MESSAGE FROM THE CHANCELLOR

The Senate of the University of Alberta is pleased to submit its task force report to the University of Alberta community. The Senate Task Force on Connecting Communities is the result of our Senate exercising its legislated mandate within Alberta’s Post-Secondary Learning Act to "inquire into any matter that might benefit the university and enhance its position in the community."

The Senate is an institution of 62 members drawn from volunteers across Edmonton and Alberta and from appointed members representing broad governance, executive, academic, non-academic staff, alumni, and student constituencies at the University of Alberta.

This report reflects findings from a cross-section of Albertans. Senators, with the support of academic colleagues, have spent many hundreds of hours developing a report to assist the University of Alberta in enhancing its mandate to serve the public interest. The Senate is solely responsible for the report’s recommendations and is committed to supporting the President in ongoing strategic planning and the university in ongoing efforts to connect communities.

The University of Alberta is considered a national leader and has made great strides in many areas; however, the needs for communication and connection have greatly accelerated with increasing expectations and increasing demands for accountability. National and international rankings – while an important measure of success – regrettably do not factor community support and community engagement.

Some readers may discount the findings and recommendations as the same old issues brought forward by people who do not understand the purpose and workings of universities. We would suggest that sustained public support is more crucial than ever before, and must be addressed by every academic institution in every generation to maintain and enhance public trust and public investment.

Important activities with the broader community are underway in every faculty of the University of Alberta – the Ideas that Work sections of this report represent only a small subset. We encourage readers to respond and contribute other university initiatives to support the creation of a living document and an ongoing reference for connecting communities.

The Senate is proud to offer this report to inform, to critique, to celebrate, and to offer counsel and recommendations.

We encourage discussion and debate on many levels both within and outside the academy so that we may truly meet the needs and desires of our many stakeholders, who hold this university as one of our province's greatest treasures.

On behalf of my colleagues on the Senate,

Ralph B. Young
Chancellor and Chair of the Senate
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Midway through the second decade of the 21st century, one thing is certain – our lives are more interconnected than ever before. So much so that, whether your organization is a non-profit, a private company or a public institution, it needs to be connected to the community to survive. Recent history is filled with stories of those who tried and failed to go it alone without community support.

As Senators, most of whom are volunteer members from communities in Edmonton and across Alberta, we are stalwart supporters of the University of Alberta. As fervent believers in the Green & Gold, we have grown concerned by an increase over the past few years of anecdotal evidence of people in communities outside the university finding it a challenge to connect with people within the university. Given our legislated duty from the Government of Alberta to “inquire into any matter that might benefit the university and enhance its position in the community,” Chancellor Ralph Young directed that a Senate Task Force be struck to investigate whether this feeling of disconnect was only the rumblings of a few or more widespread.

Unfortunately, our research has shown that the connection between the University of Alberta and Albertans is at a concerning low point. Through focus groups conducted by the Faculty of Extension, it has become clear that the significant and impressive efforts of the university leadership, faculty, and staff are not having the intended, and necessary, impact in strengthening the university’s connections with the people of Alberta.

A disconnect exists between one of the greatest public universities in the world and the public needed to sustain it. The importance of connections cannot be understated: the public needs the University of Alberta in order to help overcome the greatest challenges of our time, yet do not appreciate or understand the relevance of the university to their daily lives. The university needs the confidence of the public in order to survive and continue to deliver on its promise of “the uplifting of the whole people”.

Many great ideas on how to improve the connections came through over the course of 16 focus groups held in communities across the province. While the Senate Task Force members have analyzed these comments, it was citizens of Alberta – all of whom expressed a desire for the university to succeed – who advanced the core recommendations in this report.

The discussions focused on three overarching recommendations for the University of Alberta:

1. Redefine and emphasize community connections as vital to the university’s success
2. Demonstrate and communicate the societal value of UAlberta research and a University of Alberta education
3. Pioneer an “Open Campuses” strategy to increase access to intellectual and physical resources

Implementation of these recommendations will require a fundamental rethink of the way the university interacts with the broader community. It is no longer sufficient simply to seem to study the world from the “ivory tower” and converse amongst ourselves.

To succeed, the University of Alberta must:

- Prioritize community connections in all facets of the university – from leadership to lectures – and set accountabilities for these efforts.
- Open more lines of communication, in ways that communities understand, and help solve local problems, and
- Welcome the community in to the university – whether by sharing information or sharing a lecture hall.
The University of the Alberta is more than just its economic impact on our province, although that impact is huge. It is about the way knowledge transfers and is shared, whether at the family farm or the nanotechnology institute. It is about how the entrepreneurs who lead our industries into the future are educated and enabled to be better citizens – creating stronger families, businesses, and cities – by ensuring they focus on knowledge transfer throughout the whole community. In short, it is about educating the best people for the world, not just in the world.

The University of Alberta Senate, with 62 members, asks that these recommendations be given careful consideration. We stand ready to assist in their implementation, and applaud the work already being done by countless members of the University of Alberta leadership, faculty and staff. Now is the time to focus on how to amplify and increase the power and reach of these efforts.

One thing was clear throughout the focus group sessions – the people of Alberta want nothing more than the next generation to be better than ours. They just want to make sure they are part of the conversation on how to make this happen. They want the University of Alberta to be not just another post-secondary institution. They want it to become the University for Alberta.

CORE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Redefine and emphasize community connections as vital to the university’s success.
2. Demonstrate and communicate the societal value of UAlberta research and a University of Alberta education.
3. Pioneer an “Open Campuses” strategy to increase access to intellectual and physical resources.
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Redefine and emphasize community connections as vital to the university’s success.
   
   1.1 Support the President in his efforts to develop a community engagement strategic plan, as part of the ongoing strategic review.
   
   1.2 Restructure the accountability and reward systems of the university to encourage community engagement.
   
   1.3 Facilitate and support the activities of, and collaboration among, UAlberta volunteer organizations such as the Senate and Alumni Association in order to amplify the university’s community engagement efforts.

2. Demonstrate and communicate the societal value of UAlberta research and a University of Alberta education.
   
   2.1 Activate the university community to address emergent societal and community challenges via Presidential Task Forces and other mechanisms.
   
   2.2 Celebrate and profile leading basic and applied research being done at the University of Alberta.
   
   2.3 Develop and communicate data that evaluates the economic and social contributions of UAlberta and its graduates.
   
   2.4 Ensure that all assets, locations, research, publications and personnel are clearly identified as UAlberta.

3. Pioneer an “Open Campuses” strategy to increase access to intellectual and physical resources.
   
   3.1 Respond to community needs through more collaboration with municipal and rural organizations, businesses, non-profits and community groups.
   
   3.2 Establish and resource more interdisciplinary courses and initiatives that tap into and stimulate public interest and respond to community needs.
   
   3.3 Make University of Alberta research knowledge more accessible to the public, by revitalizing the Speakers Bureau and other outreach tools.
   
   3.4 Make UAlberta campuses and facilities more accessible and welcoming to the general public including locals and visitors.
BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The Senate of the University of Alberta (UAlberta or U of A) serves as a bridge between the university and public with the following mandate from Alberta’s Post-Secondary Learning Act – Section 13(1): “It is the duty of a Senate to inquire into any matter that might benefit the university and enhance its position in the community.”

Senate members have been concerned by an apparent public perception that the University of Alberta is not adequately connected to the communities it serves. Without community support, the university is vulnerable to funding cuts or other constraints that could impede its ability to fulfill its mandate of “the uplifting of the whole people.”

Consequently, Senate struck a Task Force to determine what perceptions of the university are held across the Province of Alberta. The Task Force enlisted the support of the Faculty of Extension’s Evaluation and Research Services at the University of Alberta to determine the best approach to conducting such an investigation scientifically, professionally and ethically.

Between May and November 2014, Senators hosted 16 focus groups in the communities they represent. A professional from Faculty of Extension Evaluation and Research Services moderated each session. The content and outcomes of each focus group session were not discussed publicly and host Senators were instructed to not share any information outside of their focus group to maintain the integrity of the inquiry.

The objective of each focus group was to determine:

- What the university means to the individuals and their communities.
- The benefits of closer connections to both the university and its communities.
- To what extent and how the university should be involved in the life of the communities.
- What UAlberta can do to better interact with the communities, as an institution of learning and as a hub of community activity.

All focus group session transcripts were analyzed by the Faculty of Extension Evaluation and Research Services, and consistent themes emanating from the questions were identified. These themes have been reviewed by the Task Force and led to the recommendations in this report.

Throughout the report, we include quotations from focus group participants. Note that these comments reflect public perceptions, which do not always fully reflect reality. Nevertheless, when the perceptions are inaccurate it signals that the university needs to do a better job of communicating the reality.

“Our university defines itself by ‘uplifting of the whole people’… [but] without the connection to the community, I think that’s going to just stay a slogan.”

Note also that the following recommendations and suggested actions are ideas generated by the members of the Senate Task Force and authors of this report to address issues identified by focus group participants. These ideas are intended to spark discussion and action, and are not intended as the best or only solutions.

