University Model Engagement Team

White Paper

[Draft]

Introduction

The XX member University Model Engagement Team included representatives from each of the faculties, NILES and two students. This particular team was unique by virtue of the fact that its membership included all of the other deans. The inclusion of all the deans in the membership of the University Model Engagement Team was done in order to facilitate communication between the University Model Engagement Team and the other engagement teams. This became problematic due to scheduling conflicts between the engagement team meetings and the meetings of the engagement teams chaired by the other Deans. As a result, very few of the Deans were able to attend the University Model Engagement Team meetings, even though they continued to contribute to the discussions electronically.

The level of engagement, commitment and enthusiasm exhibited by the all members of the University Engagement Team was exemplary.

Terms of Reference

The following terms of reference were agreed upon after considerable discussion with respect to the meaning of "university model." It was agreed that "university model' referred to the delineation of curriculum and discipline areas among faculties and departments. The phrase "university model" was also deemed to include those characteristics that would be seen as the desirable organizational best practices that would align with Sheridan's university vision, its Academic Innovation Strategy, and its Strategic Plan.

University Engagement Team Terms of Reference:

- Identify diverse models of "universities"

- Explore the advantages and disadvantages of each model with respect to Sheridan's vision

- Identify a university model that will enable Sheridan to fulfill our vision

Alignment with Sheridan Strategic Vision

In order to properly inform our investigation, the team felt it was necessary to ensure that any recommendations made should be aligned with Sheridan's University Vision (Sheridan, 2011), the Academic Innovation Strategy (Sheridan, 2010), and the Strategic Plan (Sheridan, 2009).

The Sheridan University Vision simply states Sheridan's desire "[t]o be the top ranked teaching oriented undergraduate university in Canada dedicated to the student experience and committed to the preparation of job-ready graduates who will contribute to our cultural and socio-economic future and who will be eligible for graduate studies." (Sheridan, 2011)

Both the Academic Innovation Strategy and the Strategic Plan list Sheridan's strategic thrusts as being "more welcoming, more supportive, more inspiring and more valuable" with the underlying enablers being to "develop people, build and deploy resources strategically, expand digital learning environments and {engage in] responsive planning and implementation". (Sheridan, 2009, Sheridan, 2010).

The Team felt that its recommendations for a university model should enable the achievement of Sheridan's vision, Strategic Plan and Academic Innovation Strategy. In short, the goal of the team was to recommend a university model facilitating a welcoming, supportive, inspiring university environment which created value for students, employers, faculty, staff, the community and society at large.

Methodology

After establishing the Terms of Reference, the team set about its preliminary research in two distinct phases; the first task was to identify the types of characteristics, behaviors and cultures that the team believed Sheridan should aspire to, followed by the second phase which was to identify exemplar institutions which exhibited these particular behaviors.

A comprehensive list of desirable characteristics and behaviors was compiled by the Team. In order to compile this list, the team referred to the categories used in the MacLean's rankings for undergraduate teaching universities. More importantly, the broad experience that existed within the team with respect to administrative and academic performance and student and faculty support was brought forth in a series of in depth discussions and group activities in the engagement team meetings. This list was refined and subdivided into six categories as follows: student support, student life, programs and pathways, faculties, internationalization, and faculty support. The complete list of desirable characteristics is provided in Appendix A.

In order to compile a list of exemplar institutions, the team accessed the MacLean's rankings for undergraduate teaching universities, the list of exemplar universities used by Mount Royal University to inform them on their journey from college to university, and the short list of institutions in British Columbia and Alberta who have already made the transition from college or polytechnic to a university. The insights provided by the team members, many of whom had experience working in other institutions also contributed to the final list of exemplar institutions. The final list of exemplar institutions to be reviewed is presented in Appendix B.

The next step undertaken by the team was to gain further insights into each of the exemplar institutions through further research. The team split into groups of three or four members each. Each group was then tasked with gathering data on three to four institutions for presentation to the entire group at the next engagement team meeting. The data was collected by accessing institution web sites and liaising with the personal contacts that each of the team members had at the institutions they were researching. No institution was formally requested to provide specific data by the University Model engagement Team. Direct formal inquiries made to exemplar and peer institutions were deemed inappropriate without coordination of an

investigative task force in cooperation with the other engagement teams.) The data gathered by the groups was compiled and is presented in Appendix C.

An important part of the process was to recognize which of the established desirable characteristics Sheridan currently already exhibits. The team felt that it was important to not overlook and to retain those characteristics that exemplify the many positive attributes that have contributed to Sheridan's already strong reputation. In order to codify this, the team assessed Sheridan's performance with respect to each of the desirable characteristics noted in Appendix XX. For each desired characteristic, Sheridan's performance was rated either as satisfactorily in place, under development, or needs implementation. This provides a high level benchmark against which future performance can be measured. This rating is presented in Appendix D.

