Memorandum

Date: 17 May 2011
To: All Faculty, Staff and Students in the Faculty of Arts and Science
From: Meric S. Gertler, Dean, Faculty of Arts & Science
Re: Academic Planning Year-End Report

As we approach the end of the 2010-11 academic year, this is an appropriate time to reflect back on the many developments during the past year and to take stock of academic planning in the Faculty.

It is now ten months since the recommendations of the Faculty’s Strategic Planning Committee were released in two forms. First, *The Faculty of Arts & Science Academic Plan 2010-15* outlined the opportunities and challenges facing the Faculty. Building on *Towards 2030* and initiatives underway across Arts & Science over the past several years, it emphasized five primary academic goals that accentuate our most important assets and distinctive strengths, and proposed a number of strategic initiatives to advance these goals. Second, the Strategic Planning Committee made recommendations for individual units within the Faculty that were communicated in the form of individual letters to departments, colleges, centres, institutes and programs.

In hindsight, the planning committee’s longer-than-expected period of deliberation left us in a rush to get the letters out to individual units, and their definitive tone made it seem as though the entire exercise was over. Reflecting back on this part of the process, I very much regret the tone of these letters, for which I take full responsibility.

Our real intention was to convey a set of proposals and recommendations that would stimulate debate and discussion. We expected to engage in extensive consultation, particularly with respect to those initiatives that proposed major structural changes. We anticipated that much of this consultation would take place through a set of proposed working groups, as well as at town hall meetings. We also recognized that many of the major initiatives would require formal governance approval, opening up further avenues for discussion and debate.

Beginning in the fall of 2010, my office became deeply engaged in a wide and extensive process of consultation concerning the academic planning recommendations. We held two well-attended town hall meetings in September. We devoted substantial time at the October and November meetings of Arts & Science Council to detailed discussion of the plan’s proposals, and I have provided full updates on academic planning at every meeting of Council since then. Discussions
of academic planning initiatives have become a regular feature of the monthly meetings of Arts & Science Chairs, Principals and Academic Directors (CPAD) as well as the Coalition of Arts & Science Directors (CASD). I have devoted many hours to visiting individual departments and programs to discuss our proposals and solicit reactions, and have also met with many individual faculty, staff and students to listen to their views and concerns.

This extensive consultation has provided important opportunities for members of the Faculty to express their views on the proposals. A number of those involving major organizational changes have undergone significant modification as a result of this process, which has succeeded in eliciting many constructive suggestions for alternative ways to achieve our academic objectives. For example, in place of the original proposal to establish a School of Languages and Literatures, we are now pursuing other initiatives designed to attract more students to undersubscribed courses. These new arrangements, developed through extensive dialogue with the leadership of our language, literature and culture departments, will showcase the talented faculty teaching in these units while also helping to relieve intense enrolment pressures in other departments. The spirit of co-operation and collaboration between individual departments around this issue has been both impressive and heartwarming.

Similarly, the proposals to close the Centre for Ethics and the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies have, following consultation, been replaced by modified initiatives in which the former will adopt a stronger focus on undergraduate education, while the latter will build up its program of externally funded interdisciplinary research. The Centre for Comparative Literature has also undertaken a new mandate to strengthen its contribution to undergraduate education, in collaboration with Victoria College.

While I truly regret that our overly hasty communications in the summer resulted in controversy and ill-will, I believe the results of the subsequent conversations led to major and useful revisions to the most contentious of the original proposals, and the overall outcome has helped the Faculty to move forward in tough financial circumstances. I also note that many of the original recommendations from our academic planning exercise have received strong support since they were first proposed. We have made considerable progress during the past year in developing these ideas further, deliberating on them through public discussion, securing approval through the University’s normal channels of governance where appropriate, and then proceeding with implementation. A brief summary of this activity is provided below, organized under our five major academic goals.

