

Report to Senate of the Provost & Vice-President, Academic

December 11, 2024

Dear Senators,

I am pleased to provide the report of the Provost & Vice-President, Academic to Senate. As you will note, the structure of this report and its content is focused on Brock's [academic plan](#).

As Senate is responsible for the educational policy of the University, it is critically important that we keep the goals, objectives, and outcomes of the academic plan in mind. I have framed this report accordingly around the priorities outlined in the academic plan, with an eye to the specific actions identified within each that we've committed to as an institution. I would also like to use this report as an opportunity to celebrate our progress and achievements on the plan so far.

Thank you, and I look forward to our continued discussions today.

Priority 1: High-Quality and Meaningful

- The Faculty of Mathematics and Science organized [Brock AI Day](#) on November 7, 2024 which brought together students, faculty, and industry partners to explore the topic of artificial intelligence through a full day of presentations and round table discussions. To highlight just one of the many events was a talk by Professor Ali Emani in the Department of Computer Science, which was hosted at the First Ontario Performing Arts Centre, titled 'In Search of Digital Truth' that explored the journey from science fiction to our current reality, and examined how AI systems are becoming mirrors of collective human knowledge.
- On October 30, the Goodman School of Business welcomed Alex Peters and Rohan Mahimker as its [2024 Emerging Leaders](#). This is an award for young leaders in the business community who have made an impact in their careers. Alex and Rohan are co-founders and co-CEOs of Prodigy Education, which is a free platform for elementary grade students to learn standards-aligned math and English content. Alex spent the day speaking on campus sharing his experience making entrepreneurial pitches.
- The Office of the Registrar & Enrolment Services piloted a new initiative this Fall running monthly information sessions for Department chairs, program directors, and administrative staff. Topics include upcoming deadlines, reviewing Brock DB functions, and providing just-in-time training for academic units as needed. The monthly information sessions will continue into the Winter and [details are available online here](#).

Priority 2: Accessible, Flexible, and Customizable

- The Department of Mathematics and Statistics is continuing development on the Data Science and Analytics BSc program to add new streams and provide flexibility for students. The program committee is currently working on adding a new stream in sports analytics, to capitalize on an existing area of strength at Brock.

- The Departments of Classics & Archaeology and Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures in the Faculty of Humanities have both launched experiments to collaborate with other Ontario universities on course delivery. GREE 2P01 and 2P02 (Intermediate Greek I and II) are taught at Brock this year in a hyflex format, with students beaming in from University of Waterloo. ITAL/CANA/MLLC 2Q93 (Immigrants and Indigenous Peoples: The Case of Italian Canadians) is being taught at Guelph this year with Brock students registering, and Brock will be the host next year. The Department is now looking to find a university partner for ITAL/MLLC/WGST 2Q95 (Queer Stories in Italy and the West) and ITAL/MLLC 3P02 (Black Italy: Shifts in Italian Cultural Identity).

Priority 3: Supportive and Student-Centred

- In the Faculty of Mathematics and Science, BIOL 3P64 (Introductory Insect Biology) was recently modified to include an experiential learning project for students to develop their insect identification skills. Students were invited to participate in a 2-day, work-integrated learning project in association with Entomogen, an environmental consulting and scientific research firm in the region. The project involved students working directly with expert entomologies to identify over 1,800 mosquito samples—with the class setting a new record for the average number of samples identified per student! The samples identified by our students will become a part of a future genetic study by Brock researchers.
- The Office of the Registrar & Enrolment Services ran a Student Success Navigator initiative this Fall. This initiative involved connecting Smart Start students with incoming first-years to provide them with friendly, confidential, peer-to-peer support on the transition to university. This year, the initiative made 605 student-to-student connections.
- During International Education Week, Co-op, Career and Experiential Education (CCEE) partnered with the Workforce Collective to host a discussion with regional employers on how Niagara can better leverage the international student talent pool in staffing strategies. Employers recognized the unique skills and resilience international students bring. The CCEE team highlighted Brock's support for employers, offering low-risk, cost-effective opportunities to connect with students through co-op recruitment, part-time hires, experiential learning, workshops, mentorship, and more.

