

INTRODUCTION

As we close the consultation phase of our strategic planning work, we are again engaging you, the Memorial University community, to share what we have heard to date.

We begin with a bold, aspirational, uniting vision that we believe captures the essence of what we want to be:

Memorial University – the beating heart of an economically prosperous, socially resilient, culturally vibrant and inclusive Newfoundland and Labrador

From this vision, we have heard the will and desire to be:

A University for Our Province. Memorial is a university *for* Newfoundland and Labrador, and we need to help lead it to new levels of prosperity and success.

A University for Our World. Memorial is a university *for* our world, bringing the world to the province, and the province to the world. We live in a world of global challenges, and Memorial needs to be the place that contributes solutions to those challenges.

A University for Our Future. Memorial is a university *for* our future, an innovation and creativity engine, literally inventing futures.

As a beating heart – a university for our province, world and future – we strive for nothing less than excellence for all our students, faculty, staff and alumni; a place where we thrive together.

In what follows, we elucidate the journey that has led us to these bold, aspirational directions. We begin with an *Overview of our work* where we describe the process to date of our strategic planning. We then move to *A pause for honest reflection*. Here we recognize, name and describe the critical challenges we face – what we heard is holding Memorial University back. We then move to *Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities threats*, presenting what the community has offered as core building blocks for our strategic plan. Finally, we come to *Moving forward*, the section where we synthesize what we heard into a preliminary strategic direction, proposing an orientation towards being a university for the province, the world and the future.

Our intention here is to challenge us all, to test bold constructs and to do so honestly, recognizing the challenges that lie before us. Our hope is that we heard you well, and that you find yourself, your work and your aspirations reflected here. Our ask is that you dig into this document and let us know what we got right, what we missed, what we got wrong and what needs to be improved.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2026 UPDATE: WHAT WE HAVE HEARD TO DATE

OVERVIEW OF OUR WORK:

Over the past six months, we have engaged in a highly participatory process to build Memorial's 2021-2026 Strategic Plan. We sincerely thank you all for your contributions thus far.

This journey began in July with the appointment of strategic planning co-leads, Emily Wooley and Dr. Ian Sutherland. Over the course of the summer, we issued a call to you, our Memorial community, to volunteer to serve on the strategic planning facilitation team (SPFT). You heard the call with more than 100 of you putting your names forward. Twelve members were selected to join Emily and Ian to form the SPFT:

- Dr. Carlos Bazan, assistant professor of civil engineering and engineering chair in entrepreneurship, Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science
- Tyson Bennet, sessional instructor, Faculty of Education; school principal with the NLESD
- Dr. Jan Buley, assistant professor, Faculty of Education
- Dr. Angie Clarke, director, Academic and Student Affairs, Marine Institute
- Dr. Majid Eghbali-Zarch, assistant professor, Faculty of Business Administration
- Penny Kennedy, officer, Campus Enforcement and Patrol
- Saranya Kumary, undergraduate student, Faculty of Science
- Keir McIsaac, international student recruitment officer, Office of the Registrar
- Dr. Paula Mendonça, director, Innovation and Entrepreneurship
- Ryan Murphy, PhD candidate (management of information systems), Faculty of Business Administration
- Dr. Delores Mullings, associate professor and interim associate dean (undergraduate), School of Social Work
- Dr. Boluwaji Ogunyemi, clinical assistant professor of medicine and assistant dean of social accountability, Faculty of Medicine

During the summer, we also issued a request for proposals to engage an expert higher education strategy consultant. Coming out of this process, Alex Usher, Higher Education Strategy Associates, was appointed. Alex quickly became an integral part of the team, playing a key role in guiding us through our strategic planning process. Sandy Brennan was also hired to assist the team in consultations. We thank her for her dedication and organization.

Beginning in September, we focused on planning a wide-ranging consultation process. Together we developed the approach to consultations, crafted guiding questions and developed our online survey tool. With a focus on engaging as many people as possible from across Memorial's campuses and communities, our approach was to come to you, engaging academic, administrative and support units; undergraduate and graduate students; alumni; donors; Senate; and the Board of Regents, in tailored consultation sessions.

