

October 4, 2023

On August 28, 2023, I wrote to you to introduce the process of co-developing a new academic plan for Nipissing University in this upcoming year. At that time, I mentioned that there are 4 must-haves that provide the bedrock upon which the plan rests. The “must-haves” are areas of engagement and action that are urgent to get right, upon which we must maintain vigilant focus, and exist independent of the academic plan, as they effect and determine the ambitions and future possibilities for the institution:

- (1) Student Recruitment, Enrollment, Retention and Persistence;
- (2) Indigenous Knowledge and Reconciliation;
- (3) Equity, Diversity and Inclusion; and,
- (4) Structural and Procedural Clarity.

I am identifying these 4 must-haves now because I do not believe that we can be successful in defining actions in the plan and measuring key performance indicators (KPIs) if we do share the understanding that these 4 elements must be addressed contiguous to any planning and must inform all actions in the plan (they are the soil in which any seed must grow). We must each take personal responsibility for addressing these areas and commit to continuous improvement in each of these areas, whether by addressing policy, practices, assumptions, or structural barriers in order that we build from the collective strength of all the people here and develop a nuanced understanding of who is not here, so that we can welcome more people to a great institution.

(1): Student Recruitment, Enrollment, Retention and Persistence

As a function of investment in strategic planning, analytics and structural reform, Nipissing University has begun to attenuate a period of declining enrollment and deficit. Still, the reality is that Nipissing does not have the financial capacity to absorb even modest disruption to student enrollment. At a very simple level, independent of the need to broaden and diversify the cohorts of students who participate in Nipissing’s undergraduate and graduate programs; independent of the need to renovate, innovate, and continuously improve our offerings, Nipissing’s ongoing financial sustainability is dependent on secure enrollment and the retention of students through graduation. A snapshot of 10 years of data (by headcount and by FFTE) simply reflects this reality.

Table 1: 10 Year Historical Data (Enrollment by Headcount)

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Fall Headcount	<u>2013/14</u>	<u>2014/15</u>	<u>2015/16</u>	<u>2016/17</u>	<u>2017/18</u>	<u>2018/19</u>	<u>2019/20</u>	<u>2020/21</u>	<u>2021/22</u>	<u>2022/23</u>	<u>YTD 2023/24</u>
Undergraduate FT Domestic	3586	3567	3296	3289	3282	3309	3529	3534	3628	3496	3583
Undergraduate FT International	23	19	22	31	27	26	27	24	46	55	71
Undergraduate PT Domestic	1383	1396	1344	1299	1251	1080	1082	1259	1238	1288	1302
Undergraduate PT International	5	5	2	3	6	2		2		2	3

Graduate FT Domestic	110	140	163	145	152	162	154	172	176	160	187
Graduate FT International		1	1	2	3	4	7	8	9	11	12
Graduate PT Domestic	227	175	99	42	30	12	3	2	1	1	
Post-Baccalaureate Certificates/Diplomas							5	16	21	37	258
Other Non-Degree Seeking	78	75	65	74	53	70	65	29	72	54	29
TOTAL	5412	5378	4992	4885	4804	4665	4872	5046	5191	5104	5445

Table 2: 10 Year Historical Data (Enrollment by FFTE)