Priority 4: Equitable, Diverse, Inclusive

- A new course in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences (SPMA 3V95: Sport, Community, and Indigenous Resurgence) will be launching in the Winter term. This course looks at the relationship between the sport industry and Indigenous resurgence, offering a critical analysis of sport as both a colonial force and a space for Indigenous self-determination.
- The Department of Dramatic Arts has made an express commitment to anti-supremacy in all areas of Departmental activity. This is especially demonstrated in their curriculum revisions, their trauma-informed approaches to theatre making, and their new context credit in Indigenous Canadian Theatre and Performance.
- In partnership with the Human Rights and Equity Office, the Black Student Success Centre welcomed 175 students over two days on campus for the second annual Black Secondary Student Symposium. Students visited from across the Niagara and Hamilton regions to

spend the day building connections. The event cultivates aspirations for post-secondary education while developing solutions to the challenges Black students face in university.

- As a reminder, the Faculty Fellows in Accessibility program was [formally announced in October](#). There will be one Fellow from each Faculty (Goodman, Education, Humanities, Social Sciences, Applied Health Sciences, Mathematics and Science) for a total of 6 Fellows. [More information is available on the CPI website](#).

Priority 5: Future-Oriented

- On November 17, the Goodman School of Business hosted its first-ever Double Degree Day to encourage high school students to consider Brock's unique Double Degree program. With 30 students and their parents in attendance who had pending offers, the event was a recruitment opportunity to encourage them to become future Badgers.
- On February 10, Goodman will be hosting Julie Dell'Aniello, President of Martin Brower Canada, as part of its Distinguished Leader lecture series. Julie is a leader in the supply chain area and will be spending the day on campus connecting students.
- Last week, on December 5, the Faculty of Social Sciences hosted its Social Sciences Day where over 400 local high school students visited the University. Two current students were speakers who welcomed registrants and directed them to breakout sessions where they participated in lectures offered by Departments. This annual event, which began in 2019, offers potential future Badgers a taste of university life.
- The Black Student Success Centre is currently planning for Frost Week and Black History Month/African Heritage Month in the new year. The Centre will be partnering with a variety of student clubs, Departments, and community organizations to support student engagement and success. Planned events so far include vision board making, games night, ice skating, Afro-Caribbean night, and karaoke.
- The Office of Institutional Planning, Analysis, and Performance has created a Power BI dashboard available to all staff and faculty to help inform enrolment discussion. The dashboard utilizes the Fall (November 1) enrolment data each year and provides a quick way to assess trends over nearly a decade. The dashboard is [available online here](#).

I can also share that work the budget continues across the University as we look ahead to 2025-26 and beyond. While the overall situation for universities in Ontario remains challenging, what has become apparent is that one of key levers we have at our disposal is enrolment, both in terms of recruitment and retention. While there are few projects and initiatives underway in this regard already—such as the creation of a Strategic Enrolment Management plan for the University (the details of which can be found in my recent report to the Board) as well as the ongoing Curriculum Delivery Initiative—what I would like to emphasize is role that all of us can, and should be play, in supporting enrolment at Brock. For example, I would encourage everyone at Senate to think about opportunities to get involved in recruitment. Many of us travel for conferences, research talks, and the like—and these are great opportunity to connect with the Recruitment Office to share the details of your trip. It might be as simple as bringing some promotional materials with you, or if

you're interested, there may be opportunities to take part in local recruitment events. Equally important is supporting those students once they are here to ensure they succeed in their studies. Retention supports for students are many and varied, ranging from the services available through Student Life, to academic advising and engagement in the classroom. I am sure many of you have some great ideas for how we can improve both retention and recruitment at Brock, and I have asked the Chair of Senate to make this a topic for a generative discussion in the future. I am looking forward to that conversation and hearing more of your thoughts.

As this is our last Senate meeting for the calendar year, and in the spirit of celebrating Brock's 60th anniversary coming to a close, I took the opportunity to look back at our history. On December 10, 1964 (almost 60 years ago to the day), Brock held its third-ever meeting of Senate. In attendance were just three individuals: Professor James Gibson, serving as President at the time; Professor John Hart; and Professor Michael Hornyansky. Their agenda had only six items, one of which was the appointment of a fourth member of Senate! They also reviewed and discussed the architects' drawings for what was called at the time the Tower building, or Arthur Schmon Tower as we know it today, before adjourning the meeting at 4:00pm as "curfew loomed."

