

## **Administrative Response to the:**

### **STUDENT RETENTION AND SUCCESS: REVIEW ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS (By David McMurray)**

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#### **ABREVIATIONS**

For ease of reference, I will use the following abbreviations to refer to the different sections of the McMurray. **I**: Institutional

**SEM**: Strategic Enrolment Management

**T&L**: Teaching and Learning

**SES**: Student Engagement and Support

**CDS**: Career Development & Services

**RA**: Research and Assessment

One of these abbreviations followed by a number refers to a numbered recommendation made in the indicated section of the Review.

#### **1. OVERVIEW**

David McMurray's review of Student Retention and Success at Trent provides us with an opportunity to address issues of undergraduate retention and, much more importantly, build a new approach to retention which is founded on a commitment to the success of our undergraduate students. Doing both these things will be a multi-layered process which needs to be founded on action on a number of fronts.

In this response, I have outlined actions we will take under the leadership of a variety of managers and administrators who will consult with key stakeholders (student, faculty, alumni, and others) on particular recommendations. In a number of cases, the report's recommendations outline aspirations that are already well enshrined at Trent – student support; high quality teaching; diversity; attention to indigenous concerns, etc. (as in **SES 8,14**) – which need to be embraced by everyone. In cases where very specific actions are needed, I have indicated who (the President, the Provost, the Deans, Academic Advisors, the Associate Vice-Presidents, the Head of Trent University Durham, among others – will take the lead responding to particular recommendations. Exactly what is done (or not done) in particular cases will be decided after a more detailed consideration of the current situation and the various options available to us moving forward.

## Experiential Learning and Career Services

Two sets of recommendations in the current review will be addressed in more detail at a later time. One of these is a group of recommendations on Experiential Learning and Career Services. Given the importance of these issues for students today, the university has already planned a separate review of this aspect of Trent's operations. This independent review will be in keeping with the report's conclusions that "A closer internal review, external analysis and assessment of career development, services, and experiential learning opportunities is highly recommended" and that Trent needs to better resource career development, advising, and employment services (**CDS 1, 2, 3; SEM 3, 4, 5, 6; TL 1; SES 5**).

In the interim, we may be able to make progress on some of the recommendations in the current review, but a comprehensive attempt to address experiential learning and career services needs to take place after a full and detailed review of this aspect of our operations.

## International Students

Another set of recommendations in the review address international students and ways in which Trent could more successfully support and improve their experience at Trent. As David McMurray has suggested, it is important for us to ensure that we follow best practices in supporting international students, especially in their transition to a new life at Trent (**SES 9; SEM 7**). The current Interim Director of the Trent International Program (TIP) will consider the detailed account of best practices in internationalization in the current review (notably on pp. 30-33, a-i), with an eye to improving Trent's current practices. But Trent is in the process of implementing key components of a separate Internationalization review (by Livia Castellanos of the University of Regina), which was completed earlier this year, and is currently searching for a new Associate Vice-President, International who will be asked to lead a revitalization and expansion of internationalization at Trent. Any final decisions about Trent's internationalization efforts will need to await input from this new position.

## Student Success

At the heart of the Retention Review is the suggestion that Trent needs to approach issues of retention and attrition from a broader and more positive point of view that embraces student success as its fundamental goal. As David McMurray puts it (p.11): "Whatever the reasons for Trent's attrition rates, the university could enhance the continued progression and graduation results of students by moving from a responsive 'Retention' oriented approach, to a higher level campus wide and comprehensive definition and strategic plan for 'Student Success.'"

In pursuing this approach, Trent needs, most fundamentally, to decide how it wants to define "student success," and how it may uniquely enable it. The definition that is adopted needs to be fully integrated into Trent undergraduate education. As the review puts it, it should (p. 8) be "firmly secured in Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM)" and "could start with: a promise to

prospective students; affirmed and explained at acceptance confirmation and summer transition; launched at Orientation with a complementary focus on academic preparation and social integration; then continued through the first year experience as students learn how to learn, develop personal skills and competencies, and build emotional confidence and meaningful relationships.”

With this fundamental goal in mind, the following is a summary of actions we will be undertaking in pursuit of the review’s recommendations.

