We all know developing life success doesn't only happen in the classroom. Our recent comprehensive review of athletics and sport/recreation programming at the U of L has provided strong suggestions as to our path forward in this area. We will maintain our teams and provide quality recreation programming. To do this will require new resources from external sources; we have set a new process for moving forward in Pronghorn Athletics and Sport & Recreation Services to help us achieve these goals.

We will continue to establish new programs. Several of the new programs introduced this past year are illustrating they are meeting the growing needs of our learners. Therapeutic Recreation, Master of Nursing, and pre-Engineering are all full this fall. The interest in engineering within the local community and the community of professional engineers has been so overwhelming that discussions regarding the introduction of a new engineering program are in consideration as we look at growing our professional programs footprint. And our PhD offerings continue to gain us national

attention, as the Faculty of Education is excited to admit their first doctoral students, who will commence studies in July 2016.

We will advance the 50 by 50 Research Chair program. As part of our mission to confirm our position as a comprehensive institution with a strong emphasis on research, innovation and creative activity, we are committed to reaching our goal of 50 Research Chairs by 2017, the year of our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Research chair positions are high-profile academic appointments that recognize the accomplishments of leading scholars, and facilitate increased focus on scholarly activity. By attracting and retaining accomplished faculty in increasingly diverse and strategic areas of focus, we are ensuring that we set ourselves on a path toward a productive research agenda for the *next* 50 years.

Currently, the University of Lethbridge is home to 42 Research Chairs, including 28 sponsored by external agency support and 14 Board of Governors Research Chairs. We recently updated our Board of Governors Research Chair Guidelines, to include Tier I and Tier II Research Chair positions for faculty members with established and emerging research leadership profiles, respectively.

We will grow our presence, both in programming and research, in Agriculture and Agribusiness. As the most significant industry in our own back yard, we must actively seek partnerships and meet the needs of our community. In partnership with Lethbridge College, we will advance the establishment and leadership of the Centre for Agriculture Research and Agribusiness Innovation. We will also promote and encourage tri-Council and other research opportunities and provide the necessary supports for faculty applying for these funds.

We will continue our planning for the Destination Project. As we completed the schematic design and entered into Design Development over the summer we are in the enviable position of having a “shovel ready” project. With the change in government however, we spent considerable time educating both elected officials and new members within the civil service of the importance and necessity of this project. Despite this being the third time we have had to do this, these conversations are incredibly important and they must continue. We continue to advocate to government for an accelerated schedule of funding and for the additional funds necessary to complete the project.

Our thanks go to members of the steering committee and technical committee who have spent endless hours working with our architects and technical consultants to ensure this project meets the needs of the academic community and students for many years to come.

It is encouraging to see the commitment of the university community to this project. As encouraging is the amount of very vocal and tangible support we are receiving from the broader southern Alberta community including our Mayor, Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Lethbridge, and the K to 12 system. This collective voice is being heard by our Government and we are hopeful they will respond accordingly. We have been successful in positioning the Destination Project as an important piece of community infrastructure that will be incredibly enabling for Lethbridge and the surrounding areas.

From the beginning, the Destination Project has been more than just the building of a new Science and Academic Building. As important is the revitalization of University Hall and the planning for repurposing of facilities like the CCBN building and Hepler

Hall. While our efforts still focus on the new building, we must turn our thinking to phase 2 of the Destination project. How can a revitalized University Hall enable our colleagues in the Social Sciences, the Humanities, and Fine Arts? How do we create a supportive environment for transdisciplinary research and community connection – as we are doing in our planning for the Science and Academic Building? How will we ensure this iconic Arthur Erickson building serves the needs of this university and southern Albertans long into the future? These are issues we will begin to address in the year ahead. We will build on the recent success of our SSHRC researchers and the momentum they have created.

