

RYERSON UNIVERSITY

LEARNING TOGETHER

AN ACADEMIC PLAN FOR RYERSON UNIVERSITY

2003-2008

OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT, ACADEMIC

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LEARNING TOGETHER

AN ACADEMIC PLAN FOR RYERSON, 2003-2008

1. INTRODUCING RYERSON

What Ryerson Is

Ryerson is a university with a difference. It is known for its distinctive mixture of innovative, professionally relevant programs of study and an educational experience built on the creative integration of theoretical and applied learning. Increasingly, it is known for the quality and value of its scholarship, research, and creative endeavours. Above all, it is recognized for the quality of its graduates who leave Ryerson well prepared to contribute to their professions, their communities, the economy, and society as a whole.

Students come to Ryerson to acquire current, career-related knowledge as well as to sharpen their critical and creative faculties, develop capacities for leadership, and participate in an environment of continuous learning and intellectual discovery. Through our Continuing Education Division, the largest of its kind in the Canadian university system, adult learners are provided with unparalleled opportunities to pursue professional and personal enrichment and to re-tool for the changing economy.

Ryerson is a culturally diverse community situated within a dynamic, cosmopolitan environment. Our location in the heart of Canada's largest metropolitan centre provides the University and its students with the extraordinary advantage of proximity to, and engagement with, the business and cultural communities, government, community agencies, and the professions. Our urban setting is integral to Ryerson's distinctive approach to learning, teaching, and research.

How Ryerson Came To Be What It Is

Since its founding as an *Institute of Technology* in 1948, Ryerson has been mandated to serve its larger community through the provision of "applied education", a focus that we are proud to maintain. However, the societal context of applied education has changed radically during the past five and a half decades. The emergence of a knowledge-intensive economy, globalization, a radically altered technological environment, the revolution of rising expectations, and other forces have brought unprecedented new demands for a highly educated workforce and citizenry. Narrowly defined job skills are insufficient to guarantee a place in the modern economy, nor do they provide an adequate springboard to the range of personal opportunities and career options that our students expect after graduation. The new "applied education" is that which enables graduates to both manage change and adapt to it; to bring both sound analytical judgement and imagination to their careers and professions; to develop an enthusiasm for continuous learning; and to combine specific career-related competencies with a capacity for leadership and integrative, big-picture thinking. Applied education in today's context is based on the nurturing of creativity and a broadly informed perspective as well as on the imparting of more specialized knowledge.

In this changing milieu, Ryerson has fulfilled its mandate by reinventing itself on an almost continuous basis. Each decade has seen profound, sometimes radical, change in how we have responded to society's need for the "Ryerson style" of education. Our initial one and two year certificate programs had been in existence for less than five years when they began to give way to three year diplomas. The reason was quite simple: Greater breadth and depth of learning were required in order for academic programs to remain relevant. The same reason prompted Ryerson to augment diplomas with degree programs beginning in 1971, a revolutionary step that changed (by then) *Ryerson Polytechnical Institute's* position in the post-secondary system of Ontario and set the direction for our evolution through the next two decades. By 1990 few diploma programs remained, having been replaced almost entirely by integrated four year honours-level degrees. In 1993, Ryerson achieved full university status and began immediately to assume the responsibilities associated with it, particularly scholarly, research, and creative (SRC) activity and graduate programming. The reason, once again, had to do with the increasingly multifaceted demands associated with professionally relevant education. In 2000/01 we introduced our first three graduate programs, a number that has now grown to nine and will increase steadily. Throughout, the common denominator of Ryerson's programs has been "learning for a purpose": an intentional curriculum with societal relevance. Now, with a mandate that includes SRC activity, the same principles are being extended into each of what Ernest Boyer (1990) labelled the four kinds of scholarship: discovery, integration, application, and teaching.

What Will Ryerson Become?

This question motivates the academic planning process that we have engaged in over the past 18 months, and answers to it will be offered in the details of *Learning Together*. Suffice it to say that five years from now we will be well along in a new episode of self-transformation. This episode will be less visible than the previous one - we can become a university only once, after all - but it will be profound. It will see us extend our distinctive brand of education further into the arena of graduate programming, and at both the undergraduate and graduate levels we will continue to develop and define new models of applied education. We will become a significant contributor to the creation, testing, and application of new knowledge. Essentially, Ryerson will "grow into itself", integrating its long tradition as an institution of applied learning with the potentialities inherent in its position as a young university and doing so in creative, imaginative ways.

2. ACADEMIC PLANNING: THE BACKGROUND

Approximately eighteen months ago, President Lajeunesse signalled a need for Ryerson to adopt a new, more strategically oriented approach to planning. At that time the University faced escalating budget pressures created by long-term underfunding, uncertainty as to Government intentions regarding the double cohort, and a range of concerns related to the timing, level, and stability of funding to the university sector. Inevitably, budgetary concerns provided critical context for the nascent planning process. Even though academic considerations were taken to be paramount, it was difficult to escape the sense that a new plan would to a considerable extent be an instrument for making selective budgetary reductions.