Finally, note that the Ideas that Work sections of this report represent only a small subset of the many activities with the broader community already underway in every faculty of the University of Alberta. This report is intended as a starting point in a process that will collect and highlight many other university initiatives for connecting communities.
CORE RECOMMENDATION #1:
Redefine and emphasize community connections as vital to the university’s success

Recommendation 1.1
Support the President in his efforts to develop a community engagement strategic plan, as part of the ongoing strategic review.

“From my perspective it's about leadership at the top...someone has to have a very clear, articulated vision of what it’s trying to become...and why that’s relevant to the community.”

Suggested Actions

- Building off the research in this report, continue active consultation regarding next steps in community engagement – including roundtable sessions across the province – on a systematic basis.
- Engage all members of the senior leadership team in regular conversations on enhancing community engagement.
- Develop a comprehensive inventory of all outreach and/or community engagement endeavours currently underway, in order to inform a strategic community engagement action plan.

Rationale

Half of the focus groups commented that members of the general public do not feel connected to the university. At the same time, the conversations indicate that most groups believe it is important for the university to engage with the community. A recurring theme heard throughout the 16 sessions was the need for continued conversational investment in the community.

In order to develop a targeted strategic action plan for increased community engagement, it is first necessary to take stock of current practices. In conversations with deans and faculty representatives it became clear that a great deal of successful community engagement already takes place. Some of these initiatives will be highlighted as we discuss each recommendation.

Community engagement must be a strategic priority with presidential leadership.

Many parts of the university are already involved with the aspects of the community, but the focus groups made it clear that most Albertans do not perceive this. Without an overall strategy and strong leadership from the presidential level, it is too easy for community engagement to slip through the cracks, or become haphazard. As a result, there is no overall impact felt across the province. Respondents in several focus groups sought a clear signal from senior leadership regarding a more comprehensive approach to community engagement.

The transition to new senior leadership creates an opportunity to re-examine strategic directions and reinvent existing processes. For UAlberta to remain - and continually elevate itself - as a leading public post-secondary institution, connecting with communities must remain a foundational element of who we are, and what we do.

Clear signals and collaborative efforts at the start of the new presidential mandate will serve to change the tone immediately.
Stronger community engagement leads to stronger public support, which enhances political support.

Over the course of 18 months and 16 focus group sessions, Senate members heard both concerns and aspirations from over 150 community members. Many focus group members self-identified as UAlberta supporters and were eager to provide suggestions that will enhance the university’s support within the community and its ability to contribute to our society. For many, their recommendations for establishing better community relations were based on a sense of political urgency.

“The University having a closer relationship with external communities is fundamental … a few years ago post-secondary education took a tremendous hit from a budget point of view. Why was there no response to that?”

Stronger community engagement sets the stage for greater donor support

“I always get the phone calls from the guys … who want donations.”
“Yeah, that’s the connection!” (an exchange between two focus group participants)

Many alumni, in particular, complain that the only time they hear from the university is when it wants money. A consistent, high-profile engagement strategy will foster meaningful relationships at times when the university is not seeking funding, so that potential donors will be more receptive at times when donations are being sought.

Historic mandate and precedent

The University of Alberta was founded with the stated goal of “uplifting of the whole people”. In the earlier times, the university reached out to the public through activities such as Department of Extension tours throughout Alberta and radio-based courses. There is a sense among many focus group participants that that outreach at a community-specific level has been lost.

“They [UAlberta] did some extension work, and now that connection, [that] symbiotic relationship … that’s been broken now!”

“To me connecting means providing a meaningful fit to residents of the community.”

New communications technologies make this a wonderful moment of opportunity to revitalize this type of outreach education. The university has begun this process through free, massive open online courses such as Dino 101, but it needs to explore more ways of helping to educate, inform, and collaborate with all Albertans.

Stronger engagement leads to a sense of trust and ownership

“Communication sets that foundation for trust. Once you get that trust, people will get that feeling of ownership. That relationship will be established. You have to start with really good communication at all different levels.”

Many focus group members commented that trust is formed through a shared understanding, meaningful engagement and by nurturing relationships. Trust, respect, and mutual support scaffold upon each other. Post-secondary institutions now require community buy-in from multiple stakeholder groups. Having an institution-wide community engagement strategic plan, with resources dedicated to the effort, will help instil trust, respect, and mutual support.
“The university can help the community if there is that trust, and endorsement, and shared responsibility.”

Ideas that Work

The University of Alberta has experts in community engagement. For instance, the Faculty of Extension offers a Master of Arts in Community Engagement and a certificate in Aboriginal Community-Industry Relations, the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry has a Division of Community Engagement, and the Department of Sociology offers a Community Engagement Service Learning Certificate.

The following faculties:

- **Science** – uofa.ualberta.ca/science/about-us/community-engagement
- **Education** – uofa.ualberta.ca/education/about-us/community-engagement
- **Arts** – uofa.ualberta.ca/community-service-learning/-/media/arts/about/speeches-and-docs/artscommunityreport10x.pdf

are just three of many faculties or departments to list community engagement initiatives on their portions of the University of Alberta website. These may be good starting places for developing a complete inventory of community engagement activities currently underway.

The School of Public Health is developing an inventory of engaged scholarship and community connections by reviewing faculty annual reports.
Recommendation 1.2
Restructure the accountability and reward systems of the university to encourage community engagement

“The whole incentive structure of university is not set up to support this...you know the adage is what gets rewarded gets done, so the whole reward structure has to change, the whole mentality.”

Suggested Actions

- Restructure accountability and evaluation frameworks for deans and faculty members to recognize community engagement as a valid component of “service”, given equal weight to other forms of service.
- Expand and increase the profile of the Community Connections Awards to honour community service in all areas of the university. Consider honouring community engagement as part of the Celebrate event each fall term.
- Consider creating a peer competition among the deans rewarding outstanding community engagement. Taking an approach similar to “corporate challenge” events, this could provide greater impetus for engagement and new opportunities to measure the social impact of the university.

Rationale

Nine focus groups raised the concern that university faculty face obstacles to involvement in community engagement. There is a strong sense that faculty members’ reluctance to participate in or initiate engagement activities was often due to the university’s emphasis on research and publishing. To the extent that “service” is included in reward systems it appears to be only “service” within the university that is recognized.

“They are not measured on community outreach. Faculty are evaluated on teaching, research and what’s called service but that’s service to the institution [through] various kinds of committee work.”

The university and the community both benefit from faculty involvement

The dissemination of knowledge is vital to a community’s wellbeing. New ideas and techniques advance cultural understanding, diversify and strengthen economic activities, improve health outcomes and enhance overall quality of life.

“As universities are connected to the community and understand the needs of the community they’re better able to promote excellence, … attract talent from around the world…and ultimately enhance our economy and quality of life of the people that are living here and really make this a great place to be. So I think there’s an advantage to building that engagement and really understanding the needs of the people.”

At the same time, greater involvement with the community also offers tangible benefits to the teaching and research enterprise.

- New ideas are often sparked through exposure to different perspectives and contexts.
- In many fields research relevance can be fine-tuned through more “real world” interaction.
- Students will benefit from site-based learning opportunities, both in terms of their understanding of what they are studying and in terms of employment prospects.
Professors are subject to competing pressures for their time and attention

“As a prof you [mainly] care about publishing in the academic journals.”

We heard not only from the public but also from some focus group participants very familiar with the academic community that taking a significant amount of time to help a community or government organization address a particular challenge may be a career-limiting move within the academy. With limited time, community involvement can take away from the pursuits that are currently more highly valued within the university, especially when it comes to tenure and promotion. If we expect professors to make time for greater community interaction, we must ensure that they are not penalized for doing so.

Reward systems affect culture and behaviour.

In all organizations reward systems highlight what the culture actually values, and culture is key to behaviour. Many professors have much to give to their community through community-based research, public commentary, and community leadership; this should be encouraged more systematically. Recognizing professors who are community leaders – those involved in community-related activities and attracting positive public attention – as providing essential service to the university would expand a culture of community engagement.

Rewards are not just financial. Recognition by one’s peers can also have an impact. Whether leading research in rural areas, supporting community-level projects or providing information and ideas to inform government policy, a number of professors are already leading province-wide initiatives to help Alberta and Canada solve some of our greatest challenges. It is important to reward and celebrate these contributions publicly on and off campus if we want to encourage more such behaviour.

Professors and staff are potential ambassadors in building public support

Public funding available to universities is a challenge in countries across the globe. For public universities to thrive, there is a growing realization that fundamental changes in communications, community relationships, and the public profile of individual professors and staff are necessary. Involvement in the community, and public profile for such involvement, plays a key role in building public support.

“If this is an organization that has to operate in the modern world, that has to think about accountability to the funders or people who are donors or the greater community, how does it do that? The operations have to align. But it’s like steering a big boat, right!”

