Welcome back to a new academic year

As we embark on the beginning of a new academic year, I would like to welcome Council members back for what is sure to be a memorable fall term. Reflecting on the past six months, our world has changed in ways we could never have imagined. And in response to these changes, we have remained flexible, innovative and unwavering in our commitment to ensure we advance our teaching, learning and research mission. I am confident we will successfully meet the challenges that this unique fall term will also bring.

We have made significant changes to ensure the safety of our students, staff and faculty, while creating innovative new ways to begin the academic year. The safety and well-being of our campus communities is our first priority, and we will continue to work closely with public health officials as we move through the pandemic. The changes have been significant, as have the challenges, but I have also been inspired and encouraged by how our students, our faculty, and our staff have come together with determination and dedication, patience and vision, to embrace new ways of teaching, learning, and mentoring during this global pandemic. We are beginning the fall term in a time of transition as we continue to adjust to the realities of the pandemic, but we remain a campus community committed to inclusivity, diversity and equality.

I am extremely proud of how our campus community has responded during these extraordinary times and know we will continue to do so during this fall term. That support will enable students to focus on their commitment to education, learning and discovery, and to follow their curiosity and their passions with courage and conviction.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at USask

In my last report to Council in June, I noted that I was preparing an institutional statement and actions on racism that would be released within days of my report. As I acknowledged in this statement, racism and discrimination are experienced by members of the USask community. Although we proclaim that we will not tolerate discriminatory or racist behavior in our teaching, learning and research spaces, those harmful behaviors nonetheless operate at our university in many forms, as they do in organizations and institutions across this country and around the world.

As Black Lives Matter protests locally and globally have shown, words alone are an insufficient response. Words can be a public acknowledgement of the need for action and a commitment to action. But racism and discrimination require all of us to act, all of the time, a point I made in my June 1 statement. Acting does not necessarily mean just "calling out" unacceptable behaviour and attitudes, although that must continue where it’s happening, and begin where it’s not. Acting calls for the dismantling of institutional structures, policies and processes that
contribute to inequalities faced by marginalized groups. Acting also means being well informed by history and current realities; and asking questions that open new ways of thinking through research and learning. It means challenging the status quo and changing our opinions. And it means leading and contributing to the discussions that universities are ideally suited to provide.

One of the key actions for guiding our continuing efforts to dismantle racism and discrimination is the **Equity Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy and Action Plan**, which faculty, staff and students have been working to develop over the past year. The EDI strategy and action plan will demonstrate the university’s commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity through specific and measurable goals and actions that align to the *University’s Mission, Vision, and Values* and the *University Plan*. We have been working closely with the advisory and working groups throughout the development process to ensure there is clarity of purpose between the policy, strategy and action plan. The policy will serve as an anchor for this and other EDI work on campus. I am pleased to report that this policy will soon be ready to come before our three governing bodies, including Council.

**The gifting of the Indigenous Strategy**

An extremely important milestone for our institution will be realized this month when the Indigenous Strategy will be gifted to the University of Saskatchewan by Indigenous leaders and communities. This strategy, intended to intersect with the EDI Strategy and Action Plan and the University’s 2025 Plan, calls for “meaningful and respectful action to advance Indigenization and support transformative decolonization leading to reconciliation.”

As recently noted in a statement by Dr. Jackie Ottmann, Vice-Provost Indigenous Engagement, “The Indigenous Strategy is a roadmap to right relations and will benefit the whole university as the Gift requires our campus community to tend to its care and evidenced life within all our spaces and places. This *nayâhcikan* (sacred bundle), Indigenous Strategy, provides hope for a stronger future together not only for our generation, but also for the future of our youth into the next seven generations not yet born and beyond.”

I look forward to participating in the **virtual ceremony on September 24th** and encourage Council members to attend virtually as well.

**Prince Albert USask Campus Virtual Opening**

A virtual celebration on September 15th will mark the ‘soft’ opening of the new Prince Albert USask campus. The two-story, 110,000-square foot campus has been renovated to include classrooms, offices and lab facilities; and will bring together the university’s educational programming currently taking place at sites across the city. The new space will accommodate students in the Colleges of Agriculture and Bioresources, Arts and Science, Education, Kinesiology and Nursing, and the Edwards School of Business. Additionally, students will also
be able to complete one year of study towards: dentistry, medicine, nutrition, pharmacy, physical therapy and veterinary medicine.

USask has a long history of being present in the north—running academic programs and conducting research with communities. The new campus, along with the development of a northern strategy, reaffirms the university’s commitment to Indigenous and northern education. During the 2018/2019 academic year, more than 410 students in the colleges of arts and science, nursing, and medicine took USask classes in Prince Albert. Of those students, 55 per cent were Indigenous.

Due to COVID 19 protocols in place for all USask campuses, in-person access to the new campus will be limited. A grand opening event will be planned for a future date when it is once again safe to gather in person.

USask Science facilities receive $77.5M in CFI funding

Over the summer, two of Canada’s top science facilities at USask were awarded a total of more than $77.5M. The Canadian Light Source (CLS) synchrotron and SuperDARN (Super Dual Auroral Radar Network) Canada were awarded the funding through the Canada Foundation for Innovation’s (CFI) Major Science Initiatives Fund, which ensures Canada’s large, national research facilities have the support needed to operate and stay on the leading edge of research. Earlier this spring, the federal government announced $11.3 million from the same round of CFI funding for USask’s Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization—International Vaccine Centre (VIDO-InterVac), a world leader in developing vaccines and technologies against infectious diseases. Both VIDO-InterVac and the CLS are undertaking critically important research to combat the COVID-19 global pandemic.