

President's message – April 2016

Members of the University community,

After yesterday's provincial election, and on behalf of the University of Regina, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all candidates for their commitment to public service, and congratulate those who have been elected to government and opposition. As they assume their political responsibilities that are so important for our province, we look forward to working with each of them to ensure that the University of Regina has the resources and public support it needs to build on the critical work being done here for the people of Saskatchewan.

Leading up to the election, we took every opportunity to inform political candidates from all parties about the role our University and its researchers play in the province. That includes the work we do in the area of sustainability, which gets additional attention each April. April 22 marks the most wide-spread environmental awareness initiative on the planet – Earth Day. This annual observance gives us all an opportunity to consider the fragility of our world and focus on lessening our environmental impact.

At the University of Regina, we consider ourselves to be part of the solution. Our commitment to the environment is reflected in our 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, *peyak aski kikawinaw*. Sustainability is one of the overarching themes of the plan, and the document recognizes the importance of maintaining a healthy environment.

Another initiative that reflects our dedication to the environment is the President's Advisory Committee on Sustainability. This committee was formed several years ago to appraise the University's sustainability efforts and inform institutional decision making.

In December 2013, the committee commissioned a campus sustainability survey to gather information about how members of the University community envisioned the University's sustainability efforts. The response was overwhelming, with more than 1,400 faculty, students, staff and community members completing the survey.

As a follow-up to the survey, smaller sessions were held in March 2014 to allow for more in-depth discussions. The resulting document, the Sustainability Strategic Plan, was launched earlier this year and lays out our vision for a sustainable future at our campus.

The plan outlines five areas of focus: leadership, waste, energy, transportation, and communication and engagement. It puts sustainability at the core of our teaching, research, and campus life, ensuring that we embrace emerging opportunities in sustainability and take into account the economic, cultural, social, and personal well-being of our campus community.

Already we have seen positive change. The Campus Lighting Revitalization Project is a \$1.68 million project that replaces old, inefficient lighting on the main campus with energy-efficient low-wattage lights. The project, which started last May and will conclude this summer, is expected to save \$157,000 annually.

Another recent sustainability initiative was discontinuing the use of chemical cleaning solutions in favour of ozonated water. This virtually odorless chemical-free cleanser is made by infusing ordinary tap water with electricity. The new cleaning procedure was recognized at last year's Best Practices in Collaboration in Education for Sustainable Development Forum held in Saskatoon.

Many important research projects on campus are also exploring how we can have a positive impact on our environment. For instance, a research team in the Integrated Microbial Systems and Society laboratory in the Department of Biology is working to understand how different microbial communities work together to break down oil and other contaminants. The team is hoping to find the perfect "oil-eating" microbial community. The result could have a major effect on the way petroleum spills are cleaned up.

Campion College's Dr. Katherine Arbuthnott is studying the best way to influence people to act in more environmentally friendly ways. As a conservation psychologist, Dr. Arbuthnott has discovered that in a drought, for example, people are more likely to save water when they learn about what they will lose if they don't conserve rather than what they will gain if they do. Conservation psychologists such as Dr. Arbuthnott provide critical insight into human behaviour that is crucial to putting effective climate change solutions into action.

At the University of Regina we are also working hard to ensure that our sustainability efforts are, well, sustainable. We have already begun tracking our progress using the Sustainability Tracking Assessment and Rating System (STARS), which measures sustainability performance at post-secondary institutions. We will submit to STARS in 2018 and 2020 to assess how our sustainability initiatives are faring.

In the years to come, the Sustainability Strategic Plan will help us make our vision of the University community a reality. It will be up to each of us to ensure that every day, we incorporate those sustainable practices into our lives. Doing so will give us the best opportunity to ensure that our children and grandchildren inherit the world they deserve.

Sincerely,

Dr. Vianne Timmons
President and Vice-Chancellor