Lastly, you will note that I have included my most recent report to the Board of Trustees as an appendix to this report, for Senate's reference. In a similar way, at last week's Board meeting, I also attached my previous Senate report as an appendix. I will continue to do this moving forward, to ensure that information is shared in both directions, with both the Board and Senate.

Sincerely,

Arja Vainio-Mattila
Provost & Vice-President, Academic

Enclosure: Provost's Report to the Board of Trustees (Dec 5, 2024)

Report to Board of the Provost & Vice-President, Academic

December 5, 2024

Dear Trustees,

I am pleased to provide the report of the Provost & Vice-President, Academic to the Board. As you will note, I've made some changes to the format of this report as I would like to focus its content—and any arising discussion—on Brock's new [institutional strategic plan](#).

In a similar manner to the regular updates I provide on our [academic plan](#) to Senate, I would like to use this report to highlight how the directions and priorities outlined in the institutional strategic plan are being actioned. The institutional strategic plan and the academic plan are intended to champion one another, and I hope to use this report as an opportunity to highlight how they're mutually supporting our efforts to advance the University.

Thank you, and I look forward to our discussions today.

Strategic Direction 1: Shape tomorrow through research, discovery, and knowledge

- Work is well underway on building out the implementation framework for the strategic plan. Our focus has been on identifying the different metrics we would like to track—both quantitative and qualitative—that will guide us towards our 2030 target. To highlight just one example, we've identified prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) as a space where not many postsecondary institutions are operating, and an area where Brock could be a sector leader. PLAR offers potential students the opportunity to earn credit for demonstration of prior learning, usually through study, work, or other life experiences. Our key metric, and first step in building out offerings, will be the development of a PLAR policy.
- I recently represented Brock at the University Vice Presidents Network organized by Higher Education Strategy Associates. This group provides university vice presidents with a space to exchange ideas, share knowledge, and explore opportunities for collaboration. At this past meeting, differentiation was the topic of discussion and how institutions can build support for their signature areas. For Brock, I think this is critically important as we think about celebrating and supporting our key areas of research and academic distinction.

Strategic Direction 2: Build sustainable futures

- The Provost's Office is developing a new 3-year academic action planning process for the teaching Faculties. This will be an annual exercise conducted by each teaching Faculty to forecast out a 3-year academic plan, built on both budgetary and academic assumptions, to look for areas of opportunity, and identify potential challenges in the years ahead. Topics will include enrolment and academic programs, tuition and fees, faculty and staff complement plans, and grant commitments—to name a few. This process is planned to take place over the Winter term and will inform budget discussions in the Fall.
- Work is underway on a new policy on the temporary suspension of admissions in academic programs. This policy will set out the principles and timeline for the temporary suspension

of admission into academic programs. The policy will further provide academic programs with the time and space needed to make significant changes to their curriculum and/or degree architecture to ensure alignment with institutional priorities. We are aiming to bring a draft policy to Senate for consultation later this year.

- The Canadian Association of University Business Officers recently held its 2024 annual summit for Provosts, Vice Presidents of Finance, and academic labour relations leaders, which was I pleased to attend. The topic for this year's summit was university financial sustainability and focused on navigating the current challenges in the sector, such as demographic changes, government policy, and societal expectations for universities.
- Brock's engineering program has launched, the first cohort is here, and we are delighted at the positive things we're hearing from our students. We're also happy to share that we're exploring a solution to our pressing need for teaching and research lab space to support the program. While not suitable for long-term use, we are planning to renovate the loading dock of 3401 Schmon Parkway to convert it into several teaching and research lab spaces for our faculty and students to use over the next few years, while we explore opportunities for a more permanent home for all of engineering on our main campus.
- Budget work is ongoing across the University and we're exploring and closely examining all our operations to identify areas of opportunity. Some of the areas we're still looking at, and in others we've already made some changes that will have a positive impact. For example, the Office Institutional Planning & Analysis has identified two key changes in our reporting to the government which has shifted significant number of our weighted grant units into a higher funding category—by updating the way we report our Pass/Honours degrees to the government and improving the alignment of our Classification of Instructional Programs codes. We're also looking closely at ancillary fees, as Brock is well below the provincial average, and this will be area for further discussion in the future.
- Work on a new Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) plan for the University is also underway, which will serve as a framework for ensuring enrolment aligns with the facilities and resources available at Brock by setting targets for a sustainable future. The SEM plan will also establish a roadmap for sustainable growth over the next 5 years, and address a range of topics including recruitment, admissions, and retention. The SEM plan is being developed by the Registrar's Office, in partnership with the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs, as well the Office of Institutional Planning & Analysis.

