



**University
of Manitoba**

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

UM Strategic Plan:
What We Heard in
Community Consultations

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Introduction

The world has changed significantly since the start of the last University of Manitoba (UM) strategic plan in 2015. While the 2020-2021 interim plan allowed UM and its community the opportunity to take a breath and respond to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is now time to develop a new institutional strategic plan for this changed world.

The UM community has been deeply engaged in ongoing phases of consultation, which began in late January 2023. The first phase involved almost 60 in-person and virtual community consultation sessions, in which approximately 650 faculty, 560 staff, 70 students and 70 others, including external groups, participated. The consultation sessions offered a space for faculty members, staff, students, and alumni to share ideas and hear from others. Discussion facilitators asked participants questions to gauge perceptions of what makes UM great, what values the community shares, and what areas community members would like to see changed or improved.

The second phase consisted of two surveys—one sent to faculty and staff and the other to students—with questions that built on the themes identified by the community in the first phase. Over 1,000 community members, made up of nearly equal parts students and equal parts faculty and staff, responded to the survey, offering their perspectives on and aspirations for the university.

This document is the outcome of these consultations to date. It presents the UM community's overarching ideas of what drew them to the university, what the university offers the community, their aspirations for the future of UM and of Manitoba, and the areas in which the community wants UM to commit to and invest in.

***This document is not a strategic plan, but rather an important milestone on the way to a strategic plan that reflects community goals and engagement.** While not every nuance and perspective can be realistically captured in this document, every response was reviewed and treated judiciously when structuring it.*

Emerging From Adversity

In building an institutional strategic plan, a key task is finding areas of convergence and common interest within an institution that is engaged in several different, though mutually beneficial, activities. Consultations revealed that UM has, as it has throughout its history, many components separated by geography, diverging expectations, and nuanced understandings of what UM is supposed to achieve.

Members of the UM community suggested that the university is responsible for shaping the province as it is now. For example, UM contributes significantly to the province's labour capital and future development—attracting key talent and reducing (or even reversing) the provincial “brain drain.” The community expressed a strong belief in the importance of community engagement and collaboration, both within the university and with the broader community. The university's commitment to regional access and affordability means that Manitobans who would otherwise not obtain a university education can do so because of concerted efforts to ensure the systemic structures of the university, as well as the physical infrastructure, promote access for most.

However, UM's ability to expand upon avenues for progress and innovation has been hindered by several obstacles. Most significantly these obstacles include the consistent decline of provincial public funding over the course of the past decade. Having experienced the largest decrease in provincial transfers from the government of any Canadian province in the last decade, Manitoban institutions have only in recent months received a substantial increase in funding that could be a start to reducing the impacts of these cuts. The institution and province have also faced several other obstacles. The city is no longer the same continental nexus for industry and development that it once was when the university was founded. Increasing global uncertainty has contributed to a decrease in public buy-in for, or at the very least the questioning of, the value of university-level education and other university activities. And, a tightening labour market, that is expected to remain tight, threatens to increase the opportunity-cost of university credentials.

It is therefore a particularly apt moment to develop a strategic plan. It is in moments of opportunity and challenge that it is important to pause and reflect on the future of an institution that is nearly as old as the province itself. One for which its researchers, staff, and students can inform how the next generation benefits from and contributes to the education, research, and community connection the university provides.

Where We Are Today

Throughout consultations, we heard a great deal about what matters to the university community. As respondents looked forward, they expressed a deep desire for their work to be even more compelling and relevant to society. Faculty, staff, and students agreed that a university is characterized by its high standards of integrity and social responsibility. While the expression of these commitments diverged in some respects between populations (for example, differing opinions on institutional responses to COVID-19, and institutional progress in areas of sustainability), all were nevertheless grounded in an ethos of uncompromised care and inclusivity, as well as a desire for collective betterment.



Similarly, what makes people proud of the institution is the extent to which its actions yielded direct benefits. Far from limiting actions to performative and easy gestures, many respondents pointed to specific UM initiatives with tangible impact, as well as the institution's support for post-secondary education in the province. This included UM's vocal position against the provincial government's proposal to institute performance-based funding. Also notable was the institution's track record on advancing Reconciliation and Indigenous success, exemplified by the inclusion of a mandatory course in Indigenous studies in a number of programs, former President David Barnard's formal apology before Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the establishment of Ongomiizwin—Indigenous Institute of Health and Healing.

Identified areas for the university to focus on can be captured under five broad themes, of which many overlap depending on context—Anti-racism and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion; Reconciliation and Decolonization; a UM for Manitoba; Preparing Students for Tomorrow; and Creating Knowledge that Matters. We expand on these below.