Although the budgetary environment continues to be constrained, several positive events have occurred over the past eighteen months. At the urging of the Ryerson community, intense efforts were directed towards revenue generation and these have been highly successful. A number of Government decisions have been favourable, particularly in regard to the double cohort. At the same time, some additional efficiencies have been achieved in the application of available resources. As a consequence of these and other measures our academic values, goals, and priorities have been able to take centre stage in the planning process. To be sure, the negative impacts of ongoing resource scarcity have to be recognized and will inevitably affect the implementation schedule of our plan. However, Learning Together does not take a defensive stance. Ryerson has a promising future and we intend to get on with the task of realizing its potential.

Academic plans are rarely, if ever, written on a blank slate. We work in the context of our past, our external environment, current commitments, and prevailing organizational culture(s). As a result, several factors relevant to the planning process can be taken more or less as “given”. These include, for example, the highly competitive environment of new faculty hiring and the fact that the landscape of post-secondary education is undergoing radical transformation. These and other “givens” are addressed more fully in the appendix .

Learning Together is the product of a lengthy, iterative, and highly constructive process. Six major planning papers have been released (see references), each followed by a process of consultation and subsequent revision. More than a dozen open meetings have been held at different stages in the plan’s evolution as well as meetings of the Planning and Priorities Advisory Committee (PPAC) of Academic Council, Academic Council itself, the Academic Administrators Group (AAG), Academic Planning Group (APG), Ryerson Faculty Association (RFA) Representatives, and some individual Faculties. Although precise counts have not been kept at all meetings, the total number of participants has been in the order of three hundred. As a result of the thoughtful commentary of these members of the Ryerson community, *Learning Together* differs profoundly from the initial planning papers published many months ago. This is, in every sense, a *Ryerson* academic plan.

3. LOOKING AHEAD: THE LONG VIEW

In setting directions, we have to look at both the near-term future (the five-year life span of an academic plan) and the longer term. The long view is one that reflects a combination of our ideals, aspirations, and potentialities. It is more about vision than about targets and specific strategies.

Looking out a decade or perhaps a little beyond - to 2015, let us say - how would we want Ryerson to be characterized?

- It will be a “comprehensive university” in that its traditional strength in undergraduate programming will be augmented by a significant number of graduate programs (masters and doctoral) and by substantial and still growing involvement in SRC activity.

This goal emerges logically from our university mandate which clearly entails

responsibilities in regard to the creation, testing, and dissemination of knowledge. We have already taken several early steps along the path, but expanded SRC activity and graduate programming are needed to create a critical mass. At the same time, we are serious in stating that these activities will *augment* our undergraduate strengths. As a young university, Ryerson is well positioned to avoid the more negative tensions that sometimes exist between research and teaching or between graduate and undergraduate programs. We are committed to engage in these activities in a synergistic manner that is beneficial to each of them.

- While Ryerson will fit the general definition of a “comprehensive university”, it will continue to be distinctive in some very significant ways: in its program mix; its focus on societal need as a guiding principle for both academic programs and SRC activity; its adherence to the notion of intentional, purpose-driven curriculum; its leadership in continuing education; and its attentiveness to the career and life aspirations of its students, among others. These are distinctions that reflect our core values, and we intend to maintain and build on them. The future for Ryerson will be one in which we bring our traditions and our imaginations together in creative new ways, not one in which we force ourselves to choose one or the other.
- It will draw deeply from, and contribute profoundly to, the cosmopolitan environment in which it is located. In its programs, SRC activity, and its collective role as an urban citizen, Ryerson will exhibit sustained engagement with its economic, cultural, social, and political milieu. It will be vitally linked to its broader communities, and the cosmopolitan nature of our urban environment will provide entry points to the development of a larger national and international role for Ryerson. Our student body, and increasingly our faculty and staff, will reflect the diversity of the larger community.
- It will be a vibrant learning community in which all members - students, faculty, staff, administrators - know themselves to be valued participants in a shared endeavour. Our core values will be evident in the day to day life of the community: intellectual engagement and the continuous pursuit of learning; academic freedom; service; mutual respect, support, and encouragement. Ryerson will be sought out by students, faculty, and staff because it is known to be intellectually stimulating, professionally rewarding, and personally supportive and caring. It will be recognized and supported by the larger community for the quality of its programs, graduates, and SRC activity.

4. LOOKING AHEAD: THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

If the long view is about vision and aspirations, the five year term of an academic plan is about making progress along a path. It involves shorter term goals, priorities, definable objectives and methods for achieving them, and mechanisms for evaluating and reorienting the plan as circumstances change.

It is a fairly simple matter to articulate objectives related to individual academic priorities, but the result of this approach is often an elaborate “to do list” rather than an academic plan. It is far more difficult, but essential, to develop academic objectives in a way that reflects the

systemic nature of a university in which all priorities are highly interconnected. A good academic plan (and planning process) is one that reflects an holistic view, facilitating the creation of effective connectivity, balances, and synergy as well as the direction of energy and resources. As a framework for organizing and integrating academic objectives in an holistic manner, Ryerson's plan draws heavily on the notion of the *learning community*.

4.1 THE LEARNING COMMUNITY: FOREWORD

The idea of *learning community* is a powerful one that embraces every dimension of university life. The *learning* component of the term speaks to the activities that give us our *raison d'être*: SRC activity, academic programs, teaching and learning, co-ops and clinical placements, reflective scholarship, and so on. We are all engaged in learning; it is what we are here to do. The *community* component is about people. It implies interconnection, and signals that everyone in the university - faculty, students, staff, and administrators - has a role to play in a shared enterprise. Taken together, *learning community* speaks to a spirit of inquiry, intellectual discovery, and a shared search for understanding.

