

## Introduction to the Academic Plan:

In 2024, Brandon University celebrated its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary. As we enter the second half of our second century in existence, we must chart our path towards continued academic excellence carefully and realistically, and that is the aim of this Academic Planning exercise. We must also begin by acknowledging that as an academic institution we find ourselves in local, national, and international academic contexts much different than those under which the previous Academic Plan was developed: the COVID pandemic has altered significant aspects of academic life, to the point of influencing our collective agreement; provincial governments across Canada have consistently reduced funding for institutions of higher education; we have seen a noted increase in anti-intellectual sentiments across North America and a resulting devaluation of our work as universities; and the backlash against EDI and Reconciliation work is growing at an alarming rate, affecting our BU community members' ability to fully express their complex identities and be at home in the environments in which we conduct our work and learning activities. There are many other examples, from economic uncertainty to confusion surrounding the place of international students in Canada. In pursuing our academic goals, we begin by reaffirming our commitment to helping create a world guided by the principles outlined in our Institutional Strategic Plan, and assert that Brandon University must remain a place where the open and difficult conversations that support our work can continue to thrive.

It is clear, then, that we need an Academic Plan which can help us navigate both traditional academic life, and the new ground on which we find ourselves operating. This plan will serve many purposes in this regard. The priorities articulated within it establish the future trajectory of academic work at Brandon University, charting a series of short-, medium-, and long-term goals. Each of those priorities is accompanied by a series of strategic actions which must be taken to help realize that priority. Based on these priorities and strategic actions, each Faculty, School, Department, and Unit will be able to develop their own plans, which together will form an Integrated Academic Plan. The unified framework of the Integrated Academic Plan will chart the path from our current state towards the realization of our collectively-defined vision for our institutional future, as it interacts with other institution plans such as the Institutional Strategic Plan, the Strategic Research Plan, our EDI Strategic Plan, and our Campus Master Plan.

The aim of the plan is also to serve as a decision-making framework through which resource allocation can be more strategically and transparently accomplished. This will guide the process of requesting resources, the methodology by which resource allocation decisions are made, and the decisions themselves, in all of the academic and service partner areas, including the Library and Student services, and the Offices of the Provost and VP (Academic), VP (Research), VP (Administration and Finance), AVP (Indigenous Initiatives), AVP (People and Talent) and President and Vice-Chancellor. The Academic Plan is a fundamental part of BU's overall planning and will also guide the alignment of institutional services and infrastructure towards the support and attainment of the key academic priorities of the institution. These institutional services include Finance and Registration, Human Resources, Information Technology, Facilities Management Services, Institutional Advancement, the John E. Robbins Library, and the S.J. McKee Archives. Infrastructure includes items such as technology and facilities (e.g., teaching and learning spaces, research

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laboratories, and residence accommodations). In this way, the Academic Plan will work to help us build and realize a shared vision that is truly institution-wide. To ensure that the plan is able to function in this way, it is also necessary to assign leadership and responsibility for each strategic action to a particular person or group of people (ex. Provost, a particular unit, the Deans, etc.), and to attach a potential timeline to each action; if no-one is responsible for driving a particular item forward, it cannot be approached in a strategic and proactive manner **[This last step will be accomplished when the Plan is in a near-final stage].**

### The Academic Plan:

Work on this plan began with the important realization that the COVID pandemic had an inevitable disruptive effect on the work of the previous plan. As such, the Academic Planning Committee began by asking the following questions: “which priorities in our last plan have been accomplished?”; “which priorities have not been accomplished?”; and regardless of the answer to those two questions, “which priorities should nonetheless remain in the new plan?” We also asked our communities to identify new priorities which were not included in the previous plan, and why they are important to our continued success. And finally, we asked our communities to consider whether the Mission and Vision statements in the previous plan continued to serve Brandon University well in the current contexts.

Out of the feedback received, the committee identified three over-arching considerations which are necessary conditions for the successful attainment of our new priorities and strategic actions, and which also represent potential limiting factors. These are: financial realities and sustainability; inclusive pathways to education, the mental health of our people, and support for our people generally; and community engagement.