What a time it has been! Beginning consultations on Oct. 21, 2020, the team has now conducted almost 60 sessions across our myriad stakeholder groups. These sessions have included over 1,000 participants, with more than 60 hours of data gathered. In parallel with the live sessions, we also launched our survey tool with the assistance and support of the

STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2026 UPDATE: WHAT WE HAVE HEARD TO DATE

Centre for Institutional Analysis through Qualtrics, receiving approximately 250 submissions to date.

This is a tremendous result. We are incredibly thankful for the participation, honesty, engagement and sincerity of over 1,000 participants.

As many of you will have experienced, at each session, members of the SPFT served as facilitators, note takers and transcribers documenting all that participants contributed – and you contributed a lot. Over the course of these consultations, and from the online survey, we captured thousands of insights, ideas, suggestions, priorities and concerns from individuals and groups across our diverse community. The SPFT has been busy organising these data into our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and thinking through vision and themes. We are excited to share our reflections and insights with you now.

A PAUSE FOR HONEST REFLECTION

While our consultations have shown the community to be fundamentally optimistic, hopeful, aspirational, and pointing to a vision of Memorial as the beating heart of an economically prosperous, socially resilient, culturally vibrant and inclusive province, across our consultations we heard of the challenges Memorial faces externally and internally. If we are to realize our aspirations, we recognize that these challenges must be confronted, addressed and resolved honestly and courageously.

In virtually every consultation session and survey response we heard of the resource constraints faced throughout Memorial. Crucial challenges revolve around critical financial situations, faculty and staff renewal, and infrastructure. The leitmotif of each is money. Following multiple years of funding cuts and an ongoing tuition freeze, the core mission of the university – its ability to deliver high quality academic programs and research – has been diminished and is under increasing threat. The community’s understanding around this is clear: (a) investment in Memorial University is essential to the province’s future prosperity; and (b) at the same time, we cannot rely on public funding to enable our academic mission. Time and again, participants highlighted the point that this situation is mission critical, particularly in light of the province’s economic outlook. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the decline of the oil and gas sector, reliance on a non-renewable resource-based economy, climate crisis and the need to shift to a green economy, have only inflamed this situation. Collectively, we also recognize Memorial’s commitment to help address these systemic threats.

Resource constraints have created immense frustration and exasperation (including calls for Memorial to thoughtfully sharpen its focus, to invest in areas of excellence and impact, and divest others) as well as the aspirations to engage a variety of revenue generating solutions. Suggestions included entrepreneurially mobilizing knowledge and infrastructure resources through public and private sector partnerships; increased industry partnerships particularly with respect to labour market demands; renewed and enhanced donor relations and fundraising; and more. Above all, the vast majority of participants stressed the need to end the tuition freeze that has been imposed on the university since the late 1990s. The overwhelming majority of individuals call for Memorial to gain the freedom to pursue a realistic tuition model that balances our real resource needs with accessibility to high quality education – underscoring the need to provide accessibility to students from disadvantaged, marginalized and vulnerable backgrounds.

While resource challenges – fundamentally financial – were consistently highlighted as the central restraint on Memorial, it was far from the only significant challenge described by the university community. Across most sessions the changing provincial demographic, primarily the declining population of future university-age students, was named as a significant threat to Memorial. With a low birthrate and high out-migration, forecasts indicate that over the next 15 years the number of 18-year-olds in Newfoundland and Labrador will drop by nearly 20 per cent. This decline in aspiring university students from the province requires Memorial to

STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2026 UPDATE: WHAT WE HAVE HEARD TO DATE

further diversify its student population, including efforts to increase enrolment of out-of-province and international students.

The university community advised that this is a complex challenge requiring the need to innovate student recruitment efforts; place significant emphasis on excellence in student experience and mental health supports; make substantial progress in Indigenization, equity, diversity and inclusion; revolutionize our communications to tell our success stories effectively and widely; build Memorial's brand at home and abroad; and engage in curricular innovation and access to meet the needs of a diversity of future learners. These challenges also connect back to revenue generation, with participants noting that increasing tuition will not address our financial issues if we have a declining student population. We must be a destination of choice for all our future learners, enhancing student services, experience and ultimately success.