### **What do we NEED to do to achieve this?**

It is essential to ensure sustainable and predictable operational funding for the University of Lethbridge in the years ahead. The province has indicated a review of Alberta's post-secondary funding is underway. This is an opportunity for us to correct historical inequities that have disadvantaged the U of L in the past and initial interactions with the new MLAs that serve our city have been very positive. The last few years have been especially challenging in regards to our budgeting and I would like to thank all of you, in particular those in Financial Services/Financial Planning and those on the Budget Advisory Committee, for your tenacity and creative thinking to help navigate us through these challenging times.

I would also like to thank everyone who has been involved in the Banner Revitalization Process. This is a major restructuring of how the University does business. It is a significant change to all units on campus as we are introducing tools that we have not had that will help us do our jobs better. There really isn't a unit on campus this work doesn't affect and I applaud those of you who have been involved.

We need to ensure the Destination Project remains a key infrastructure project for the Province. In essence, much of my time needs to be spent on external advocacy to ensure the necessary environment to make our initiatives such as the Destination Project successful. I need to work with donors, all levels of government, external agencies like Universities Canada, and funding agencies to help us achieve our institutional goals. Two weeks ago I was able to share the story of the importance of our University and other regional universities like ours, to over 40 Federal deputy Ministers and senior leaders of federal and Tri-Council departments. With the Presidents of two other like-sized Universities, we impressed on this group the impact mid-sized institutions have on our respective communities and by extension, on Canada as a whole. Our message was heard and agreed with. We can now continue a national dialogue on how “bigger isn’t necessarily better.”

It is for this reason, the need to advocate forcefully beyond the confines of our University that I recently solidified and better defined the position of Provost under Dr. Andy Hakin’s leadership . I would like to thank him and commend him on a job well done so far in this role. And, thank you to all of my executive team for their leadership and support.

I have talked in the past of our fundraising goals and noted some recent, enabling gifts during this address. Previously, I have alluded to our comprehensive fundraising campaign. This campaign is still in the quiet phases and our hope is to successfully launch the public phase of this campaign as part of our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Our achievement to date already is approaching the total amount we raised during our last campaign – and we have only just begun. This campaign has potential to significantly enhance our academic and research programs and to help support countless students.

It is time for us to consider the opportunity to have named Faculties at the University, endowed chairs and professorships, enhanced research partnerships, and of course enhanced supports for students. While I recognize this may cause uncertainty to some, I have to express again how philanthropy and research partnerships are significant opportunities for our University. We have grown to recognize and now benefit from the valuable relationships that can occur through TRUE philanthropy – a willingness to give and in doing so, to nourish, care for, develop and enhance with no expectation of return. We see how a donor can achieve their personal goals and how the faculty and students of the University can achieve their goals through philanthropy. A great example of this is a recent gift of \$100,000 to the Centre for Oral History and Traditions. While the donor wishes to remain anonymous, their motivation was to help capture the stories of southern Alberta. The faculty of the Centre made a very compelling case to the donor and it has resulted in a gift that will allow the faculty to achieve many of the early goals they have set for themselves in setting up the Centre.

We have been very successful in our fundraising efforts over the years but there is a need for us to do more. We must properly and effectively thank those who give gifts to the University and keep them apprised of how we are using their gifts in support of students, programs, infrastructure or research. I had the pleasure of delivering a handwritten thank you note from a student award recipient to a donor in Calgary and I got to witness the reaction as our 99-year old donor read the grateful words of a young graduate student. I am spending an increasing amount of my time working with alumni and donors of the University. It is incredibly motivating to see the reaction of people when they know their gift is making a difference in someone's life. As satisfying is seeing how, by way of these gifts, our students and faculty are also achieving many of their aspirations.

I would like to thank the Deans and the many faculty members who are actively working with donors to our University. I would like to thank the staff in University Advancement for their efforts as well. I would also like to thank those donors who believe in the people at the U of L and believe so firmly in what we are doing that they are willing to pledge their personal financial support to help achieve our goals.

As I said earlier, people are the essential resource of our institution; *you* each define our university and are our greatest strength. Do not underestimate the value you bring to this university. We create paths for people to shine, and in doing so we are proving that together we really do shine brighter.

Thank you again for your continued commitment to the University of Lethbridge.