

## **FIAT LUX ADDRESS**

**OCTOBER 10, 2013 – 3:00 P.M.**

**Dr. Michael J. Mahon, President & Vice Chancellor**

**University of Lethbridge**

I would like to thank you all for attending the 2013 Fiat Lux Address. For those of you I haven't had a chance to personally welcome back this academic year – welcome.

I would like to begin this year's Fiat Lux address with a thank you to everyone – a thank you for your service to the University of Lethbridge. Over the last six months, we have had a number of challenges that have drawn much of our collective attention and perhaps distracted us from what is truly important at our University. In June we had the flood that occurred in our Library, the Centre for the Arts and beyond and of course in March, we were informed of the 7.3% reduction in our Campus Alberta Operating Grant, and we have had to address what is becoming a new budget reality not only for us but for the entire post-secondary system in our province. I know there are sentiments of uncertainty and concern as to how we will realize our way through this without negatively affecting our university or compromising our future.

I am here today to tell you that we will be successful in this task. We will find our way through the budget challenges and we will focus our attention on achieving our goals as collectively set out in our Strategic Plan. We started our steps into this “new normal” last January when we revised our budget processes and struck the Budget Advisory Committee and the Budget Priority Advisory Committee. We knew then, prior to the provincial budget announcements, we needed to change our budgeting practices with a focus on the long-term sustainability of our University's finances. The March 7<sup>th</sup> budget announcement forced us into a heightened pace. Our task to reduce our University operating budget by \$11.8 million has been ongoing since then.

As I have said to you in previous budget updates, we have done this, and will continue to do this methodically and with our values as our guide. Our record of prudent financial planning and management has served the University well in the past and will continue to do so into the future.

To date we have realized reductions of \$8.5 million. My intention is not to go into details today about what we have done. I invite you to look to our budget and finance website for those details. These have been communicated consistently and on a timely basis as steps have been undertaken. I do want to thank you all for your feedback, your personal efforts and personal sacrifice that have gone into the budget response to date. Much has been accomplished but much remains to be done.

Over the course of the summer, nine budget advisory committees have worked to identify additional savings, revenue opportunities and efficiencies. I wish to thank all of those who worked on these committees for their contributions. President's Executive has received reports from these groups and our extended senior administration of Associate Vice Presidents, Deans and Executive Directors held a retreat in early October to vigorously debate and where appropriate, approve recommendations that we will pursue. The results of these reports will be released within the next week. The report will be posted on the same budget and finance website that has housed our other budgetary information.

While there will be savings that come from these recommendations over the coming months, many will require a change in how we conduct some activities at the University and thus will take time to implement.

As you can see, there has been a lot of budget activity over the summer months, but much remains to be resolved before we can confidently say we have completed our necessary budget reduction work. Adding to our challenges, we must also begin our development of the 2014/2015 University operating budget. In developing this

budget we are assuming no operating grant increases from the government and a very limited tuition increase tied to the Consumer Price Index. Given this scenario, we expect another challenging budget process that sees our University in a continued deficit position. Our expectation however, and that of our Board of Governors, is that the University will submit a balanced 2014/2015 operating budget to the Provincial Government.

So yes, it has been a challenging year, and I know that as a University community we are both frustrated and fatigued by these budget issues. But it is something we need to look beyond and focus on the future of the University of Lethbridge. Our vision needs to be contextualized in a new reality - a new budget landscape, but that does not mean we must compromise or that we can't achieve our goals. With a new draft Strategic Plan that was introduced late last week to unit leaders, we have a clear path before us. A path that started 46 years ago with the establishment of the University of Lethbridge and one enunciated very clearly by this community in our current Strategic Plan.

Our Strategic Plan and mandate tells us quite clearly who we are and what our priorities are. I'm paraphrasing our Roles and Mandate statement, but at the heart of it, we are a Comprehensive Academic and Research institution that offers undergraduate and graduate programs and we conduct pure and applied research. Everything we do at the University should support this. All of our activities and our staff from administrative units to academic units should support this.

I state this obvious mandate of the University because our path forward MUST focus on supporting this mission. It should come as no surprise then that our draft Strategic Plan defines our path forward with a set of priorities widely accepted and already well underway at the University. Priorities that enable us to focus on our academic and research mission and unite us all to that common aim.

Our draft plan outlines and reinforces five familiar priorities. We will:

**Excel as a comprehensive university.** We have evolved from a primarily undergraduate university to a comprehensive university that offers a wide range of undergraduate and graduate programs, and encourages excellence in teaching. We advance knowledge through a significant research program. We will continue to excel as a comprehensive university that stays true to its founding ideas of student-centred, liberal education.