Annual FFTE	YTD										
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Undergraduate FT Domestic	3378.80	3373.05	3118.26	3135.44	3138.65	3151.55	3423.03	3415.83	3502.27	3369.16	3317.31
Undergraduate FT International	21.90	18.30	19.17	27.60	27.70	28.10	28.80	26.00	43.30	57.86	54.00
Undergraduate PT Domestic	601.55	652.87	670.74	672.16	672.67	610.33	572.67	641.70	658.16	675.83	613.72
Undergraduate PT International	3.10	2.08	1.17	2.27	2.05	0.80	0.40	1.20	1.73	1.30	4.40
Graduate FT Domestic	97.07	122.57	149.70	137.20	140.47	152.77	145.33	160.00	167.00	155.67	171.43
Graduate FT International	0.33	1.00	1.00	1.33	2.33	3.67	5.67	7.67	8.67	10.33	11.33
Graduate PT Domestic	67.90	53.00	33.40	14.00	9.00	3.90	1.00	0.70	0.40	0.30	
Post-Baccalaureate Certificates/Diplomas							10.63	19.60	18.60	67.00	240.10
Other Non-Degree Seeking	118.90	111.07	98.20	62.17	31.10	36.63	40.30	12.70	38.03	23.80	11.33
AQ/ABQ	482.60	371.57	251.00	134.80	130.80	117.70	87.60	84.60	86.40	75.13	63.40
Indigenous Education	24.61	22.99	26.38	50.76	60.71	93.55	90.91	58.35	75.08	48.99	44.16
TOTAL	4796.77	4728.49	4369.01	4237.74	4215.49	4199.00	4406.34	4428.34	4599.64	4485.38	4531.19

What is axiomatic as well is that every assumption at a university is predicated upon meeting enrollment targets. Post-COVID-19, throughout the sector, it is more obvious how fragile recruitment and enrollment projections can be because they are based on precedent and what we have is a disrupted history from which to forecast the future. COVID changed the ways in which students think about their studies, about going to university, about the value of a degree to their long-term happiness; it changed our expectations about their academic preparedness, our ability to meet students where they are on a learning journey, and the effectiveness of the ways we have conventionally taught. As an intellectual challenge, it is a very interesting and exciting time to be in the university sector.

Action #1: Moving forward, Nipissing requires ongoing careful attention, planning and strategy, from which to project and manage student enrollment and persistence. In my

conversations on campus over the past two months, I know that Nipissing has committed to strategic enrollment management (SEM) and a recognition that recruitment, enrollment, retention, and persistence are meaningfully measurable, distinct, and, most importantly, shared responsibilities of all members of the Nipissing community.

We need to mirror our high-touch, personalized recruitment (i.e., we need to know our recruits by name and circumstances, we need to provide them the accurate advice they need about programs and being in North Bay, we need to build a bond of community with our recruits from the moment of inquiry to enrolling) to high-touch, personalized retention and persistence efforts (identifying at-risk students and providing them with the supports that work for them and also celebrating and promoting students who excel in academics, sport, or community service). These efforts are intrinsic to building a strong sense of welcome and belonging.



Nipissing, in this vision, is accessible to sufficient numbers of satisfied students who we retain and who become successful alumni and ambassadors for the institution. Our goal is academic excellence that continuously evolves as a function of new and continuing (persistent) students who are drawn to Nipissing by virtue of its reputation for excellence, its engaged community, and its innovative and challenging curricula.

(2): Indigenous Knowledge and Reconciliation

In Nipissing University's land acknowledgment, we express our gratitude to live and work on the Nipissing First Nation Traditional Territory and the traditional territory of the Anishnabek and recognize that this is the territory of the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850. It is clear that that gratitude must be marshalled into action to redress systemic wrongs and legacies of trauma that have singled out the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island.

Between 2007 and 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission heard from more than 6,500 witnesses about the history and legacies of the residential schools system in Canada. In June 2015, the Commission's final report was published along with 94 Calls to Action to support reconciliation between Canadians and Indigenous Peoples. In 2019, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls published its findings, *Reclaiming Power and Place*. In these reports, we have the necessary direction for initial action to redress relations, curricula, and opportunities for participation, all of which must start with humility and the willingness to listen to community.

Action #2: We must demonstrate our commitment to redress systemic wrongs and legacies of trauma by instrumentalizing the 94 Calls to Action in the TRC Report and establish relations with community to ensure ongoing support of the aspirations of our treaty partners.

(3): *Equity Diversity and Inclusion*

Nipissing as a community has a deeply felt ethic of social justice; however, we don't yet see equity, diversity and inclusion formally embedded in its practices, policies and mission.