Inclusive pathways to education are necessary for our success – Brandon University has high numbers of Indigenous students (our fastest growing student demographic), international students, and students belonging to EDI groups. In order to improve recruitment and retention efforts, it is necessary for us to create an inclusive, welcoming, and supportive environment for all students, and this reality is intricately connected both to our institutional commitment to doing good EDI work, and to our financial stability. We live in an age when students are highly engaged with these issues, and tend to vote with their feet; our financial sustainability rests upon the ability to attract students from both our traditional and new demographics, and this begins with creating an environment where they can make an academic home that supports them in their success. The same is true of our faculty and staff members, who must be supported in their work and in achieving a healthy life-work balance, and whose energies are crucial to the institution’s ability to deliver on our core missions of excellence in education, scholarship, and community engagement. We have done good work in this regard based on principles outlined in our previous Academic Plan; we must continue to push forward.

Community engagement is likewise crucial to our success. Universities are supported by their communities, and it is incumbent upon us to give back to those communities in a variety of ways

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suitable to our mission. Community engagement demonstrates to our local, provincial, and other communities the importance of the work we do here, the excellence of our students and their capacity to contribute to Manitoba's success, and the importance of having a successful local university. This leads to greater opportunities for collaboration for our faculty, staff, and students with research partners, industrial collaborators, and employers, as well as fundraising possibilities, as we have seen through the successes of the RDI and BUCARES to name only two examples. The majority of our graduating students remain within Manitoba – forming relationships with our successful alumni throughout the province provides many other opportunities as well, including formal mentorship opportunities for students, alumni presence at recruiting and fundraising events, job-readiness workshops, community lectures, etc. Community engagement, done well, greatly amplifies our ability to be successful.

Most crucial to our current context, of course, are the financial realities currently facing Brandon University, which make our ability to ensure the financial sustainability of our academic mission a crucial consideration in our work, and also an opportunity. Difficult decisions will need to be made during the life of this Academic Plan, and those decisions must be made in a careful strategic manner with clear aims in mind; this plan lays out a decision-making framework through which such decisions can be screened. At the same time, addressing these financial realities cannot be made simply through a series of cuts across the institution. Even in difficult financial times, it is necessary to identify areas where money must nevertheless be spent either to help create additional revenue, or to forward the academic mission of the university. The current financial situation also demands that we focus our attention closely on how we conduct our work, and to ask hard questions regarding whether we need to continue doing all of things we currently do, as well as thinking through a reprioritization of those things that we agree are necessary to continue doing. Thus in this Academic Plan you will find some aspects of the previous plan appearing in new forms, some aspects dropped altogether, and new priorities to focus on in the coming years. Guided by a strategic and transparent decision-making process, this Academic Plan offers a framework from within which we can begin the hard work of building a sustainable academic life, both financially and in consideration of the human energies through which all universities create their success.

The second and third considerations identified above, inclusivity and community engagement, are each addressed in several places throughout the priority areas identified below. The question of financial sustainability is so crucial to our academic work that it is listed first, and is a priority unto itself. This highlights the necessity of creating a sound and sustainable financial environment that enables the work of this plan, and without which it will be difficult to achieve these goals. Brandon University is an excellent institution that has withstood the test of time and troubled periods to strengthen our academic foundations and grow our research capacity – addressing these three overarching considerations, and following the path collegially developed in this plan, can help us move into a future where the excellence of our academic work and community engagement is ensured, and valued by the communities we serve.

## Vision, Priorities, and Strategic Actions:

In what follows, this Academic Plan lays out an action-oriented and forward-looking roadmap, moving from the broad to the specific. The previous Mission and Vision statements have been replaced by a single statement, which encapsulates in broad terms the Priorities which follow it. The Priorities themselves, as noted above, are meant to guide our actions, planning, and decision-making, in continuing to enhance our academic excellence and sustainability. Following our Institution Strategic Plan, we envision these Priorities and the strategic actions they contain as interconnected braids, continually touching each other and functioning together to push us towards our objectives. While the first Priority, financial sustainability, is clearly paramount, the Priorities following it are presented as equally important and in continual conversation with each other. Each initiative we undertake will speak to several of these Priorities, and requests for resources that address the plan more comprehensively are more likely to be successful.

## The Academic Plan: Vision and Priorities

### Academic Vision

Through a sustained commitment to strong, innovative, and inclusive academic offerings and supports, Brandon University will become a first-choice institution for faculty, students, and staff.

Our mission is to advance knowledge-creation and mobilization by empowering students and faculty to contribute meaningfully to societal advancement, engaging deeply with the process of ReconciliAction and our diverse communities (from the local to the international), fostering equitable paths to education, championing open scholarship for a changing world, and through the continual pursuit of excellence in teaching, learning, and research. We will approach this work through the seven priorities laid out below and the strategic actions contained within each of them.