Taking Full Advantage of our Disciplinary Breadth

The proposal to establish new ‘Big Ideas in Arts & Science’ courses has met with a very positive response across the Faculty. Sandy Welsh, Acting Vice-Dean, Teaching & Learning, has convened an advisory committee of faculty and students to develop a more detailed proposal, and this committee has been meeting for the past several months. We expect to see a more comprehensive proposal by the fall, which will then be circulated widely for discussion. This committee’s work will also dovetail with a more comprehensive review of the structure of our first-year academic and co-curricular offerings, including 199 courses and college-based programs (discussed below).
At the same time, we have made excellent progress in implementing the primary recommendations arising from curriculum renewal, many of which are designed to enhance the breadth of our undergraduate programs and develop core competencies in all of our undergraduate students. In this regard, we appointed a working group, led by Donald Ainslie, Chair of Philosophy, to develop guidelines for implementing our new requirements with respect to social and ethical responsibility. The report of the Ethics Education Working Group has recently been circulated widely within the Faculty, and offers a number of concrete and very helpful steps to advance us in this direction.

We have taken significant steps to realign our programs more effectively with our core strengths through two specific initiatives. The proposal to move the undergraduate program in Architectural Studies to the Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design was enthusiastically endorsed by Arts & Science Council and is now working its way through the final stages of University governance. A proposal to relocate the undergraduate and graduate programs in Visual Studies to the Daniels Faculty has also been the subject of considerable discussion. If a consensus is reached in both divisions, we shall move forward on this proposal.

**Leveraging our Excellence in Research and Graduate Education**

We have made considerable progress towards the goal of ensuring that all of our research centres and institutes make a strong contribution to undergraduate education. As noted above, the Centre for Ethics and the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies have both changed their missions to reflect this priority. Similarly, the Centre for Biological Timing and Cognition is in the process of becoming integrated operationally within the Department of Psychology, and the activities of the Centre for International Studies will be fully integrated into the Munk School of Global Affairs as of 1 July 2011. We have also been working with the Canadian Institute for Theoretical Astrophysics (CITA) to enhance interaction between their faculty and undergraduate students through a number of research-focused opportunities. At the same time, three graduate centres – Criminology, Industrial Relations and Human Resources, and Drama – have been engaged in intensive discussions with their undergraduate counterparts in Woodsworth College and University College to explore opportunities for closer cooperation and coordination of their respective operations.

We have also increased participation in undergraduate research opportunities (299s), with the number of students and faculty taking part in these courses during the past year approaching all-time highs. We have been particularly successful in broadening the range of units offering research opportunities, with a growing number of humanities faculty participating. As another way to facilitate greater participation in research experiences, we have been working closely with ASSU during the past year to develop a new Undergraduate Research Fund. Full details will be announced early in the 2011-12 academic year.

In all of these initiatives, the primary beneficiaries will be our undergraduates, who will be able to take advantage of more opportunities to work with our most distinguished scholars. At the same time, the Faculty has been working hard to ensure that we continue to build on our unprecedented expansion of graduate education during the past five years. In particular, the Three-Campus Graduate Advisory Committee was asked to review existing practices with respect to graduate admissions and funding. It has now updated unit-level enrolment targets and
has also proposed a set of new mechanisms to enhance the financial sustainability of our graduate programs.

*Enhancing our Students’ Academic Experience*

One of the most important recommendations to emerge from academic planning was the proposal to proceed with a set of new academic appointments, once the resources flowing from the Faculty’s budget strategy became available. With a number of revenue-raising measures now beginning to bear fruit, the Faculty has recently authorized searches in 2011-12 for a substantial number of new faculty positions, with high priority given to those units experiencing the most severe enrolment pressures.

At the same time, we have pursued a number of strategies aimed at making better use of our existing teaching capacity. We have adjusted our undergraduate admissions plan to rebalance our intake in favour of those streams with the capacity to accommodate more students. We have also been working with a number of departments that are experiencing intense enrolment pressures, encouraging them to adjust their program requirements to take better advantage of courses offered by other units that have spare capacity.

The Faculty’s academic planning process triggered a number of informal discussions on how to enhance learning opportunities for our students in the delivery of academic programs and research in the area of the environment, resources and related fields. In order to focus the discussion and consider how best to offer high-quality programs and support for internationally significant research related to the environment and resources, I have recently announced the establishment of a working group on environment and resources to support these discussions and consultations. Among other initiatives, this working group is considering whether the establishment of a Department of Earth Sciences would provide a more effective framework for teaching undergraduate and graduate students in these fields and, at the same time, attract more students to make better use of our impressive teaching and research assets.

