

Email to employees

Date: April 14, 2020

Subject: The Road to Recovery

Colleagues:

It was just over a year ago that we finalized our new Strategic Plan. Its release followed six months of thought-provoking dialogue and debate that challenged our community to dream big, be bold and capture our shared vision for the future of post-secondary education.

Presciently, long before any hint of a pandemic was known, we collectively determined that:

- we're living in a world of unprecedented change and disruptive innovation;
- the future of work will require people to adapt, re-gear and seize emerging opportunities;
- learners require discipline-specific skills, emotional intelligence and entrepreneurial capacity to ensure a self-sustaining future; and
- Sheridan must reshape itself to prepare people for a world of uncertainty.

Galvanizing Education for (a significantly more) Complex World

Many experts have suggested that we're living through the biggest economic threat since the Great Depression and the most significant disruption ever to the delivery of post-secondary education. There is no consensus on when learning – and life in general – will return to 'normal' and whether or not the old 'normal' is achievable or even fully desirable.

In this context, it is imperative that we contemplate lessons from our pandemic response so that we emerge stronger from this crisis. To kickstart that work, a taskforce team has been assembled to contemplate strategies and promising practice models for academic innovation that are rooted in creativity and entrepreneurship. The team will:

- identify the tools and practices that enabled a quick pivot to alternate delivery across our collegium to learn what we did well and how we can best leverage existing human, technological and learning resources;
- examine how we can infuse creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship into our Strategic Enrolment Management Plan to increase our market share, enhance our reputation and drive financial recovery;
- determine the systems, processes, and cultural norms that may prevent Sheridan from being the most innovative, responsive and nimble postsecondary institution in the sector; and
- contemplate how our recovery plan can harness the Sheridan Factor skills and competencies while respecting the three tenets of our Academic Plan: quality, character and accountability.

This work represents a slight repositioning of the Galvanizing Education Hub that was promised as part of our plan's Year One Objectives. The core team will be facilitated by Amanda Pike, our Chief Change Officer, and report to me, the Provost & Vice-President, Academic (Melanie Spence-Ariemma) and the Vice-President, Student Experience & Enrolment Management (Carol Altilia). I wanted to keep the team small and focused because we must be nimble; current members include:

- John Helliker, Dean, Innovation
- Renee Deveraux, Director of Entrepreneurship and Changemaking
- Catherine Hale, Director, Creative Campus
- Cherie Werhun, Strategic Lead, S-Factor Framework
- Janet Shuh, Associate Dean, Educational Development & Technology
- Jock Phippen, AVP, Enrolment Innovation

The team is meeting for the first time today; included on the agenda is when and how they will solicit community input. Consistent with how planning and decision-making at Sheridan happens normally, you can expect to be kept updated over the weeks and months ahead.

The Student Experience

Over the past month it has become clear that the pandemic is reshaping how we live, learn, and work. Recovery in this new context will require us to rethink how we can best meet the expectations and preferences of our learners. Fortunately, our Sheridan 2024 plan already committed us to re-examine the student experience, building on our decades-long commitment to fostering student success. Those efforts are manifest in re-imagined opportunities for work-integrated learning, the development of new credentials and the use of new technology to enhance service delivery.

Thriving in this new context, however, will rest on more than just digital transformation. Rather, it's becoming increasingly clear that we will need to facilitate and navigate organizational and cultural transformation that is *supported* by technology. Without question, this constitutes a huge shift and we don't have the luxury of time to do it gradually. It's a call to action for every employee to rethink what we do and how we do it, always in the service of students and learning.

It's important to recognize and celebrate that change is already well underway as a consequence and response to the pandemic; these examples attest to our capacity to adapt and pivot. Most notably, faculty members and our Centre for Teaching and Learning partnered to retool, rethink and reorganize over 3,000 courses for remote delivery between March 16-20, 2020. To foster and maintain engagement, a Caring Community Network is making proactive check-in calls to learners. Our student services have shifted to alternative formats with staff working remotely to support students online, via chat and over the phone. And, an Online Learning and Teaching Guide was created by the Centre for Teaching and Learning and Library

Learning Services that offers the tools, practices and examples to inspire a remote approach that is relevant and relational.

Mindset Matters

I know that these are trying times. Temporary layoffs for some of our part-time colleagues and forced vacations are uncomfortable and difficult for all of us. I can only reiterate that the challenges we are facing as a consequence of the pandemic are very real. We are facing unprecedented uncertainty with respect to spring/summer and fall enrolment, which impacts our financial health. News that the number of COVID-19 cases continues to rise in Canada and that the Province is extending our State of Emergency can amplify our restlessness and feel daunting.

As we navigate this time of uncertainty, I hope that you find comfort and reassurance – as I do – in Sheridan’s mission and purpose. Each of us are being called upon to embrace the challenges that lie ahead, believe in ourselves and our teams, and focus on the factors within our scope of control. Every day, every member of our community contributes to bringing Sheridan’s strategic plan, enablers and first principles to life. This fuels me with resolve.

Pulling together in this coordinated effort will ensure that Sheridan emerges from the pandemic with its reputation for trailblazing and championing the transformative power of postsecondary education intact. That will ensure our relevance and sustainability for the long-term.

Sincerely,

Janet Morrison
President and Vice Chancellor