### The Academic Priorities

- A. To foster a sustainable academic environment
- B. To distinguish Brandon University as a leading, student-centred institution of choice
- C. To foster academic program excellence, renewal, and development
- D. To enhance Brandon University's growing reputations as an institution engaged in innovative research, scholarly, and creative activity
- E. To engage in respectful relationships with diverse communities to support reciprocal relationships, service activities, and Advancement
- F. To work actively towards Indigenization, Decolonization, and ReconciliAction
- G. To promote equity, diversity, and inclusivity in all of our academic work

## Key Academic Priorities and Strategic Actions

### **A. To foster a sustainable academic environment:**

- i. Establish a multi-year academic budget model and institutional information framework to facilitate integrated and effective multi-year planning of all aspects of this Academic Plan.
- ii. Establish clear and transparent mechanisms to provide support for Faculties/Schools, Departments, programs, and academic services to benefit from innovation and initiatives in teaching and learning excellence, academic program development and renewal, and interdisciplinary academic program collaboration and coordination that contribute to student recruitment and retention, enrolment, degree completion, and student experience. This includes providing resources that will enable success in doing this work; sometimes, success can only come about through the ability to access supports in advance.
- iii. Create and implement a Strategic Enrollment Management plan which properly takes account of the many categories of students who call BU home (ex. local, Westman, Indigenous, International, etc.) and the supports they require to be successful at BU
- iv. Create an academic infrastructure plan, alongside the multi-year budget model, which ensures that our academic spaces will remain able to properly support the institution's academic and student support work (ex. Library and IT services, student spaces, labs, residences, faculty and staff offices, technology for remote and online learning, etc.).
- v. Ensure that academic planning is included as a crucial element in all of BU's emergency planning.
- vi. Endeavor to create a Special Initiatives Fund for relevant and priority academic initiatives which emerge outside of regular budgeting processes.

### **B. To distinguish Brandon University as a leading, student-centred institution of choice:**

- i. Support excellence in student experience and academic success through teaching and learning advancements, academic program innovation and renewal, and enhancement of student supports (i.e., Student Services, John E. Robbins Library, Information Technology, Residence services, etc.).
- ii. Establish and communicate clear requirements for admissions and degree completion for all degree programs, enhance student advising, and implement a technological infrastructure that will allow students and staff to effectively understand and navigate student requirements for progression through their studies.
- iii. Strengthen the attractiveness of our programs through program reviews aimed at aligning those programs with student and societal needs, through comprehensive data collection, data-informed decision-making, and partnerships which support the aims of this Academic Plan.

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- iv. Support current experiential and service learning opportunities designed to enhance student learning and experience, such as our Co-operative Education program and practicum placements in Education and Health Studies, and support all departments in exploring and developing work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities.
- v. Work closely with institutional and provincial Indigenous leaders to strengthen our position as a first-choice university for Indigenous students in Manitoba, including through enhancing the Al and Bee Wagner Indigenous Student Transition Program.
- vi. Ensure that our BU community is aware of the comprehensive institutional data, at the program, Department, and Faculty/School levels, that is available to support data-informed decision-making.
- vii. Encourage and support the creation of suitable micro-credentials, certificates, and diplomas, and increase collaborations across faculties, schools, departments, and programs, for the benefit of students.

### **C. To foster academic programming excellence, renewal, and development:**

- i. In order to facilitate the foundation for sustained advancement of the University and its academic mission, we will continue to enhance an environment that encourages difficult and open conversations, and that supports academic freedom.
- ii. Enhance institutional supports for the integrated partner units which enable and advance academic programming, research, teaching, and learning, including but not limited to: Library and IT services; the Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology; peer reviews of teaching; and Faculty/School academic program renewal and development activities.
- iii. Create and publicize a schedule of academic program reviews, prioritizing programs that have not been reviewed for a long time, and programs which request a review.
- iv. Use data available through our Institutional Data and Analysis Office, and other available data (such as from student surveys, government publications, StatsCan reports, etc.) to help determine opportunities for initiatives aimed at enhancing the recruitment, success, and retention of faculty and students at the University. Design and implement community- and student-needs assessment tools to enable data-informed decision-making in this work.
- v. Establish mechanisms to look at our existing programs and resource allocations to make adjustments in order to support our educational programming, at an institutional level.

