

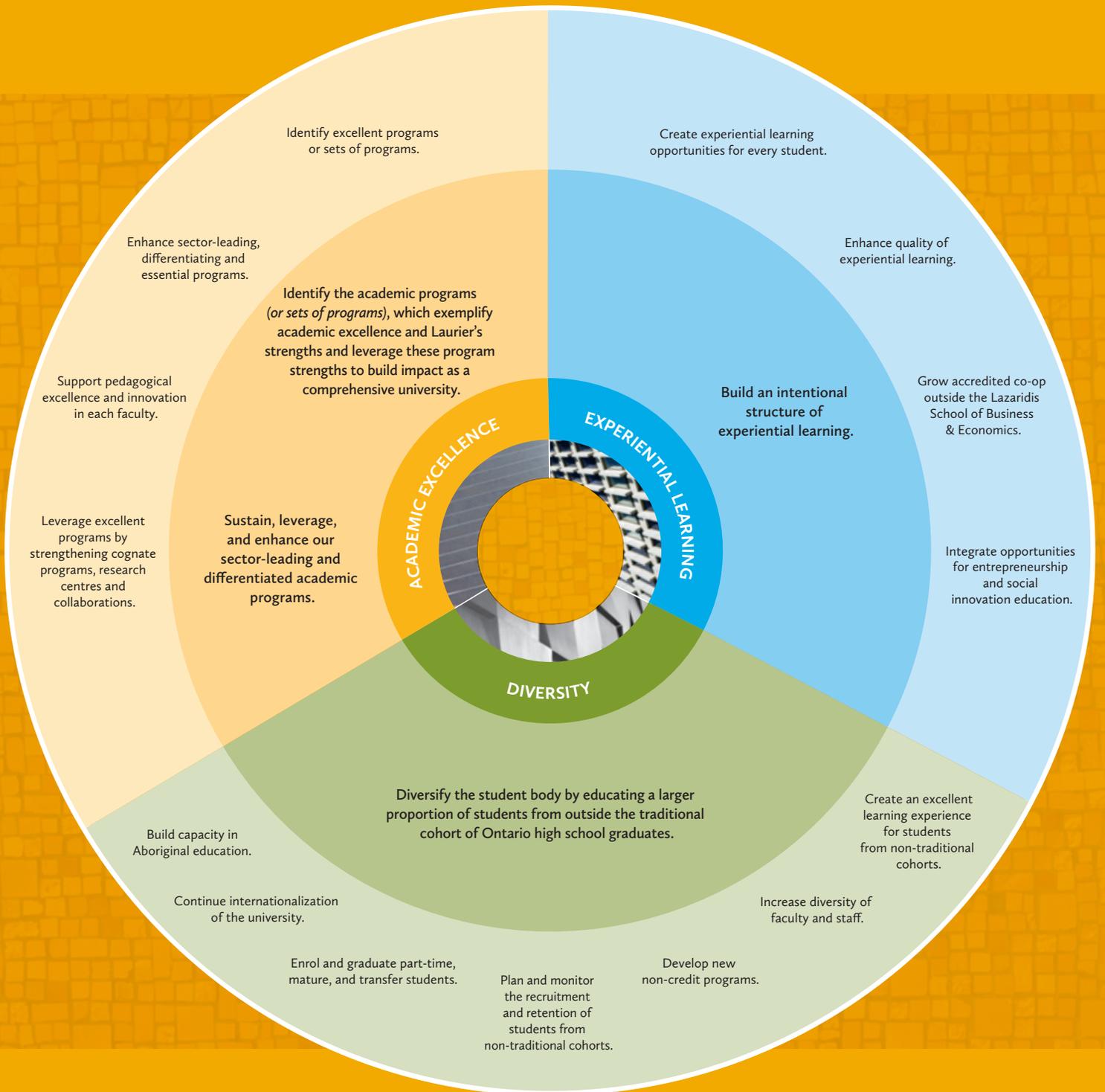


ADVANCING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

EXPANDING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

ENHANCING DIVERSITY

2015-2020
Strategic Academic Plan



Building on a strong foundation

OUR VISION

Our commitment is to justice and sustainability now and in the future, so we strive to ignite the minds, spirits and hearts of our communities through excellence in teaching and learning, in the discovery, scholarly exploration, and application of new ideas, and in instilling the courage to engage and challenge the world in all its complexity.

