

August 2007

President David Naylor
Simcoe Hall
University of Toronto

Dear David,

Thank you for sharing *Towards 2030*. My colleagues and I at the School of Continuing Studies (SCS) have spent significant time discussing this thought-provoking document.

In our conversations we have returned time and again to the “essential” question with which you conclude: “How can we ensure that the University of Toronto’s third century is even more successful than this one has been?” In this letter I set forth and describe the five broad ways my colleagues and I believe SCS can contribute to our university’s thriving evolution.

Lifelong Learning and Public Prosperity

Before I delve into details, I will briefly establish a frame of reference for the remarks that follow.

In the World Economic Forum’s 2006 ranking of global competitiveness, Canada slipped from 13th to 16th place. The same report also noted that our country’s productivity trails that of other industrialized countries, a conclusion echoed recently by the Ontario Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity and Economic Progress.

According to the federally-funded Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), however, a solution to these shortcomings resides in high-quality adult learning. Extensive research has proven that adult learning “enriches personal development, economic opportunity, and civic engagement, and has a positive impact on individuals and communities, as well as on the nation.” Therefore, Paul Cappon, the president of CCL, contends that now is the time to “take action to both broaden and deepen the scope and potential of lifelong learning for Canadians.” That view is in keeping with Dean Roger Martin’s observation that “investments in education, training, and specialized skills upgrading have among the highest pay-off of any investment government can make in improving the microeconomic environment for business.”

For our part in helping to address these challenges, SCS adheres to a vision of being “the benchmark of excellence in continuing education at leading universities in North America.” This expansive view derives in large measure from the pride we take in being part of a 126-year history of lifelong learning at one of the world’s great public universities. We are passionate about working with partners throughout the U of T to ensure the courses and programs we deliver provide, in your words, a “transformative educational experience” that contributes to the social and economic development of adult learners and the societies they create.

Towards 2030 at the School of Continuing Studies

Having set the context for our work, in what follows I discuss five interdependent ways that my colleagues and I believe SCS can help to create a made-at-U of T century that surpasses even the immense achievements of the previous two. In each case, we have attempted to follow your lead in *Towards 2030*; that is, to “think big” and consider broad strategies that draw on current strengths and that look to creating future capacities and pathways.

Intra-federation Partnership

Working with our U of T partners to expand adults’ access to the highest quality lifelong learning is our proposed mode of engagement. It is the keystone of our present and projected efforts.

As you note in your planning document, the University’s disaggregated structure has transformed our vast institution into “navigable neighbourhoods” for students. The colleges and federated universities have done estimable work in developing unique characters that, in the main, serve students well through the creation of distinct organizational characters and programming.

Looking to find the ideal balance between disaggregation and unity, we believe SCS has an important role to play in coordinating the University’s extensive range of continuing education opportunities. Given our considerable sector expertise we are well positioned to assist other U of T providers in their efforts – from program planning to marketing to delivery. Already, for instance, we have forged a collaborative alliance with the Faculty of Medicine, to help expand public education offerings.

Encouraging the integration, strategic alignment, and complementarity of U of T’s continuing education efforts will, we believe, generate an economy of scale capable of realizing significant quality benefits. This is one of the exciting prospects we see when we set our sights towards 2030.

Internationalization – At Home and Abroad

Over the last year and a half, my colleagues and I have renewed the School’s emphasis on designing and delivering programs for international students. The most visible sign of our success in this regard is our award-winning English Language Program (ELP), which continues to serve the needs of learners by giving them access to the finest language instructors and most effective curricula.

In a concrete way, the ELP speaks to the “two Gs” you mention in *Towards 2030*. Traditionally, the program has attracted men and women from around the world; increasingly, we are finding ways to serve the learning needs of people resident in the GTA. Our participation in UTSC’s Greenpath program, for instance, highlights our dedication both to the kind of intra-federation partnership I discussed above and to helping to prepare international students for their studies at U of T.

In your planning document you ask, “What are the barriers to international student enrolment growth and how can we surmount them?” Recognizing that there is no one solution, my colleagues and I nevertheless see our work – in particular the ELP and our increasing business offerings tailored to internationally educated professionals (more on that below) – as focal gateways for international students to begin long-term relationships with U of T.

Public Partnerships

Successfully addressing the specialized educational requirements of organizations and industries requires sustained dialogue with an array of public partners. Over the past 12 months SCS has begun to devote significant resources to this endeavour.

