The President’s Preface

I am very pleased to present the University of Guelph’s renewed strategic framework. This document is the result of the efforts of many people from inside and outside of the University. It has been crafted to reflect the complexity and nuances of this institution, including its relationships with the people and communities it serves. It has been designed to provide an inspirational expression of our common purpose, as well as a practical, strategic framework that we can use to chart our future.

Strategic documents come in many forms. Our strategic renewal process delivered a product that is relevant to the University at this time. It has been 20 years since we last examined the strategic elements that connect our existing mandate and mission to our ongoing planning processes. Planning and adapting to change is ongoing. This new framework will guide the articulation of specific action plans in the months and years ahead. It will provide a platform for preparing detailed institutional planning documents, including the Strategic Mandate Agreement we hold with the province and the Strategic Research Plan that shapes our relationship with various external funding partners. Our new strategic framework reflects conversations and consultations that occurred during the past eight months. It represents converging aspirations. It helps direct choices while leaving room for transformative thinking and new initiatives. It reaffirms – to ourselves and to others – who we are, where we want to focus, and how we want to move forward.

At the heart of the new strategic framework are five themes: Inspiring Learning and Inquiry; Catalyzing Discovery and Change; Connecting Communities; Stewarding Valued Resources; and Nurturing a Distinctive University Culture. Each theme is described in the document and accompanied by a set of objectives. With each theme, a suite of complementary questions is provided that can be used as a tool to help frame our future planning in an institutional context.

Our new strategic framework encompasses activities and endeavours on all our campuses – Guelph, Guelph-Humber, and Ridgetown. It serves to reaffirm – to ourselves and to others – that we are committed to maintaining excellence and our distinctive, caring university culture. These elements are intertwined at U of G and integral to our future success.

The framework reflects our commitment to sustaining deep disciplinary strengths as a comprehensive university while leveraging our proven interdisciplinary capacities and unique strengths. It salutes the legacy of our founding colleges – the Ontario
Agricultural College, the Ontario Veterinary College, and the MacDonald Institute – and how their history has positioned us to achieve continued excellence in the areas of agriculture, food, animal health and community engagement. At the same time, our history has positioned us to achieve continued excellence as a comprehensive university through our commitment to academic breadth in interdisciplinary and collaborative scholarly activities. Equally, it invites our commitment to advancing our growing international presence and global connections. The framework also reflects and reinforces our deep commitment to diversity, inclusion and accountability, and helps ensure the actions we take today effectively prepare us for our future.

Let me also take this opportunity to address another question that I have been asked. As this strategic renewal process has developed over the last eight months, some members of our community have asked what particular activities or areas I see as key to the University in the near term. Of course, with the support of our University community, particular areas of focus will always continue to emerge as points for attention within our various portfolio plans. The presented framework, with its five strategic themes, will be a valuable guiding resource throughout. In this context, with the various plans to be created over the next few years, we have opportunities to deliver significant advances in institutional areas such as: internationalization, graduate and undergraduate education and experience, interdisciplinary research, supportive and healthy campus environments, and mobilized knowledge that improves local and global communities.

What makes this strategic framework distinctly ours is the fact that it resulted from a process of engagement and consultation. This process created a set of guiding themes that speak to our story, signal our sense of what matters, and shape a future that will be uniquely ours.

I am tremendously grateful to everyone who contributed to the preparation of this document. This includes more than 1,100 individuals – students, faculty, staff, alumni, members of the broader community, donors, and retirees – who participated in the Fall 2015 conversations. The dedicated members of the Strategic Renewal Advisory Committee guided the work that followed, from conversational input to offering counsel. My gratitude extends to the members of the University’s Senate, Board of Trustees and Board of Governors for their ongoing encouragement and support of the strategic renewal process. It has been a source of great personal inspiration to see this University, and the communities that support it, come together with passion, and strength of conviction, to chart our path forward.

Our future success relies on such continued, collective efforts. I am confident that we will deliver in this regard, bound together by a renewed sense of common purpose, and inspired by the guideposts offered to us through this new strategic framework.