The mission describes our core purpose and commitment to stakeholders.

OUR MISSION

Wilfrid Laurier University is devoted to excellence in learning, research, scholarship and creativity. It challenges people to become engaged and aware citizens of an increasingly complex world. It fulfills its mission by advancing knowledge, supporting and enhancing high-quality undergraduate, graduate and professional education, and emphasizing co-curricular development of the whole student.

THE STRATEGIC ACADEMIC PLAN (2015–2020)

The SAP outlines strategies to advance Laurier’s mission over the next five years. It is built on the foundation of the *2010–2015 Academic Plan* and is set in the context of how Laurier was described in that plan. We continue to endorse the core principles expressed in the 2010 plan—discovery and innovation, civic engagement, diversity, integration, global citizenship, sustainability, justice, quantitative and scientific analysis, communication and performance. Academic programming and research at Laurier remain best understood as grouped under the domains listed in the Academic Plan and subsequently elaborated and refined in the *Strategic Research Plan (2014)* and the *Strategic Mandate Agreement (2014–2017)*.¹

¹ For more information about the relationship between the SAP and other strategic planning activity, please see the accompanying web document *Background & Rationale*. wlu.ca/academicplan



Laurier is a comprehensive, multi-campus university with a long history of excellence in teaching, learning and the student experience in the liberal arts and sciences and select professional programs.

Laurier provides an extraordinary learning environment that results in a highly personalized educational experience; a hallmark of Laurier is our community of faculty and staff that is accessible to students and responsive to student needs. The educational experience is transformative, as embodied in our institutional proposition, 'inspiring lives of leadership and purpose'. We balance acquisition of knowledge and critical thinking skills with opportunities for relevant application and reflective practice. Students develop the tools to engage with complex problems and to understand their own roles in confronting society's most pressing issues.

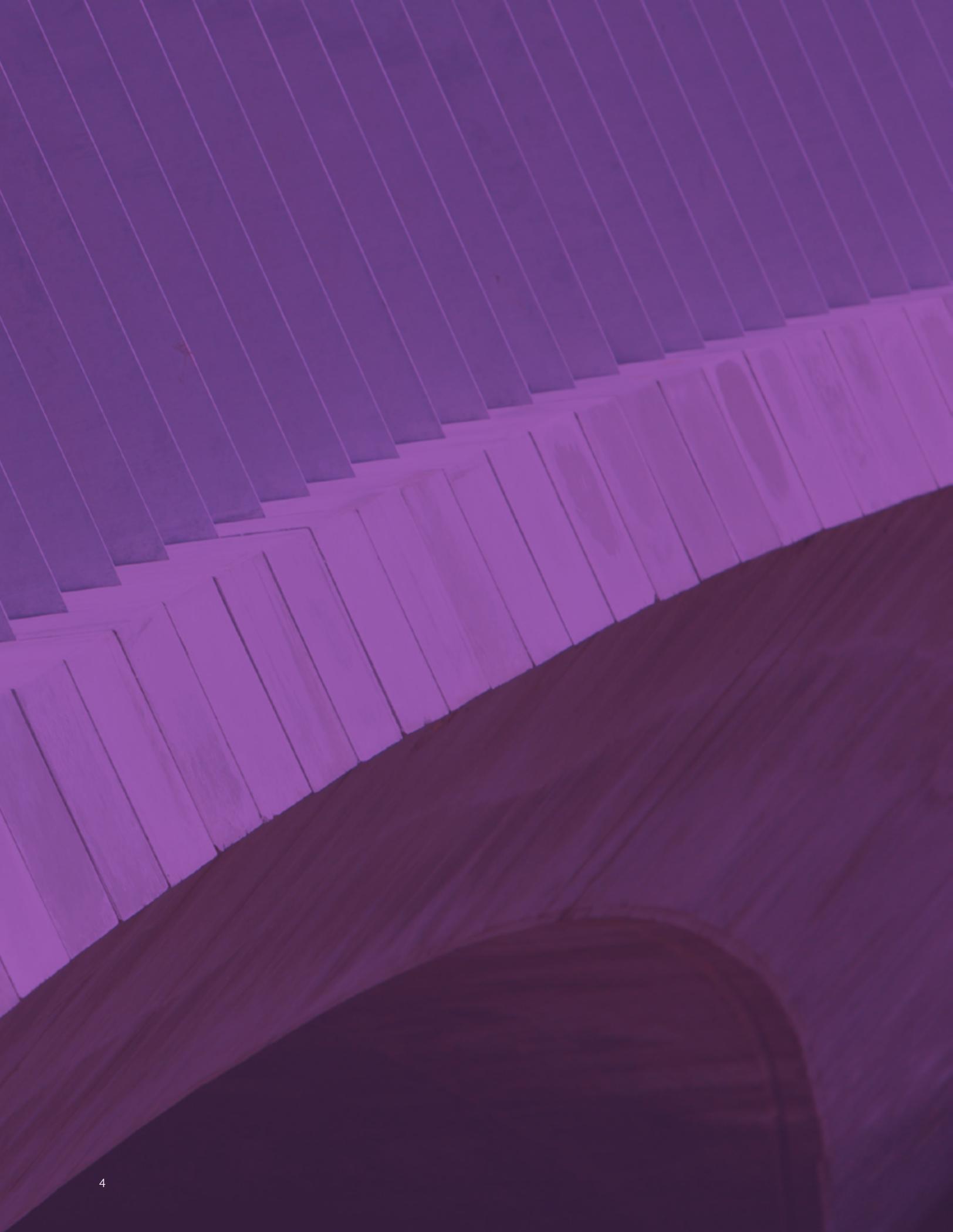
As a comprehensive university, Laurier has grown rapidly in research intensity and graduate programming. In selecting areas of focus for research and graduate education, we have chosen areas of research excellence that connect to program strength at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Continuing to enhance the graduate student experience at Laurier remains a priority for the institution.