In *Learning Together*, the operative question is taken to be "What are the major steps Ryerson needs to take over the next five years to move forward as a *learning community*?" The question is approached along the lines set out above: activities, people, and shared purpose. It is worth noting at the outset that strategies to address the *learning* component tend to be relatively concrete as, to a lesser degree, do strategies to address *community*. Strategies to address the *learning community* as a whole tend to be softer, involving communication, discourse, collegiality, opportunities for engagement, a sense of purpose, and empowerment.

4.2 THE LEARNING COMMUNITY: CORE ACTIVITIES

While reiterating the interconnection among all activities, for simplicity this section will focus on academic programs, teaching, SRC activity, and academic and administrative support.

4.2.1 Academic Programs (Undergraduate)

Ryerson is still very much an undergraduate institution. Our self-identity, academic strengths, and external image and reputation are based largely on our distinctive mix of undergraduate programs and the success of our graduates. The emergence of new priorities does not suggest that we are about to abandon our focus on undergraduate learning. On the contrary, it demands that we reaffirm our commitment to it.

Key Objectives

- to introduce continuous quality-improvement mechanisms in every undergraduate program
- to clarify our undergraduate niche(s) in the post-secondary sector

Our focus over the next five years will be on program quality. New programs may be implemented in light of new opportunities and societal needs, but our primary goals will be to augment current strengths and position our programs to adapt to new

opportunities, demands, and competition. We will challenge every program to improve demonstrably in the quality of its curriculum and program delivery.

- In their periodic program reviews and in the annual academic planning cycle, programs will be asked to address standards of academic quality, curricular relevance and currency, and the appropriateness of current delivery modes.
- Ryerson will engage in a wide-ranging review of the means by which we ensure an appropriate balance between theory and practice in our programs. We will undertake a review of the tripartite curriculum in this context.
- We will endeavour to achieve/preserve the optimal mix of learning and teaching modes for each program. Many modes of learning play vital roles in Ryerson's particular style of education. Some, such as studios, workshops, and practicums, tend to be more costly than others. Where these are required in order for a program's quality and integrity to be maintained, we must find ways to support them. At the same time, programs must be prepared to demonstrate that these modes of delivery are being managed efficiently, effectively, and in such a way as to maximize their educational benefits. Tradeoffs may be required. For instance, larger lecture classes may be a prerequisite to the operation of studios with an optimal student: faculty ratio.
- All schools and departments will be asked to assess their role in the development of "universal" skills and perspectives including: communication, international understanding, enquiry/research skills, information literacy, an understanding of social and cultural forces, ethics/professional practice, and IT proficiency. They will also be asked to ensure that programs are multi-disciplinary in ways that reflect the realities of the particular field and the changing nature of the world around us and, where necessary, to broaden program objectives and ameliorate the so-called "silo effect". All schools and departments will be asked to develop explicit strategies to nurture intellectual curiosity and an enthusiasm for lifelong learning.
- The somewhat younger student body resulting from the new Ontario secondary school curriculum is likely to require a wider range of academic advising. We have already made numerous adjustments in this regard but will monitor emerging needs closely to determine what further changes are required.
- We expect that younger students will be less prepared to make optimal program and career decisions. The University and individual schools and departments will monitor this closely to identify changes that may be required in respect to program advising, curriculum, and course delivery methods.

4.2.2 Academic Programs (Graduate)

We have achieved impressive early success in our initial graduate programs, but we have not yet reached the critical threshold beyond which graduate studies will become an integral component of the University's academic culture. Additional programs, including some at the doctoral level, will be offered as a means to reach this threshold and also as a means to help attract and retain new faculty, provide more teaching and research assistants, and enhance our SRC potential.

Key Objectives:

- to implement additional programs over the next half decade and to have further programs “on stream”, ready to be implemented when academic and funding conditions are favourable.
- to integrate graduate studies more fully into Ryerson’s academic culture.

The graduate programs we introduce will be required to satisfy a number of conditions:

- They will reflect Ryerson’s distinctive mandate. Particular focus will be placed on societal need, career/professional relevance, and innovative program concepts.
- They will build on established strengths and meet strategic goals. (New niche areas will emerge over time.)
- They will have high potential to contribute towards the further enhancement of both SRC and undergraduate program strength.
- They will not place undue/unsustainable financial burdens on the University.

Learning Together does not specify what the catalogue of graduate programs will include by the end of the plan’s five year term. To do so could stifle creative energies and legitimate aspirations across the University. It would also be both misleading and unfair to identify programs that are under preliminary consideration but have yet to go through a rigorous developmental process. For now, it is sufficient to acknowledge that there are several academic areas in which new graduate programs could be introduced over the next three to four years. While this is being undertaken, we will consider a more detailed strategic plan to guide the further development of graduate programs.

