Sustainability Agenda

In my first GAA address to the campus community I stated that “universities well positioned for the future also place a high priority on sustainability.” Sustainability isn’t merely another problem to be tackled or solved by innovative research and study (though it does deserve a large amount of research attention); it needs to be foundational to many of the decisions made within the university.

The significance of sustainability is why I ensured it was one of the key principles in our mission, vision, and values document and a pillar of our University’s strategic plan. To support sustainability’s presence in those crucial documents, I established the first President’s Sustainability Council three years ago. In reviewing my own goals and progress in this area, I have realized that there is a need to bring together the many initiatives already underway on campus, identify where areas of improvement may lie and then build a cohesive strategy to better foster the growth of a culture of sustainability throughout all areas of campus life including: academic programming, research, operations, governance and community engagement.

To this end, I’ve appointed Irena Creed, Associate Vice-President Research, former professor in and previous executive director of SENS, and former CRC in watershed science, as a Special Advisor to the President on Sustainability. Dr. Creed, along with staff from my office and across campus, will be tasked with the development of a comprehensive sustainability strategic plan for the University of Saskatchewan.

Even in the absence of a comprehensive plan, there are many activities and initiatives that fall within the scope of sustainability at USask. Academically, we are home to a School of Environment and Sustainability, the Global Institute for Water Security, the Sustainability Education Research Institute, and numerous undergraduate programs with a direct and indirect focus on sustainability issues. Administratively, our Office of Sustainability ensures our facilities are built and our lands are maintained with sustainability in mind, offers funding to environmental initiatives on campus, and promotes sustainability throughout campus. My office and the USSU continue to fulfill the commitments of an MoU signed three years ago that annually distributes funding to student applications for sustainability-related initiatives.

Despite this considerable list of work, I feel it is important to make a comprehensive statement about the University of Saskatchewan’s commitment to sustainability, a statement I hope to make with this plan and the actions resulting from it. Both I and Dr. Creed look forward to engaging with and reporting back to this Council over the coming months as we progress with the plan’s development.
Anniversary of the Canadian Light Source

I was proud to be part of the 20th anniversary celebrations of the Canadian Light Source (CLS) Synchrotron this past month. Construction of the synchrotron facility on the USask campus began in 1999 and its official opening was held Oct. 22, 2004. Since then, thousands of scientists from across Canada and around the world have come to the CLS to conduct experiments that could not be done elsewhere in Canada.

This unique-in-Canada research centre arose from an unprecedented level of collaboration among governments, universities, and industry in Canada, and represents the largest single investment in Canadian science infrastructure. Strongly endorsed two decades ago by many other universities across Canada and by an international scientific panel, the CLS has made possible cutting-edge research that benefits human and animal health, agriculture, advanced materials, and the environment. For USask’s research community, it has helped us be the university the world needs.

Part of the anniversary celebration involved highlighting a few of the remarkable projects undertaken at Canada’s only synchrotron:

- a study of bone and teeth from Franklin Expedition crew members that showed that lead poisoning, long assumed to have caused their deaths, was in fact not a major contributor;
- use of synchrotron-enabled science to confirm the effective performance of an engineered tailings management facility built by Orano at its McClean Lake, Sask. uranium processing mill; and
- discovery of a compound that prevents the formation of the plaques in the brain associated with Alzheimer’s, opening the door to new treatment for a disease that affects over 747,000 people in Canada alone.

In addition to cutting-edge research, the CLS has helped to train thousands of students from around the world. Over 3,000 scientists and 1,200 students from 40 countries and 300 institutions have used the CLS in the last 20 years.

Legacy of Eli Bornstein

The Structurist is an international art journal, founded in 1960 at the University of Saskatchewan by Eli Bornstein, former head of the Department of Art and Art History. This summer, Dr. Bornstein launched the 60th anniversary edition of the publication, making it the longest-running art journal in Canadian history.

As one of the early examples of the interdisciplinary work at the University of Saskatchewan, the Structurist is a publication that combines processes of creation in Art, Architecture, and Nature. It focuses upon ideas in architecture and the arts – including painting, sculpture, design,
photography, music and literature – their histories and relationships to each other, as well as to science, technology, and nature.

Dr. Bornstein, a celebrated artist in his own right, combined the launch of the 60th anniversary edition with a show of his work at the Remai Modern Gallery. I was extremely pleased to be able to support Dr. Bornstein in both endeavours. Dr. Bornstein and the Structurist are shining examples of USask creativity, determination and influence.