Our multi-campus, multi-community emphasis is also a critical part of our identity as a comprehensive university. We recognize and celebrate the strength that comes from campuses in Waterloo and Brantford and locations in Kitchener and Toronto which are differentiated from one another and which connect to their communities in impactful ways.

The 2013 Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) process between Laurier and the Province of Ontario resulted in a two-pronged mandate that captures Laurier's distinctive mission:

Wilfrid Laurier University will **(1)** lead the province and the nation in combining the comprehensive human development of students with outstanding intellectual development in a liberal arts and sciences tradition, and **(2)** lead by example in innovative and highly efficient multi-community, multi-campus delivery of academic and professional undergraduate and graduate programs within a comprehensive university context.





The SMA is just one of several critical external contexts for the development of this plan. There are a host of challenges which demand a response, including in particular system differentiation, demographic change, and technological transformation in higher education.

The provincial government has embarked on a major re-design of the Ontario post-secondary education system. The SMAs were the first step in a process which will be advanced by upcoming changes to the funding formula. As a result, *it is particularly important that we focus on a set of coherent strengths that align with the needs of society, broadly conceived.*

We have entered a period during which the number of students graduating from Ontario high schools will decline until about 2021. Historically, Laurier has relied predominantly on new graduates from Ontario high schools to meet its enrolment targets. However, in recent years we have recruited greater numbers of college transfer students and we have also have focused on recruitment of international and Aboriginal students. This diversity is critical so that we can more fully reflect and be inclusive of the communities in which we live, prepare our students for citizenship in a complex and changing global environment, and ensure our sustainability through periods of demographic change.

Technological change is part of the fabric of the 21st-century university, with rapid change expected to continue in modes of delivery, classroom technology, learning management systems, learning analytics, research and scholarship, and knowledge dissemination. There are few areas of the academic enterprise not touched by information and communication technology, making it a critical enabler of academic strategy.

In order to plan effectively in this highly uncertain context, we must take action to strengthen our institutional value proposition and to position Laurier in the most competitive manner possible.

The following sections present a series of essential strategies that are grouped under three pillars: *academic excellence, experiential learning, and diversity*. Each strategy is linked to metrics (see appendix 1) so that we can understand how impact will be measured, assess progress towards our goals, and communicate our progress to students, our communities, and government. Metrics will be both qualitative and quantitative, with an appropriate balance between institution-wide and Faculty- or discipline-specific metrics. Furthermore, it is recognized that metrics cannot capture every dimension of academic programs and must therefore be employed with an awareness of their appropriate applications and inherent limitations.