Franco J. Vaccarino
President and Vice-Chancellor
UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH

Strategic Framework: Charting Our Path

Our need for strategic renewal

The University of Guelph last created a strategic plan in 1995. The two decades that followed included technological, scientific, and cultural changes so profound that they reshaped our very understanding of the world around us. The challenges we now face are more urgent than ever. Climate change, population growth, shifting ideologies, emerging technologies, big data, and social media are only a few of the fundamental shifts demanding adaptive learners and responsive research.

Showing great foresight, the U of G community recognized that these shifts also present new opportunities to fulfill the University’s mandate of creating and sharing knowledge. Today, we are regarded nationally and internationally as a force for research excellence and innovation, learner-centered and engaged education, and knowledge mobilization and transfer.

Referencing the strategic plan of 20 years ago, we adapted and thrived thanks to our historical strengths, emerging capacities, and comprehensive approach. Our ability to be prepared for change, and successfully adapt to it, is a characteristic that has served us well. It is now time to renew our strategic path and offer fresh and relevant guideposts that we can use to chart our way forward. An expression of our common purpose – and a shared determination of what matters most – will allow us to continue to thrive. We will stay true to our roots while connecting in new ways to our changing world as we navigate the challenges ahead and evolve to serve the needs of the future.

Our legacy

The University’s three founding colleges were established to address and create change, and they did so with vision and conviction. These pioneering academic institutions and their commitment to excellence, innovation and service became the foundation of the University of Guelph. Their values and stories are embedded in the University’s mandate, activities and culture, and have guided our path to the present.

The Ontario Agricultural College (OAC) began in 1874 with a grant of 500 acres and a mandate to blend theory and new thinking in agricultural production. Even in those early days, OAC was committed to developing the whole person, exposing students to liberal arts programming and highlighting the values necessary for a well-rounded life. This forethought positioned graduates for societal and community leadership, characteristics that are significant to both our legacy and path forward.

The story of how society works with animals and practices animal health has progressed with our economy, agriculture and industry, and the rural/urban evolution.
This is captured in the history of the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC), which has met the need for veterinary education in this province for 154 years. From discovery to practice, individual animal to herd, and at every stage in between, the OVC continues to lead in advancing public and animal health.

The history of the Macdonald Institute both leads and mirrors the history of social change in Canada, especially in terms of the changing roles of women and the evolving dynamics of family relationships. Between 1903 and the mid-1950s, the Institute was a leader in providing post-secondary educational opportunities for women. Building from its roots in home economics and extension services, the University continues to play a leadership role in fostering an understanding of health and wellness, the shifting roles of women and men in increasingly diverse families, and the practice of community engagement.

When the University of Guelph was established in May 1964, its mandate reflected the commitment of its founding institutions to excellence, innovation, and service to society. Over the decades, the University has expanded and its comprehensive nature has evolved. The legacy of our founding colleges has provided a bedrock for our pursuit of excellence across disciplines. We have built a caring and supportive community environment that allows people to thrive and excel in a wide range of scholarly pursuits.

Today, in addition to the inviting, green spaces of the main Guelph campus, our footprint includes Guelph-Humber, Ridgetown, and research stations across Ontario – a network that preserves and enhances the University’s connections across rural and urban settings. The University’s seven colleges span the arts, social and applied human sciences, physical and engineering science, biological science, business and economics, agriculture, and veterinary medicine. Together, our colleges and campuses provide a comprehensive academic foundation, with proven excellence, deep connections to communities and partners, and the capacity to tackle many of the big questions framing the future of our world. We take pride in our rich history and in the growing recognition of our diverse, emerging strengths in areas such as the fine arts, sustainable business practices, environmental engineering, and social justice.

**Our path forward**

The University of Guelph has demonstrated repeatedly the ability to be adaptive and draw on its array of specialized knowledge. We create opportunity in the face of uncertainty, steadiness amidst acceleration, and clarity within growing complexity. As a result, we are becoming increasingly aware of the needs and expectations of our communities. We also recognize that there is room to better leverage our capacities as an academic institution – to go further in leading discovery and change.