**We will continue enhancing the student experience—** We will ensure that students remain central to what we do at the University.

We will continue to **promote access to quality post-secondary education—** Society as a whole benefits from an educated populace, and we will continue to find ways to give access to our educational programs for as many qualified individuals as possible. Faculty on our three campuses are continuously exploring ways to improve educational pathways across Alberta, Canada, and beyond, so that obtaining a post-secondary education is as seamless as possible.

**We will continue to build our internal community and enhance those valuable, productive relationships with external communities—**We will continue to develop our internal community so that it remains inclusive and welcoming. We also recognize though that as a public institution we must offer our expertise, facilities, and services for the benefit of the communities we serve and the communities that support us.

**We will enhance the sustainability of the University—** We recognize that sustainability comes in three parts. It is not just about environmental sustainability

but also social and financial sustainability. We must make responsible decisions today that will ensure that we are reducing our footprint, improving our communities, and prospering well into the future.

In the context of these five priorities, I would now like to reflect on some of the significant success we have had this past year and illustrate how they align to our priorities. How this success is not random but illustrative of the deliberate, purposeful steps we as a University are taking. And, how despite budgetary challenges, we should celebrate and remain focused on our continued momentum.

Our enrolment remains stable, but there are some significant increases that illustrate goals we set out to accomplish are being realized. Despite losing a significant number of transfer students to our University through the creation of two new undergraduate universities in the province, we have maintained our overall student numbers. We have replaced that annual intake of transfer students with students who are interested in a 4-year experience, not 2 years to completion. We welcomed more than 1,100 first-year high school graduates this fall, an increase of 11.3% over last year. Recognition of the U of L as a destination university is evident in the increasing number of students from Calgary and other markets choosing U of L as their school of choice this year. Registrations from students living in Calgary are up nearly 35% over this time last year, and we had a 31.5% increase over last year in local high school students choosing to attend the U of L. This year also saw graduate student enrolment up by 16.4% and international student registration up by 8.1%.

Our recognition as Canada's Research University of the Year last year and our 3<sup>rd</sup> place ranking by Maclean's Magazine in their annual review of Canadian universities illustrates external acknowledgement that the path we are on is appropriate and more importantly that our collective efforts are successful.

Construction projects this past year have enhanced the student experience at the University. More residence space was deemed a strategic priority in terms of attracting new students to campus and subsequently retaining those students through graduation. Mt. Blakiston House, the new student residence we opened this fall adds 259 beds to residence capacity. The new Food Services outlets developed by our new partner Aramark have been received positively by the campus community; the new Quad, a green space located on the north side of Markin Hall, and the forthcoming renovated south patio of the Student's Union are all excellent examples of our commitment to the student experience here.

Yesterday, we announced a new partnership with Volunteer Lethbridge that invites them into the Penny Building downtown. This partnership will create opportunities for an enhanced connection to the community and greater opportunities for our students to engage in volunteer activity.

The strength of our university is rooted in the strength of our people. This has been demonstrated in many ways. First, our faculty members continue to make important discoveries that capture the attention of national audiences. For example, Cheryl Currie made national headlines earlier this year for her research which is showing urban aboriginal populations are less likely to abuse prescription and illegal drugs when they maintain their traditional culture. David Naylor and Rob Sutherland were named by Venture magazine as two of Alberta's most influential people. And just this week Paul Vasey's research that found transgendered men were viewed as assets in some ancestral societies was featured in Time magazine.

As well, we see a continuing focus from the faculty into the development and enhancement of the curriculum at the University. Despite funding issues, we continue to move forward on ensuring our programs are of the highest quality and on the development of innovative, new degree pathways at the undergraduate and graduate level. For example we see new Ph.D. programs developed in Education and through the Prentice Institute, and the new undergraduate degree in Native

American Art.

Faculty continue to devote their time to reaching out to high schools and illustrating to young people not only the value of a post-secondary education but also how it is within their ability to achieve.

Our non-academic staff also contribute in so many ways to the success of our university. For example, this summer Erin Crane provided the logistical support for our wildly successful Canada Wide Science Fair, and then, just as she was ready to take a breather, she was tasked with welcoming hundreds of evacuees from High River to our student residences. When we put out the call for volunteers to support this effort, we were overwhelmed by the response. In the same manner, the night of our own flood, our staff dropped all that they were doing at home to get to campus and provide support.

Now, allow me to turn to the future. What initiatives will shape our University in the years ahead? How can we achieve the necessary re-investment in the University that will allow for faculty invigoration and renewal? How do we achieve the firm affirmation of the value of liberal education? How do we ensure the vitality of the University and instill in our faculty, staff and students the belief that their educational, career and research goals can be realized here in southern Alberta?