A concurrent desired outcome of the review of exemplar and peer institutions was the identification of characteristics of "university colleges" and universities that had previously transformed from colleges that Sheridan did not want to emulate. Investigation and recognition of mistakes made and undesirable characteristics acquired by other institutions provide valuable insight with respect to the pitfalls to avoid during Sheridan's transformation.

General Observations

While many of the exemplar institutions exhibit several, or at least some, of the characteristics identified as desirable, the team could find no single institution that was suitable as a singular role model. It was determined by the Team that Sheridan's most appropriate course of action would be to select the institutions that engaged in particular desired characteristics particularly well and emulate those institutions in the desirable traits in which they excelled. This would allow Sheridan to create a set of desirable traits based on a patchwork of best practices obtained from a cross section of educational institutions. Under this model, Sheridan would be able to retain its overall uniqueness while benchmarking a variety of best practices across a number of its peer institutions.

Sheridan is unique in its construction as a medium sized institution with three campuses of (eventually) equal size. Most of the multi campus models within the selected exemplar institutions have one large central campus with one or more satellite campuses, significantly smaller in size with limited program offerings. Other exemplar institutions maintained a single campus with no satellite operations.

Several of the Western institutions that had made rapid transition to university status confessed that many of their systems and processes were slow to adapt. Also slow to adapt was the institutional culture and employee attitudes towards the revised status and market position of the institution.

Institutions that have made the change to university status noted that acquiring the right to grant degrees and the responsibility for the quality of those offerings facilitated the offering of more innovative programming on an increasing timely and faster-to-market basis. In Ontario, this would require one of three things to happen;

1. Sheridan to acquire the right to grant degrees under an independent Act of the Assembly of Ontario (Baker and Miosi, 2010).
2. An amendment to the Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act. (The administration of the processes governed by this act require each degree credential to be individually approved, followed by a further consent to renew each five years thereafter) (Baker and Miosi, 2010).
3. The enactment of new legislation governing "undergraduate teaching universities".

Findings specific to six categories of desired characteristics

Student Support

Exemplar institutions recognize that one size does not fit all when it comes to student support. Different types of student require different types of support. A multi-faceted and comprehensive system of programs to support a diversity of student groups including

international, domestic, indigenous, and special needs students facilitates both improved student performance and student retention. In addition to the diversity of student groups requiring support, it is important to recognize the many types of support that may be required by these students. These types of support include academic (study skills, basic literacy and numeracy remediation, language upgrading and support), financial (access to scholarships, awards, bursaries and other forms of internal and external financial assistance), social (student engagement, counseling) and cultural (acculturation of international students).

Most of the exemplar institutions that exhibited a significant number of the identified desirable characteristics relating to student support and student life, were significantly smaller than Sheridan in terms of student population. These institutions include but are not limited to Acadia University, Trent University, Bishop's University and Mount Allison. It was surmised by the team that this may present Sheridan with a unique opportunity based on its configuration as three equal sized campuses. The replication of the delivery of the type of superior student support provided by the identified exemplar institutions could be achieved by Sheridan by separately focusing on each individual campus's population of approximately 7,000 students.

Student Life

As with student support, exemplar institutions recognized that different students engage in student life and activities in different ways. The services and activities offered to students should be organized to meet a number of goals; personal and professional development, health and wellness, pursuit of personal interests, opportunities to experiment and discover, positive social experiences and strong school spirit. Many of these goals are interrelated, and can be achieved by providing access to quality and affordable services and a diverse menu of extracurricular personal and professional growth opportunities.

Student services that were identified as critical included quality and affordable food services, access to recreational facilities, comfortable and convenient social and study spaces, access to health services, and affordable student housing.

Extracurricular opportunities contributing to personal and professional growth include, but are not limited to, athletics, student clubs and organizations, involvement in student government, internal and external discipline based academic competitions, robust co-op and internship opportunities, academic exchanges and international field schools, applied research opportunities, community involvement and service learning opportunities, access to conferences and seminars, opportunities to engage with the business community, etc. While it is unlikely that any individual student would find the time to participate in all of the above noted extracurricular activities, providing access to a diverse menu of extracurricular personal and professional growth opportunities allows each student the opportunity to engage along each of his or her own interest while concurrently providing opportunities to experiment and develop.

While the provision of such a diverse collection of services and extracurricular activities requires some resources, the benefits include greater student retention, improved student performance, enhanced institutional reputation, increased profile within the community and among employers. Student engagement in extracurricular activities also contributes to the development of soft skills such as communication, presentation skills and interpersonal skills.