An inclusive campus is an environment where every member is a valued contributor. It is a campus that encourages diverse perspectives and recognizes that it is through diversity that creativity and innovation can flourish. Fostering a culture of inclusion is a process that begins with acknowledging the diversity among us and the fact that some members of our community experience barriers to education, employment, and full participation due to systemic factors. An institution that is committed to fostering a culture of inclusion continually designs, reviews and rebuilds structures (policies, programs, practices) that are inclusive, equitable, and accessible to all, thereby reducing the necessity for accommodation and remediation.

An integral part of the EDI involves university research and the ways in which faculty appointments and the working environments respond to and reflect the broad diversity of the community. The primary objective is to make the campus environment demonstrably more inclusive.

We do not yet have robust systems of data collection in which to record demographic data from staff, student, or faculty declarations and from which to identify barriers to access or successes. As a relatively small organization, we rely on the bonds of community, but we must recognize that much of what could be shared to help the organization make barriers visible will only be shared once we produce a fully safe space.

While there are external pressures on all universities to formally address barriers to equity, diversity and inclusion, specifically from the Canada Research Chair (CRC) Secretariat and the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the will to remove the barriers to access and participation must come from within in an integrated/holistic way.

EDI must permeate all facets of governance, administration, and academic life – curriculum design, recruitment (student, faculty and staff), registration processes, teaching and learning

approaches, student life, evaluation and strategic decision making. We do so knowing that Nipissing will be more innovative, interesting, creative and welcoming as a function of our efforts to decolonize and transform ways of thinking and being in culturally responsive and inclusive ways.

It is absolutely crucial that every member of the Nipissing community reflect on the barriers to access, participation, persistence and retention. It will not be easy to redress the barriers (in fact, spatial/facilities planning may be the simplest to address); many barriers are insidious, invidious, structural and will challenge what is held to be essential. The very nature of institutional and systemic issues related to EDI will challenge the very structure of the university for the better.

Action #3: We must develop an EDI Action Plan addressing the student experience, research and knowledge outreach, workforce and physical space. This will require the completion of the proposed Equity Audit and then meaningful consultation to deliver the institutional plan with implementation framework and targets within one year of the adoption of the Academic Plan.

The EDI Action Plan will require us: (1) as individuals and collectively in groups throughout the University to identify and redress the systemic and structural barriers to EDI that are impediments to access and success defined in our own terms. This is a *cri de coeur*—**there must be urgency and action**: there must be an immediate effort to build a comprehensive framework from which to set targets, track progress, and celebrate our success, and (2) to commit to move away from design for accommodation to universal and inclusive design, whereby accommodation will be rarely needed. As a community of problem solvers, Nipissing must reexamine the strategies of recruitment, means of welcome, programs of engagement, curricula, modes of evaluation, work-integrated opportunities, program and degree structures, and alumni relations all under the lens of universal design for learning (UDL), inclusive design, culturally responsive pedagogies, and belonging. The results of our work will be embedded in the fabric of the institution; they will not be reactive, procedural, and siloed in one office, nor assumed to be one person's responsibility— they will be transformative.

(4): *Structural and Procedural Clarity*

Nipissing University is a bicameral organization. This means that, by virtue of the Provincial Act that created the institution, the Board of Governors has the fiduciary responsibility for the university and it has delegated to Senate the responsibility for academic governance.

Governance is a weighty challenge and the decisions that will be necessary over the next few years will require everyone to understand the individual and collective decision-making authority of deans, provost, president, senate, and Board in order to ensure that the best interests of the institution are met and that energies are dedicated to decision making confident that the correct processes have been followed.

Action #4: We will work to make legible the authority and responsibilities of the Board of Governors, Senate, deans, provost and president in order to ensure that everyone has confidence in the procedural fairness and authority of decisions.

All my best,

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