



Message from David T. Barnard, President and Vice-Chancellor

Dear Colleagues,

For almost 135 years, the University of Manitoba has been shaping academic, business and community leaders, enhancing our community and conducting research that changes the world.

Throughout our history, we have grown and evolved through a constant process of rethinking, re-evaluating and reassessing where we are, where we want to be and how we'll get there.

Many members of the University of Manitoba community have heard me refer to the complex academic structure that exists here. Currently, we have 20 faculties and schools and 78 departments delivering programs to serve over 27,000 students. By comparison, the University of Toronto has the same number of faculties and schools, and only 14 additional departments, to serve 72,000 students. Almost 30,000 students at the University of Calgary are served by 13 faculties and schools encompassing 70 departments. At McMaster University, programs are delivered to its 27,000 students through 6 faculties and 49 departments. In fact, based on available data, no other medical-doctoral institution of our size and scope in Canada has as many free-standing faculties and schools or departments as we do.

I believe that this overly elaborated academic structure impedes our academic work in at least three important ways.

1. It affects academic planning and decision making because academic leaders – especially deans and directors – are more removed from these processes than they should be. Put simply, this group is too large to bring together effectively on these and other matters.
2. This structure results in the inefficient use of our most precious resource, namely, our people, who should have the opportunity to use their skills more creatively to advance our learning, discovery and engagement missions.
3. Most importantly, the need to navigate within our highly articulated structure hinders progress on our Strategic Planning Framework priorities, notably, our commitment to providing an outstanding student experience and to enhancing our teaching and research programs in areas of strength and/or strategic importance to our province and nation. Students require more flexible program and course selection, and simpler academic regulations to achieve their educational and career goals; faculty, in turn, require greater opportunities for inter- and multi-disciplinary collaboration to develop and advance their teaching and research programs.

I want to begin an important conversation within the University of Manitoba community about how we move forward and enhance our commitment to our students, our faculty and staff, and to the community we serve. It is my vision to see the University of Manitoba's academic structure better reflect our size and scope, enhancing rather than impeding our ability to deliver on our mandate.

When the University of Manitoba's Strategic Planning Framework was adopted, I committed to ensuring that it would guide the decisions we make together and that we would use it to pursue our ultimate objective of achieving excellence. Initiatives like ROSE and OARs have been focused on transforming our organizational infrastructure and approaches, in order to improve the way the university conducts its work. It is now time to move forward with a plan to simplify and improve our university's academic structure, so that we can more effectively achieve our strategic vision.

Some work designed to address our current academic structure is already underway. Late last year, we began a process where deans and directors of faculties and schools with natural affinities of various sorts began working in clusters to explore some new avenues of collaboration and interaction. Through this process, work on new cross-faculty academic programming, the sharing of administrative resources and facilities, and collaborative outreach activity has already begun. It has shown us that more and closer ties among units can be beneficial - to students, faculty and staff and to our community at large.

This cluster mechanism, I believe, can serve as a useful starting point in the development of a plan to simplify and improve our academic structure. To this end, I have asked Dr. Joanne Keselman, Vice President (Academic) and Provost, to work with deans and directors through the cluster groups and they, in turn, with their faculty, staff, students, alumni and external stakeholders, to identify viable options for reducing the number of faculties and schools from the current total of 20 to a number closer to the national average of 13 by 2017.

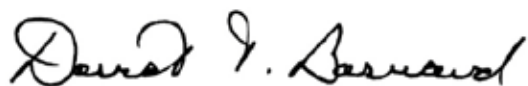
Based on discussions to date, it is clear that there are significant opportunities to improve our academic structure in the health sciences area. The move to interprofessional education and an increasing emphasis on multi-disciplinary research teams, combined with the need to address common issues including clinical education and program accreditation, provide compelling reasons to proceed with this cluster as a first step in the development of a plan. To this end, Dr. Keselman will work with the health sciences cluster to develop a proposal or set of options by December 2012 for consideration by our governing bodies. An interim report on this work will be provided in the spring of 2012.

It is clear that other opportunities exist to improve our academic structure. I encourage faculties or departments that see possibilities where closer relationships among themselves would be beneficial to bring their ideas forward for discussion.

We remain committed, as the only medical-doctoral institution in Manitoba, to contributing to our communities' and our province's cultural, social and economic well-being. This process will enhance our ability to meet the needs of our students, our faculty and our community as a whole.

We want this change to be invigorating and exciting. We want it to be inclusive, and will engage the University of Manitoba in discussions about how this goal will be achieved. Finally, we will only move forward where it makes sense, and proposals will be advanced, discussed, improved and approved through the University of Manitoba's collegial governance processes.

This institution will soon be 135 years old. We respect and honour our traditions but must adapt them to ensure a vibrant and prosperous future for the much loved University of Manitoba, its staff and students and the community it serves.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "David J. Bernard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.