Academic excellence, experiential learning, and diversity are highly interdependent, mutually reinforcing goals. Laurier will continue to pursue academic excellence, and for the next five years will focus on the strategies outlined below, informed by the complementary goals of experiential learning and enhanced diversity.

The goals of academic excellence, experiential learning, and diversity connect back to the higher order goals at the core of Laurier's identity: to fulfill our societal mandate and engage our communities, to grow as a comprehensive university, and to successfully confront whatever challenges the future may hold.



PILLAR 1 | Advancing Academic Excellence

GOALS

- 1 Identify the academic programs (or sets of programs) which exemplify academic excellence and Laurier's strengths in experiential learning, pedagogical innovation, and community engagement and leverage these program strengths to build impact as a comprehensive university.
- 2 Sustain, leverage, and enhance our sector-leading and differentiated academic programs.

RATIONALE

Laurier is built on a foundation of academic excellence in the liberal arts and sciences. Within this context, it is important that we proactively identify programs capable of being provincial and national leaders (our “sector-leading” programs) as well as our programs which are differentiated by their distinctive and articulated programmatic approaches. We recognize that academic programs at Laurier are highly interdependent and that the sustainability of all programs and the comprehensiveness of the university depend on connections among faculties.

Over the term of this academic plan, programs and departments will be encouraged to engage in unit-level planning aimed at program enhancement informed by external benchmarking. Of necessity, programs will need to identify their strengths and aspirational goals and to track progress towards them. Progress will be measured in part through defined institutional metrics as well as through metrics particular to discipline or approach. Institutional metrics will assess quality, demand, productivity, impact, and outcomes. Separate sets of institutional metrics (both qualitative and quantitative) will be developed for undergraduate and graduate programs. The selection and definition of specific metrics will be carried out in consultation with the relevant dean(s) and informed by best practices.

In this plan, we recognize those programs which have already built a provincial or national reputation in 2015. In a highly competitive postsecondary sector, programs of exceptional quality are a critical differentiator. Sector-leading programs are reputational cornerstones that distinguish the institution and can, when properly leveraged, enhance the educational experience for all students. Building sector-leading programs is a long-term task and requires that programs be prioritized within their faculties, fully recognizing that the strength of one sector-leading program will benefit other programs. Here, we identify the Bachelor of Business Administration, the Bachelor of Music, and the Master of Social Work as three long-standing programs that have achieved sector-leading quality and reputation.



These three programs are distinguished by their outstanding performance across key parameters, including: a strong record of attracting and retaining very good students, a critical mass of students and faculty, and generation of significant impact through student outcomes, faculty and student academic, professional and creative endeavours, and community engagement. The purpose of identifying these three programs in the plan is so that they may serve as exemplars. If the strategies outlined below are effective, Laurier's next academic plan will be able to point to more sector-leading programs. Across Laurier's faculties, there are many programs which are on the cusp of achieving sector-leading excellence. Additionally, other programs are academic and regional leaders essential for solidifying Laurier's differentiating strengths as a comprehensive, liberal arts and sciences-based institution integrated with the communities it serves; these programs are equally served by the following strategies.

We recognize that it is neither desirable nor feasible for every program to be differentiated and in high-demand. A critical role of many programs is to be part of the interdependent web that enables a university to be comprehensive. Laurier is also home to excellent distinctive smaller programs which generate significant impact internally and externally. Research-based graduate programs, for example, are critical to Laurier's continued growth in research intensity.

STRATEGIES

- A** Identify excellent program(s) (or a set of programs with a common, differentiating strength) within and by each faculty and develop a plan to support this excellence and the leveraging of program strengths for the benefit of the faculty and/or university as a whole.
- B** Enhance sector-leading, differentiating and essential programs by developing and supporting strategic plans for augmenting program quality and reputation.
- C** Identify and support pedagogical excellence and innovation within and by each faculty to increase effectiveness of teaching and learning.
- D** Leverage excellent programs by building and strengthening cognate programs (undergraduate and graduate), research centres and collaborations.