PATHWAY TO EXCELLENCE: ANTI-RACISM AND EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

While anti-racism and equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) thread across all themes in this document, it has resonance as an independent theme as a necessary condition towards building a great university and excelling as an institution. Students often characterized UM as a welcoming and inclusive place and frequently mentioned the university's work on EDI when asked to point to what the university does best. Likewise, faculty and staff pointed to advancements in anti-racism and EDI efforts that made them proud. This included hiring people to direct critical and necessary changes at the university to advance EDI, creating the anti-racism taskforce, and developing the anti-racism framework. It was also made clear that these initiatives were just the start and there is much more work to be done for the UM to be a truly inclusive community. The need to re-commit and to continue ongoing efforts was articulated as necessary in making strides in anti-racism and EDI and was common in respondents' vision of their ideal UM in 2040.

Many felt that what is perceived as the university's siloed structure impedes excellence and the collective orientation required to achieve big, impactful goals. It was raised that current efforts focused on anti-racism and EDI are somewhat fragmented, and respondents advocated for active work in breaking down silos and hierarchical structures with the aim of promoting inclusion and belonging. Suggestions on activities that could encourage community inclusivity included better alignment and language around EDI in the hiring process and the institution being more outspoken in the community on issues of race and EDI. There was an articulated desire to see ongoing mandatory engagement with anti-racism, Indigenous history and epistemology, and EDI curriculum both in academic programs and in training for staff and faculty. Respondents also articulated a desire to see the creation of additional policies and practices that support underrepresented groups and ensure equitable opportunities for all, including peer mentorship for members of marginalized groups to support individual and collective success.

Should the university establish goals to lead in areas of anti-racism and EDI, in addition to tangible steps that have been identified through the initial rounds of consultation, advancement in this area could include aspirations such as:

- **Providing opportunities for all to excel—establishing ambitious targets for the representation of historically marginalized and underserved groups at any or all levels (students, staff, faculty).**
 - **Becoming the first choice for an inclusive and seamless educational experience and enhancing our reputation as an employer of choice.**
 - **Becoming the national leader in EDI education.**
 - **Prioritizing collaboration between units to increase inclusivity and belonging within the institution and with external community members.**
 - **Implementing the highest standard in facility design for physical accessibility.**
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ADVANCING MEANINGFUL RECONCILIATION AND DECOLONIZATION

There was little doubt that making strides in Reconciliation, decolonization, and Indigenous success is integral for the UM community. Respondents expressed a strong desire to strengthen bonds of respect, trust, and shared benefit with Indigenous communities in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and across Canada. Feedback provided during consultations reaffirmed that supporting Indigenous peoples, prioritizing deep and consistent engagement with Indigenous knowledges, and building trusting relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is essential to describing the ideal state for UM.

For UM to reach the next step in its journey towards Reconciliation and decolonization and continue to be relevant for future generations, making meaningful connections with Indigenous communities is essential. This means not only increasing representation of Indigenous peoples on campus, but also ensuring increased representation reflects institutional changes made to make it a more attractive, welcoming, and culturally safe place for Indigenous peoples to attend.



Advancing meaningful Reconciliation and making decolonization a reality challenged some in the community, particularly those respondents who identified as non-Indigenous in the survey. (Please note, in-person group consultations do not allow us to distinguish populations in the same way). Non-Indigenous respondents often avoided saying precisely how strides in Reconciliation and decolonization could be achieved or what would constitute meaningful advancement in this area. Respondents often indicated that they were uncomfortable speaking on behalf of Indigenous peoples, and while discomfort in doing so was interpreted as a sign of respect, it was also recognized by others that Reconciliation is a necessary call to action which requires vulnerable participation by those who have benefited and continue to benefit from the legacies of colonialism—one that invites a rebalancing of relationships and inspires opportunities for mutual cultural understanding. A small but notable portion of respondents articulated a desire to ensure that the perfect is not the enemy of the good, and that current and future efforts in Reconciliation and decolonization be recognized for their attempts at progress.

Suggestions on how to tangibly contribute to Reconciliation, decolonization, and Indigenous success involved a collection of individualized initiatives, including: more full funding for Indigenous students; doing more advocacy in consultation with and on behalf of Indigenous peoples; hiring Indigenous peoples at all levels of the university (not just at the top, but everywhere); having wider integration of Indigenous content and epistemology in courses across the institution; giving streets and buildings on campus Indigenous names; adding signage in Indigenous languages across campus; and recognizing Treaty 5 of the Thompson campus in acknowledgments. Other suggestions included more relational accountability with Indigenous communities; more recruitment efforts (including better outreach to Northern communities); and promoting online or hybrid learning to strike a balance between flexibility of staying in community and avoiding isolationism. Overall, these pointed to a desire to see the university continue to genuinely embrace the value of, and engage with, the advancement of initiatives in the interest of creating a better UM that is purpose-built for Indigenous peoples.