4.2.3 Scholarly, Research, and Creative (SRC) Activity

SRC activity is a fundamental responsibility that is assumed by all Canadian universities. The opportunity to participate in the creation and dissemination of knowledge and to work with graduate students is a major factor in attracting and retaining new faculty, thereby having a direct impact on the quality of our undergraduate programs. SRC initiatives undertaken by faculty can provide rich learning experiences to both undergraduate and graduate students and illustrate the excitement of intellectual inquiry. It might also be noted that this is an aspect of post-secondary education for which increased funding is available to universities. High-quality SRC activity will be encouraged and supported in all fields, but we need to have an eye to the potential to generate significant external resources in certain areas in which Ryerson possesses significant expertise.

Key Objectives:

- to increase significantly the level of peer-reviewed SRC “products” including, but not limited to, refereed publications.
- to increase the number and quality of research proposals submitted to external funders and the value and/or number of externally funded research grants.

(Something in the order of a doubling over five years would be a reasonable expectation.)

- to improve SRC infrastructure and to increase the Library's capacity to support SRC activity.
- to generate new and increased opportunities for undergraduate students to be involved in faculty SRC projects.
- to increase the number of research/SRC partnerships, both within Ryerson and with external organizations.

These objectives can be viewed as extensions of current trend lines. However, some additional requirements will have to be met in order to support expanded SRC activity. These include a competitive level of start-up funding for all new faculty and teaching workloads that are more "SRC compatible".

Over the next 2-3 years we will also undertake:

- to develop more effective mechanisms for tracking SRC activity and accomplishments.
- to implement effective internal peer review and mentoring mechanisms
- to articulate more precise targets for the key objectives outlined above. (Provisional targets are currently under discussion, but further thinking is required.)
- to sharpen focus on certain critical SRC niche areas consistent with our vision of a comprehensive, applied university integrally linked with its urban community.

4.2.4 Teaching

It is generally recognized that the best university level "teaching institutions" are those that are able to connect vibrant SRC activities to the educational enterprise. In this context, the educational enterprise includes both undergraduate and graduate teaching.

Key Objectives

- to reinforce the importance of high quality teaching to Ryerson's mission
- to ensure that there is appropriate support for, and recognition of, high quality teaching

There are many steps we can take to encourage, support, and value high quality teaching (and, more generally, student supervision) while also pursuing other parts of our mission. Some of these steps will require further discussion and some will require a reallocation of resources.

- We have to ensure that teaching is always emphasized appropriately in faculty hiring, tenure, and promotion processes. We will adjust policies, procedures, and expectations where necessary in order to ensure that good teaching is treated as a fundamental.
- We will strive to improve Teaching Assistant support in ways that enhance the

teaching and learning experience. (Not all courses and circumstances can be treated alike. There are situations in which greater TA support could improve course delivery and student learning while also providing faculty with greater capacity to conduct SRC activity. In other cases, this may not be so. Where the interests of learning and teaching cannot be demonstrated, we should proceed with caution.)

- Excellence in teaching requires appropriate workload flexibility and balances among teaching, SRC, and service expectations.
- Further Library enhancements are required to establish it as a comprehensive resource for teaching and course delivery.
- Additional programs will be developed and offered through the Learning and Teaching Office.
- At a somewhat more abstract level, we need to create an environment in which teaching and student supervision are explicitly recognized as primary contributions to the learning community.

The core activities described above cannot be treated in isolation either from one another or from other aspects of the learning community. They are best viewed as individual nodes in an ecology of learning that involves all academic activities and the people who participate in them. Because Ryerson is a young university, still developing new academic niches and organizational structures, we have an extraordinary opportunity to create mutually beneficial relationships among SRC activity, graduate and undergraduate programming, and teaching. This opportunity is also a challenge. It will not happen of its own accord, a lesson we can take from the experience of other universities. We will have to proceed deliberately.

4.3 THE LEARNING COMMUNITY: ABOUT PEOPLE

The community is a highly interdependent system that includes all faculty, instructors, students, staff, and academic administrators.

4.3.1 Faculty

A university evolves in direct relation to the expertise, commitment, and enthusiasm of its faculty. Faculty play a pivotal role in the learning community, and without an outstanding professoriate the learning enterprise is incomplete.

Key Objectives

- to position ourselves to attract the most promising new faculty (We expect to hire an unprecedented number of new faculty over the next five years.)
- to hire strategically, allocating positions in relation to academic plans at the University and local levels.
- to ensure that the learning environment is such that both newer faculty and those who are farther advanced in their career cycles will find Ryerson conducive to their teaching and SRC interests and supportive of their professional development.

There are several steps available to Ryerson in pursuing these objectives, some of which have been referred to elsewhere in this plan. (Where there are budgetary implications, we obviously do not work with a free hand. Many of these measures will have to be phased in, and choices will have to be made about which come first.)