PILLAR 2 | Expanding Experiential Learning

GOAL

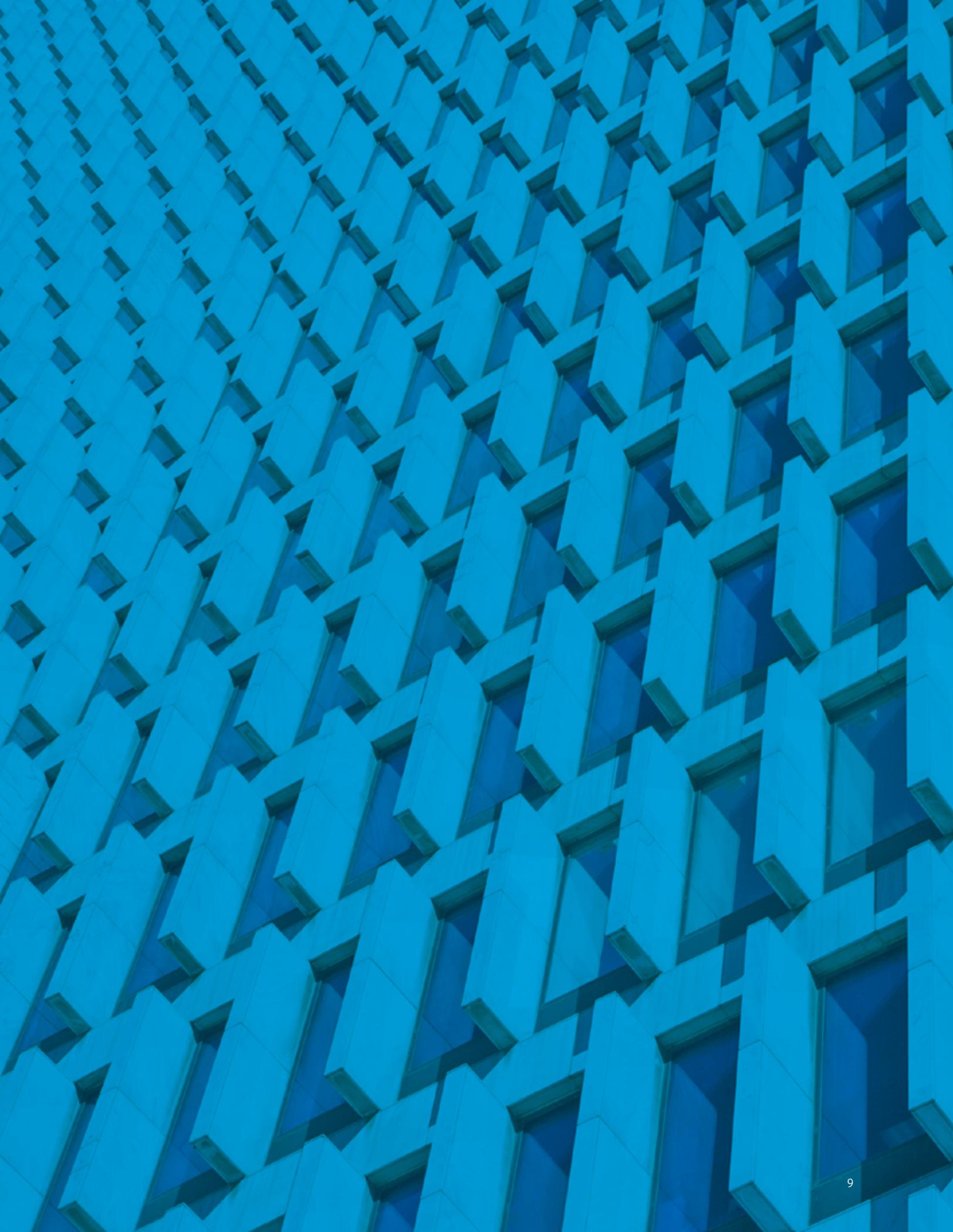
- 3 Build an intentional structure of experiential learning connected to program learning outcomes which themselves are connected to the “communities of interest” critical to Laurier’s graduates.