### **1. EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING, CAREER SERVICES, CO-OP REVIEW** (External Consultant to be Determined)

I have already noted that the university will be conducting a separate review which will focus on experiential learning, career services, and Co-op at Trent. This review will underscore the need for Trent to do more in this regard. This is especially important at a time when students are concerned about their future employment prospects and are looking for an educational experience which will improve them. One possibility which will be considered in the course of the review is the suggestion that Trent should establish an expanded co-curricular record which is integrated with a student’s official curricular record (**SEM 4**), though we may need to begin improving this side of our operations by addressing more fundamental issues. Career Services will begin preparing for this further review immediately.

### **2. RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENT** (Office of Institutional Research: Steve Jones; Associate Vice-President, Enrollment: Marilyn Burns; Associate Vice-President, Students: Nona Robinson) Any attempt to reposition Trent to promote student success and improve retention must be founded on a much better understanding of the factors that contribute to (or detract from) student success (**I2, SEM 11; T&L 2; RA 1, 6**). Data on such factors needs to be the root of evidence based discussions and decisions which play a central role in SEM. The current review usefully notes that there are many anecdotal hypotheses about the reasons that students leave Trent: financial, mental health, academic program choice, personal fit, and a more navigable career focused college path (**RA 2**), but little empirical data to help us choose between them (and decide what issues we need to emphasize).

In rectifying this situation, assessment tools should include data on how many students take part in particular programs and how satisfied they were, in a manner that employs a variety of assessment tools -- questionnaires, surveys, focus groups, interviews, one minute testimonials, mentor/advisor observations, portfolio records, and community based case studies. (**RA 5**) Something more than limited online surveys needs to be employed (**SEM 11**).

In acquiring empirical data, Institutional Research will work with SEM and Student Affairs to establish some standard data collecting exercises Trent can use to better understand what makes student successful, why students leave, and what Trent does well (and poorly) in this respect (**RA 7**). Proper student surveys are an obvious place to begin. Special projects might

look at particular aspects of our operations and consider whether they accomplish their objectives.

Learning outcomes can help develop clear goals for students -- in particular, students who require additional support in coursework (**RA 3, RA 4**). At the same time, some broad learning outcomes are difficult to measure. In the case of program approvals (which often require learning outcomes) and program development, learning outcomes may be essential, but they are only one metric that may be considered and are not a central priority in some cases (e.g., in considering outcomes in terms of student employment).

**3. STRATEGIC PLANNING** (Chair of the Board: Rod Taylor; President: Leo Groarke; Provost: Jackie Muldoon; Vice-President Research and Innovation: Neil Emery; Deans: Craig Brunetti, Moira Howes, Kirsten Woodend, Cathy Bruce, Bruce Cater, Holger Hintelmann, and Head of Trent University Durham: Joe Muldoon)

The review recommends that Trent rethink its broad approach to its goals, not only in SEM, but more broadly, to emphasize student success (I 1). As the Review recognizes, doing so will require that Trent recognize its own version of student success and determine it can uniquely accomplish it. Considering how colleges fit into the university structure is one issue that needs to be considered in this regard (**I 3; SES 15**).

Two components of strategic planning will be undertaken in the next two years. One is a strategic planning exercise by the Board, scheduled for the fall of 2016; another is an academic planning exercise planned for the following year. The Board Chair and the President will organize the first; the Provost, the Vice-President Research, the Deans, and the Head of Trent University Durham will take the lead in organizing the second. In both exercises, the university will be mindful of the need to make student success a key component of Trent's view of itself. If, as expected, the government negotiates a new Strategic Mandate Agreement in the next two years, it will need to be done in a way that shares this concern for student success.

**4. SEM COMMITTEE** (Associate Vice-President, Enrolment: Marilyn Burns; President: Leo Groarke; Associate Vice-President, Students: Nona Robinson)

The SEM Committee (chaired by the President but organized and managed by the Associate Vice-President, Enrolment) is already committed to retention as a goal (it is this that led to the current review). The Associate Vice-President, Students will continue to chair the Retention subcommittee, but the SEM Committee will underscore its significance, and the broader significance of student success. The role of retention in enrolment will be reaffirmed and enhanced in discussions of recruitment, admissions, communications, and retention situational analysis, strategies, goals, tactics, research analytics and assessment (**SEM 1, 10, 14**). The SEM Committee will stop short of considering students' progression to alumni, just because it needs to focus on other aspects of student success, but will highlight other aspects of student success that have a close relationship to enrolment and enrolment management.

## **5. Trent University DURHAM** (Head of Durham: Joe Muldoon)

In keeping with the suggestions in the McMurray Review, the following proposals for Trent University Durham will be investigated (**I 4; SES 1**):

- i. a “campus collegium” approach to space at the Durham campus;
- ii. a hybrid/cross trained model of academic advising, career development and services;
- iii. additional support dedicated to student wellness, mental health and over-all personal well-being; and
- iv. a re-location of the front door security function, replacing it with an information services, resource and referral focused “Welcome Desk.”

## **6. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS** (Interim Director of TIP: Michael Eamon)

The Review outlines a series of best practices for working with international students (**SES** pp. 30-33, a-i). TIP will use these as a checklist to review our own practices in regard to:

- pre-arrival connections and communications, and the use of webinars to proactively deal with student questions before they arrive;
- peer mentoring;
- orientation after students are settled in Canada;
- career resources for international students;
- the Trent website and how well it serves International Students; and
- student affairs services, including mental health services, for international students.

## **7. STUDENT ALUMNI ASSOCIATION (SAA)** (Director of Alumni Affairs: Lee Hays)

Alumni Affairs will explore the further development of its “Life After Trent” program, and the development of a Student Alumni Association (SAA). The latter would aim to allow students to lead programs and special events that connect current students to their lifetime experience as future Trent alumni. Finding a way to productively include the SAA in the recruitment and admissions cycle is one way we might better send the right peer-to-peer message that the institution is committed to graduates for life. (**SES 16**)

## **8. CENTRE FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING** (Director: Cathy Bruce)

The Trent Centre for Teaching and Learning operates as an “ideas hub,” which supports “educational improvements; research on pedagogy and andragogy; the infusion of low and high technologies that enhance student learning experiences; as well as great teaching.” It will consider the McMurray report’s suggestions on alternate forms of assessment and student learning styles, and seek ways in which we can better support instructors and others to accommodate them. (**T&L 3, 4**)

**9. JOBS ON CAMPUS** (Associate Vice-President, Students: Nona Robinson; Director of Career Services: Waleska Vernon)

At a time when many students face financial pressures (sometimes in a way that negatively impacts their ability to continue in their programs) Career Services will look to expand student jobs on campus in a way that will provide students with more opportunities for employment and experiential learning (**SES 10**).

**10. FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE** (Provost: Jackie Muldoon; Associate Vice-President, Students: Nona Robinson; Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning: Cathy Bruce)

A student's first year experience should provide a foundation for the rest of their university career. With this in mind, first year experience is a particularly salient component of student retention and success. First year orientation plays a key role in this. To ensure that Trent's orientation and first year experience is the best that it can be, the university's Associate VicePresident, Students will oversee a study of first year experience to determine its strengths and weaknesses and ways in which it might be improved (**SEM 2; SES 6**). The study will build on the work of the Centre for Teaching, which is currently being completed. and Learning of Issues for orientation to be considered include academic preparation; better connections with transfer students; the opportunity to meet students in one's academic program as well as one's college; and efforts to connect with students living off campus. The results of the study will be reported to the Provost, Vice-President Academic, who will bring them to the SEM Committee for discussion.

**11. RESIDENTIAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES** (Director of Housing Services: Jen Coulter)

Residential Services will work with interested faculty to develop further academically based Residential Learning Communities (RLC's) at Trent. (**T&L 5, SES 12**)

**12. ACADEMIC ADVISING AND SUPPORT** (Provost, Vice-President Academic: Jackie Muldoon; Head of Colleges: Stephanie Muehlethaler; College Academic Advisors: Tina Fridgen; Christine Freeman-Roth; Melanie Buddle; Christy Carlson; Craig Cameron)

The Retention Review provides a useful opportunity to review academic advising and academic support at Trent in a way that ensures that they incorporate best practices. With this in mind, the university's academic advisors will examine our academic advising and support, and the extent to which they are keeping with the principles and suggestions made in the current review. (**SEM 7; SES 7**) On this basis they will bring a set of recommendations to the Provost/Vice-President Academic, who will lead a discussion of them with the deans and consider how they might be implemented.