The strategic renewal process and the framework that emerged will support and guide our way forward. In recent years, strategic work has evolved into a more continuous and
supple exercise. Today’s organizations must ensure that they adjust to the new speed of change and adapt to rapidly emerging challenges.

To that end, in Fall 2015 we embarked on a process to renew our planning path – the lens through which we will view the future and the mindset we will employ to successfully shape and adapt plans for moving forward.

The path emerged from a set of conversations that included more than 1,100 voices; the work of a strategic renewal committee; and a continued exchange of ideas over the course of eight months. It comprises five strategic themes that intersect and inform all that the University does and aspires to achieve.

True to our culture – indicative of the value we place on transparency, accountability, reciprocity, exploration, innovation, and inclusion – these themes emerged through open dialogue. Everyone with an interest in the University’s future was invited to provide input. We listened to one another and shared observations and ideas.

The five strategic themes represent the points of convergence, the qualities of the University that consistently came through as being critical to our future success. These themes will be our guideposts as we develop and assess plans for the University’s path forward. Each theme includes an inventory of questions for examining the purpose of what we study, produce, share, and learn.

These themes, and the questions and answers they inspire, will help establish plans, methods and metrics for aligning and measuring our success. We will navigate this strategic process together to ensure that it is continuous, that our progress is demonstrable, and that we continue to be inspired and motivated to fulfill our full potential.

**Inspiring Learning and Inquiry**

U of G has been recognized as a leader in student support, curriculum development, and the advancement of post-secondary teaching practices for many years. This is the result of our deep commitment to scholarly inquiry and to collaborative, engaged, and experiential learning. Our leadership is grounded in the intersection of research and teaching, the intentional use of learner-centred technology, creation and assessment of learning outcomes, and the delivery of varied, flexible, and empirically-based teaching methods.

We are known for our ability to support the education and well-being of the whole person. We will continue to offer the best of scholarship to our students, giving them the opportunity to address today’s issues and tomorrow’s questions. We will go beyond familiar practices in our teaching and learning. The changing needs of students and the inevitability of new technology demand that we challenge ourselves and explore how we will offer our learners more.
To continue to be a leader and inspire learning and inquiry, we will:

- intensify our commitment to evidence-based teaching and learning practices informed by what students want and need to enrich their learning
- encourage and support the university-wide adoption of experiential learning and engaged scholarship for building practical knowledge
- expand our already significant engagement in open learning and learner-responsive technological applications
- champion and advance learning outcomes assessment
- provide graduate students with an enhanced learning environment that reflects the unique needs of their advanced scholarly pursuits
- extend our strengths in teaching by offering staff, faculty, alumni, and various communities a broad and dynamic continuum of learning opportunities

We will test our plans by asking, “How will they:”

- contribute to a more adaptive and inclusive learning environment that builds and advances evidence-based teaching and innovative pedagogies?
- advance learners’ capacity for independent and collaborative inquiry?
- advance students’ ability to tackle complex questions and issues?
- create more, and more effective, opportunities for experiential learning and engaged scholarship, both within and outside of our campuses?
- offer state-of-the-art digital technologies in support of student learning, including advancement of students’ digital competencies?
- provide students with a clear sense of their learning – in both knowledge acquired and skills developed – as part of their educational experience?
- contribute to a “whole-person” educational experience and an ongoing learning journey for both undergraduate and graduate students?
- create more and better opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and external community members to enhance their knowledge and skills?

Catalyzing Discovery and Change

For leading universities around the world, scholarly excellence is at the core of their mission. The University of Guelph is no exception. We are deeply committed to research excellence. Our outstanding reputation for creating and mobilizing knowledge across a comprehensive span of scholarly areas is a genuine source of pride. Our ambition is to expand and strengthen this reputation.

U of G’s approach to knowledge sharing, innovation, and research stands out. Unfettered by traditional barriers and boundaries, we formulate scholarly questions and seek answers proven effective in catalyzing discovery and change. In both fundamental and applied research, we foster conditions that generate new knowledge and effect positive change in the world around us – locally and globally. This includes our established scholarly leadership in disciplines pertaining to food and agriculture,
veterinary medicine, health, the environment, and community life. These areas of special responsibility were bequeathed to us by our founding institutions. This heritage inspires our comprehensive and interdisciplinary nature and scholarly and creative endeavours.