Goals in this area will continue to build on and elevate existing efforts, strive for continued prioritization, and articulate progress with the collective aim of becoming a national leader in Reconciliation and decolonization. Examples of how this could take form in our new strategic plan include:

- **Becoming the first choice for Indigenous students and academics across Canada and increasing the proportion of Indigenous students to be reflective of the provincial population.**
- **Becoming a fully decolonized university, addressing all processes impacting enrolment, access, research, engagement, hiring, tenure, and promotion.**
- **Becoming the national leader in Indigenous education, setting the highest standard for Reconciliation and decolonization in post-secondary institutions across Canada.**
- **Redistributing intellectual privilege across the university through the broad inclusion of Indigenous knowledges, world views, and methodologies.**

A UM FOR MANITOBA

What was clear from both internal and external consultations was that for UM to thrive, it needs to be the university *for* Manitoba. Respondents indicated that the university's actions and the fortunes that result from them must benefit those who reside in the province. Within those needs was a clear sense that access to education was foundational. There are already tangible successes in access and inclusion that the university community can point to as meaningful achievements in this area, including lower tuition and attainable entrance requirements.

Increasing participation in post-secondary education by underrepresented groups was mentioned by several respondents to ensure continued commitment and success in building a university for all Manitobans. There were structural means by which respondents indicated this could make the university more accessible and attainable. For instance, several student respondents mentioned increasing the availability of childcare, creating more space where students could study and socialize, and providing more affordable student housing on campus.

When asked about the most important investment UM could make to increase access to university, student responses focused on two major opportunities: affordability and flexible (online/hybrid) learning options. Expanded online or hybrid learning is a way to accommodate variable schedules, allow for more efficient progression through degree programs, and reduce costs, with respect to transportation and time. For students, timely degree completion equated with (re-)entering the labour market with a credential and thereby having access to new job opportunities and salaries or enabling them to pursue professional or graduate school.

As a university that prides itself in providing access to and opportunity for all Manitobans, there are various targets that can be set to ensure further success and advancement in this area. Some examples could include:

- Being the first choice for post-secondary education for Manitobans, offering quality programs that are affordable, flexible, and future focused.
- Becoming the province with the highest rates of university-level education in the country.
- Committing to empowering personal success in students and ensuring our student population is reflective of our provincial population.
- Developing more innovative and diverse entrance pathways to become more inclusive and promote excellence for all.

PREPARING STUDENTS OF TODAY FOR TOMORROW

Consultations revealed that it is not just access to a university education that matters, but access to a higher caliber and quality of education. That the university offers several programs that are both unavailable anywhere else in the province and which play a vital contribution towards ensuring the province has qualified professionals is seen as a mark of its ability to deliver quality education. When speaking to areas of importance and pride at the university, several respondents pointed to convocation—a celebration of students with drive and curiosity who go out and contribute to the province’s future prosperity. UM graduates are the university’s brand and one of the primary values it brings to the province, making real impact in the community. Being a U15 that offers a wide breadth of programs, the university community articulated a great pride in enabling the success of each student.



Many student respondents shared that their professors made them feel engaged, supported, and like much more than a number or face in the crowd (a smaller number of students were of a differing opinion). Students were relatively split on whether the university education offered to them prepares them for their goals. Those who felt it lacked in this area articulated a desire for more experiential learning opportunities, including paid practicums, field trips, internships, and co-op placements. With the advent of new technologies disrupting how learning happens, a student population that has increasingly needed to work while attending school, and shifting expectations around the student experience, the university must take the lead in providing its students with a transformative experience that will provide them with the skills and opportunities they need to shape the province in the coming decades.

If the university is to invest in ensuring Manitobans not only have access to university education, but that education be of the highest quality, potential objectives or goals that could ensure UM makes meaningful progress in this area could include:

- Ensuring every student leaves UM having had an experience that connects their learning to the world.
- Becoming Manitoba's destination for lifelong learning by identifying and meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population.
- Setting ambitious targets for the availability of discipline-specific, high-impact learning practices, such as field placements, internships, work-integrated learning, or other forms of experiential learning that support upskilling for the modern world.
- Developing life-long learners skilled in creative, critical, and adaptive thought.