- the provision of competitive levels of start-up support for all new faculty
- additional space for both teaching and SRC activity. This will include offices to accommodate new faculty and appropriately equipped laboratories. (Space is at a premium. Our ability to meet this objective in the very short term will depend on maximizing use of current space and bringing additional space on line as rapidly as possible.)
- appropriate degrees of flexibility in faculty workload patterns. While all faculty will participate in teaching, SRC activity, and service, there should be opportunities for the balance among these to be adjusted through time and from one faculty member to another. For instance, based on expertise, inclination, and departmental needs, one faculty member might focus more heavily on teaching while another is involved more extensively in SRC activity. Under certain circumstances, the weighting assigned to service might increase. Greater flexibility through time could enable faculty members to create different emphases during different stages of their careers, thereby contributing to professional development and greater career satisfaction. Flexibility of this sort could improve both teaching and SRC outcomes and provide greater incentives for service to the University.
- enhanced TA support
- increased SRC/graduate program opportunities

More generally, the quality of the learning community is itself a major factor in the successful recruitment of new faculty and, even more, in the decision of faculty members to commit to Ryerson over the long term. A community in which intellectual engagement is the norm, and in which faculty have meaningful opportunities to shape both their own careers and the evolution of the University as a whole, is perhaps the most profound contributor to faculty renewal and excellence.

4.3.2 Students

A successful university is one with capable, highly motivated students. Over the past five years, the academic qualifications of Ryerson's incoming students have improved continuously at a rate surpassing that of the Ontario system average. Admission into most programs is highly competitive. At the same time, for many of our students university life has become increasingly complex and challenging for both financial and personal reasons. We have to be sensitive to the fact that not all are "full time students" in the classic sense and that many struggle to find the ideal balance among study, work, and family responsibilities.

Key Objectives

- to attract students who are very highly qualified academically and highly

- motivated
- to continue to improve the level of student academic success, both in-program and post-graduation.

Much has already been done to enhance student recruitment and academic success, but we will go farther.

- Recommendations of the *Task Force on Student Success and Retention* will be reviewed by all academic units in the context of their initial academic plans.
- We will set clear objectives for the overall academic qualifications of incoming students in all programs. Our base-line objective in relation to these "101" applicants is to continue to increase the mean average of incoming students at a rate higher than the system average. At the same time, we must continue to attract highly qualified transfer students and other applicants from outside the secondary school sector.
- We will continue to expand international student exchange opportunities. Our objective is to establish a minimum of one exchange partnership in every program that has close academic comparators abroad. Programs that already have such exchanges will be asked to consider whether expanded involvement would be appropriate and, if so, to what level.
- We will increase student financial assistance through expanded bursary and scholarship programs. (Student assistance is a centrepiece of the *Invest in Futures* campaign, and early successes have been realized.)
- We will continue to improve academic advising, both centrally and in individual academic units.
- Given the obvious relationship between student success and appropriate curricula and course delivery mechanisms, we will work to develop more flexible delivery systems and to accommodate increasingly varied learning styles.
- We will improve Library facilities, provide more and better study space, and work to engender a greater sense of community.

4.3.3 Staff

Members of the Ryerson community are keenly aware of the pressures that have been placed on academic and administrative support units and the staff members who work in them. Many departments are overburdened, and the result has been a decline in the quality of working life for all of us because of (for example) a degraded physical environment or inadequacies in the provision of basic services. Moreover, many of the staff who work in these departments are invisible to most of the Ryerson community. They are integral members of the learning community and deserve more recognition and better support for their contributions.

This problem is almost exclusively of budgetary creation and in a constrained fiscal environment there is no magical solution. However, we have to ensure that support units are factored integrally into the University's investment decisions.

Key Objectives:

- to halt and reverse the reductions evident over the past decade in essential support units
- to provide greater recognition of staff members and the value of their work

This area involves both the academic and administrative sides of Ryerson, and the two areas will work together over the next year to develop specific strategies and targets.

4.3.4 Academic Administrators

Over the past several months we have too often heard the question “Why would anyone want to be a Chair or Director?”. (Occasionally the word “Dean” is substituted.) This is rarely, if ever, expressed in relation to financial rewards. Rather, it is expressed in relation to the nature of work associated with the position (i.e., too much “administrivia”), and a perceived imbalance between responsibilities of the position and the tools available to discharge them. Time devoted to academic administration is sometimes seen as a temporary withdrawal from one’s career path rather than as a period of growth and professional enrichment. We have to address these issues and make the positions of Chair, Director, and Dean more attractive. Academic leadership is absolutely critical to the evolution of the learning community and the overall quality of the University.

Key Objectives:

- to make academic leadership positions more attractive and more “doable” by ensuring that appropriate tools are available and that energy can be dedicated more to leadership rather than to purely administrative functions.
- to introduce more proactive succession planning into the academic administrative domain.

The Academic Planning Group, the Academic Administrators Group, Administrative Directors and others will be asked to participate in the development of strategies to deal with this circumstance. Discussions around this issue will commence later this year and continue through 2003/04.

4.4 INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Of the categories included in *Learning Together* this is the broadest, comprising elements that relate to all aspects of the learning community and our capacity to advance Ryerson’s mission. Continued resource scarcity has resulted in serious challenges to our capacity to provide and maintain adequate support and infrastructure. The challenges cannot be met all at once given current funding realities, but they have to be prominent on our list of priorities.

4.4.1 Space (Our Physical Environment)

Ryerson falls short of COU (Council of Ontario Universities) space standards in virtually

every category. This was true prior to the double cohort and it is certainly true now, even with our successes in the SuperBuild competitions. Moreover, our physical plant was for the most part created at a time when Ryerson was a very different kind of institution. The legacy of shared faculty offices is one reflection of that different era, as is the large number of classrooms of a size most commonly associated with secondary schools.

