

Response to the Rae Review of Postsecondary Education November 2004

Lakehead University presents this submission in response to the Postsecondary Review Discussion Paper released on October 1, 2004. Lakehead supports the shared vision and recommendations presented in the Council of Ontario Universities' submission entitled *A Vision for Excellence*. Lakehead believes, however, that it is essential that all institutions be represented in discussions with Government in determining how growth, development in the system and changes to the funding formula will be constructed.

1. Adequate funding of all current students and infrastructure should be the first priorities of Government.

Meeting the objectives of improved quality, accessibility to a wider range of students, enrolment growth with increasing demographic and participation rates, development of graduate programs and sustained research excellence will require significantly improved funding for Ontario universities. The physical deterioration of the infrastructure must be addressed. As a starting point full funding for all eligible enrolment currently in the system will be required. Consideration should be given to allow universities like Lakehead to establish satellite campuses when there are willing partners.

2. If there is to be a delay in reaching full funding of the system's students, the decade long funding inequity suffered by Lakehead University should be corrected immediately.

Lakehead is seriously encumbered because of unfunded enrolment outside our original corridor that has seriously hampered operations for over a decade. This unfunded situation is anomalous in the university system as most unfunded enrolment is a much more recent phenomenon. Lakehead's situation resulted from a funding model for growth that set aside the important stabilizing principles of the corridor system for a competitive model which favoured institutions with the advantage of demographics and geography. The funding inequity was further exacerbated when the current Accessibility Envelope 'stranded' much of our unfunded enrolment by setting the base for incremental accessibility funding on enrolment that included unfunded students. This situation must be corrected now and guarded against in future growth models.

3. System funding should be managed using the 'corridor funding model' with its inherent principles of stability, predictability, equity, accountability and simplicity and any further 'accessibility' or growth funding should respect these principles.

Despite our negative experience with corridor funding, we believe it is the appropriate model for the Ontario system. Periods of growth and transition where the principles of the corridor system have

been abandoned have been unpredictable and unstable for many universities and particularly difficult for the smaller northern universities. These are the institutions for which continued growth is essential for development and economy of scale.

4. Adequate funding should be provided for Aboriginal academic bridging and access programming to Lakehead University, an institution with a high Aboriginal enrolment located in a region with a high percentage of the population of Aboriginal origin.

The special role of Lakehead University in meeting the access needs of a diverse and geographically dispersed population should be a central component in accessibility policy. Lakehead has extensive experience in promoting the success of northern Aboriginal students. Special targeted funding from the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy has helped to some extent; however, Aboriginal students face geographical, cultural, financial and academic barriers to the successful completion of postsecondary education that require far more complex support than can be provided from this modest fund.

In particular, students from many Aboriginal communities arrive at university without the academic skills necessary for success. Literacy and numeracy can be below grade 12 level and remediation is often required. The lack of the academic skills necessary for success can then lead to retention problems. Bridging provisions are necessary to provide students with the academic tools for success and mentoring is often required, yet funding is not in place for such programs. Lakehead University has been forced to discontinue its Aboriginal transition and access program in Engineering because the external corporate funding dried up. The Province of Manitoba, on the other hand, provides significant money to the University of Manitoba to fund successful access and mentorship programs for Aboriginal students.

5. Graduate studies and research are hallmarks of a university and each university should develop and strengthen these foundations of higher education consistent with its mission. Northern universities should be provided additional resources to allow their graduate programming to develop and grow to a level that is consistent with other comprehensive institutions in the Ontario system.

The Government has recognized the particular needs of the north and the need to train physicians here with the creation of the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. However, the need for skilled practitioners exists beyond the medical community. Graduate programming is very important to the vitality of the north. Lakehead trains core and professional graduate students in areas such as public health, business, education, forestry, the liberal arts and sciences. Many programs have a northern emphasis and many graduates remain in the region.

Research conducted at the University depends on the availability of graduate students. However, much of our current graduate enrolment is unfunded. Full funding for graduate growth is necessary to ensure the health of both Lakehead as an institution and the northwestern region that we serve. Research and scholarly activity are fundamental to a quality educational experience and there is an inextricable link between teaching and research that is fundamental to all universities. Universities large and small need graduate programs and access to research funds. It should be evident from Lakehead's growing research success that size is not the key determinant.

6. The Northern Ontario Grants which recognize the special fiscal demands faced by universities located in Northern Ontario and which are essential to our ability to operate in the northwest, must be maintained and should be indexed to the cost of living to curtail erosion of their value.

While Government has responded to some extent to the special needs of Lakehead University and other northern universities with the Northern Grants, university participation rates for northern residents, although improved, are still well below the provincial average and these grants are necessary to deal with the complex issues of a comprehensive university in Northwestern Ontario. The region's geography with its dispersed small communities and cultural diversity requires greater expense to deliver education that is accessible to all northerners.

To serve its regional mandate, Lakehead University is a comprehensive university with a much broader array of programs than is normally found in a university of its size. To deliver these programs with limited resources, Lakehead has developed a complex integration of liberal arts, sciences and professional programs. At Lakehead, arts and science programs depend on healthy professional programs to be viable and professional programs require strong arts and science programs to provide a critical component of their curricula. This integration has led to a dynamic of interest and cooperation among academic units that serves to strengthen the University and to encourage interdisciplinary activity so necessary in today's academic culture. While cost effectiveness and efficiencies are realized to some extent through this dynamic, the Northern Grants are absolutely necessary for our operation.

7. The link between higher education and economic prosperity should be supported by fostering the role Lakehead University plays in the economic prosperity and social development of Northwestern Ontario.

The link between higher education and socio-economic health is well proven and is extremely important to Northwestern Ontario and to Thunder Bay. The social, cultural and economic configurations of Northwestern Ontario are different from those of the southern areas of the province. Both the region and the City are suffering from declining populations and must deal with a changing economic structure due to the decline in the traditional resource sectors. There is an urgent need for a growing knowledge-based sector to offset these declines and to provide the foundation for economic stability. Fostering the link between economic prosperity and higher education provided by Lakehead University is critical to revitalizing economic growth and development in the northwest and to mitigate the financial burden that will otherwise be faced by social assistance programs.

8. Government should guide growth and development in the Ontario university system in such a manner that the benefits associated with the investment in higher education are felt more equitably in all regions of the Province and a 'northern corridor' should be established to ensure the benefits of higher education are felt across the Province.

Northern universities must be allowed to grow and develop if the benefits associated with the provincial investment in higher education are to be equally felt in all regions of the province. For northern universities, a more stable and equitable distribution of funding could be achieved by a

'northern corridor' that provides a set-aside portion of growth and resources for the north. Approximately 50% of our students come from Northwestern Ontario and the rest mainly from southern Ontario. The University needs to be able to sustain this outside the region intake or otherwise have access to southern Ontario students as a result of a satellite campus. We need to grow to become a larger institution to properly sustain the comprehensive programming necessary as the only university in this large region and to achieve economies of scale.

While arguments have been made that resource distribution issues and growth can best be resolved by autonomous and differentiated institutions responding to market forces and student and societal demands, the circumstances are quite different in the northwest and warrant special consideration. Lakehead can compete in an entrepreneurial system intellectually with ideas, enthusiasm, research excellence and quality programs as has been demonstrated by our successes. We cannot compete equitably on the basis of population density or geography and look to Government to "level the playing field" and deal with system inequities.

Although Lakehead University has a sound foundation with excellent academic programs and research strength on which to build a future, we are under tremendous risk due to the enormous impact of unfettered growth associated with Accessibility programs and our anomalous, decade-long unfunded corridor situation. The current Accessibility program has had a very negative impact on Lakehead University. For example, in 2001-02, our share of students enrolled directly from high school declined by 18% as southern institutions grew without restraint in order to garner the considerable fiscal benefits of increasing enrolment. Our intake will not return to its normal level until some stability is brought to the system.

System design and funding issues are extremely complex and must be approached with particular sensitivity to create a fair and competitive system that disadvantages neither students nor institutions. This is particularly important for Lakehead University. *We wish to make a very strong statement that if institutional growth is tied to regional demographics it will clearly contribute to the further economic decline of the Northwestern Ontario and will negatively impact this university.*

9. Support for the development of distributed learning should be increased and targeted to universities such as Lakehead with the existing capability and demonstrated commitment to use distributed learning to improve access and meet the needs of a diverse and dispersed Ontario student body.

Lakehead is at the forefront of Ontario universities in providing distributed learning opportunities. With the facilities of the new Advanced Technology and Academic Centre, Lakehead provides students with options for distance learning that parallel the traditional classroom experience and allow direct contact between instructors and learners as a result of innovative technology. Increasing numbers of students from across the province are making use of these opportunities. The distributed learning model is particularly important for low-income people, for Aboriginals and others located in remote communities for whom relocation is difficult, and for place-bound people, particularly women, with family and work responsibilities for whom flexibility is key to access and retention.

10. Universities should measure student satisfaction and engagement in a manner that is institution specific and congruent with their missions and which provides the institution the ability to compare itself with a self-selected peer group.

A common system-wide student satisfaction survey is not necessary. Lakehead University already participates in the Canadian Undergraduate Survey Consortium (CUSC) which provides a wealth of data that allows a comparison with peer universities as well as an overall comparison. Currently, many Ontario universities participate in this comprehensive, Canada-wide survey which asks students to assess numerous aspects of their university experience and to comment on their satisfaction level. Consistently, close to 90 percent of students are satisfied or very satisfied with their university experience. At Lakehead University this information is used to measure satisfaction and to address our commitment to continuous improvement in a variety of programs and services. Other universities participate in the American National Survey of Student Engagement, possibly because it is a better match with their needs. We would be pleased to share these results, compared to our selected peers, with Government.

11. A virtual centre of higher education teaching excellence could be established to promote best practices in curriculum development and teaching in the Ontario university system.

The development of best practices for teaching and the encouragement of the integration of new technology into the classroom are important objectives. A virtual, web-based centre of higher education and teaching excellence could offer training to faculty, share expertise and provide on-going support in the development of curriculum and teaching resources across institutions and thus provide instructors with support in the improvement of their teaching methodology. The Office for Partnerships for Advanced Skills at COU has expertise in new approaches to learning, actively promotes the use of learning technologies by faculty and could fulfill this objective.

12. Considering the importance of international activity and the benefits of supporting international study and exchanges, the funding eligibility of international students should be restored.

Internationalizing the student experience is a desirable objective. Students, institutions and society in general would gain a better understanding of international perspectives through direct experience with students from other nations and through exchange programs. These experiences would enhance the quality and value of a student's educational experience. However, it must be remembered that Government eliminated base funding for international students which has had a negative impact on international enrolment and exchanges at Lakehead University as well as other universities.

13. Cooperation between colleges and universities and system-to-system articulations should be improved and strengthened to provide flexible education pathways.

A fundamental strength of the current system of postsecondary education in Ontario is the diversity and the differentiation that exists between and among colleges and universities. The diverse societal needs and student demands of Ontario would not be well served by a more homogeneous system. There is strength in the differentiation that results from the complementary relationship among

sectors and institutions, however, cooperation must be encouraged and flexible pathways promoted between sectors. Despite the very different missions of colleges and universities, Lakehead University has been able to create college transfer programs and articulations that provide opportunities to college graduates who have the motivation and academic foundation to complete a university degree. For example, Lakehead offers the only engineering degree completion program in Canada for graduates of college engineering technology programs and continues to develop system-to-system articulations as well as program-to-program articulations with individual colleges. Information provided to college students to detail the credit value of the college courses taken for university academic programs could be clearer.

14. The necessary steps should be taken to make university education affordable to all segments of society as outlined in the Council of Ontario Universities' recommendation concerning the Ontario Student Assistance Program.

While it is acknowledged that higher education provides a benefit to both society and the individual and that both should share the cost, it must be recognized that the cost and the prospect of huge debt is a disincentive to many who have the aptitude for higher education. The Council of Ontario Universities presents in its submission a thorough recommendation to address important issues related to accessibility and retention. It outlines the improvements necessary to make education more affordable to all segments of society in its recommendation on improving the Ontario Student Assistance Program. Lakehead strongly supports this recommendation. Lakehead also believes that deregulation of tuition must be framed within reasonable limits and linked to mechanisms to fund student aid to ensure no qualified student is precluded from attending university because of financial constraints.

15. The Council of Ontario Universities' University Accountability Framework presents a comprehensive approach to accountability which is an appropriate way to address complex accountability reporting requirements.

This framework recognizes that universities are autonomous institutions governed by establishing Acts, reflects the responsibilities of the Board and Senate in governing the institution, monitors the mission statement, vision and strategic planning relationship, and measures progress to institutional goals and objectives with institutional-based performance indicators. Individual institutional performance indicators should be linked with a university's plans and, at the same time, support common elements that could serve as system indicators. A student identifier should be assigned when a student enters the system and which would be used to support system-wide indicators such as retention and graduation rate and other important tracking information as the student moves through to graduation at one or more institutions.