RATIONALE

Academic programs meet program learning outcomes through a combination of classroom-based pedagogies and experiential learning. The challenge over the next five years is for programs to examine their learning outcomes and consider how best to assess each of them, considering experiential, classroom-based, and other pedagogies. Laurier has a strong tradition of teaching excellence and experiential learning. Our goal over the next five years is to focus more intentionally on integrating experiential learning by: (1) encouraging more programs to forge explicit connections between experiential learning and program learning outcomes; and (2) emphasizing the importance of tying program learning outcomes to the skills required for students to engage the complexity of the 21st century and the many communities of interest to which they belong: geographic, virtual, cultural, social, professional, environmental, and economic. Making these connections concrete will support students to develop and test the knowledge and skills required for them to be successful beyond university. It is recognized that these learning outcomes are achieved by many approaches (Strategy (c) in Academic Excellence). Experiential learning is emphasized in the plan to encourage further enhancement during the next five years, as well as to enhance our strong connections to our communities.

STRATEGIES

- A Create opportunities for every student to participate in experiential learning, which will include developing a framework to appropriately define and provide criteria for co-operative education, practica, internships, laboratory experience, entrepreneurship activities, community service-learning, research and teaching apprenticeships, and curricular international experiences (including study abroad).
- B Enhance quality of experiential learning by emphasizing appropriate preparation and integration of learning through reflection.
- C Grow accredited co-operative education programs in faculties outside the Lazaridis School of Business & Economics.
- D Integrate opportunities for entrepreneurship and social innovation education into undergraduate and graduate programs.





PILLAR 3 | Enhancing Diversity

GOAL

- 4 Build a diverse 21st century university by educating a larger proportion of students from outside the traditional cohort of Ontario high school graduates.

RATIONALE

Diversity strengthens the university as a whole. There is a societal imperative to continue to diversify the student body, both to meet the needs and aspirations of under-represented groups and to reflect the cultural, societal, political, environmental and economic complexities that define our age. In particular, development of inter-cultural competencies must be a hallmark of Laurier graduates.

Aboriginal learners are the single-most under-represented group in Canadian higher education. Laurier recognizes the unique heritages of Aboriginal peoples and supports the intentions of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples to preserve and express their distinctive indigenous cultures, histories and knowledge through academic programming, scholarship and co-curricular activities. Laurier recognizes the unique needs of Aboriginal learners and communities. We seek to create a climate where learning about and understanding indigeneity is part of the core experience for all students, faculty and staff.

Over the next five years, strategies are focussed on Aboriginal learners, internationalization, and mature, part-time, and transfer students. The purpose of this narrowly defined goal is to ensure that we can make significant progress on these important objectives. The goal is not to diminish focus, or lessen emphasis, on other types of diversity. We are confident that Laurier will continue to promote empowerment and education and to eradicate the barriers that inhibit access to equal opportunities. We advocate for the inclusion and equal treatment of everyone, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, religion, age, ability, or socio-economic background, as well as recruitment and retention of highly-qualified and diverse faculty and staff to support our educational mission.



To meet the demand for education from mature, part-time, and transfer students, it is critically important that Laurier increase learners from these student populations. As a university which has traditionally depended on recruiting principally from Ontario high school graduates, such diversification is also important for our overall sustainability as an institution.

STRATEGIES

- A** Build capacity in Aboriginal education and indigenization of our campuses to enable Aboriginal programming to be expanded under the leadership of Aboriginal students, faculty and staff.
- B** Continue internationalization of the university through a multi-pronged strategy of increased international student enrolment and support, internationalization of the curriculum, enhanced opportunities for study abroad, and 'international at home'; institutional mechanisms for international graduate student recruitment and retention are to be a priority.
- C** Enrol and graduate part-time, mature, and transfer students through increased transfer credit agreements, implementation of prior learning assessment and recognition policies, clear degree completion pathways for part-time students, and flexible modes of delivery such as online and hybrid formats.
- D** Plan and monitor the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal, international, part-time and mature, and transfer students through the leadership of the Strategic Enrolment Management Committee.
- E** Develop new non-credit programs.
- F** Increase diversity of faculty and staff.
- G** Ensure that Laurier offers an excellent learning experience for students from non-traditional cohorts.



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