In addition to the above noted goals, an efficient and effective institutional administration was clearly identified y many of the exemplar institutions as being a key factor in contributing to overall student satisfaction. Clearly designed and communicated policies and procedures combined with services delivered on a timely and efficient basis decrease student anxiety levels, improve student morale and spirit, and contribute positively to the overall student experience.

Programs and Pathways

Students entering educational institutions are often unclear as to their career goals, their talents and aptitudes.   Additionally, students entering the college system do so at different stages of maturity and personal development. Establishing a comprehensive system of pathways facilitates the students' exploration of their own strengths, aptitudes, skills and abilities. Once a student discovers their own potential based on their desire, preferences and

abilities, they should be able to move between credential programs as their preferences change and they are able to exhibit their aptitudes and abilities. Effective pathways should foster an environment where students are able to progress academically to their maximum potential based on their ability and desire.

Internally within Sheridan, a comprehensive system of pathways encompasses multi level entry points at the certificate, diploma and degree levels. Additionally, progression from one credential level to the next needs to be facilitated on a timely basis based on the student's exhibited performance. For example, a student showing strong performance in a diploma program, should have the opportunity to move into degree level study once the equivalent of entrance level requirements have been met or exceeded. This may happen on a staged basis or as a transfer with appropriate recognition of diploma level credit.

Pathways also need to be established from Sheridan into graduate level study at other institutions or into professional programs. High achieving students at Sheridan must have the opportunity to progress academically and/or professionally to their maximum potential into studies at other institutions that are beyond Sheridan's mandate to deliver.

Faculties

Many of the exemplar institutions researched had faculties structured along traditional discipline specific basis. Faculties in such institutions generally include faculties of business, information technology/computing science, humanities/liberal arts and social sciences, applied sciences/engineering as well as some form of continuing education. In many cases, these institutions recognized a silo affect between faculties, albeit to different extents.

Some institutions have attempted to mitigate the silo effect by integrating faculties. Trent, for instance has information technology and computing instructors spread between three other faculties. The downside to this type of integration is the disenfranchising of faculty by separating them from their discipline specific colleagues.

The institutions that have been most successful at reducing the silo effect characteristic of discipline based faculties without adverse affects have done so by maintaining their discipline

based faculties while promoting interdisciplinary and interfaculty cooperation and programming. This interdisciplinary activity is facilitated through the development of joint and combined curriculum, faculty cross appointments, shared curriculum/courses and integration of strategic themes such as critical, analytical and creative thinking, sustainability, globalization , innovation, entrepreneurship, and corporate citizenship. This strategy maintains the instructor's affiliation with his or her own discipline while fostering increased awareness and collaboration between faculties.

Internationalization

To date, Sheridan's international activities have been focused almost exclusively on the recruitment of international students. While international student recruitment adds diversity and brings an international awareness into the classroom, little has been done to promote international student mobility. Student mobility is the practice of sending students abroad, either on academic exchanges, field schools, or internships. While this sort of activity has happened at Sheridan in the past, it occurs on an ad hoc basis and is usually dependent on the efforts of individual faculty members. Currently, Sheridan's international office lacks the resources and infrastructure necessary to support student mobility. Many of the identified exemplar institutions offer robust academic exchange programs to their students, often with active exchange agreements with multiple partner institutions across the globe. Indeed, Canadian institutions lag behind European institutions which often require an international experience as part of their program completion requirements. The benefits of student mobility are widely documented (Alon, I et. al. 2009) and a number of international organizations exist to support international education including NAFSA (Association of International Educators), CBIE (Canadian Bureau for International Education) and the student run AEISEC.

It should be noted here that comprehensive internationalization of a campus requires more than in-coming and out-going student activity. International staff mobility initiatives and faculty exchanges promote stronger deeper relationships between international partner institutions while increasing global awareness at the faculty and administrative levels. Faculty mobility also contributes to the building of international networks and research collaboration.

Faculty Support

While instructors are hired for their discipline specific knowledge and industry expertise, many either lack training or experience or desire continued support with respect to teaching and learning technology and pedagogy.   Actively encouraging and supporting ongoing relevant professional development in the areas of teaching and learning and instructional technology contributes to an increased level of comfort and confidence in the classroom which benefits both faculty and students.

In addition to support for teaching and learning and educational technology, ongoing support for discipline specific professional development is important for the engagement and commitment of the faculty. It also contributes to the currency of the faculty and the maintenance of up-to date curriculum. Current levels of tuition support and professional development should be maintained. The sabbatical program is also a significant incentive for faculty to maintain currency in their subject areas.