### **D. To enhance Brandon University's growing reputation as an institution engaged in innovative research, scholarly, and creative activity:**

- i. Implement Brandon University's Strategic Research Plan and its seven priorities:
  - 1. Research Leadership and Administration
  - 2. Research Funding
  - 3. Communicating Research Excellence

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4. Building a Supportive Research Environment
5. Catalyzing and Rewarding Research Partnerships
6. Data Management and Open Access
7. Infrastructure
8. Establish, grow, and support opportunities for the inclusion of undergraduate and graduate research in faculty members' research and teaching.

### **E. To work actively towards Indigenization, Decolonization, and Reconciliation:**

As per the Manitoba Collaborative Indigenous Education Blueprint, we will:

1. Engage with Indigenous peoples in respectful and reciprocal relationships to advance reconciliation, language, and culture through education, research, and skill development.
2. Bring Indigenous knowledge, languages, and intellectual traditions, models, and approaches into curriculum, pedagogy, and research.
3. Promote research and learning that reflects the history and contemporary context of the lives of Indigenous peoples.
4. Increase access to services, programs, and supports to Indigenous students, to ensure a learning environment that fosters learner success.
5. Showcase the work and successes of Indigenous students and educators.

As per the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, we will:

6. Work to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, by improving educational attainment levels and success rates through the measures outlined in this priority and the larger Academic Plan.
7. Protect the right to Indigenous languages, including reinvigorating the number of credit courses offered in the study of Indigenous languages at BU
8. Build overall student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
9. Over the longer term, work with the Manitoba government to create degree and diploma programs in Indigenous languages.

### **F. To promote equity, diversity, and inclusivity in all of our academic work:**

- i. Implement BU's EDI plan, and use it to develop Faculty/Unit/Department specific plans that clearly articulate how our academic programs and service reflect and promote the plan's principles within the curriculum and the student experience.
- ii. Expand opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to engage in experiences and initiatives that embrace diversity and inclusion, involve engaged citizenship and leaders, and address international and global issues.

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- iii. Establish outreach initiatives to facilitate the University's reflection of its values of diversity and inclusion in teaching and learning; research, scholarly, and creative activities; and community engagement.
- iv. Promote openness of debate, civility of dialogue, and global citizenship.
- v. Show leadership in our internal and external communities in relation to items 2, 3, and 4 above (for example, we could host external scholars and community members on campus, host roundtable discussions by BU faculty and students on difficult issues, make representations to public and government bodies, work with the city to support events such as Red Dress Day and Black History Month, etc.).
- vi. Endeavor to create a culture in which EDI work permeates all of our academic work and processes, strive to diversify our institution at all levels, and work to understand EDI as a broad term that includes many different categories of identification (gender, race, disability, immigration status, neurodivergence, linguistic minorities, disability, sexual identification, sexual orientation, and many many more).
- vii. Establish supports to aid faculty, staff, and students in this work (ex. course releases, expert-led workshops).

### **G. To engage in respectful relationships with diverse communities to support reciprocal relationships, service activities, and Advancement:**

- i. Work with our Indigenous Elders, Knowledge-Keepers, and community partners to continually educate ourselves about Indigenous peoples and their communities, and partner with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities and organizations to create reciprocal learning relations aimed at: enhancing the accessibility of post-secondary educational opportunities; improving student experience and academic success; and engagement in research, scholarly and creative activities with potential benefits to Indigenous communities.
- ii. Engage with newcomers to Canada, and International and Indigenous students, in order to recognize prior learning (PLAR), to increase pathways to a BU education, and to improve student outcomes.
- iii. Seek out appropriate community partnerships, with a focus on the goals laid out in this Academic Plan, our Strategic Research Plan, and individual faculty engagement plans, while continuing to support and learn from BU entities that are exemplars of this work (ex. RDI, BU CARES).
- iv. Seek out opportunities to deliver the BU educational experience to as many members of our BU communities (local, national, and international) as is practicable and pedagogically sound.
- v. Enhance alumni outreach to increase their participation and engagement in the academic mission of BU, both for their benefit and to the benefit of our current students; for example, alumni can be invited to deliver guest lectures, to offer formal mentorship opportunities for current students and recent alumni, and to attend recruitment events in their home cities.

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- vi. Seek ways to facilitate access to continuing education and professional development, and to enhance part-time degree opportunities and completion.
- vii. Enhance support for IRBU, define its scope and priorities, and publicize it widely both within BU and to our various external communities.