

President's Newsletter



It has long been my practice to write a President's Newsletter as a way of communicating directly with faculty, staff and students. Therefore I am pleased to provide my first Newsletter at MacEwan. My intention is to write a Newsletter every two months, except for the period from April to August. While I will from time to time offer my own personal views, the Newsletter is for the most part intended to advise the University community on major institutional developments.

Let me begin, by expressing my thanks for the very warm welcome extended to my wife Terry and me by the MacEwan community. The welcome we have received has been singularly gracious, and confirms the wisdom of our decision to come to MacEwan, and, of course, to return to Alberta.

Getting to know the MacEwan community

September brings a sense of new beginning as students return for the fall semester. It has always been a very special time for me, and it is especially so this year, being my first academic year at MacEwan. I was very pleased last week to participate in a number of kick-off events for the year, in particular the New Student Orientation, which attracted 1,300 students, and Parent Orientation, which attracted 550 participants. I understand both events broke records for attendance and were highly praised by students and parents alike. I wish to recognize all those who worked so hard to make these events successful. I also appreciated being allowed to address faculty at the recent Faculty Development Day, which I understand also attracted more faculty members than previous events.

It has been my pleasure to meet a number of new faculty and staff over the last few weeks, and I would like to extend a welcome to them on behalf of the MacEwan community. I do this even though I know I am very new myself. MacEwan is at present going through a remarkable transition, and I can't think of a better time to be joining the University. We all look forward to the contributions you will make in the coming years.

Moving forward – what will MacEwan be?

Over the last eight weeks, I have met with a large number of different groups as I try to get a sense of what colleagues see as the opportunities and challenges facing MacEwan at present. One thing that has truly impressed me is the pervasive sense of optimism and positive energy characterizing MacEwan. People seem genuinely engaged with MacEwan, want only the best for the institution, and want very much to be a part of its future.

At the same time, though, there is a pervasive question that has repeatedly come up in my discussions -- what does MacEwan want to be? The success of MacEwan at present is the result of the many people who have worked hard to make the institution what it is today. We need to recognize and celebrate these contributions, as well as the traditions and values that have come to characterize MacEwan. At the same time, we should not be afraid of change. Whatever we become over the next few years must be the collective voice of everyone associated with the University. There is no one person who can determine what the future will bring.

There are, however, some things that we do know, and that we must unequivocally support and embrace as part of MacEwan's new mandate. First, MacEwan is a university, and while it may have a different form of comprehensiveness from other universities, it must nonetheless behave and respond to issues as a university should. In this context, we must take the best of what we were and integrate it into what we will become.

Second, MacEwan is an undergraduate university, and must aim to provide undergraduate students with the very best possible learning experience. We all understand the impact universities have on their students. While we will for the foreseeable future focus on the 18 to 23-year-old age group, we must recognize that demographics are changing, that our students are getting older, and that they will be looking for different kinds of learning delivery to meet their needs.

Third, MacEwan is an institution committed to teaching and learning. This does not mean that the University is not interested in scholarly and creative activity – quite the contrary. It is a matter of maintaining balance, and of not allowing ourselves to sway too much in one direction or the other. We all accept that teaching and research should mutually inform one another – that every faculty member should be involved in learning as part of the exercise of teaching, regardless of whether it finds its way into a refereed journal. What is clear is that MacEwan has a remarkable opportunity to shape who and what it wants to be without imitating what exists elsewhere.

Adjustments in administration and organizational structure

Since my arrival, there have been several developments of note. Communication and marketing are among the President's most important responsibilities, especially now as the institution goes through dramatic change. I am therefore pleased to announce that Strategic Communications and Corporate Marketing (SCCM), now to be known as the Office of Communications and Marketing, will report directly to the President. This closer relationship will enable the President's Office to have a more direct line of communication to MacEwan faculty, staff and students, along with closer ties to our external stakeholders. I want to thank Cathryn Heslep, Vice-President Student Services, for her oversight of Communications and Marketing over the last five years. Her support has helped steer the department through several leadership transitions. At this time we do not anticipate any changes in the services that the Office of Communications and Marketing provides to our institution.