Ideas that Work

The Renaissance Committee Report to the Board of Governors (November 2013) contained 92 recommendations for improving the accountability and reward systems for academic staff. Recommendation 2.4, for instance, explicitly included “service to the community and profession” as activities that should be included in the “determination and recognition of scholarship excellence.”

rennaissance.ualberta.ca/~media/renaissance/RenComReportComplete20131209Footnote.pdf
Recommendation 1.3
Facilitate and support the activities of, and collaboration among, UAlberta volunteer organizations in order to amplify the university’s community engagement efforts.

“The university probably has all the right stories. I think it’s become disconnected from its alumni ... there’s more to an alumni relationship than money.”

Suggested Actions

- Strategically align the roles, resources, and plans of Alumni Council, Senate and Friends of the University to coordinate and expand opportunities to connect with people in communities across Alberta.
- Embrace the community advisory role of elected public members of the University Senate by including regular updates on community perceptions from Senate plenary to the senior leadership.
- Create additional community advisory roles for other university volunteers, for example, through greater leveraging of the Friends of the University of Alberta.
- Recognize and reward “time philanthropy” such as advocacy and volunteering in addition to financial philanthropy.
- Recognize the significant contributions of community members directly involved in student mentorship by providing them a formal role in convocation ceremonies.

Rationale

There are many volunteers from the community who are eager to help UAlberta, both on campus and through activities in the broader community. UAlberta can benefit in many ways through better recruitment and deployment of such volunteers.

Many current students and recent alumni look for ways to "give back" to the university, share their experiences, and remain part of the university community. Alumni can be a powerful avenue for getting information about the university into their communities in a way that personalizes that information, builds trust, and shows leadership.

Money is just part of the equation

Five focus groups proposed improving the university’s connection with its alumni, currently perceived to be focused mainly on raising money.

“I graduated now nine years [ago] from this university. I’ve always got a call about a donation. But I’ve never got a call to say, ‘[name], you’re an engineer… how are you able to contribute [to] the university and in what capacity?’ …I never get a call to say… ‘Do you have any ideas or do you have any feedback for your faculty?’ …I think [the U of A has] become disconnected from its alumni... it’s the flat handshake! There’s more to an alumni relationship than money… you’ve got to get to know your alumni. They’ve got to trust you that you really do care about them after graduation.”

“All I’m receiving is letters asking for the donation... but there’s no personal connection.”

Yet many graduates, particularly in the years right after graduation when they still feel a strong emotional connection to the university, have limited financial resources. Giving them more opportunities to contribute in meaningful non-financial ways during those years will maintain their sense of involvement with and commitment to the university. Then, when their finances are such that they can afford to donate they may be much more likely to do so.
Involving more people in volunteer activities will also help with outreach efforts, as volunteers frequently discuss their activities with friends and colleagues.

“What about the connection to the volunteer community? ...that’d be a wonderful way for a community member to learn about the university if there were volunteer opportunities presented to them and I mean for people from all walks of life... particularly the alumni because they have a lot of capacity to serve as mentors.”

Highly engaged volunteers on Senate and Alumni Council are under-used assets in setting strategic directions for community engagement

Senate and Alumni Council engage dozens of volunteer advocates for the University of Alberta. Membership rosters renew each year, creating an evolving cohort of community connectors.

These cohorts meet regularly with deans, directors, and professors to learn about current initiatives in teaching, research, and community service. They then disseminate that knowledge back out to their communities, while asking questions about future directions and opportunities.

Better mobilizing Senate and Alumni Council members would help with a two-way flow of information between communities and the university, providing valuable insights, and support.

Greater interaction among volunteer groups leads to more effective use of resources

There is a risk of duplication of efforts when organizations such as Alumni Council, the Senate, and public members on Faculty Advisory Boards, are all trying to bridge connections between the community and the university. By finding ways to facilitate greater information sharing among volunteer bodies, funds that are currently spent on outreach could be used more effectively, and UAlberta would minimize the risk of irritating potential donors with multiple, uncoordinated interactions.

Convocation recognition of volunteer preceptors and mentors encourages continued involvement

Many UAlberta students benefit from off-campus learning experiences, in which they are overseen and mentored by members of the public. Over a third of the focus groups had participants who said they were connected to UAlberta through co-op programs and/or volunteer placements.

While community members typically see benefits within their organizations when UAlberta students join them for co-op or other placements, they nonetheless need to make a significant commitment of time and effort to oversee those placements. Inviting off-campus mentors to sit on stage during convocation sends a clear message that the university values their role in the academic development of these students.

People who experience the grandeur of a convocation ceremony from the vantage point of the stage are likely to feel a stronger attachment to the university, and share their experiences with their colleagues and friends.

“If people can see the benefit of an institution like this to a community, there’s going to be a greater feeling, a greater positive feeling towards supporting them financially, supporting them in any way in the community. The more interaction[s], the more comfortable people are with going on campus, interacting with university people, with university students [and] professors. There’s a spillover effect that they feel more positive about the organization and the institution.”
Ideas that Work

The President’s Office recently held a university-wide meeting of Board of Governors, General Faculties Council, Alumni Association and Senate representatives to discuss the university’s Institutional Strategic Plan (ISP).

uofa.ualberta.ca/strategic-plan

The Faculty of Education supported the Senate’s U School program from the start by providing classroom space and encouraging faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students to volunteer. The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) also provides space and many student volunteer mentors. www.uschool.ualberta.ca

Alumni Relations launched the Venture Mentoring Service (VMS) in Fall 2013 with a mandate to create exciting opportunities for passionate student and alumni entrepreneurs to connect with experienced mentors to inspire, engage and learn. alumni.ualberta.ca/volunteer/venture-mentoring-service
CORE RECOMMENDATION #2

Demonstrate and communicate the societal value of UAlberta research and a University of Alberta education.

Recommendation 2.1
Activate the university community to address emergent societal and community challenges via Presidential Task Forces and other mechanisms.

“The University has to push the reset button and say, 'We’re trying to reach out to the community'.

Suggested Actions

- Canvas Board of Governors, Senate and Alumni Council members regularly to learn what their constituents are discussing as important, emergent issues where the university could add value.
- Arrange semi-annual meetings amongst the president, vice-presidents and deans to discuss the ways in which faculties could collaborate on such challenges and to set and monitor plans for working on them.
- Establish a UAlberta version of Grand Challenges Canada or the U.S. government’s challenge.gov, where major prizes are offered to encourage people both inside and outside of academia to find solutions to major problems.

Rational

By nature of its vast research and talent pools, the university is uniquely positioned to help solve major societal problems. To do so effectively often means looking outside its own walls to help identify the key issues where it can help, and to collaborate with others inside and outside of the academy.

Helping to solve society’s problems is part of the “social contract” by which the university receives 61% of its funding from government. By “giving back” in this way, it helps maintain respect on both sides of that social contract.

Solving major societal issues

“I personally would like to see the U of A showing more leadership not just inside the community of Edmonton but outside like the global level.”

Although not all university research can solve immediate issues, much of its research can contribute to evidence-based public policy to help solve current challenges. At the same time, building awareness within the university community of public challenges may provide focus and direction to academics who may not already have an established research program. Creating new university and civil service partnerships to tackle public policy challenges may improve the odds of solving such challenges more quickly, by providing a diversity of perspectives and expertise.

New sources of funding

Given the concrete nature of challenges such as those posted on challenge.gov, it may be possible to get corporate or major donor funding without compromising academic principles. Instead of naming buildings, donors could attach their name to a challenge, which they fund. Such funds would have no strings attached as to how research is completed (as long as ethics requirements are met) and what can be said in communicating the results.
Ideas that Work

The Community University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth and Families (CUP) brings researchers and community organizations together across disciplines to research and improve conditions for children and low-income families. [www.cup.ualberta.ca](http://www.cup.ualberta.ca/)

The Parkland Institute in the Faculty of Arts studies economic, social, political, and cultural issues affecting Albertans and Canadians. [parklandinstitute.ca](http://parklandinstitute.ca/)

The Institute for Sexual Minorities Studies and Services (iSMSS) in the Faculty of Education researches LGBTQ issues and extends support to LGBTQ students and their families. [www.ismss.ualberta.ca](http://www.ismss.ualberta.ca)

Students in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation may participate in a service-learning course in collaboration with schools, orphanages and community organizations to deliver physical activity and sport programs in northern Canada, South America and Asia. [www.physedandrec.ualberta.ca/UndergraduatePrograms/International/PlayAroundtheWorld.aspx](http://www.physedandrec.ualberta.ca/UndergraduatePrograms/International/PlayAroundtheWorld.aspx)

Dr. Debra Davidson, a specialist in climate change impacts and adaptation within the Faculty of Agriculture, Life and Environmental Sciences (ALES), addressed influential participants at the 2015 United Nations climate change conference in Paris. [www.ales.ualberta.ca/ALESNews/2015/November/ALESSociologisttospeakonclimate-smartagricultureduringupcomingParisclimateconference.aspx](http://www.ales.ualberta.ca/ALESNews/2015/November/ALESSociologisttospeakonclimate-smartagricultureduringupcomingParisclimateconference.aspx)


The Faculty of Native Studies’ Indigenous Partnership Development Program seeks to assist non-Indigenous public sector and business leaders in working more effectively alongside Indigenous communities by providing a forum for the discussion of key issues and engaging in dialogue about the way forward. [nativestudies.ualberta.ca/programs/indigenous-partnership-development-program](http://nativestudies.ualberta.ca/programs/indigenous-partnership-development-program)
Recommendation 2.2

Celebrate and profile leading basic and applied research being done at the University of Alberta.