More generally, the Faculty has taken important steps to increase its support for successful innovations in undergraduate teaching and learning. We have committed to long-term, continuing funding for the highly successful First-Year Learning Communities (FLCs), the increasingly popular Writing Instruction for TAs (WIT) program, a comprehensive English Language Learning program targeted to those students for whom English is not a first language, and innovations such as the Philosophy Department’s Socrates Project, originally funded through the Student Experience Fund and our Curriculum Renewal Initiatives Fund.

*Capitalizing on our Colleges*

Thanks to financial assistance in the form of seed funding from the Provost’s Office, five of our colleges are developing new first-year programs analogous to the much-admired Vic One and Trinity One programs. This coming September will see the launch of UC One, with programs from Innis, New, St Michael’s and Woodsworth colleges soon to follow.

We have also taken major steps to enhance the structures supporting our students’ academic achievement. The office of the Faculty Registrar is currently undertaking a review of capacity and services in the college registrars’ offices. The growing number of international students in
our midst represents a tremendous opportunity for enhancing the overall diversity of the learning experience within the Faculty, but also poses some special challenges. Colleges provide front-line services to support the successful performance of these students, and the Faculty is working collaboratively with the office of the Vice-Provost Students to enhance this support.

The Faculty is also expanding the International Foundation Program based at New College, which develops English-language and learning skills for academically qualified international students before they are admitted to Arts & Science for full-time study. Moreover, we have recently disseminated new guidelines for the development of other similar international student support programs across the Faculty as a way of enhancing these students’ prospects for academic success.

**Engaging with the Community – Locally and Globally**

The academic plan makes a very strong commitment to enable as many of our students as possible to undertake a significant international experience. In this regard, I am pleased to report that we have converted the very popular Internationalized Course Module (ICM) program from a pilot to a continuing feature of undergraduate education in Arts & Science. We have also expanded the number of projects funded annually, and hope that this funding will continue to grow in the future.

We have also increased the number of opportunities available for international research experiences through the 399 program, which is now under the auspices of Ito Peng, Associate Dean, Interdisciplinary and International Affairs. Ito’s office has recently completed a comprehensive review of international activities across the Faculty, and will soon be establishing an advisory committee to support the development of further international opportunities for our students.

Locally, the momentum continues to build around service learning, another highly popular initiative amongst our students. My office is working closely with various colleges, departments and programs to provide ongoing funding to support the coordination of service learning placements. We are also designing a new system for tracking and disseminating information about all of the existing service learning opportunities available to our students.

In addition to the achievements noted above with respect to our five major academic goals, the Faculty remains on track in implementing its enrolment plan. As noted earlier, we have now rebalanced our intake streams to relieve the most acute pressures and take advantage of spare capacity. We remain committed to reducing overall undergraduate numbers gradually over the next five years, while increasing the international proportion of our intake over the same period. Our application flow is extremely healthy, and the quality of our applicants (in terms of average grades and cut offs) continues to rise. Our recent and ongoing improvements to the undergraduate learning experience should help us make even more progress on these fronts in the next few years.

We have also introduced a new system for complement planning within the Faculty. The recent establishment of the Faculty Appointments Committee provides us with a process for reviewing
the complement needs of individual units on an annual basis, accommodating changing circumstances and contingencies over the five-year planning period.

Finally, the Faculty’s budget plan remains on target. While we anticipate that our accumulated deficit will remain sizeable for some time to come, we have made considerable progress in reducing the size of our annual structural deficit over the past three years. While we must be mindful of the continuing need for fiscal prudence and the importance of living within our means, we are cautiously optimistic that our financial recovery will enable further renewal over the next 2-3 years.

In sum, this has been an eventful and productive year. I am grateful for the passion and commitment of faculty, staff and students, all of whom care deeply about the quality of our teaching and research programs and the experience we offer our students. I believe that the Faculty has emerged as a stronger entity as a result, and I look forward to working with you on the continuous process of planning for a brighter future.