Our key objectives in regard to space are almost too obvious to warrant explication, but the fact that they are self-evident does not diminish their importance.

Key Objectives

- to build/acquire more space
- to use our available space to maximum advantage
- to configure both new and existing space optimally in light of current and projected teaching, learning, SRC, and workplace needs

Our ability to make progress on this front is inextricably related to resources. Given our considerable success in SuperBuild competitions and assuming positive outcomes from *Invest in Futures* and various revenue generation strategies, our priorities are:

- to create more flexibility in teaching and learning spaces. For example, we desperately need more large classrooms (large by Ryerson standards, meaning 120+ seats) and more small seminar rooms (capacity of 15-20). We also need more “smart rooms”.
- to create additional faculty offices and SRC space
- to create additional study spaces and group project areas
- to bring academically related units/activities into closer proximity
- to create suitable community spaces to enable us to assemble more easily for meetings, town halls, and other shared purposes
- to invest in maintaining the quality of our environment and in making efficient use of the space available to us.

4.4.2 The Library

Our Library staff have brought exceptional skill and commitment to the task of creating a first-rate learning resource for Ryerson, and have succeeded to a degree that we might not have imagined even a decade ago. However, our Library is still not on a par with those of other universities. Earlier planning documents and community consultations have affirmed that closing the gap is an academic priority for Ryerson.

Key Objectives

- to strengthen collections
- to improve the Library’s physical environment
- to assist the Library with its own strategic plan which will address staffing, IT, and other matters
- in more general terms, to bring the Library’s budget to the mid-point of the range

of comparator universities within three years.

4.4.3 Information Technology

IT issues fall into two categories. One involves “routine” development: replacing hardware, upgrading labs, expanding backbone/wireless capacity, licensing agreements, and the like. The other is more forward looking, having to do with where our priorities should lie, areas where we have to be at the cutting edge, the relationship between technology and learning, and the future of distance and distributed learning, among other considerations.

A working group is currently developing a proposal to renew Ryerson’s IT “blueprint”. We will wait until the group’s recommendations have been put forward before identifying precise objectives.

4.5 THE *LEARNING COMMUNITY*: REPRISE

Taken in its holistic sense, the learning community is about a collective spirit of inquiry, intellectual discovery, and shared understanding.

Key Objective

- to work together to sharpen our vision for Ryerson
- to define and build upon shared values and purposes
- to enrich the flow of ideas and intellectual energy, and to do so in an atmosphere of academic freedom and mutual respect.

It has been observed that communities grow organically and cannot easily be created by plans or policies. However, there are some things we can begin to address immediately.

- As individuals and as a collective we can reflect on the ways we communicate, and develop new mechanisms to help us learn about one another.
- We can take steps to diminish the so-called “silo effect”. The boundaries between academic units, disciplines, and programs should be meeting places for intellectual exchange, not barriers in the way of innovation, communication, and collaboration. We will encourage and reward outreach, cooperation, and collaboration with other units¹ in respect to program and curriculum development, teaching and learning, and SRC activity.
- We can look for ways of organizing our activities in such a manner that exchange and collaboration are encouraged, not impeded.
- We can use existing structures more fully and effectively to bring together communities of interest within the larger entity (e.g., the Academic Administrators Group, the Planning and Priorities Committee, and others) and create new structures, both formal and informal, to achieve similar ends.

¹And, where academically appropriate, with other universities.

- We can (and will) sustain the open conversations initiated through this planning process. Community consultations have been thoughtful, thought-provoking, and worthy of continuation after the plan is in place.

5. ACADEMIC PLANNING: THE MECHANICS

For a University's academic plan to have life beyond the printed page, it has to engage the aspirations, capacities, and day-to-day realities of the institution's academic constituencies. Effective planning cannot be an exclusively centralized activity. Meaningful participation on the part of all academic units is a prerequisite. Faculties, support units, and schools and departments all have essential roles to play, both in shaping their own developmental paths and in giving active expression to the University's overall plan .

5.1 THE PLANNING PROCESS

In the planning process set out here, all academic units will have the opportunity (and the responsibility) to engage in meaningful planning. Local expertise and discipline-specific knowledge will be brought to bear in shaping developmental paths and priorities within the context of an overall University plan. Planning at all levels will result in tangible outcomes. Plans that clearly contribute to an academic unit's capacity to sustain and improve quality (i.e., plans that demonstrate thorough self-assessment, a keen understanding of the external environment, and a clear and realistic sense of direction) will be associated with enhanced support. Plans that do not actively promote improvement (i.e., those that are purely descriptive, uninformed, lacking in direction, or reflective of undue complacency) will be associated with static or reduced support.

Key Objectives:

- Our first objective, by definition, is to complete and successfully implement the academic plan, and planning process, that have been under development for the past 18 months. The process has a built-in review and renewal element, so over the five year life of the plan it will be refined and redesigned as needed.
- A second key objective is to review the current distribution of academic responsibility and authority to determine whether the current approach is optimal. (Would greater decentralization be an asset? New or revitalized organizational structures? Realignments of existing structures?)

Ryerson's planning model is based on a five year planning cycle. In this cycle, an initial plan is followed by annual reviews and, once every five years, a comprehensive plan renewal. Within this model, a three step sequence is reiterated annually.