While we have significant external challenges, we have also heard of our internal struggles. Throughout the consultation process, the university community has held a mirror up to itself recognizing we have cultural challenges that are manifested in our structures, processes and ways of working together. Though consultations were replete with aspirations and the assertion that we are a university of incredibly devoted and dedicated people, we collectively recognize that culturally we are resistant to change; risk-averse; conservative and traditional in our outlooks; and, more often than not, we default to gate-keeping, especially in our interactions with students.

These cultural characteristics manifest in our structures, and both academic and administrative processes. Repeatedly, we heard how Memorial is inordinately bureaucratic, to the point of paralysis. Consultations described extreme silos, unhealthy internal competition for scarce resources, a stark lack of knowledge and awareness of what is going on across the university, a deficit of collaboration and partnerships especially across campuses, duplication of activities, roles and mandates, and a lack of a coherent pan-university identity and vision. Put succinctly, many experience Memorial as a series of disparate parts - a university that is the sum of its parts, but not more.

We also have urgent and substantial work to do to realise our aspirations to be a place that lives equity, diversity and inclusion at our core, and continues to advance Indigenization.

We share this feedback with the Memorial community, not to discourage us from the work ahead, but to acknowledge that our future success requires us to collectively reflect upon our top strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in an honest, forthright manner. We must reflect this mirror back on ourselves, recognizing that we all have a responsibility to change, to act and be agents for change. While there is much to celebrate and build upon, there is challenging work ahead.

TOP STENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNTIES, THREATS

Embarking upon a strategic planning process during a global pandemic has provided us with unique views and insights into Memorial. In so many sessions the university's collective, coherent response to the COVID-19 pandemic was hailed as an example of what we can achieve when we truly work together in a culture of care, creativity, and aspiration. This is something to be celebrated.

STRENGTHS

In this regard, our response to the pandemic has highlighted some of Memorial's top strengths – resiliency, deeply-rooted care and concern for students, and the amazing capability and passion of dedicated faculty and staff to get what needs to be done, done. Our experience has also highlighted that while we are directly impacted and connected to global events, the uniqueness of our place offers distinct advantages that few other places enjoy.

Our strengths are thus deeply connected to our place. Our role as the only university within the province of Newfoundland and Labrador is one to which we intrinsically feel a deep connection. There is pride in working and contributing to the province through our work at Memorial. Our unique role shapes our commitment to students, communities, our multi-campus reach and the comprehensiveness of our program and degree offerings.

During consultations, we heard of many strengths such as our work in marine studies and ocean research; folklore; health sciences; our achievements in music and the arts; entrepreneurship; the important ongoing developments at the Labrador Institute; our Harlow campus presence; and our recent focus on Indigenization and reconciliation. Our research growth has been tremendous over the last decade and we now lead the Atlantic region in sponsored research income. Our students repeatedly show that they can compete and excel nationally and internationally; our graduates are equipped with a strong foundation to begin their careers with many programs (e.g. engineering, business) offering stellar cooperative education opportunities.

Employers spoke of the high calibre of our graduates provincially, nationally and internationally. Our international community of students, faculty and staff bring a vibrancy and global perspective that enriches the province. Our strengths are rooted within our place, yet we demonstrate time and time again that our place, Newfoundland and Labrador, is also greatly enriched by Memorial, the work we lead, and the people and alumni who are proud to be part of the Memorial community.

WEAKNESSES

Yet, we need to acknowledge that our reliance on our place can limit us. We do not have a cohesive understanding, nor have we clearly articulated, what our role in shaping the province and beyond, looks like. Our role as the only university in Newfoundland and Labrador is perhaps our biggest strength and yet our own internal weakness. Throughout consultations, we heard that we lack focus in our approach; that we limit our thinking to the provincial realm a little too often; that we can be complacent; that we lack both the competitive and innovative

STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2026 UPDATE: WHAT WE HAVE HEARD TO DATE

spirit necessary to propel us forward; and that work of engaging with communities and peoples of this vast province in respectful partnerships requires a deeper, more meaningful and ground-up commitment across Memorial.