At the same time, new themes of scholarly excellence have emerged since our inception as a comprehensive university. These reflect opportunities afforded by the full breadth of our research and teaching. We will continue to explore challenging and complex questions such as how to provide food for the world, and assess climate change impacts and adaptation strategies. We will persist in examining complex matters such as the effects of policies on human prosperity and well-being; how arts and culture enhance quality of life; and the interconnections between human and animal health.

We will be steadfast in our drive to create meaningful knowledge that bolsters our disciplinary strengths while advancing its application. Underpinning our activities will be an unwavering commitment to excellence.

To continue to operate as a catalyst for discovery and change, we will:

- foster innovation in research, teaching, and learning, and recruit and retain top talent to meet this goal
- improve our success rate in attracting new resources that support research and knowledge mobilization
- continue to look for new opportunities to use our comprehensive strengths to address deep and complex questions affecting our world
- promote evidence-based decision-making through scholarly activities, especially those that start locally and build globally

We will test our plans by asking, “How will they:”

- attract and retain top talent including faculty, librarians, graduate students, and other professionals and experts?
- create new knowledge, strengthen and enhance our adaptability, and foster innovation?
- provide resources that generate new knowledge, mobilize results, and increase open access to the outputs of scholarship?
- improve impact and engagement for addressing complex world problems?
- help our students and graduates become lifelong learners and share their knowledge?

**Connecting Communities**

U of G has long taken pride in being connected to those we serve – whether it be the city of Guelph, our provincial partner, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), or rural and urban areas around the globe. Our focus is to
work with others, be agents of constructive change, and to shape the next generation of active, engaged citizens.

Meaningful, mutually beneficial partnerships and endeavours have been part of the U of G experience from the outset. They are critical for building successful collaborations that deepen learning, enhance scholarly rigour and excellence, and contribute to local and global communities. We are recognized for this strength, and it is a capacity that is increasingly placed at a premium in today’s world.

We are resolved to continue partnerships and collaborations with groups and organizations – near and far – that share our quest for creating new knowledge. This is key to fulfilling our commitment to diversity. It unites a range of perspectives and expertise, and brings the power of collaboration to scholarly endeavours. We will also remain attentive to serving our communities by applying our expertise and creativity to answer new questions and meet new challenges.

To continue to enhance the value we see in connecting communities, we will:

- foster knowledge-sharing partnerships driven by principles of engagement, collaboration, reciprocity, open communication, accountability, and a shared vision for change.
- enhance communication strategies, both within and outside the University, so that we can listen carefully, make our presence known, and collaborate effectively in the service of scholarly work and constructive change.
- provide campus environments that are vibrant and inclusive, open and respectful, where University members and visitors alike know they are valued.
- advance our international relationships and strengthen international planning.

We will test our plans by asking, “How will they:”

- advance efforts to deliberately build excellence and strength through openness, inclusivity, and diversity on all our campuses?
- enhance connections with various communities of interest, both near and far?
- embody the values of engagement and reciprocity?
- ensure that endeavours are broadly communicated using a full spectrum of communication vehicles?
- improve internal awareness of collaborations and partnerships to cultivate recognition of opportunities, capacities to support them, and the impact of their success?
- elevate international relationships, reputation, and identity?

Stewarding Valued Resources

We have the opportunity and responsibility to support and sustain the resources we need to fulfill our academic mission and to help improve our planet. We are committed
to doing our part to safeguard valued environmental resources for present and future generations. But our dedication does not stop there.

We will also apply the concept of sustainability to our stewardship of resources that are the University’s direct responsibility. These include financial and physical resources and, even more importantly, our human resources – students, faculty, staff, alumni, volunteers and our partners. As we pursue the work of today, we will consider carefully how we can sustain and cultivate our people, finances, lands and facilities to meet the needs of the future.

