

# **Concordia today and tomorrow: What I heard**

## **Consultations with the CUE community**

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One of the objectives of my plan for the first 100 days of my presidency (and beyond) was to listen. To facilitate that I held formal and informal consultations with groups and individual members of the Concordia community, including students, faculty, and staff. These were timed so that everyone who wanted to be involved could have input. I wanted to provide an opportunity for us to articulate our identity; how we view Concordia today and what we want to retain and change moving into the future. This will inform our upcoming academic planning process, as well as providing us with the basis to construct our collective story. Not surprisingly, I found that Concordia is and will continue to be a vibrant, caring, rigorous place. The following is what I heard, based on notes taken and my own recollection. In an effort to craft a summary not everything that was said is included below, however, that does not mean that it is being ignored. I would be appreciative of any further comments or corrections from the Concordia community with respect to the narrative presented here.

### **Who are we now, in 2017?**

Concordia University of Edmonton is a well-respected university with a clear vision. We are financially responsible, nimble, and bursting with potential. We value and exemplify transparency, collaboration, innovation, and resourcefulness.

The Concordia of 2017 is a small but mighty community, and the value and importance of our close-knit community is widely recognized. CUE has built a culture of learning. It is variously described as a friendly, comfortable, vibrant, and exciting small university. Contributing to this are our accessible, approachable, and helpful faculty, staff, and administration. Students are attracted to and come here for our excellent programs, but perhaps stay because of the small classes they encounter, the focus on students, the expert knowledge of our faculty, the general ethos of caring, and the interdisciplinary cooperation that they discover once they arrive here.

Concordia is also an increasingly diverse and inclusive university, respectful of people of all religious backgrounds, cultures, genders, sexual orientation, abilities, and viewpoints. We are open to and accepting of everyone. We are also considerably more international than we have been in the past, welcoming students from all over the world to study here.

There are, however, some areas that require attention. The changes at Concordia have been largely positive, but we have experienced the inevitable growing pains that come with transition. The health of our programs also spans a spectrum, with some growing and others struggling to remain viable. We are often

also misunderstood (are you still a high school?) or not well known in the community (a hidden gem). Finally, our students want a pub on campus.

### **What do we want to look like in the future?**

Concordia University of Edmonton wants to become Canada's preeminent small university. Our recent name change and changes to our Mission and Vision reflect a different path forward, one that is public and focused on growth and quality (to be measured in traditional and non-traditional ways). We want to be recognized across Canada as a leading small university for the distinctive and exceptional experience we provide, for our solid liberal arts education, and for our professional and 'boutique' programs. We want to be a destination university of first choice that provides students with what they need to launch into the next phase of their lives following graduation, that provides them with opportunities for even further growth while they are with us, and that engages with them as alumni once they leave.

In providing that distinctive education we want to offer students creative opportunities to do double degrees, explore connections with business and industry, and to complete degrees within three years should they so choose (a competitive advantage). We want to continue to offer and develop new, unique, and marketable programs that take advantage of the latest in pedagogical and technological advances.

We also want to retain the best of Concordia from 2017, and from our heritage. We should remain small (under 4000 students), and we should work especially hard to remain the caring, inclusive community of learners that we are so proud of. Indeed, we want to become even more accessible and inclusive. We want to be an enjoyable place to work and study, with an eye to maintaining a healthy university culture. We no longer want to be Edmonton's best-kept secret or to be misunderstood. We want to be visible, leveraging our expert faculty, student, and alumni accomplishments to appear regularly in the media and in public discourse. We also need to continue to be a nimble university, being ready to take on sensible opportunities as they present, or as we pursue them.

The Concordia of the future should also be a more scholarly institution, leveraging local, national, and international collaborations to enhance our research and scholarly activities. Students should be involved in our research and innovation efforts, with our scholarly faculty promoting external research connections. We need to further develop a sense of pride in our scholarly accomplishments.

### **What opportunities and challenges might we face?**

Some of the challenges that CUE might face in the future include our capacity to succinctly articulate who we are, and correct public misconceptions about our university (through management of marketing messages), managing our growing infrastructure needs (parking, buildings, residences, food services), and the receipt of stable and adequate funding. There are also some potential challenges relating to students, such as our capacity to continue to provide adequate student supports, a focus on robust and innovative programming, a continued caring context, and our ability to attract the very best students to our programs.

A number of opportunities were identified specific to CUE becoming a public institution, in particular the potential for such an eventuality to enhance our access to funding, improve our reputation, and advance our research and internationalization potential. In addition, the recent changes at Concordia provide opportunities to support a more diverse student body, and move outside of our comfort zone while continuing to appeal to our traditional stakeholder base and alumni. Our size also provides us with the opportunity to further engage in interdisciplinary programming and to enhance our focus on graduate school and career opportunities for our students once they have completed that programming. Our current position provides greater opportunities to reach out to the local and international community to form teaching and research partnerships.

### **Next steps**

Having outlined 'what I heard' in this document I will provide the Concordia community with a couple of weeks to ruminate on whether or not this is an accurate reflection of what was said. Feedback is welcome! Following that, I will work on a high level document that articulates where we see ourselves as we move into the future, and I will share that with the Concordia community for further feedback. I will also work on a very brief 'elevator speech' that our community can use to clearly articulate who we are at Concordia and where we are headed. This is, in my view, a concrete first step to becoming Canada's preeminent small university.