The renewal of the Campus Master Plan is the most extensive development plan that the University has undertaken since the original west campus was developed over 40 years ago and it will effectively guide decision-making on our campus development for the next decade. A cornerstone of the Campus Master Plan is the Destination Project. This project as many know, is the construction of a new academic building, the revitalization of University Hall and the construction of a new central plant for the University. It is also a means through which many of our collective aspirations can be realized. The construction of a new science facility and

the revitalization of University Hall provide a great opportunity to help us define liberal education at the University of Lethbridge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In his Fiat Lux Address last year, Provost Dr. Hakin outlined a path forward for liberal education. He outlined a dialogue well underway at the University and he outlined how University Hall will contribute to and become the home of liberal education at the University. **In planning for the revitalization of U Hall, we can lead the academic world in redefining liberal education to support the ever changing nature of teaching and scholarship and enable our students to be best prepared for our world's evolving landscape.**

In our planning for the Destination Project, we have been imaginary and innovative in our thinking. In doing so, we have considered the concept of the new science facility as more than a teaching and research space but a place for community engagement and outreach. A research incubator, a place where undergraduate and graduate research opportunities flourish, where knowledge transfer and commercialization happen; a place the next generation of researchers, scientists, and scholars credit for the start of their science careers.

Of course the most significant element of this new facility is that it will house the research and teaching spaces and laboratories for a significant number of our science programs. Imagine it as well as a hub for innovation; a place where science research and teaching are conducted and made accessible not only to post-secondary students but also to school-aged children and their families and anyone in our community who wishes to learn. A place where high school students can refine their understanding of and ignite their passion for science, launching the next phase of their educational journeys, a place where Albertans can gather to learn more about the world in which they live.

We are well into our planning for this transformative project. The provincial government has already provided \$12 million in planning funds and I know it is viewed as a top-priority among infrastructure projects for our province. I know this because the Premier and our Minister have said this in our private meetings and in



public forums. The value to the University of these projects however goes well beyond space. The true value is that it will enable people to come together in new and interesting ways across the academy.

One such example of this is the ability to create opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to come together from across the disciplines, to take their ideas and, with the help of faculty researchers, entrepreneurs and **community leaders, turn them into community supports and services** and businesses. This concept already has its early examples of success. Dr. HJ Wieden has led our University iGem team once again to national prominence by winning the North American iGem competition. In November, the team will compete against the best teams in the world. Students from earlier iGem teams have developed a new method of detecting hormones, and are in the process of patenting their idea through their company Synbiologica Ltd. Their idea is being developed because of the opportunity the University provided to a group of student from different disciplines and faculties to come together and, under the guidance of faculty mentors, develop, share and create a new company.

This concept can be further enabled through the Destination project through the creation of incubation space to be used by students, faculty, and community members. This vision can one day see Lethbridge become home to one of Canada's renowned innovation hubs and ensure southern Alberta continues to create **social and cultural development** and new wealth for the entire province.

This concept uniquely contributes to our liberal education focus. It provides a new element of multi-disciplinarity and further enhances a vitally important concept to our students, that of the research process and their active engagement in it.

The Destination project is significant and I spent a lot of my time today outlining it but more importantly, outlining it through the lens of our strategic priorities. There is much other activity underway at the University that also will contribute to the realization of our goals and strategic priorities.

In other communication, such as my prior Fiat Lux address and my open letter to the University Community, I introduced a number of strategic initiatives that continue to guide our actions. The continued activity of our GFC Aboriginal Education Committee and their work on the establishment of an Aboriginal Centre on campus is one such example. The Academic Quality Assurance review, and the substantial efforts in support of this continue as a regularized process. We are well advanced in our planning and have now begun active engagement with donors and volunteers in support of the most significant comprehensive fundraising campaign that the University has undertaken. These initiatives move us forward and continue in spite of our immediate budgetary challenges.

Today I spoke of our focus and our actions in support of our academic programs and research programs. I spoke of our commitment to our students and our commitment and actions to see sustainability in our student numbers. I spoke of our commitment to liberal education and to an expansion of our concept of liberal education. I also spoke of the most significant capital expansion of the University since our arrival in West Lethbridge and more importantly what this expansion will enable.

We have a draft strategic plan that provides a foundation for these commitments. They all speak to and enable the 5 priorities I outlined earlier. Most importantly, they are all within our grasp. They can be achieved if we remain focused on them. If we work together and stay focused on our people, our programs and our goals. **If we not only use our Strategic Plan, but also our Academic and Research plans as guides in setting priorities, our budget challenges will not prevent us from achieving these goals.**

Thank you for taking the time to be here today and thank you for your contributions to the University of Lethbridge. I am happy to take questions.

Thank you.