A recent sign that we are on the right track was the School’s receipt, in June 2007, of the Canadian Council on Learning’s “Sharing the Flame” award for excellence in adult learning. Specifically, this award recognized the value to learners and society at large of our Certificate in Canadian Business Management Essentials, the only university-based business program taught entirely in Cantonese.

Launched in fall 2006, this certificate has surpassed our enrolment expectations and has garnered positive reviews from students and Toronto’s Chinese community. In addition to the essential contribution it makes in aiding members of that community to succeed in business here in Canada, this certificate testifies to the vital role SCS plays in forging partnerships between the University and external groups.

Indeed, this program came about because of SCS’s gateway nature. A few years ago, Louis Cheng, the president of Sing Tao Newspapers Canada (part-owned by Torstar), completed some of our courses. He was so impressed with the quality of our programming and instructors that he approached us about the possibility of developing a certificate aimed at giving internationally educated Cantonese-speaking professionals a thorough understanding of Canadian business practices. My colleagues and I recognized the potential in this partnership and developed curricula accordingly. Planning is now underway for a parallel Mandarin certificate.

Public partnerships that have their *raison d’être* in a commitment to serving the “two-Gs” ought, we believe, to be a major focus for SCS moving forward. Our local communities are increasingly globalized. As a result, when we position U of T as a learning partner with resident groups of newcomers – including many highly skilled foreign educated professionals – we are simultaneously associating it with the international networks in which they are highly active. Indeed, as a number of students in the Certificate in Canadian Business Management Essentials told us, they intend not only to apply what they have learned to their work in this country but also back in China when they do business there with Canadian firms.

Alumni Relationships and Support

In *Towards 2030* you observe that “the post-secondary educational system will be responding province-wide to increasing participation rates.” One of the manifestations of this trend will, no doubt, be a return for further education by U of T alumni. SCS can play a dynamic role in helping these motivated people advance their knowledge and skills at the same time as they deepen their connections to their alma mater.

To this end, a year ago we launched the School’s first Young Alumni Program. This initiative offers one free SCS course to every U of T alumnus during the year following their graduation. Already, 175 alumni have taken us up on this offer and we anticipate cultivating additional relationships as the program becomes better known.

Further evidence of the benefits of supporting alumni appears in the case of Marina Nemat, a graduate of SCS’s Certificate in Creative Writing and a Women’s Studies research assistant at U of T. A refugee from Iran who suffered terrible brutalities while incarcerated in Evin prison, through the courses she took with the School, Marina developed the literary skills necessary to tell her story. As a material demonstration of our commitment to our alumni’s success, SCS proudly hosted the official launch of Marina’s memoir, *Prisoner of Tehran* (published by Penguin in April 2007). Marina has now been taken up by Indigo Books & Music CEO Heather Reisman who, like us, is working hard to promote this talented new writer for a worldwide audience.

Looking ahead to 2030, we see these sorts of opportunities for alumni support and cultivation as critical in our effort to strengthen U of T’s third century. Standing tall among our efforts in this regard will be finding ways, as our peer institutions in the United States and the United Kingdom are doing, to answer the call for ongoing learning among the growing cohort of later-life learners (many of whom are and will be U of T graduates).

E-learning

Time and again, we hear from students that e-learning ought to support and be a part of SCS’s courses. Currently, however, the School lags a little behind continuing education providers at other eminent universities in that regard. To ensure we meet the needs of all learners – both in the GTA and well beyond – we need significantly to develop our e-learning capacity.

E-learning will give SCS a more robust means of bringing the world to our University – of fulfilling the promise of internationalization. It will, in short, permit us to be more innovative, responsive, and nimble in our programming and its delivery. This is why we strongly support the e-learning component of lifelong learning as U of T prepares for its next hundred years of educational brilliance.

Final Thoughts

Superior lifelong learning is a critical element of every top-tier university. It adds to those universities’ abilities to contribute to individual, public, and economic well-being. Done right, it

raises their profile on the international stage and makes them global contributors to the creation and export of essential knowledge.

Our vision for SCS's role in U of T's third century is enthusiastic and comprehensive. We see the School as a self-funded, income-generating division, one that collaborates closely with partners within and without the University in order to enhance the student experience in its myriad facets.

I hope, David, that this short response to has given you a snapshot of the enthusiasm my colleagues and I feel for some of the roles SCS can play in the *Towards 2030* universe at U of T. I hope, too, that we will have opportunity in the months ahead to discuss these and other topics.

Sincerely,

Marilynn Booth, Director
University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies