

TO: Fran Walley, chair, Planning and Priorities Committee of Council

FROM: Gordon DesBrisay, chair, Scholarships & Awards Committee of Council

DATE: January 24, 2014

RE: TransformUS Reports: Scholarships & Awards Committee feedback

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The Scholarships & Awards Committee of Council welcomes this opportunity to provide feedback regarding the TransformUS reports as seen from our committee's perspective. A special meeting of our committee was held on January 13<sup>th</sup> to discuss this matter. Eight of our eighteen members were able to attend, and a ninth member submitted written comments to the committee. Our ranks include some members whose own positions could be directly affected by the recommendations in the report.

Our discussion was wide-ranging and touched on particular matters relating to the work of our committee as well as more general concerns relating to the TransformUS process as a whole.

With regard to the particular mandate of Scholarships & Awards, the committee was pleased to note that non-academic support services for undergraduates in general, and Aboriginal students in particular, tended to fare well in the Support Service report.

- Members were relieved, but not surprised, to find the Awards & Financial Aid unit reporting to the AVP Student Affairs was placed in Q1.
- We were concerned, on the other hand, to note that the Awards & Scholarships unit of the College of Graduate Studies & Research was placed in Q5. As with other aspects of CGSR, our committee is concerned that there are necessary functions relating to the effective oversight and of graduate studies across campus that must be accommodated in any restructuring.

We read the suggestion to transfer responsibility for administering graduate awards and scholarships "to SESD, International Office, etc. for delivery of this service" with mixed feelings that, upon reflection, sum up much of our overall view of the TransformUS process to date.

- The committee acknowledges the need for administrative restructuring and we embrace the drive for clearer, simpler, leaner administrative structures and processes.
- But we are wary of potential cuts or changes that could cost this institution the experts and expertise necessary to function at peak efficiency.
- We wish to stress, for example, that the undergraduate and graduate funding landscapes are fundamentally different, and that simply asking one unit to take over the functions of the other would not likely work. A merger of some form would make more sense but save less money in the short term. Whatever the fate of the graduate awards office is to be, the functions it currently undertakes must be accounted for.
- The committee agrees with the Support Service statement that "A large need exists for more direct graduate student support" in Arts and Science, in particular, but handing these functions and responsibilities over to college administrations without transferring resources sufficient for the work would not likely improve matters.

- The right kind of restructuring would connect decision-making responsibilities with administrative functions and see greater coordination not only between the central administration and the colleges, but in relation to allied units with a stake in the management of student funding, including:
  - the OVP Research
  - college and university student recruiting offices
  - fundraising and alumni relations branches of University Advancement.

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In its terms of reference, our committee is tasked with “Recommending to Council on matters relating to the awards, scholarships and bursaries under the control of the University” and “Recommending to Council on the establishment of awards, scholarships and bursaries.”

- Our capacity to make effective recommendations to Council depends on having ready access to data that is accurate, up-to-date, and comprehensive. That is not something we have been able to count on. Lately, the work associated with TransformUS itself appears to have all but overwhelmed the units charged with data management and reporting.
- Even allowing for exceptional circumstances, however, the data we need is too often hard to come by: difficult to access, difficult to interpret, unavailable due to being spread amongst mutually incompatible systems, or slow in arriving.
- In the absence of effective data support, our committee finds it difficult not only to recommend initiatives to Council, but to evaluate proposals brought to us from units on campus whose cases rest on data we are in no position to assess.
- This is a systemic problem: thinking only of the student funding angle, it impedes progress across campus and imperils institutional goals regarding graduate student enrolment; research productivity; and Strategic Enrolment Management – particularly as it applies to Aboriginal students and international students.

As for more general comments, committee members echoed concerns raised in other forums regarding the underlying principles, process, and data deployed in TransformUS. The way in which small departments, interdisciplinary programs, and service teaching tended to be undervalued in the reports was noted (as was the fact that the authors of the reports acknowledged as much), but beyond that, and a general sense of unease, there was no clear consensus on the TransformUS process as a whole.

There was, however, consensus surrounding our collective appreciation for the vast and hard work undertaken on behalf of the university by our colleagues who served on the committees that produced the reports.