We have also heard that we must challenge ourselves more. Our academic and administrative processes, structures, decision making and culture of risk-aversion hold us back. Navigating our services and finding information can be confusing for students, alumni and even ourselves. We operate within distinct silos, at times competing against each other not only for resources, but also in our roles and mandates. We lack a clear unifying vision that unites us while celebrating the diverse aspects of who we are. While we have recently made tangible steps towards Indigenization, much is still to be done here and with respect to equity, diversity and inclusion. We have responded swiftly during the pandemic; however, there is apprehension that we will revert back to our traditional ways of working and that these ways lack the innovation and nimbleness needed to operate at our best. Resoundingly, we heard that while our dedicated staff and faculty are one of our strengths, we need to enable ourselves in our work by removing barriers, reducing cumbersome processes and improving the way in which we collectively respect and collaborate with each other.

OPPORTUNITIES

The most consistent strategic opportunity that emerged from the consultations has to do with remote, asynchronous and community delivery of programming. While there is little appetite to replace existing programming with this type of education, one of the realizations of the pandemic is that it is possible to extend current programming to new and more diverse learners through this method, and also that Memorial has real expertise in this area thanks to the Centre for Innovation in Teaching and Learning.

The advantage of widening outreach in this manner touches on three other major opportunities. The first has to do with continuing to attract more international students. As our growth to date has shown, this enhances the university in so many ways from diverse learning and research environments, to revenue to immigration for the province. Combining remote and in-person opportunities for international students may create more viable pathways for these students.

The second has to do with reaching learners in all parts of the province and helping provide greater opportunities for students at campuses outside St. John's. The latter seems particularly important given the emphasis placed during the consultations on collaboration and integration across campuses, and leveraging these possibilities to advance learning and research locally and internationally.

Finally, widening outreach may also play into a third opportunity; namely, the development of new programs such as micro-credentials, which could be delivered both in person and remotely. Within an expansion of the types of learning opportunities, we also heard the need to re-imagine who our learners are, recognizing there are large constituencies of learners

beyond the traditional categories and demographics that engage in bachelor, masters and doctoral programs.

Another significant opportunity, which received frequent mention, centred on issues relating to the green economy. Partly, this is about greening the operations of the institution, but it is also about developing new learning and research programs for a post-carbon economy. This is seen by many not just as a moral imperative, but also a way of dealing with one of the largest social, cultural, economic and technological shifts of the 21st century, perhaps in human history.

THREATS

Two key threats were fairly clear from the outset. The first is that the university is highly dependent on revenue from a government, which is itself in deep financial difficulty, and years more fiscal squeeze are in store for Memorial unless alternative sources of funding are found. The second is demography and the reality that there are ever-fewer young Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to educate, which indirectly creates still more financial pressures. These two threats put a premium on diversification of revenue sources, though some indicated wariness about becoming over-reliant on tuition, particularly from international students.

But these were far from the only threats that were on consultees' minds. Some worried about the institution's poor reputation within the province where the university is seen by some as the cheap or default option for students. Outside Newfoundland and Labrador, people are concerned by a perception that Memorial is simply a university for the province and hence not very engaged in broader issues. Here too, comparatively low tuition was seen as indicating low quality. These perceptions in turn contribute to another threat, that the university has increasing difficulty attracting high-quality faculty, in addition to the lack of faculty renewal resulting from fiscal challenges.

A final perceived threat was a mirror-image of a key opportunity, how the university will choose to deal with the issues of climate change. A number of consultees believed that the institution is too focussed on oil and gas and that this puts the institution at a disadvantage.

MOVING FORWARD

As we look towards the coming decade, if Memorial is to be the beating heart of an economically prosperous, socially resilient, culturally vibrant and inclusive Newfoundland and Labrador, it needs to fulfill three key roles. Specifically, we feel, it needs to be:

A University for Our Province. Memorial is a university *for* Newfoundland and Labrador, and we need to help lead it to new levels of prosperity and success. The people of Memorial are fiercely loyal to the mandate of service to the province. The meaning of that service needs to be better defined and articulated. Here we believe our work should focus on economic prosperity, social resiliency, cultural vibrancy and inclusivity. At the same time, the way we

service different parts of the province needs to be modernized and improved in various ways. Memorial is a university *for* Newfoundland and Labrador, and we need to play a pivotal role in our future prosperity and success.