“I think there’s a perception gap sometimes. The university as an institution isn’t communicating its relevance…. Maybe it’s trying, and it’s not getting there, I don’t know. It just seems like there’s a disconnect.”

Suggested Actions

- Mandate deans to submit annual reports to the President outlining key research underway in their faculties. These reports should be understandable by a non-technical, public audience. Collecting relevant excerpts from winning grant proposals submitted by professors could help with this process.
- Resource Marketing and Communications staff to help wordsmith these documents and to release excerpts in social media and traditional media at least once a week throughout the year.
- Develop, coordinate, and evaluate shared strategic social media and traditional media engagement plans across faculties, departments, and the university.
- Create a web- and phone-accessible, user-friendly database, to help potential community partners and media find relevant university experts. Ensure that a link to this database is prominent on the UAlberta home page and throughout the website.
- Encourage graduate students to present their research at community events and forums, such as the Three Minute Thesis competition.
- Provide media and speaker training for all professors, students and staff who are interested in presenting their work to the public.
- Strengthen the UAlberta Speakers’ Bureau (this is discussed more in Recommendation 3.3).

Rationale

“I had no idea that they do research in those two areas. I have clients that are constantly looking for that kind of information. We serve the oil field industry all the time. They’re trying to solve various little problems and they come up with their own solutions as opposed to realizing that there’s research being done already and we can piggyback on that, or work together on that, and pool the funding and create our solutions quicker and cheaper and better.”

The barrier most frequently mentioned in the focus groups was a lack of awareness of the university within the community. Respondents in 13 of the 16 groups cited a lack of awareness of the research and events going on at the university. Some explicitly faulted the university for this, citing poor communication with the community.

Five focus groups cited a perceived lack of relevance of the research being pursued at the university. This perception may reflect poor communication about what research is being pursued and its value. This applies even to basic research, a message that needs to be communicated more effectively to the public. The scope and quality of UAlberta research is one of the key strengths differentiating UAlberta from other post-secondary institutions. Although some faculties do a very good job of sharing their research with the public, others could benefit from more such outreach. A common plan, developed, implemented and supported across the entire system, could ensure that UAlberta research is constantly in the public eye.
Accessible expertise helps serve our communities and breaks down the “ivory tower” perception

Many focus group respondents felt that having UAlberta experts share their knowledge with public audiences would benefit those audiences and counteract the sense that the university prefers to be isolated from the non-academic world. Several had tried to get UAlberta speakers for their business or service-group functions, but found it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to identify and invite relevant experts.

“We’re not allowed in. It’s not only just the community’s job to figure out a way into the university. The university needs to fundamentally rethink this.”

Even when they had identified relevant experts, several commented that UAlberta experts were reluctant to make themselves available for community talks. This, participants argued, has led to increased feelings of disconnection between the UAlberta and the community.

“UA Solve is a program that currently tries to foster community-university collaborations. It allows anybody who wants to tap any kind of problem -- it could be an engineering problem, ..., any kind of a problem, to go find a researcher or somebody to actually do everything from the scientific research to the actual practical prototyping of the product that you’re envisioning on campus. ...For anybody to try and get into that labyrinth on their own would be very difficult.”

We have partially addressed this challenge in recommendation 1.2 (restructure the accountability and reward system of the University to encourage community engagement), but making sure professors are not penalized for spending time communicating with the community is only part of the solution. Many also need help in developing the skills and comfort level that is needed to present their work effectively to public audiences. At the same time, the community needs to know what experts and expertise are available at UAlberta so that relevant speaking invitations will be extended to academics. We address these needs further in recommendation 3.2.

Leveraging the UAlberta website helps remove barriers between the public and the university

One area of concern that received considerable discussion was the UAlberta website as both a symbolic and logistical barrier. In addition to commenting that the website was “organized for someone else’s purpose”, a focus group member observed, “there is no tab there for community. There should be a community tab and then it will tell you what’s happening this week.”

Virtually all event organizers search the Internet to find speakers for their events. Having a well-structured, easy to use, website would give UAlberta an edge in terms of getting its messages out to the public. It would signal that we welcome interaction with the community, and demonstrate that we have expertise in almost every field. It can also lead to future opportunities for partnerships that can result from a one-time invitation to speak or collaborate on a research initiative.

Some areas within UAlberta have already demonstrated skill at sharing their knowledge with the broader community. To cite just two examples:

- Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, which frequently has discoveries profiled by news media.
- Faculty of Education and its Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services (iSMSS).

Their media relations expertise should be shared across the system.
The University of Alberta has recently begun resurrecting its Speakers Bureau. If it is well designed, centralized, promoted and easily accessible to the public, it will help make the university and its experts more visible and accessible to the community.

Not all faculty or graduate students will feel comfortable giving public-level presentations, but there are likely many who would be willing and could be effective if they were encouraged and given training in how to communicate with non-academic audiences.

**Raising awareness of the value of research builds community support**

Seven focus groups emphasized the importance of creating communication lines with the public that will elevate appreciation for the relevance of UAlberta research, and how it helps solve societal problems and enhance the quality of life. What is sometimes not appreciated by the public (and the politicians who represent us) is the value of even very basic research. Many innovations are a result of unfettered research, free of constraints imposed by policy makers of the day. The value of autonomous query must also be nurtured, even when the direct impacts are not yet completely understood, or when the research is not directed at solving a specific problem in the short-term.

By regularly highlighting UAlberta research, including basic research, the university will cultivate public appreciation for the relevance of unobstructed problem-based inquiry, and the public may be less likely to support funding cuts for such research.

**Elevating awareness of the breadth of UAlberta research helps build appreciation for the institution**

While media coverage highlighting breakthrough UAlberta research appears sporadically, focus group members spoke of the need for outgoing communications to be handled with increased precision to increase public awareness and encourage community accessibility. Participants felt that, if UAlberta success stories, typically featured in the New Trail magazine and read by Alumni, were shared systemically, a broader audience than just alumni would be swayed to support the university.

Providing one highly visible, easy-to-understand access point, featuring tales of ongoing projects and ways to contact the experts behind them, will help communicate the university’s value to the public. There are often community groups working on projects that could tie in with and/or benefit from university research and expertise. Having an easily accessible digital catalogue of research pursuits will help them identify and connect with professors whose research interests overlap with theirs.

**Students can serve as academic representatives in the community**

In seven of the focus groups, members identified initiatives to connect students with the community as a way to improve university-community engagement. Participants suggested that students could help display academic relevance to a greater variety of people by telling the human stories behind, and within, their research.

The *Three Minute Thesis* (3MT) is an academic competition organized by the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) that helps current graduate students build effective presentations and communication skills. Participants have three minutes to explain the breadth and significance of their research to a general audience. This daunting yet memorable learning experience hones presentation skills. It also facilitates cross-disciplinary conversations and networks at competitions. As a UAlberta academic staff member stated, it “*will serve them well professionally and socially for the rest of their lives.*”
Students, graduates and faculty can be advocates in the community

Focus group members were frustrated with the university’s messages not being translated properly. Some suggested following a model similar to Al Gore’s environmental activism campaign, whereby interested members of the public were trained on the messages and how to deliver them effectively, thus becoming informed advocates.

“Maybe the university needs to do THAT sort of thing [Al Gore approach]… faculty members or even some of us ‘Joe publics’ are trained with a fairly consistent message.”

UAleberta administrators and academics should also seize 3MT and other presentation opportunities to “engage our graduates in the work of defending and promoting our university” (A. Gow, UAlberta, 2015).

If properly mentored and systematically supported, this cadre of graduate students could be encouraged to seek additional community engagement responsibilities to promote their research, advocate for the University of Alberta and dispel the “ivory tower” perception.

Ideas that Work

In addition to the Three Minute Thesis initiatives, the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research offers a range of professional development opportunities for graduate students in all disciplines. uofa.ualberta.ca/graduate-studies/professional-development

University Relations and faculty communications staff work with a variety of methods to ensure that members of the media are kept informed about UAlberta research and activities.

The Community Connections Awards organized by University Relations celebrate the scholarship, leadership and community impacts of university faculty, staff, and students who are active in the community. uofa.ualberta.ca/university-relations/about-us/community-connections-awards

Research by the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry receives considerable international acclaim. Examples are the Edmonton Protocol that improved treatment of type 1 diabetes, and the creation of Smart-e-Pants™, which prevent pressure ulcers in people with reduced mobility.

The Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life is the first (and only) gathering point in a public university in Canada focusing on themes where religion and public life intersect. It seeks to enhance the quality and civility of debate on contested issues through establishing hospitable environments for informed and lively discussion to take place. Each academic term, it sponsors a range of events that feature presentations by highly qualified scholars and participation by members of the public. https://www.augustana.ualberta.ca/research/centres/ronningcentre/
Recommendation 2.3

*Develop and share data that evaluates the economic and social contributions of UAlberta and its graduates.*

“When you take a look at some of the other schools, they tell better stories. And they’ve got their history down pat and they can draw the threads from where [they] were to where they are.”

**Suggested Actions**

- Continue to regularly update and publicize the results of alumni impact research.
- Celebrate and publicize how key university-community collaborations have saved taxpayer dollars and/or improved quality of life.
- Encourage students in marketing, economics, and other relevant fields to research alumni impact.
- Ensure effective use of digital media to inform the public about such research and get ongoing feedback about how the public perceives UAlberta and its work. Measure engagement and reaction levels on a regular basis.

**Rationale**

Members from seven focus groups specified that communicating relevance was an essential step to increasing the university’s connection to the community. Although UAlberta is mentioned in news stories, especially with regard to medical breakthroughs, a more strategic approach to external communications will result in more consistent mentions.

Better use of digital media is crucial to communications, especially with people under age 65. These audiences are interested in two-way communication, so it is important to do more than simply post news updates on the university’s accounts on social media platforms. Instead, the university must leverage the “social” aspect of social media, by generating conversation and sharing.

**Bridging the chasm**

Despite UAlberta’s robust history of community engagement, many focus group members expressed a perception that during the last 20 years a rift has formed between the communities that have historically enriched UAlberta and the institution itself.

“I see a big brain and big mouth. I really don’t see those ears when you talk about community. That vehicle doesn’t seem to have been developed.”

Stimulating authentic, two-way conversations between UAlberta and the communities it serves is critical for establishing meaningful relationships. Social media provides wonderful opportunities to have such conversations.

Members of nine focus groups suggested better use of social media as a tool to reach the community. According to WeAreSocial.sg, 91% of Canadian Internet users have a social media account and 66% have used social media in the past month. Social media is no longer just a youth phenomenon. According to Forum Research, for example, 63% of 45-54 year olds, 47% of 55-64 year olds and 32% of seniors use Facebook (www.forumresearch.com). These age groups represent people with resources and networks within business and government communities.
Development of a “communication vehicle” garnered considerable attention during many focus group discussions, with nine focus groups sharing their thoughts and ideas with regards to the university communicating “its relevance” and “getting the word out” to a broader community.

Proving societal benefits from funding UAlberta

“U of A alumni have a major impact on our economy and society. It is important that the community be reminded of this contribution on a regular basis.”

The University of Alberta contributed $12.3 billion of direct and indirect economic impact, or approximately five per cent of Alberta’s GDP in the 2009/10 fiscal year, according to a 2012 study by Dr. Anthony Briggs and Dr. Jennifer Jennings in the University of Alberta School of Business. The study also demonstrated the enormous impact of U of A alumni on the Alberta economy.

Ideas that Work

The Briggs and Jennings survey highlighted that in 2012 there were 70,258 alumni-founded organizations with annual revenues of $348.5B and employing 1,581,923 people. alumni.ualberta.ca/about-us/impact
Recommendation 2.4
Ensure all assets, locations, research, publications, and personnel are clearly identified as UAlberta.

“There needs to be a rebranding that first, we’re the U of A, and then what it is that our products or services are.”

“The U of A has a giant footprint downtown [Enterprise Square] even when I’m walking through it I hardly notice the university...we have this large footprint in the business community and it doesn’t seem to be leveraged in any way, shape, or form.”

Suggested Actions

- Increase resources dedicated to visual reputation enhancement and promotional messages during marquee events held on campuses (i.e., craft sales, sport tournaments, conferences).
- Consider painting more UAlberta fixed property assets the school colours of green and gold.
- Increase permanent celebratory messages throughout campus.
- Use reputation-enhancing messages throughout campus, in addition to faculty specific messaging, to instill a broader sense of UAlberta loyalty and pride.
- Initiate well-designed wrapping of UAlberta vehicles with key messages.
- Strongly encourage staff who will be interviewed or photographed to wear UAlberta clothing and/or be positioned with the UAlberta logo in the background.

Rationale

“We [UAlberta] need to make sure that strong brand is kept.”

Building a sense of community pride in the university was suggested in five focus groups as a potential way to increase connection with the community. People who feel proud of where they work or study are more likely to mention it in conversations with others. Students who feel proud of where they studied are more likely to become donors.

Focus group participants often compared UAlberta to other highly regarded post-secondary institutions. Several felt that UAlberta was too understated in its communications, and that it should market itself more assertively in the crowded post-secondary landscape. Some noted that it seems to be much more effective at promoting the names of its major donors or specific researchers than at promoting the university itself.

Better branding leads to stronger mental associations with UAlberta

“...some major, major breakthroughs in...the health field for sure...[but] there’s a lot more profile for the people than there is to the university.”

Having the logo visible whenever UAlberta people are speaking to the media will help reinforce that the institution is part of what made this discovery or event possible. It will associate the brand with exciting developments. By placing visual marketing advertisements in local public places, such as transit shelters and pedways, the university helps position itself as a resource for societal advancement. Consistent, frequent use of the logo and colours throughout our campuses helps remind people of what UAlberta offers.

Adding stories such as the history of specific buildings or places on campus will also help reinforce the brand. Current and new students would appreciate the history of their alma mater and would likely feel more pride in their school and their accomplishments.
Public events held on campus can be leveraged to grow brand awareness

“*It should be highly visibly branded...as big U of A green and gold.*”

University of Alberta campuses host marquee commercial and sporting events which are key opportunities to highlight the importance of UAlberta. For example, the Winter and Spring Butterdome Craft Sales draw close to 50,000 visitors to campus. The Butterdome also hosts public sporting events that draw over 25,000 guests each year. The Saville Centre draws an incredible 1,000,000 visitors annually. Visitors to these events and locations should not only be exposed to UAlberta branding on the walls, but could also be given print or electronic information regarding upcoming university events or engagement opportunities.

Branded vehicles increase awareness and conversation

UAlberta has approximately 100 plain white delivery vehicles, some 40 of which are used for extended trips away from north campus. These present a wonderful, low cost opportunity to increase visibility and awareness of UAlberta. Wrapping these vehicles with UAlberta promotional messaging is inexpensive and could be done quickly. Such branding also sparks conversations. For example, when Campus Saint-Jean (CSJ) shuttle buses – which have CSJ branding on them – are stopped on north campus, non-CSJ students sometimes approach these vehicles and ask their drivers about programming at CSJ¹.

Fundraising opportunity

Community or corporate sponsorship of messaging on the buses or walls of buildings may be possible, as long as it does not detract significantly from the main message about UAlberta itself. It is conceivable that “wrapped” UAlberta delivery vehicles might be used to assist local and regional festivals. One respondent suggested that the, “*University needs to advertise what they’re doing at Folk Fest and at the Fringe to start to have people come back into the [university] community.*”

Ideas that Work

The University of Alberta School of Business has recently rebranded itself to give more prominence to the U of A logo to make it very clear that it is part of the University of Alberta.

The Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine has posters throughout Corbett Hall highlighting how it has helped the community. Each message features the face of an individual who has benefitted from the services offered by the faculty and the effect these treatments have had on the quality of that person’s life.

The Town of Banff, which has installed waist-high, weather resistant, tasteful information plaques directly in front of each historic structure. Banff has augmented these signs with an on-line tour that allows tourists to download information either before or after their visit as they continue their journey.

[www.banffmaps.ca/heritage_Downtown/](http://www.banffmaps.ca/heritage_Downtown/)

¹ Eve Robidoux, CSJ, Dec. 16, 2014
CORE RECOMMENDATION #3
Pioneer an “Open Campuses” strategy to increase access to intellectual and physical resources.

Recommendation 3.1
Respond to community needs through more collaboration with municipal and rural organizations, businesses, non-profits and community groups

“So there’s affordable housing strategies...poverty reduction initiatives, but none of those people that are doing any of those initiatives...are going out to universities, especially not to humanities, to say hey do you have any people working on projects like this...”

While members of the university community do indeed work with community groups on many such issues, there is an opportunity to do much more. Many people outside the university do not know how to connect with relevant UAlberta experts, and sometimes the converse is also true.

Suggested Actions

- Deepen senior leadership relationships with not-for-profit leaders and senior civil servants in departments beyond ministries responsible for advanced education.
- Create an ongoing university/partners working group to assess potential partners’ needs and interests, the university’s expertise, and opportunities for mutual benefit.
- Develop a central database of expertise on campus that would be accessible to the public to help match academic and community needs. Communities could identify experts who may have interest in working with them to solve problems. This could include creating and promoting a project portal or hotline where local organizations seeking help could post their needs. Professors and graduate students could also indicate their areas of interest for collaborating with community organizations.

Rationale

Members of five focus groups noted they had connections to the university through business collaborations such as TEC Edmonton or farming. However, several groups made it clear that more could be done to build such connections.