**13. PERSONAL COUNSELLING** (Associate Vice-President, Students: Nona Robinson; Director, Student Wellness Centre: Stewart Engelberg)

Personal Counselling at Trent does match the higher education common standard of one counsellor for every 1500 students (**SES 3**), but it is still important to ensure that we provide, within our financial means, the best counselling that is possible. With this in mind, Counselling will review the suggestions made in the review, including the suggestion that signage be made more visually impactful, to better identify the services available (**SES 4**).

**14. ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING** (Provost, Vice-President Academic: Jackie Muldoon; Deans: Craig Brunetti; Kirsten Woodend; Holger Hintelmann; Bruce Cater; Cathy Bruce; Moira Howes; Head of Trent University Durham: Joe Muldoon; Head of Colleges: Stephanie Muehlethaler; College Academic Advisors: Tina Fridgen; Christine Freeman-Roth; Melanie Buddle; Christy Carlson; Craig Cameron)

One of the challenges for Trent students seems to be “inconsistent, confusing, or obsolete academic requirements and regulations.” In an effort to address any obstacles this may create in the seamless completion of students’ degrees, the university’s academic advisors will review issues and present recommendations for changes to the Provost/Vice-President Academic. She will discuss these proposals with the deans and take recommendations to Senate’s Undergraduate Academic Policy Committee (UAPC), which will recommend possible changes to Senate. (**SEM 9, 10, 13, 14**)

**15. GENERAL DEGREE** (Provost/Vice-President Academic: Jackie Muldoon; Deans: Craig Brunetti, Moira Howes, Kirsten Woodend, Cathy Bruce, Bruce Cater, Holger Hintelmann; Head of Trent University Durham Joe Muldoon; Student Senators)

There are many reasons why students can be unable to complete their degree (financial, academic, personal, etc.). For some students, a shorter degree without a major or honours standing may be the best and most appropriate way to exit their university studying with something that recognizes what they have accomplished. To facilitate graduation for students who are for some reason unable to complete their chosen major, the university will consider the creation of a general degree with no major that allows such students to have the work they have completed recognized (**SEM 12**). The Provost/Vice President Academic will take a lead in this development, and will include student senators in the discussion, with the aim of bringing a proposal to Senate.

**16. ENTRY LEVEL STUDENT SUCCESS PROGRAMS** (Associate Vice-President, Students: Nona Robinson; SEM Committee; Office of Institutional Research)

In keeping with its commitment to Social Justice and diversity, Trent should continue to welcome some students who do not make the university’s official admission cut offs (students who may have had family or other issues they had to deal with in high school, and students who

are more likely to be first generation students). To ensure the success of such students, it is important to maintain and possibly expand the current programs the university has to help them with their transition to university.

It is also important to monitor such programs to ensure that they are effective from both an academic and a fiscal point of view (**SEM 8**). The VP, Students, Nona Robinson, will lead this monitoring and initiate a discussion at the University's SEM Committee.

**17. COMMUNICATIONS** (Associate Vice-President, Enrolment: Marilyn Burns; Associate Vice-president, IT: Tariq Al-Idrissi)

In a number of ways, the review raises questions about communications at Trent – specifically, about their effectiveness in serving students and creating the kind of university Trent aspires to be. Faculty have indicated that they are not always aware of accommodation requirements for students with disabilities (**SES 2**). Students would like to see improved communication of events and volunteer activities (**SES 13**). The University's AVPs of communications and IT will discuss ways in which such communications may be improved.

**18. BATA LIBRARY** (Librarian: Robert Clarke)

As the university reworks the Bata Library, it has already begun planning for an integrated learning commons space that will promote student engagement and support, hopefully in a way that can integrate a range of academic, library, and career advice. (**SES 11**) These ideas will be a part of the planning for future renovations to the library.