Also of note is the return visit of the AUCC visitation team on November 29. It will be exactly a year since the team was here last November. While members of the visitation team were extremely positive about MacEwan when they last visited, they expressed a desire that the institution make further progress relative to academic governance, in particular the creation of Faculty Councils. I know that Academic Governance Council has been working very hard on this matter, and it is critical that this exercise be completed for the visitation team.

MacEwan has for sometime had an Executive Leadership Team which constitutes the chief administrative body in the institution. This body will henceforth be known simply as the President's Group, and will have an enlarged membership that includes the three Associate Vice Presidents, the University Librarian and the Director of Institutional Analysis. These are in addition to the current membership, which consists of the Executive Vice President Academic and Provost, the Vice-President University Services, the Vice-President Student Services, the Vice-President Community Relations and Fund Development, the Chief Information Officer, the CFO and Associate Vice-President University Services, the Senior Manager Board Governance and President's Office, and the four Faculty Deans.

A job well done - but the work continues

During my meetings over the last two months, the challenges of implementing the ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) project and PeopleSoft were repeatedly raised. A project of this magnitude inevitably puts enormous strain on an institution and places extraordinary demands on faculty and staff. I recognize the tremendous effort given by those seconded to the project and by the staff involved in keeping the University operating in the meantime. We know that many are feeling fatigued and burned-out, yet we cannot for now fully disengage from the project.

I am optimistic, however, that things will flow more smoothly over the next year. In this regard the ERP project has completed installation of the base modules of our primary systems (Student, Finance, Human Resources) as well as various related modules. While the modules are now live, we must continue to work to ensure that the system

operates in the manner intended and supports everyone in performing their roles within the institution. We must still complete a number of adjustments to both processes and systems to bring about these expected enhancements.

Plans are being developed and additional resources are being put in place to provide users with the support they need to be successful in their roles and to ensure the project achieves the benefits expected. We understand the importance of having appropriate, ongoing resources in place to sustain and develop the system and to provide appropriate training for users of the system. Please be assured that further information will be coming out in the near future regarding these plans.

Negotiations for the sale of South Campus

As everyone knows, the Board of Governors has approved a single sustainable campus model, which was subsequently approved by the provincial government. The intention of this plan is to provide all MacEwan students with equal access to the resources and services they need to be successful in their studies. Accordingly, MacEwan's satellite campuses will all eventually be sold and their operations moved to City Centre Campus.

Very recently, Millwoods Christian School has expressed an interest in purchasing MacEwan's South Campus, and in advance of any purchase it further wishes to lease space for the coming year. The Board decided at a special meeting held August 17 that the University's administration should proceed with negotiations on both fronts. The salient features of this development are

- Millwoods Christian School (MCS) has provided MacEwan with a letter of intent which expresses interest in purchasing and taking over the South Campus in the summer of 2012.
- MCS has a strong need for space and, while negotiations on a sale continue, an interim lease agreement is being finalized to provide MCS with some classroom and office space as well as shared use of specific areas of the South Campus. These arrangements will take effect in October.

- Discussions and negotiations regarding the potential sale of South Campus are in the early stages. There is much work left to be done and no guarantee that we will conclude a sale agreement.
- I wish to stress that before a sale can occur, sale terms need to be agreed to and approved by the governing bodies of both organizations. The Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology also needs to approve the sale through an Order in Council, and MCS will need to go through its own approvals. Financing and other business matters will need to be finalized. Most important, planning and logistics around moving South Campus programs with all students, faculty and staff need to be completed.
- Planning and implementation teams have been established and have started work that will support a successful conclusion of the sale of the South Campus and movement of programming to City Centre Campus.

Given the need to ensure adequate communication, we met with the faculty, staff and students of South Campus on September 8 to brief them on these recent developments. It must be recognized, however, that there are a number of steps in finalizing a sale of the South Campus, and nothing will be final until all approvals are secured. We shall keep the MacEwan community advised of all developments related to our three satellite campuses.

Until next time ...

By way of conclusion, let me once more express my gratitude for the opportunity of being MacEwan's fourth president.

It is an incredible privilege, and I look forward to working with you all as MacEwan goes through this exciting time of transformation.

David W. Atkinson