Builds support within government

Working in closer collaboration with Alberta government efforts to help solve major issues will increase the government’s awareness of the importance of the university to the province. It gives them a direct stake in continuing adequate funding. By participating in this way, UAlberta will help reinforce the notion that we are the University of Alberta, not just a university in Alberta.

Build public support through closer collaboration

Eight of the focus groups perceived a psychological barrier between the university and the community. Respondents describing seeing the university as an “ivory tower” that has “branded itself as the intelligentsia, as elitist and is unwelcoming to the general community”.

The focus group participants clearly believe that the University of Alberta has intellectual capabilities that could directly help Alberta’s communities. Eleven focus groups suggested that the university increase connection by forming partnerships with external groups for research and other projects. Seven focus groups suggested that the university increase connection by sharing its knowledge and serving as a problem-solver with the community.
Mutual learning opportunities and benefits

External collaborations present opportunities for all concerned:

- *Faculty can broaden their networks, build their reputations, and have the opportunity to apply research to real world problems.*
- *Students benefit from a greater understanding of how their learning can be applied in the real world. Participating in such projects also improves their job prospects through more experience and community connections.*
- *Community partners benefit from access to expertise. Such partnerships can also strengthen their organizational capacity.*

A formal process and database makes partnerships easier

Many focus group participants spoke of their frustration in accessing UAlberta expertise. The current approach to matching academics and community organizations appears complicated and ad hoc. A formal process and publicly accessible database will use resources more efficiently and make it easier for such partnerships to happen.

The ongoing working group will help establish trust and mutual respect and nurture long-term relationships. It will create a better understanding of mutual needs and perspectives and respond to the desires felt by many community groups, students and academics for a greater community connection.

Ideas that Work

During the 2014/15 academic year 1,500 students spent more than 30,000 hours helping non-profit community organizations, as part of the Faculty of Arts Community Service Learning program (CSL). Carley-Jane Stanton, for example, worked with Sustainable Food Edmonton, and has recently been awarded a Rhodes Scholarship. uofa.ualberta.ca/community-service-learning

The Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities (ASCRC) at Augustana Campus partners with rural and small urban communities to research and help solve challenges faced by those communities. http://www.augustana.ualberta.ca/research/centres/acsrc/

Action research projects at Campus Saint-Jean (CSJ) align with Francophone community needs, and include literacy, domestic violence, primary care services in French, and integration of French-speaking newcomers outside of Québec.

Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences students help local agencies run flu clinics and host community education sessions both in Edmonton and rural communities in Alberta through Community Service Learning (CSL) courses.

Researchers in the School of Public Health such as Dr. Candace Nykiforuk, Dr. Cameron Wild and Dr. Nicholas Ashbolt engage across disciplines to tackle challenges related to water sustainability, addictions and mental health. Masters of Public Health students spend 6 - 8 week practicums in government Alberta Health Services and non-governmental organizations to learn first-hand about public health policy and governance practices.

Each year over 250 students in the Faculty of Law volunteer their support for Student Legal Services, a student-managed, non-profit society dedicated to helping low-income individuals in Edmonton and area understand their legal issues and solve their legal problems. lawschool.ualberta.ca/student-resources/get-involved/student-legal-services

The Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (ATEP) makes it possible for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students to complete the final 60 credits of a Bachelor of Elementary Education degree at a college close to home. www.atep.ualberta.ca
Recommendation 3.2

Establish and resource more interdisciplinary courses and initiatives that tap into and stimulate public interest and respond to community needs

"How to get them (Deans) to interconnect, because the world has moved from those silos, and it’s the spaces between those silos that's usually where all the excitement is."

Suggested Actions

- Research and eliminate barriers that currently exist which discourage interdisciplinary collaboration. There has recently started to be a shift in the attitudes of government-funded bodies to support cross-disciplinary collaboration, but the university has not yet grappled with how to give credit to pre-tenure academics for interdisciplinary efforts.
- Support co-teaching and courses being cross-listed across departments and faculties (e.g. Engineering and Philosophy, or the Sociology of Science)
- Organize more cross-departmental and cross-faculty events where faculty may meet and mingle with colleagues from other disciplines. There is currently an event for new faculty from across the university to meet each other, but there are no ongoing events that foster continued cross-departmental and cross-faculty exchange of ideas.
- Talk with and listen to community leaders to determine where they perceive a need or value to be had from interdisciplinary programs.
- Make it easier for students to take and get credit for courses offered by other faculties.

Rationale

Seven of the focus groups commented on the insular nature of university faculties and services, often operating independently of each other in “silos” or even in competition with each other, as a barrier to engagement. At the same time, it is increasingly recognized that there are few remaining areas of knowledge that do not require collaboration among people with disparate specialties in order to make significant progress. However the traditional academic model struggles to reconcile the need to collaborate across silos with the desire to judge each academic’s work independently.

Grow research funding

Some granting agencies now encourage interdisciplinary collaborations, so encouraging further interdisciplinary research and programs within UAlberta may help the university attract funding. For example, in its web page directing researchers to the correct granting agency, the federal government states:

“Some research also requires an interdisciplinary approach. The agencies wish to encourage the Canadian research community to advance and lead interdisciplinary research that is cross-cutting and addresses important social, economic and health issues that matter to Canadians. This includes research that bridges more than one discipline or that requires the skills of several disciplines.

The agencies support this type of research through a number of joint and co-operative programs (see “Research Funding Collaboration” for a complete listing) and have in place a number of mechanisms to ensure that interdisciplinary research is accommodated within their individual programs.”

Private sector donors are also starting to look for initiatives that cross disciplines. For example, the Health Research Foundation launched its million-dollar “Interdisciplinary Health Research Program” in 2014.

“The objectives of this program are to increase inter-faculty research collaboration and contribute to the development of Canadian leadership capacity in interdisciplinary research.”


Conduct better research

The complexity of today’s problems means that less and less can be solved within one academic silo. Research on innovation shows consistently that efforts to examine issues from diverse perspectives are more likely to come up with innovative solutions.

Support the new generation of professors

Having grown up in the digital era, younger professors are accustomed to more open, multidisciplinary and cross-fertilized learning environments. But in the university environment, they can be penalized for focusing on interdisciplinary research. In many fields, the tenure process does not assign value to projects that professors have done as part of a team rather than on their own.

Provide greater job opportunities for students

Businesses say they want students who are flexible and able to examine issues from many perspectives. Interdisciplinary programs could give students a competitive edge. It is also important that the university and graduates do a good job of explaining to prospective employers what the students have learned in their interdisciplinary studies.
Provide programs of interest to the students and the public

It is our observation that a growing number of students and members of the general public are seeking interdisciplinary learning. Meeting the demand for such programs will meet a need expressed by the community, and will make UAlberta attractive to more students.

“I know a scholar who started a “Sunday university” where he and colleagues did lectures open to the public, for free. Apparently it was quite popular and all sorts of people showed up regularly. This could be one interesting approach to engaging people, and having scholars (and students) from different disciplines engage!”

Ideas that Work

The University of Alberta School of Business has a number of interdisciplinary entrepreneurship initiatives. For example, students, faculty and staff from across UAlberta meet at eHub to learn from each other to develop new business ideas. Mentors from the University of Alberta Alumni Association and Edmonton-based entrepreneurial organizations assist student participants. The Entrepreneurship 101 course reserves half its 40 - 50 seats for non-business students to encourage cross discipline interactions and diverse perspectives. 
[entrepreneurship.ualberta.ca/ehub and business.ualberta.ca/centres/technology-commercialization/entrepreneurship-101]

The SHINE Youth Clinic is a multi-faculty, interdisciplinary, student-directed health clinic helping the underserved youth population of Edmonton’s inner city. The Clinic involves students from a range of disciplines: Medicine and Dentistry, Rehabilitation Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Social Work, Nutrition, Counselling Psychology, and Physiotherapy. [www.shineclinic.ca]

The Alberta Land Institute in the Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences (ALES) seeks to address a number of challenges related to land use management in communities across the province. [www.albertalandinstitute.ca]

The Faculty of Extension works with other faculties to meet community needs. For example, together with the Faculty of Engineering it offers a program in construction management. [http://www.extension.ualberta.ca/study/applied-sciences/construction/]

The Alberta Centre on Aging promotes cutting-edge research, education, and service in aging, through interdisciplinary collaboration and through partnerships with stakeholders. The Centre brings together researchers, faculty members and students from several faculties include: Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences; Arts; Extension; Medicine and Dentistry; Nursing; Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences; Physical Education and Recreation; Rehabilitation Medicine; and Science to study age related issues and concerns. [rehabilitation.ualberta.ca/research/institutes-and-centres/alberta-centre-on-aging]
Recomme
[520x709]ndation 3.3
Make University of Alberta research knowledge more accessible to the public by revitalizing the Speakers Bureau and other outreach tools.

“We’re in the business of telling the Edmonton story, the Alberta story. Our stories are your stories, your stories are our stories, but we’re not allowed in. That’s crazy! … The university needs to re-think this.”

