The University of Alberta aspires to be among the world's great public universities, an ambition that is appropriate given the university's gains in recent years. In the rapidly evolving world of Canadian post-secondary education, the University of Alberta stands out as a success story. In this context, the invitation to our committee to assist in identifying changes to the provost's office that would further strengthen the university in the years ahead is welcome and timely. We are pleased to submit our report.

We should state first that our focus is on the organization of the provost's office and its place within the university structure. We were not asked to consider the performance of the incumbent in that office though we note that, without exception, those from whom we heard commented with admiration on the commitment, ability, skill and achievements of Provost Amrhein. The University of Alberta is fortunate to be the beneficiary of his dedication to high administrative service.

We should state, too, that although we were well informed about the university's structures and practices, we knew that we could not be helpful if we focused on them in this review. Although our cumulative experience in the administration of Canadian, US and British universities is longer than we care to admit, and we do make some reference to best practices in our experience, it is not on this level that we can offer our best advice. In part, this is because we are not so familiar with the culture or practices and behaviors at U of A that we can offer advice in matters of academic and administrative detail. We did not want to be prescriptive on matters that are best addressed at the university by its able faculty, staff and administration. We focused instead on key features of the organization that have major and broad impact.

The Provost Portfolio Review Committee is pleased to offer these five recommendations:

1. **Reorganize the Provost's Office to enhance the capacity of the office for strategic planning and policy development.**

   There is no doubt that the tremendous success of the University of Alberta in recent years is due to a large extent to the central role played by the Office of the Provost and the outstanding service of the incumbent, Provost Amrhein. As mentioned above, the review committee heard a great deal about the enormous energy that Provost Amrhein brings to his leadership role and about his accessibility and responsiveness. Indeed Carl is held in high regard by all we talked to, and the Deans and Vice-Presidents have a great deal of admiration and affection for him.

   That said, concern was expressed by many—including Provost Amrhein himself—about the complexity of the Office organizational structure, its effectiveness and most seriously its sustainability in the long term. The review committee shares these concerns and wonders whether with so many direct reports and with so much accessibility, the Provost would have any time and creative energy left to engage more intensely in long range planning—a very important challenge and opportunity for the University at this time. It is in the spirit of addressing this concern that the Committee makes this first recommendation.
Our recommendation is aimed at restructuring the Provost’s Office and not at reducing the scope of its responsibility or authority. Indeed, we believe that most (but perhaps not all) of the functions currently performed by the office should remain with it. However, we believe that the number of vice-provosts can be reduced through combining various related functions together in larger portfolios, establishing two deputy provosts, and increasing the level of delegation and empowerment of those who will lead the new and enlarged portfolios.

The deans and all other clients of the Provost’s Office should be urged to deal directly with the appropriate deputy or vice-provost, reserving dealings with the provost to truly high level issues. The combination of reducing the number of direct reports and the accessibility of the provost would, in our view, result in a more effective operation, and equally important, increase in the strategic long-range planning capacity of the Provost’s Office.

As an illustration of our thinking and to make matters more concrete, we present a possible organization of the Office in the attached org chart. As shown, two deputy provost positions have been created and the number of vice-provost positions has been reduced to four. One of the deputy provost positions, that dealing with Academic Programs and Services, has responsibility for a large number of academic units and functions. These include Academic Programs and Instruction, Graduate Studies, Information Technology, the School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS), the Centre for Teaching and Learning, Extension, and Research Co-ordination. The other deputy provost position has fewer line management responsibilities, allowing for capacity to engage with the provost in strategic planning, lead new initiatives, support policy development, and co-ordinate the various elements of international activities (see Recommendation 5). The interdisciplinary centres and institutes can be the responsibility of either of the two deputy provosts.

The responsibilities of the four vice-provosts should be clear from the title of each. Note that we have combined Faculty Relations and Human Resources under one vice-provost. As well, all student-related functions are combined into the proposed Vice-Provost (Students) portfolio.

The structure proposed is obviously not the only solution and a number of the functions can be grouped differently. The important point, however, is to provide a more effective structure and more efficient operation while again allowing the Provost’s Office increased capacity for long-range visioning and strategic planning.

2. **Establish a blue ribbon committee to review current policies and procedures governing appointments, tenure and promotion, with a view to identifying and recommending changes that would support the university's high aspirations.**

The single most important determinant of success for universities lies in their ability to attract and retain outstanding people. Nothing is more important. It follows that the ability of the University of Alberta to become one among the greatest public universities in the world will depend on it becoming a magnet for attracting more of the best talent than its peers and rivals.

To do this, the university must be confident that its hiring, tenure and promotion decisions and processes represent a gold standard. The university generally, and at all levels, should begin by asking and candidly answering the following question: “Are we satisfied that the gold standard is in place right now?” Based on what we heard in our time in Edmonton, we suspect that it is not,
or that, at the very least, there is unevenness across units with the result that uniform high standards are not in place.

We believe that this subject can be addressed by bringing together some of the university's leading academic and administrative talent into a blue ribbon committee to consider what the gold standard in recruitment, tenure and promotion practices should look like at U of A. The university has a comparator group of Canadian, and U.S. and British universities. What are the best practices in those universities? Do they include, for example, putting in place a university level appointments, tenure and promotions committee to review files to ensure appropriately high and consistent standards? Can the president and board receive and act on recommendations with confidence that the gold standard is being applied?

When these questions are answered, and when your blue ribbon committee reports, their recommendations should be greeted with enthusiasm at all levels of the university and acted on forthwith in the interests encouraging everyone to meet the University of Alberta's lofty ambitions.

3. Address the academic fragmentation of the university into 18 Faculty and Schools of widely variable size and scope, so as to achieve an organization commensurate with the university’s high ambitions.

The committee appreciated the considerable strengths represented within the current configuration of the U of A’s Faculties and Schools. Nevertheless, the university’s highly decentralized and fragmented character is sub-optimal for academic reasons. Establishing broader educational and training opportunities for students would increase the quality of their academic experience, create critical mass among students in fields that are currently very small, and help ensure that all the university’s programs are of the highest standard. Greater integration would not only strengthen the university’s educational mission and align it more closely with top-tier institutions, but would also help foster new and exciting research synergies. We note that the present system is administratively cumbersome and probably not cost-effective, but we emphasize that our recommendation focuses on the academic enhancements of greater synergy.

We recognize the challenge and complexity of merging Faculties and Schools, particularly in the highly decentralized system at the University of Alberta, but we nevertheless urge the university to give attention to this possibility. We strongly encourage the university to seek ways to cluster or consolidate specific functions.

We offer here a few sample reconfigurations drawn from our own experience, and suggest that the university’s discussions of this issue would also benefit from systematic research on the organizational arrangements and experience of peer universities:

a) In keeping with Recommendation 1, we strongly urge the consideration of a “divisional” approach to appointments, tenure and promotion.

b) PhD and professional degree students in the life sciences would benefit from a broader training program, probably in conjunction with better integration of admissions standards and practices while maintaining the distinctiveness of the various professions. For example, one approach would be to establish an Applied Health Sciences cluster. Another would be to combine training elements (and admissions) in some or all of the six Schools
and Faculties in the domain of life sciences (Medicine & Dentistry, Nursing, Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences, Physical Education & Recreation, Public Health, and Rehabilitation Medicine).

c) Students at all levels would benefit from close coordination or integration of academic programs in the Arts and Native Studies.

d) Although the coordination or integration of training and education programs in and of itself helps foster innovative inter-disciplinary research, we also recommend that the university establish further mechanisms and incentives to encourage research synergies among Schools and Faculties.

4. **Abolish the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, and assign greater responsibility and accountability to the academic Faculties, while maintaining appropriate central support and oversight role.**

Attracting high quality graduate students and postdoctoral scholars—and providing them with an outstanding research and educational experience—is key to the success of being a leading research intensive university. A centralized faculty structure for graduate studies, as is now in place at the University of Alberta, was created when universities had a more limited cadre of professors who were active and accomplished researchers able to provide appropriate supervision of graduate students. The initial rationale for a Faculty of Graduate Studies was to establish practices and policies as well as to determine who had the qualifications to supervise graduate students. The University of Alberta is now at the stage where its deans and professors are hired because they are strong researchers. All professors at the University of Alberta are, thus, by default members of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, so that being a graduate supervisor is synonymous with being a professor. The existence of such a centralized Faculty for graduate studies can lead to a confusing, ineffective and unnecessary bifurcation of responsibilities.

We recommended that the Provost take the lead on the development of an appropriate new structure and function for graduate and postdoctoral studies at the University of Alberta. The experience of other universities in this regard may be instructive to that process.

For example, certain Canadian research-intensive universities, such as the University of Toronto and McGill University, have restructured graduate studies at their universities so that there is no longer a centralized faculty. The appropriate education of graduate students and the research experience of postdoctoral scholars has become the responsibility of all faculties, their deans, chairs and professors.

However, even without such a faculty, universities can maintain a dean who is responsible for leadership and oversight in graduate studies and the postdoctoral research experience. This position, much the same as a dean of students, can be a dean (if this function is to have any clout, as I believe it must in a decentralized system, it will need to be an academic in my experience) without a faculty. The dean’s responsibilities, activities and functions can be structured into an Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies to:

a) Ensure that the university has leadership for graduate studies and postdoctoral research that is readily identifiable within the community as well as to external governmental agencies and other universities.
b) Assure the quality and efficiency of certain processes such as admissions, records, fellowships, thesis defenses, problem solving, and workshops on best practices and professional skills.

c) Communicate in a consistent and effective manner the strength of the research experience for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars through consistent and effective messaging on websites and in recruitment and other University of Alberta materials.

Lastly, even without the faculty structure for graduate structure for graduate studies, some universities maintain a council comprised of professors representing various academic units as well as student and postdoctoral representatives that decides on policies relevant to the graduate student and postdoctoral experience. The variation in such approaches adopted by other universities in Canada and elsewhere will serve as useful information to the restructuring process recommended for the U of A.

5. Establish strong institutional coordination of international activities while dispersing and integrating them into relevant units, in order to better reflect the pervasiveness of international activities in a modern university.

At present, the U of A has a single central office for international affairs entitled University of Alberta International (UAI). This office is primarily focused on recruitment of students. However, in addition to recruitment, there are a striking number of international initiatives at the university and a strong commitment to international affairs. These include admissions; student services for international students; study abroad and student mobility programs; joint and double degree programs at both the undergraduate and the graduate level; global alumni affairs and fund raising; internships; and research partnerships and collaborations. A number of these units have their own individual strategies and there appears to be a lack of coordination between the various strategies and possibly some areas of overlap and under representation.

As is the case with other universities, there are a number of examples at the U of A where the need for the coordination of international initiatives is apparent. For instance, there appears to be some confusion concerning the relationship of recruitment carried out by UAI and alumni relations carried out by the Office of Alumni Affairs. Universities also need to think strategically about which countries are targets for recruitment and which are targets for student exchanges. If exchanges are possible, students may choose this route instead of enrolling in a full degree program at the U of A.

Fueled by the Erasmus program in Europe, the development of joint academic and double degree programs is increasingly important for universities at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Here again, a strategic assessment needs to be made about which programs at the U of A are optimal for joint and double degree program options as well as which universities and locations the U of A would target in the development of such endeavours. These decisions need to be made with reference to the alternative of recruiting of students directly into full programs offered by the U of A. For instance, where strong research collaborations exist, the university might decide to favor a ‘co-tutelle’ style double PhD degree.

Coordination between units should also be considered for the placement of both undergraduate and graduate student internships in relevant companies outside of Canada owned or operated by international alumni or alternatively in international companies that have a strong link with international research initiatives.
For reasons such as these, we recommended that the breadth and depth of international initiatives and activities be developed and integrated into various units across the U of A and that a clearly articulated international strategy that coordinates the activities of the various units be developed and put into place by the Provost’s Office through the leadership of a deputy provost working in close collaboration with the Vice President Research and the Vice President Advancement.

To conclude, we, as members of the committee, were excited and challenged by our task, and we thank the University of Alberta for the opportunity to participate in this way in its great mission. We look forward to observing its progress.

We are grateful to all with whom we talked during our time in Edmonton for their unfailing assistance and consideration. We are particularly indebted to President Samarasekera and her chief of staff Marcia Lang for their support throughout.

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