A University for Our World. Memorial is a university *for* our world, bringing the world to the province, and the province to the world. We live in a world of global challenges, and Memorial needs to be the place where Newfoundland and Labrador contributes solutions to those challenges. Memorial University faces a bleak future if it is *only* a university for Newfoundland and Labrador. For it to retain the capacity to serve the province, it needs to have much wider horizons in terms of innovating programs, developing institutional partnerships, advancing research growth and collaborating with others around the globe. By contributing to global challenges, we contribute to our provincial challenges. By contributing to our provincial challenges, we contribute to global challenges.

A University for Our Future. Memorial is a university *for* our future, an innovation and creativity engine, literally inventing futures. One of the challenges of being a provincial university is not being limited by the province as it currently exists. We must be future focused. Memorial will fail if its research services to the province are predominantly oil and fish. The province is at an inflection point, where it needs to find new partnerships, entrepreneurs and industries if it is to thrive. Memorial needs to be a leader in this. As far as the province is concerned, it needs to help invent our future.

Fulfilling these roles is a substantial task. The challenge ahead of us requires us to be bold, think innovatively and challenge ourselves openly yet respectfully. We must come together and use our collective expertise, across administration and academic disciplines, to take risks. To achieve success for our students, and in our teaching and learning, research and engagement endeavours, we must first strengthen our foundations. We must act now to harness the power of our people, streamline and improve our infrastructure, and actively and collectively work to shift to a culture of connectedness and openness.

As we have heard a vision of Memorial as the beating heart of an economically prosperous, socially resilient, culturally vibrant and inclusive Newfoundland and Labrador, and the emergent themes of being a university for the province, world and future, we have also heard the priorities upon which we need to focus to address our challenges.

A culture of listening, service, and adaptability. Memorial's future will depend crucially on two things: Its ability to develop beneficial social, cultural and economic partnerships across the province; and its ability to find new sources of revenue. Both of these things require a change of culture, one that prioritizes listening to partners and learners, being able to adapt to meet their needs, and providing excellence in experience and service to all. It means being a more outward-facing culture, one that does not allow established practice to get in the way of prioritizing the support of our students and partners.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2026 UPDATE: WHAT WE HAVE HEARD TO DATE

A sense of connectedness and openness. A continued shift towards a culture of connectedness and openness is foundational to our ability to act as a single, cohesive unit rather than a disparate group of faculties and units. Honest dialogue on our challenges and opportunities, respectful collaboration between faculties, departments, units and campuses, and an openness to work and engage with each other differently will foster trust and innovation across units.

The power of our people. Our faculty and staff must be enabled to do their best, to feel supported in their work, empowered to make decisions and changes that move us forward, and be encouraged to take risks. Finding ways to empower ourselves, be change agents, share perspectives and respect our contributions is core to meeting the challenges ahead. Our workforce must be reflective of diverse backgrounds, expertise and identities. We must truly commit to being a place where all peoples thrive, where we create and enable brave spaces, and where we celebrate each of our unique contributions and expertise.

Improved infrastructure and structures. Our spaces and structures impact our work and how we work. Conversations, relationships and collaboration opportunities are shaped by our physical, virtual and operational infrastructure. Physical infrastructure that purposefully reflects the changing nature of work, climate, accessibility and sustainability considerations, and that contributes rather than detracts from our pride, is needed. Our technology infrastructure can equip us as we modernize the ways in which we work, and it must be used to support us in a streamlined and effective manner. Our operational infrastructure, comprised of our structures and processes, must enable us rather than frustrate, confine and divide us. Work to innovate and modernize our processes, reduce bureaucracy and duplication across all campuses, and clarify roles and departmental mandates, is urgently needed to focus and align.

OUR FINAL THOUGHTS... FOR NOW

We share these preliminary thoughts, reflections and findings with you openly and with a sense of realism yet hopefulness. We understand the challenges are significant and we hear and agree whole-heartedly with you that there are no easy or quick solutions. Yet, we have seen and heard firsthand your passion, commitment and dedication to our place and our university. It has been humbling and a true honour to connect with you all and hear your aspirations for our future.

For now, we reiterate our intentions, hope and ask. We have intended here to challenge and test bold visions and directions with openness and an honest recognition of our challenges. We hope that we have heard you well and that you have found yourself in what we are reflecting back to you. Finally, our ask is for you to tell us what we got right, what we missed, what we got wrong and what needs to be improved.

Together we are building our new strategic plan. Together, we are inventing our future.