Suggested Actions

● Centralize an easily accessible, user-friendly, online UAlberta Speakers Bureau with representation from all departments.
● Provide media and speaker training for all interested professors and students.
● Conduct user testing on the university’s website with members of the general public, to ensure that outsiders can easily find what they seek.
● Measure engagement and awareness not only from the perspective of what is covered by non-university media but also in terms of the effectiveness of two-way dialogues with communities about research, teaching and service.

Rationale

Respondents in eight of the focus groups described a sense that the university is an “ivory tower” that has “branded itself as the intelligentsia, as elitist” and is unwelcoming to the general community. Three of these groups commented on ways to overcome this barrier, suggesting that the university do more to engage with a greater variety of people and organizations.

Implementing initiatives to connect students with the community was also identified in seven focus groups as a way to improve university-community engagement.

The suggested actions will help overcome these perceptions and barriers.

“We have speaker series, we have theatre, we have music, musical entertainment, we have the whole arts. The drama department puts on amazing productions. Edmonton doesn’t know about it; we don’t connect with our community at the grassroots level.”

Make the university’s programs and expertise easier for the public to discover and connect with

The University of Alberta is so large and diverse that it is impossible for members of the public to be aware of everything going on there. However, making it easier to discover the university’s programs, research and experts when seeking information will help break down the barriers between the university and the communities it serves.

“I went to the website today and there’s no tab there for community. It’s all broken down in an organized way but for someone else’s purpose.”

Respondents from focus groups were frustrated in their efforts to find suitable UAlberta based speakers for their business or service-group functions. A well-designed website and effective social media will help improve communication, but having actual people out speaking about their work at the university will have a more powerful impact on those who attend.

“What is the best medium to get that message out…is it something in the newspaper or is it actually…physical bodies out there?”
Help students and professors be comfortable in a more public role

In order to effectively leverage faculty and students to be representatives of the university at public events it is essential that they be comfortable doing so. Not everybody will want to take on this role (nor should they all), but there are many who could be good at it and happy to do it if they have had some training to increase their comfort level and presentation skills.

Ensure UAAlberta's social media is truly social

Social media is a powerful way to connect with people in the community, but real connection involves two-way conversation. By experimenting with different techniques and social media channels to increase two-way communication, assessing what is most successful, and sharing those successes, the university will be able to increase the number of followers who see what UAAlberta is posting, and develop a sense of engagement that goes well beyond mere broadcasting of university happenings.

Ideas that Work

University Relations relaunched the Speakers Bureau in July 2015. So far 32 faculty members have signed up and a dozen have given talks at community events. [uofa.ualberta.ca/university-relations/speakers-bureau](uofa.ualberta.ca/university-relations/speakers-bureau)

The Arts Faculty offers Humanities 101, a free non-credit university level course for people living in Edmonton’s downtown and surrounding areas who have faced barriers to accessing formal education. [uofa.ualberta.ca/community-service-learning/humanities-101](uofa.ualberta.ca/community-service-learning/humanities-101)

Every Nursing Faculty member has a mandated or volunteer community connection. For example, faculty members researching family violence offer their expertise, faculty with expertise in homelessness volunteer with inner city non-profit agencies, and students serve meals at Mustard Seed church.

For 28 years the fully self-supporting Institute for Stuttering Treatment and Research (ISTAR), in the Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine, has helped treat people who stutter and educate health professionals in treatment techniques. It is the only treatment and research facility of its kind in North America. In addition to teaching the Comprehensive Stuttering Program (CSP), ISTAR staff are recognized worldwide as authorities on the treatment of stuttering, and frequently give workshops or short courses in Canada, the United States and other countries. [www.istar.ualberta.ca/](www.istar.ualberta.ca/)

The Institute for Space Science, Exploration and Technology (ISSET) invites children ages 7 - 9 into immersive summer programs. [uofa.ualberta.ca/camps/faculty-of-science](uofa.ualberta.ca/camps/faculty-of-science)

U School, an initiative of the University of Alberta Senate, brings students from vulnerable communities to campus for a week of learning and fun experiences guided by UAAlberta students, faculty and alumni volunteers. [www.senate.ualberta.ca/USchool/Volunteeringopportunities.aspx](www.senate.ualberta.ca/USchool/Volunteeringopportunities.aspx)
Recommendation 3.4
Make UAlberta campuses and facilities more accessible and welcoming to the general public, including locals and visitors.

“Are they mutually exclusive… those pursuits of, you know, higher ranking and the connection to the community?”

Suggested Actions

- **Share use of UAlberta facilities when they are not needed for university activities.**
  - Partner with Edmonton Public, Catholic and Francophone School Boards, City of Edmonton to make UAlberta facilities available to their staff and students. For example:
    - Professional development opportunities for City and School Board staff.
    - A “One Card” for City and School Board staff to access U of A facilities.
    - Make facilities available to City and School Boards for classes and recreation programs.
  - Explore opportunities to expand summer camp programs.

- **Make campuses more accessible and welcoming.**
  - Explore opportunities to cooperate with civic governments to offer reduced transportation costs.
  - Explore parking options that will encourage people to visit and participate in events or activities on campus.

- **Turn campuses into tourist destinations.**
  - Improve signage and wayfinding resources.
  - Establish visitor Information resources like kiosks and mobile apps, including walking/virtual tours.
  - Collaborate with the Edmonton 311 program to share tourist information.
  - Collaborate with agencies such as Edmonton Tourism, Edmonton Heritage Council, Edmonton Historical Board, Edmonton Economic Development Corporation, Make Something Edmonton, Edmonton Arts Council, Social Enterprise Fund, and Alberta Tourism.
  - Extend hours for public access to collections.
  - Collaborate with community partners on cultural events such as festivals.
  - Collaborate with tourism organizations on packages that include UAlberta.

Rationale

“Maybe you could bring more youth, like elementary-type students, here for functions with their parents, in the summer time. Maybe there’s [something] like… the learning tree program and things like that. Opens up a lot of doors for people to get on campus.”

Respondents from 13 focus groups, including all those held with participants from outside of Edmonton, believe that connecting with youth and children, primarily through schools, would increase connection with the university.

The physical features of the university campus are perceived favourably, with respondents from four focus groups commenting that they had taken visitors to view the campus grounds. However seven groups said that members of the general public do not feel connected to the university as a physical destination to visit.

Poor accessibility of the university was a commonly identified barrier, cited by eleven different groups. Ten of these groups found that navigating campus was difficult, often mentioning the size of the campus and the changing landscape due to new buildings. Seven of these groups also perceived transportation to campus as an obstacle, frequently complaining about the cost and availability of parking near campus.
A publicly funded asset should be accessible to the public

As a public resource paid for in large part by the citizens of Alberta, UAlberta facilities should be as available as possible for use by taxpayers.

Opening up the university’s campuses to the broader community would allow more community members to enjoy both the physical beauty of each campus and resources within each facility and faculty. It would instill an inviting tone and create positive engagement from those who have not experienced it as faculty, staff, or students.

PR, marketing and recruitment potential

“We’re underselling the school!”

The University of Alberta should be a four-season tourist attraction. It is in the middle of a thriving urban centre and the capital of the province. Its main campus is situated on beautiful grounds linked to the North Saskatchewan River park system and has major transit services. Its other campuses are also in beautiful locations. It has physical assets like lecture theatres, meeting spaces, labs, libraries, theatres, accommodations, museums, collections, food services, sports and recreation facilities, hospitals and clinics.

“I can’t believe how cool it is that your university is situated off the river valley... They [children who had visited the campus] talked about the university a lot. [They said] I [want to] go to that school, it is a pretty cool school”.

There are major annual events that happen on campus that could be leveraged to increase tourism and recruitment. Visitors who, for instance, come to the huge Butterdome craft sales or to convocation ceremonies, should leave campus feeling welcomed as visitors to the U of A, and encouraged to come back.

Accessibility increases community and funder support

Despite having some connection to the University of Alberta, many focus group participants feel intimidated about coming to the north campus. Building up visitor information resources and improving signage to make navigating campus easier would help make campus more welcoming.

“The university, it’s a no man’s land! You don’t know how to navigate it... there’s no reason to go there. Why would you go there? ...you can’t find parking! ...you don’t even know where to go on campus.”

Many participants expressed a desire to champion the history, natural beauty, and resources of the UAlberta north campus but cited barriers such as the high cost and limited availability of parking near campus. (Parking was cited as a problem in seven focus groups).
Tourist attraction

“For the last 14 years I’ve had kids do fundraising to go on fieldtrips. They go to Drumheller, they go to the Legislature and they go to the Space Science Centre. Never once have I heard them go to the U of A.”

Modern technology offers cost-effective opportunities to encourage tourism on campus. In addition to attracting tourists through online “virtual tours”, the university could have audio guides available for people to use on their phones to tour campus. It could also make navigating the university easier with mobile-friendly interactive maps.

The university could generate revenues and tourism by extending operating hours for key university services, such as the Bookstore, and exhibitions such as the Mactaggart collection or the Bruce Peel Special Collections Library.