Strategic Direction 3: Realize you matter

- I recently represented Brock at the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce Economic Summit and spoke about the important role we play in the local economy. This annual summit addresses pressing issues, trends, and topics in the region—and was an opportunity to foster connections that will help further enrich the work, research, and creative activity within our community. Events like these are a reminder of the important and differentiated role Brock occupies the competitive education landscape, and that as a mid-sized regional university our strength is in serving the needs of the Niagara region.

Strategic Direction 4: Bring the world to Brock, and Brock to the world

- I am pleased to share that I will be taking on a role on the executive of the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV) next year. As a part of the Council of Ontario Universities, OCAV provides leadership on matters relating to educational excellence, academic quality, and policy issues effecting the postsecondary sector. I am looking forward to the opportunity to share more about the great things happening at Brock with this group, and to bring back learnings from what is working well at some of our peer institutions.
- We're putting a renewed focus on our international portfolio, particularly in light of the recent immigration policy changes at the federal level, to help further promote Brock's global footprint. I look forward to sharing more information on this in future reports. This will include a renewed focus on our recruitment strategies to tailor them to an increased competitive environment.

Another change I have made with this report is to include details on Brock's competitive position in Ontario's evolving post-secondary landscape. I touched on this in a few areas already in this report and will continue to do so in the future. However, there are a couple topics I would like to expand on that cut across several of the strategic directions above.

The first is demographics. We know there are significant shifts happening in the higher education landscape, and the domestic population is expected to grow over the next few years—especially in the Greater Toronto Area, driven in part due to immigration. The relocation of Brock's Hamilton activities to Burlington is one part of providing us with a better location to take advantage of these demographic trends. Increased competition with colleges is another related factor. As colleges begin to launch master's programs in applied areas of study, this will be an area for universities to lean into their differentiated position as centres of excellence that can bridge both teaching and research. As we have seen, the college sector has been heavily reliant on international students to support their financial sustainability in recent years, and it will be interesting to see how they adapt to the changing immigration environment in Canada.

The second topic I would like to mention is technology, and more specifically the need for a new Student Information System (SIS) at Brock. Coming out of COVID, one of the key learnings was the need to quickly be able to pivot to, and provide, a robust online learning environment for our students. In order to fill that need, Brock's Learning Management System (LMS) was upgraded two years ago to a new platform called Brightspace. Brightspace replaced Brock's homegrown LMS called Sakai, which was built around a primarily in-person student experience. In a similar way, Brock's current SIS is another homegrown system (BrockDB) built for a time when university operations looked very different than they do today. To provide just one example, the Accelerate into Master's (AIM) program is something unique to Brock that allows students who excel in a 4-year Bachelor's degree to enter directly into a Master's program upon graduation. The AIM program attracts students, and while we currently have it in place in a couple Departments, it's not possible to operationalize it at scale with our current SIS. A new SIS would also allow us to significantly streamline applications and admissions, speeding up the processes and giving Brock a competitive advantage when it comes to getting offers into the hands of prospective students. The SIS will not be

a new topic to Trustees, but I think it's important to reinforce its importance when it comes to Brock's competitive position in Ontario's postsecondary environment.

I have also included my most recent report to Senate as an appendix to this report, for the Board's reference. In a similar way, at the next Senate meeting, I will be including this report as an appendix to ensure the information is shared in both directions.

Sincerely,

Arja Vainio-Mattila
Provost & Vice-President, Academic

Enclosure: Report to Senate of the Provost & Vice-President, Academic (Nov 13, 2024)