Opportunities for Further Research

The University model engagement team recognized two specific areas that require further investigation. While the team concentrated its investigations on domestic Canadian educational institutions, there are clearly a number of overseas institutions that have developed models distinctly different from anything that currently exists within Canada. Australia was noted as a jurisdiction that has been particularly innovative in developing alternative university models. As an example, the Queensland University of Technology has arranged its faculties and curriculum on the basis of industry segments including a Faculty of Creative Industries, Faculty of Building and Planning and a Faculty of Health and Community (Queensland University of Technology, n.d.).

The other research identified as being both desirable and necessary to facilitate the establishment of a university model uniquely suited to Sheridan's vision is the investigation into possible funding models. Trick et al address the disadvantages of the current funding models

for colleges and universities in Ontario. The possibility of revising and amending either of these funding models to better suit the development of an undergraduate teaching university or developing a completely new hybrid funding model needs to be investigated. The optimal characteristics of any revised or hybrid funding model would also need to be established.

Conclusions

As per the terms of reference, the University Engagement Team reviewed a number of institutions with the purpose of identifying diverse models of "universities." In attempting to explore the advantages and disadvantages of each model with respect to Sheridan's vision, the team found that there was no one university model that stands out independently as being a vehicle that would enable Sheridan to fulfill our vision. Rather, it was found that a number of institutions exhibited certain specific characteristics that represented best practice in areas identified by the engagement team as being desirable for an "undergraduate teaching university." Sheridan itself exhibits unique characteristics that make it difficult for it to emulate a single already existing university model.

This places Sheridan in the unique position of being able to adopt best practices from a number of diverse institutions, creating a patchwork of desirable characteristics that when combined, culminate in a unique institution aligned with Sheridan's Academic Innovation Strategy and its strategic vision of becoming Canada's "premiere undergraduate teaching university."

Recommendations

The engagement team settled on three primary overarching institutional recommendations followed a set of sub-recommendations in relation to the six established categories of desired characteristics; student support, student life, programs and pathways, faculties, internationalization, and faculty support. The primary recommendations are process-oriented

and designed to facilitate the achievement, maintenance and continuous development and improvement of the noted desirable characteristics.

Recommendations

1. Ensure that measures are put in place to move towards the implementation of all identified desirable characteristics.

2. Recognizing that these desirable characteristics are often interrelated, in each of the broad categories review Sheridan's performance in relation to best practices of exemplar institutions. Establish a baseline for measurement of ongoing performance improvements.

3. Devise a process of continuous assessment and improvement that moves Sheridan toward best-in-class for all desirable characteristics. Maintain ongoing dialogue with like institutions.

Sub-recommendations

1. *Student Support*

   Develop multi-faceted and comprehensive system of programs to support all students (international, domestic, indigenous, special needs, etc.) academically, financially, socially and culturally as needed.

2. *Student Life*

   Actively encourage and support a rich and engaging student experience providing access to a diverse menu of extracurricular personal and professional growth opportunities.

3. *Programs and Pathways*

Establish a comprehensive system of pathways facilitating the students' achievement of their maximum potential based on their desire and ability.

4. *Faculties*

Facilitate interdisciplinary and interfaculty cooperation and programming through joint and combined curriculum, faculty cross appointments, shared curriculum/courses and integration of strategic themes such as critical, analytical and creative thinking, sustainability, globalization , innovation, entrepreneurship, and corporate citizenship.

5. *Internationalization*

Develop multi-faceted internationalization of campuses, programs and in-coming and out-going activities. Internationalization efforts must involve all students, faculty and staff.

6. *Faculty Support*

Provide comprehensive support teaching and learning technology and pedagogy. Actively encourage and support ongoing relevant professional development and applied research activities.

Next steps

The team proposed several next steps to further the research;

- Review findings of the university model engagement teams with the other engagement teams to gage consistency of findings.
- Together with other engagement teams, design a comprehensive common survey to be used for engaging in dialogue with exemplar institutions. This would provide qualitative data sets that could be used effectively for comparative purposes.
- Initiate an investigative task force whose purpose is to formally visit and interview exemplar institutions with respect to their desirable characteristics, their processes for

achieving and maintaining those characteristics and the problems and hurdles overcome in establishing these characteristics (and in their transformation from college to university, where relevant.) The survey instrument noted above would serve as the basis for the interview process.

- Assimilate data gathered, confirm characteristics desired by Sheridan, suggest processes and timeline for implementation of desired characteristics.

- Develop long term strategy for reputation building and branding of institution based on its unique value proposition.

References

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List of Appendices

Appendix A   Desired Characteristics

Appendix B   List of Exemplar Institutions

Appendix C   Compiled Data on Exemplar Institutions

Appendix D   Sheridan's Performance with respect to Identified Desired Characteristics