The University of Alberta has been an integral part of the province’s history, and is home to some of the oldest buildings in the province. Cooperating with other tourist attractions and tourism promotion agencies would help the university attract more visitors, as well as high-quality students and professors.

“We do not cultivate and talk about some wonderful things that happened in the past! If you go to Fort Edmonton, where do we go to learn the history of the U of A? If I’m a tourist... I should see something at Fort Edmonton... I should look up the hill and know the U of A is up there.”

Locations such as historic Rutherford House and the beautifully situated Faculty Club have the potential to become highly popular dining spots for locals as well as visitors to Edmonton. Unique destinations such as these create opportunities to bring many more people onto north campus, creating a comfort level and positive associations with being here. This, in turn, will build citizen support for the university, and will help to attract students, faculty, and staff.

Ideas that Work

Many departments within the Faculty of Arts invite the public to campus to attend performances. For instance, the Drama Department hosts several affordably priced Studio Theatre productions each season and the Music Department offers many free performances, some in the architectural gem that is Convocation Hall. uofa.ualberta.ca/drama/about-drama/studio-theatre and uofa.ualberta.ca/music/music-events-calendar

The Jeanne and Peter Lougheed Centre for the Performing Arts at Augustana campus was designed both to serve as a facility for university use and to engage people from the broader Camrose community. www.tourismcamrose.com/jeanne-peter-lougheed-performing-arts-centre/

Camp FYrefly is the only leadership retreat for sexual and gender minority youth in Canada and the only camp of its kind to be operated by a major research university in the world. To date more than 1,000 youth have attended Camp FYrefly. www.fyrefly.ualberta.ca/

UAlberta Physical Education facilities are used to provide athletic day camps to hundreds of children aged 3-14 in the Edmonton area during school breaks. The facilities are also used for city-wide track and field and other athletic events.

DiscoverE partners with organizations in Edmonton, northern Alberta, and the Northwest Territories to deliver science and technology programming to children aged 8-16 from 80 communities. Some of their programming takes place at the U of A, but the northern events are a way of introducing potential students from those communities to the university. discovere.ualberta.ca/en/CommunityOutreach.aspx
The Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences (ALES) offers a range of public programs and education initiatives at the Devonian Botanic Garden, including a Green School for elementary students. [www.devonian.ualberta.ca/EducationCourses/GreenSchool.aspx](www.devonian.ualberta.ca/EducationCourses/GreenSchool.aspx)

Campus Saint-Jean (CSJ) facilities are used for many community events. Community groups may use the campus theatre, gym, and great hall for a nominal fee. CSJ recently partnered with a francophone elementary school that temporarily required gym space. The theatre is also one of the venues for the Edmonton Fringe Festival.

The Corbett Hall Student Physical Therapy Clinic opens its doors to underserved populations within the greater Edmonton Area in need of physical therapy at minimal cost. Students provide the services, under the supervision of licensed physical therapists. [rehabilitation.ualberta.ca/about-us/our-students/student-clinics-and-programs/corbett-hall-student-physical-therapy-clinic](rehabilitation.ualberta.ca/about-us/our-students/student-clinics-and-programs/corbett-hall-student-physical-therapy-clinic)

The Office of the Registrar hosts an annual Open House, which attracts up to 8,000 prospective students and their families to campus in one day. The office also offer virtual tours for those who may be interested in the University of Alberta and guided personal tours by trained current students who serve as Campus Ambassadors. [admissions.ualberta.ca/Campus-Visit-Program.aspx](admissions.ualberta.ca/Campus-Visit-Program.aspx)
CONCLUSION

This report aims to make a mark in time, to capture the feelings and comments of the community at large and then provide recommendations on how to strengthen the connections. It is not intended as a critique of ongoing efforts or some sort of scorecard to judge levels of connection. Instead, we submit it as a discussion piece for the start of a conversation between all elements of the university and the communities around it - geographic, social, academic, and more.

During fall 2015, Senate Faculty Liaisons have helped to start this conversation, inviting every faculty to participate and collecting feedback from almost all of them. The results so far have been truly informative and thought-provoking. All elements of the university have some form of community engagement, with many directing a significant portion of their resources to the effort. We applaud all these programs and projects, and we believe they need to be highlighted further. The fact that so much is being done, yet the external community is not necessarily aware of it, leads us to believe that there is a fundamental need to provide greater focus and coordination to the university’s community engagement efforts.

As we note in Recommendation #1, the university must redefine and emphasize community connections as vital to the university’s success. Only through a focused approach will these many different faculty-level initiatives have the desired, and necessary, cumulative impact laid out in Recommendation #2: to demonstrate and communicate the societal value of UAlberta research and a University of Alberta education. During the feedback research conducted and over the course of writing, the Task Force has learned of very positive anecdotal evidence that suggests that University of Alberta President Turpin and his entire leadership team have already made great strides forward on the matter of community engagement, and we applaud these initiatives. We encourage them to amplify their efforts and take up recommendation #3: to pioneer an “Open Campuses” strategy to increase access to the university’s intellectual and physical resources.

We also encourage the Senate Standing Committee on Campus Inquiries and Initiatives to take up this report, build upon our research and identify ways to implement the recommendations. There is a great deal of community engagement currently ongoing, and it is incumbent upon all University of Alberta Senators not only to learn about but to support and amplify these initiatives. Our responsibility is to inquire, promote, and connect.

Written by volunteer members of the University of Alberta Senate, using direct quotations from focus groups conducted across the province, this report reflects the perceptions of Albertans at a specific point in time. Although there were countless points of view across the research, one overriding opinion was clear: members of the community want to be connected to the University of Alberta, and to help the university succeed. While they may not always understand its relevance to their daily lives, when they do connect and have a conversation with the brilliant minds working in every discipline, a light comes on and they see the University of Alberta for what it truly is: a place where the problems of current and future generations can be solved. It is a place designed for “the uplifting of the whole people,” not for the benefit of the elite few, but for all Albertans.
APPENDIX – FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Expectations outlined prior to start of pilot focus group session:
- We want your opinions. This is a safe place to speak freely.
- We cannot implement everything you may suggest (Senate’s mandate is limited to ‘inquire, promote, connect’ / university resources are limited and directed strategically)
- Please share your wildest ideas. Questions are intentionally open-ended. The purpose is to have a discussion, there are no right or wrong answers nor is there any specific response that we are looking for.
- This is not intended to be a discussion about the university’s core teaching and research mandates, but more about the university’s connections to the communities it serves. (We are fundamentally asking – what does/should the University of Alberta mean to the community and how does this play out for you on a personal level?)

1) What does it mean to “connect” with the university?

2) What are the benefits to the university as a result of closer connection to the broader community?

3) What are the benefits to the broader community as a result of closer connection to the university?

4) Do you personally feel connected in any way to the University of Alberta? If so, how do you feel connected? If not, why not?
   a. From your personal perspective how important is it to you to engage with the University of Alberta?
      If so, how? Prompting point – may need to prompt beyond degrees / Prompting point – may be some who feel connected and some who do not – need to balance conversation with both – grasp threads out of both groups

5) What activities, services, events or program offerings of the University of Alberta have you used (past or present) or might you use in future?
   a. What do you think others in your circle might be interested in?
   b. What barriers might the university remove to improve your (or others’) opportunities to connect?
      i. How might these barriers be removed?
         Prompting point – within this question or at end – possible list of activities and opportunities for facilitator – HAND OUT for participants to refer to and to take away from session - did you know about these sorts of offerings at UAlberta?

6) What could the university do to make you feel more connected?
   a. What is the best way for the university to keep you and your community informed about what is occurring at the university?
   b. How would you participate in the future? What involvement in the university appeals to you – or might you consider? Prompting point – move from ‘what’ to ‘how’ and ‘why’

7) Ideally, what should the university mean to you and your community?
   a. What changes would you like to see at the university over the next 10 to 15 years to make you and your community feel more connected?

8) When we talk to other groups, is there additional information that we should be collecting (additional/different questions)?

9) What other comments about the university would you like to make?
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Senate Vision
The University of Alberta Senate, an independent body of diverse community leaders and university representatives, will be recognized as successfully examining, fostering and celebrating the achievements and excellence of the University of Alberta, resulting in enhanced linkages in the community.

Mission
“It is the duty of a Senate to inquire into any matter that might benefit the university and enhance its position in the community.”  
Post-Secondary Learning Act of Alberta, 2003

Composition
The Senate comprises elected and appointed members from across Alberta, ex-officio members from the university senior leadership, as well as appointed members from the Alumni Association, Board of Governors, Deans’ Council, General Faculties Council, Graduate Students’ Association, Non-Academic Staff Association and Students’ Union. The Chancellor of the University of Alberta chairs the Senate.

Work of the Senate
The Senate strives to communicate the needs and perspectives of Albertans to the university community and to interpret to the public the many different facets of the university. As one way of accomplishing this, a task force may be struck to explore an issue brought to the Senate’s attention. This report is the result of such a task force.

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- Community members in Edmonton, Barrhead, Calgary, Camrose, Fort McMurray, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, and Wetaskiwin and area.

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