- Step one is the preparation of the University's academic plan or annual plan review, which will take place from May to September each year. The University plan articulates an overall academic vision, sets out goals and priorities, guides the academic budget, and establishes an operational framework within which plans are implemented.
- Step two (September-November) is the Faculty or support unit plan. At this level, the

University plan is viewed through the lens of local norms, cultures, and aspirations. Strategic priorities are established and directions set for the Faculty or unit, creating the framework within which resource allocations are determined.

- Step 3 (November-February) occurs at the school/departmental/area level. The focus at this stage is shifted more towards specific objectives and targets, and methods for meeting them. Departmental plans can be viewed as somewhat broader versions of what our periodic program review policy refers to as “developmental plans”, set within the context of Faculty and University plans.

As in any planning process, feedback mechanisms are essential. Local units take general direction from Ryerson’s academic plan, but they also inform it.

Planning is inevitably a demanding process. However, every effort will be made at the University and local levels to keep the demands manageable. We have to avoid at all costs a situation in which planning absorbs so much energy and so many resources that it impedes the very academic progress it is intended to serve.

Further procedural details are under development and will ultimately be brought to Academic Council for approval as appendices to the plan.

5.2 BUDGETING AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION

Thus far, *Learning Together* has been relatively silent on the matter of budgets and resources, focussing instead on matters of direction and objectives. Clearly, though, resources are integral to our ability to execute this or any other academic plan in a timely and effective manner. Resource constraints can reduce the rate at which we move forward, force decisions about “priorities within priorities” (i.e., Which among several possibilities has to come first?), or under extreme circumstances, stall progress in certain dimensions entirely. However, to plan Ryerson’s academic future on the basis of worst-case assumptions would be altogether self-defeating.

In this planning model, academic plans will drive budgets and resource allocations. Specific criteria and parameters to guide budget decisions have been under discussion for several months and have been outlined in earlier planning documents. Four very general criteria have been identified: centrality to mission, quality, responsiveness, and an omnibus financial criterion labelled “efficiency, effectiveness, and affordability”. Additional details have been identified for each. (See, for example, *Draft Academic Plan*, December 2002) However, the single most important criterion is the academic plan itself, as it defines Ryerson’s directions, priorities, and objectives.

In the coming year, additional steps will be taken to enable Ryerson to execute its academic plan. One example, which has been repeatedly emphasized in community consultations, is to develop further strategies to increase revenue. A second, emphasized in earlier documents, will be to achieve further efficiency in the allocation of current resources. A third will involve the creation of an *Academic Priorities Fund (APF)*. As in many other universities, the fund is to be established

specifically to direct resources to activities critical to Ryerson's mission at a particular time. In this context, priority investments could include the Library, physical/ infrastructure upgrades, and additional faculty start-up support, to name just a few current examples. Without a constant fund directed towards such purposes, the only available reallocative mechanism is to specifically withdraw resources from one area for transfer to another.

5.3 NEXT STEPS

Upon approval of this plan, a series of events will be set in motion. These include the development of Faculty and individual unit plans, the implementation of a variety of follow-up steps referred to in *Learning Together*, and the preparation of operational guides and planning manuals.

A "mini-review" of the plan will commence almost immediately after its approval. The intent will be to test its clarity and coherence in an operational sense and to establish a methodological basis for annual plan reviews.

6. AFTERWORD

Ideally, the benefits of an academic plan are realized not only in its implementation but also in the endeavour of creating it. Viewed in this light, *Learning Together* has already been successful, bringing together in thoughtful conversation individuals from nearly every constituency in the University. The process began in sombre tones dictated by budgetary necessity, but has ended in brighter hues: a vision based on the fundamental value of shared learning and understanding; our belief in a model of higher learning that is distinctively "Ryerson"; and our aspiration to exemplify a learning community in which all members - students, faculty, staff, and administrators - know themselves to be part of a shared enterprise and are recognized for their unique contributions. It is true enough that financial constraints continue to be part of our day to day reality and that no plan can immunize us from their effects. It is also true, however, that Ryerson has a special mission, is blessed with a wonderful tapestry of dedicated and gifted individuals, and can look to a future of extraordinary academic opportunity. As so often before, this is a time for Ryerson to move to a new, higher level. And we will do just that.

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APPENDIX

SOME PLANNING "GIVENS"

1. Ryerson's current academic goals remain appropriate

The goals established in *Academic Priorities* reports over the past several years are, in abbreviated form, *high quality programs, responsiveness to students, faculty excellence, high quality SRC activity, and excellence in learning support and infrastructure*. While these are somewhat too general to provide the basis for strategic decisions, they continue to express Ryerson's major academic goals and provide a perfectly suitable framework within which strategic planning can occur.

2. Ryerson will be significantly larger in five years

In five years time, Ryerson will have something in the order of twenty per cent more students than in 2001/02. This is primarily associated with the double cohort, but by the end of the five year period we will be approaching the echo baby boom. Allowing for short-term fluctuations, enrolment is expected to remain significantly higher than at present and the demand for additional spaces will grow again beginning in about 2008.

Enrolment growth has implications across many areas: the quantity, quality, and design of physical space; the need for more faculty and support staff; demands on Library and IT resources; and services to students, to name just a few.