To further our stewardship of valued resources, we will:

- position ourselves as an employer of choice, using the range of resources at our disposal equitably, productively, and sustainably
- leverage our power of place – our facilities and lands – to enhance delivery of our academic mission in a manner that reflects the strategic framework
- harness our historical and emerging strengths, distinctive capacities, and breadth of interdisciplinary knowledge
- provide leadership in safeguarding valued environmental resources
- build and strengthen connections with government and others to leverage and expand available resources to support and enhance our academic platform

We will test our plans by asking, “How will they:”

- utilize wisely the University’s resources and relationships, including those associated with its historical and emerging strengths and distinctive capacities?
- sustain and advance our ability to be an employer of choice?
- recognize opportunities to creatively deploy resources to achieve an impact that is greater than the sum of its parts?
- create opportunities for utilizing our lands and facilities in beneficial ways that support our academic and research missions?
- address sustainability and offer opportunities to show leadership in environmental and strategic stewardship?

**Nurturing a Distinctive University Culture**

The University of Guelph is recognized in Ontario, Canada, and beyond for its distinct campus culture, which is expressed in a range of ways across each of our campuses. Our culture is enhanced by beautiful campuses and caring, helpful people and services – yet it is far more than that. It stems from a passion for building community spirit while simultaneously striving for excellence, and a willingness to do things differently, without pretense or apology. Our culture shapes what we do and how we do it. It drives us to the heights of performance and scholarly achievement. It reminds us to “do good,” be authentic, and count on one another.
Our culture makes us stand out to prospective students, their parents, new faculty, staff, visitors, or and alumni. Its impact is present on all our campuses: Guelph, Ridgetown, and Toronto. People cite it as a ‘je ne sais quoi’, or the ‘x factor,’ the quality that gives us an intangible but decidedly potent advantage as a university of excellence and distinction. Although we may struggle to define it, we recognize it as a strategic necessity – a key aspect of our success that we must and will protect and cultivate.

To further our distinctive university culture, we will:

• inspire each other through a shared commitment to excellence and to remaining curious, innovative, and willing to take informed risks
• care about one another, and respect opportunities to work collaboratively and support people in need – locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally
• take pride in our rich history and the adaptive, responsive, and resilient qualities it has fostered
• make principled choices that are transparent and accountable
• work together to ensure openness, respect, and inclusion
• value the unique opportunities our campuses, facilities, and services provide for scholastic achievement while building communities that allow people to thrive

We will test our plans by asking, “How will they:”

• embody and enhance qualities recognized as key to U of G’s culture, including supportive community and fostering excellence?
• honour our legacy and inspire us in the journey forward?
• foster possibilities to serve the common good and advance our commitment to excellence?
• ensure respect, co-operation, and inclusion among people of all backgrounds?
• promote innovation, adaptation, responsiveness, and resilience?
• demonstrate our principled and transparent approach to decision-making?

Moving Forward

Our renewed strategic framework is based on the premise that our University has powerful and unique characteristics that offer tremendous opportunity for us.

Our potential is remarkable and our strengths are many:

• our unique approach to learning and inquiry
• our contributions to discovery and change
• our willingness to work together
• our priority on safeguarding valued resources
• our distinctive approach to creating and sustaining a vibrant culture of scholarship and citizenship.
By enhancing these qualities and strengths, we can do our part to help shape our fast-changing world and adapt in healthy ways.

The task before us is bringing our strategic framework and its five themes to life in our planning. This includes pursuing cross-institutional initiatives guided by our renewed strategic path. Most immediately, we will prepare a refreshed strategic research plan; review and renew the strategic mandate agreement with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities; and develop a comprehensive plan for internationalism. We must align our plans and activities with the framework themes in support of our common purpose. This includes evolving our strategic planning culture and capacities to ensure that we retain a shared appreciation for our strategic narrative while planning and adapting.

The needs of our learners, university constituents and partners are changing, and the pace of that change is accelerating. The demands upon our finite resources are increasing. Our opportunities and challenges come with more complexities. The strategic framework we have identified—our five themes and related objectives and questions for guiding the path forward—will ensure we can respond while retaining our essence and our ability to achieve excellence. Together we will deliver our best to our students, to our partners, and to communities nearby and throughout the world.