CREATING KNOWLEDGE THAT MATTERS— FOR MANITOBA AND THE WORLD

There was no doubt throughout consultations that the creation and dissemination of new knowledge and creative exploration were identified as essential functions of the university. This institutional strategic planning process is occurring alongside the development of the university's new strategic research plan, and we were encouraged to see similar themes emerging from these consultations.

Many respondents described their ideal province as one with a thriving healthcare system, one where there have been meaningful strides in poverty alleviation, and one that has made advancements in climate impact mitigation. The path towards greater relevance, greater influence, and meaningful change in these areas—within the province and beyond—was in no uncertain terms talked about in relation to research quality. Respondents were clear that research success is not solely defined through traditional measures, such as bibliometrics or research dollars obtained; instead, success encompasses a broader understanding of research. Equally valuable is the recognition of contributions that beneficially impact local, national, and global communities, and recognition by peers in a researcher's discipline. This broader understanding allows researchers in different disciplines to better communicate how their research contributes to the advancement of knowledge and society.



There was also a desire to see the university lead discourse within the province and beyond. This is not to say that the university currently fails in this respect, but rather some suggested a desire to see the university take a greater leadership position towards creating a prosperous and sustainable Manitoba. Connected to this notion, some respondents suggested and supported the idea of developing a critical mass around a few core and emerging research areas through strategically targeted resources. Some of these areas are already a point of pride for UM but could use more resources, like the work being done with northern communities or research in the development of water security. Others are points of aspiration or growth, like meaningful work in poverty reduction, and more concerted efforts to advance Indigenous knowledges and Reconciliation. Other participants shared a desire to see UM play a more active role in contributing to climate change adaptation, advances in health research, promoting the resurgence of Indigenous peoples, combating inequality, and countering the rise of misinformation in society.

When thinking about *Creating Knowledge that Matters*, there are several different ways the university can translate its commitments to high quality research and innovation, as well as being a driver of evidence-based decision making. Examples could include:

- **Fostering an environment that enables bold innovation through creative risk-taking and becoming the national leader in specific fields that support better lives and longer lives for Manitobans, such as Indigenous research, community-based research, and/or human rights.**
 - **Becoming an internationally renowned university in specific fields such as advancing health and healthcare, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and poverty alleviation.**
 - **Becoming a top 10 research funded university in Canada.**
 - **Cementing the university's position as a sought-after partner in advancing societal and economic growth in Manitoba.**
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Next Steps: Where We Aspire to be Tomorrow

The above provides a hopefully faithful synthesis of conversations the community has had over the past months about what it values and what it sees its role being in the future. To turn these areas of importance into pillars of our institution's future strategy, the next task is one of looking to the future to set ambitious standards and goals in these areas. To do this, we must come together as a community to determine where we want to go next and what we need to do to achieve success in these areas.

COMING TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY

Throughout the consultations we heard that making strides in any of the above areas means creating a collaborative environment, one that breaks down silos. We heard a desire for an institution that enables high levels of collective performance, and one that supports the development of successful and rewarding careers for all those at the university. There was a recognition that big challenges require us to come together across many different domains and fields of expertise to generate meaningful solutions.

Respondents spoke to the physical space and place of campus as another important facet of community building necessary to achieve excellence and become a stronger institution. There is a shared desire expressed by respondents to create a more intentionally designed campus as an attractive third place, one where students, staff, and the community want and choose to spend time. To connect more with the city and broader community, respondents indicated a desire to see the development of a vibrant campus culture and campus layout, while increasing links between the community and university to make access more possible.

We must address this need within the community if we want to move forward as an institution and reach our aspirational goals.

THINKING AMBITIOUSLY

The university community has done a great deal of work over the past few months in articulating a collective institutional identity. We have heard what is important to the University of Manitoba—it is an institution guided by high standards of ethics and grounded in making an impact in areas that are important to elevating the social good. The issues and spaces in which the university community wants to effect change are clear and provide a sense of its guiding principles.

As we continue the development of the institutional strategic plan, the university community must come together to articulate what meaningful and effective change in these areas would look like. **Included in the above were some examples of what these goals might look like, but the decision of what to strive for belongs to the UM community.** Together, we can set the tone for such discussions by asking ourselves: what do we need to do differently or how does our university need to look different in the coming years to make meaningful advancements in these areas?

Articulating those ambitious goals together is the focus of the next stage in this strategic planning process. The next round of consultations will focus on what types of ambitions or goals resonate most with the university community.

Prepared in collaboration with:



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