3. Funding will continue to be scarce and uncertain

Ryerson continues to lobby actively for inflationary protection, the redress of unfunded BIUs, and other enhancements to the provincial funding regime. The Spring, 2003 Provincial Budget provides a greatly appreciated commitment to the funding of enrolment growth over the next few years and the institution of a Quality Enhancement Fund. However, the level of funds available remains inadequate and largely tied to highly volatile enrolment growth. There will continue to be uncertainty about the annual level of enrolment and operating funds and shortfalls in dealing with inflationary costs.

One important exception is in the area of research and innovation, where the Federal government has assumed an increasingly significant role. Since allocations have been based primarily on each university's track record with Federal Research Granting Councils, Ryerson, being a young university, has been at a disadvantage in this respect. However, we have established a solid performance base and are now recognized as an SRC presence. We have every reason to be confident that our success rate will continue to improve.

4. Competition to recruit and retain faculty will be unprecedented

Combine significant enrolment growth with a wave of faculty retirements, multiply the result by the number of universities in Canada (or, realistically, North America) and the outcome is obvious. In Canada alone, as many as 30,000-40,000 new faculty may be required by 2011 according to a recent AUCC study. Faculty renewal will be challenging in all fields; in some it will be extraordinarily so.

5. The post-secondary landscape will be fundamentally changed

The movement of Ontario's colleges into applied degree programming and the potential for private institutions to come on stream would represent dramatic changes in and of themselves. However, the changes we should anticipate are both broader and deeper. Institutions from out-of-province and out-of-country are likely to make their presence felt increasingly, as they have already done elsewhere. Within Ontario there may be new kinds of stratification within the post-secondary system(s), augured (perhaps) by new institutions such as UOIT (University of Ontario Institute of Technology), new collaborations such as Guelph-Humber, and new institutional designations.

New approaches to program delivery and to teaching and learning are likely to have an impact, and education may assume a more "modular" quality as students integrate academic study with the demands of careers and family. On-line education may not represent quite the paradigm shift that was assumed just a few short years ago, but it will certainly play itself out in new and largely unpredictable ways.

6. Our student body will be significantly different than at present

Changes in the secondary school curriculum will result in younger students entering universities. This on its own would give us pause. It is unclear how it will play out in respect to academic preparedness, personal and academic maturity, and - very significant for Ryerson - readiness to determine program and career choices after secondary school graduation.

Our student body will also be more diverse ethnically, culturally, and linguistically. This is a straight line extrapolation of what has been happening for many years, but we would be foolish to ignore the new opportunities this diversity will bring to our learning community. We should also recognize that there may be implications for program design and delivery, particularly as related to factors such as learning styles and English language familiarity.

We also need to keep in focus the very different and diverse student populations in Continuing Education and in our part-time programs. These students bring many different life experiences, personal and academic circumstances, and learning objectives.

7. Our new academic planning process (and the plan itself) should reflect several essential principles. It should:

- *respect and enrich Ryerson's differentiated mission*

Ryerson's mission emphasizes "the advancement of applied knowledge and research to address societal need" and "the provision of programs of study that provide a balance between theory and application and that prepare students for careers in professional and quasi-professional fields". This mission is taken as the foundation upon which our academic plans and planning processes are created. Our task is to fulfill that mission *as a university* through the constructive integration of SRC activity and graduate studies with teaching and undergraduate programs.

- *acknowledge and draw effectively on local, subject-area expertise, and be open and transparent in its development and in its ongoing evaluation and review*

An excessively centralized planning process is not best suited to Ryerson's goals or academic culture. Within the context of an overall University plan, there have to be both opportunities and expectations for Faculties, departments, and support units to develop plans that will shape their own priorities and directions. The process must include systematic opportunities for input, discussion, debate, and challenge. All planning procedures will be clearly identified and communicated to the Ryerson community.

- *set quality as the highest priority*

No university plans for anything less than excellence in any dimension of its activities. If we are going to do something, we should do it well. If we aren't doing it well, we should take steps to improve. If we are unable to improve, we should be prepared to ask tough questions about whether the activity, structure, or process needs to be continued. If it doesn't, better that we redirect the resources to other endeavours where quality can be enhanced.

We know that in an academic setting, quality is often difficult to assess. It is sometimes easier to "feel" than to measure. However, there are both quantitative indicators and qualitative assessment tools that can help us to understand various aspects of quality and changes in it.

- *acknowledge and address the requirements of efficiency, financial sustainability, and affordability*

As a public sector institution funded almost entirely by taxpayers and students, it is our inherent responsibility to use resources wisely and productively. However, there is a more immediate reason to be concerned with efficiency, that being that every dollar we invest unproductively is a dollar that could have been invested in other, more effective ways. We have to promote efficiency for the very simple reason that it maximizes the academic benefits of scarce resources.

Activities that generate net costs to the University and therefore require ongoing subsidy have to be considered in light of their contribution to Ryerson's mission. This is not to suggest that every activity can or should operate on a cost-recovery basis; this would be

impossible and probably quite undesirable. But subsidies have to be justifiable, and the best justification is one based on the contribution an activity or unit makes to the quality, academic richness, and reputation of the University and, more generally, to the fulfilment of our mission.