

District Partner Communiqué
Ambrose University Update for the District Leadership of
The Christian and Missionary Alliance and The Church of the Nazarene Canada
Office of the President; March, 2019

Although spring-like weather may be little more than an aspiration in many parts of the country at time of writing, lengthening days, Reading Week at the university, and final exams little more than six weeks away, all signal that it is, indeed, time for our spring update to our district partners.

Enrolment

Fall and winter numbers for the current academic year were below our growth targets. This is both disappointing and concerning, although it is still too soon to determine if this will be a long-term trend or a temporary anomaly.

It is still too early in the recruitment cycle to have any real sense of numbers for fall 2019, but we have set what we believe to be achievable targets for new student recruitment and have engaged the entire faculty and staff in the recruitment process.

Retention is also a key aspect of overall student numbers, and we have instituted a very intentional program with faculty and staff institution-wide reinforcing the importance of “customer service” as it relates to the student body (and beyond, of course, but with the focus on providing a good experience for our students— and/or their parents – such that everything possible is being done to encourage students to complete their studies at Ambrose). A workshop was held for staff on February 11 and I was very pleased with how this was received.

Personnel Transitions

In the fall I advised you of the interim arrangements made to cover the vice president’s responsibilities in the Student Development division. In January of this year, following some internal reorganization of responsibilities, I appointed Monique Verhoef as Associate Vice President of the Student Life division.

We have recruited Dr. Alana Ireland as Assistant Professor of Psychology to join us in the summer. We have needed a second psychologist for our Behavioural Science program, but Dr. Ireland will also teach in a new psychology program that has recently been approved by the Campus Alberta Quality Council in time for fall 2019. The degree approval process is rigorous and lengthy and I commend program chair Dr. Jim Cresswell, Arts & Science Dean Dr. Linda Schwartz, and Vice President Academic Affairs Dr. Pam Nordstrom for their excellent work in steering our application to a successful conclusion.

Kathy Crawford will join the Education faculty as a full-time Assistant Professor in August. She has been teaching classes for us as a Lecturer for a number of years, and we are pleased to see her now transition to this more permanent role.

Searches in Music, Biology, and Christian Theology are also ongoing at time of writing; these searches have attracted some fine candidates and we hope to be able to make appointments in the coming weeks.

At the end of this academic year, we will bid farewell to two long-term Ambrose faculty: Rev. Dr. Bill McAlpine, Professor of Practical Theology retires after 29 years with the institution, and Dr. Ian Charter moves into retirement after 28 years with us. We will be holding farewell events on campus at the end of April, and acknowledging both at our undergraduate graduation ceremony on April 27.

Board Transitions

There are currently two vacancies on the Ambrose board as a result of resignations. One is a board appointee and the other is within the purview of the Christian & Missionary Alliance. Our Nominating and Development Committee is currently working to identify the right nominees for appointment and some very strong candidates are emerging.

Financial Update

As we have communicated on frequent occasions, Ambrose University is currently functioning under significant financial constraint. We have not been able to persuade the Government of Alberta to update the funding formula. And we have only been able to make modest progress on the development front. And even though we continue to raise tuition, we continue to live with the challenge of a rather high amount of mortgaged debt. This is significantly limiting our capacity to fulfill our mission and serve our affiliated denominations.

In response to this development a decision has been made to sell a significant portion of our land. Two conditional offers on two separate parcels have been received and accepted by the Board of Governors. If these offers go through and the conditions are removed we can anticipate that we will have the cash in place to make debt a less onerous factor in our operations. However, we will not see the proceeds from these sales until late 2020. So, in the meantime, we continue to operate under an austerity budget that means that some key faculty positions are not being filled. Salaries for faculty will continue to be somewhat depressed – the lowest of our peer institutions. And, as significant as anything, we will need to secure bridge financing to cover our cash short-falls through the coming two fiscal years. The TD Bank, which holds our mortgage, is not prepared to increase our line of credit; thus, as I write this, our CFO – Don VanderZwaag – is diligently exploring other options with both church and financial institutions so that by the end of April 2019 we have this bridge financing in place.

We continue to be very grateful for all church and denominational support that we receive; your partnership with us in this ministry is deeply appreciated.

Campus Renovations

With growth in the biology program, there is still urgent need of a third laboratory space. We have received further designated funding for this project from a donor and over the coming summer we will be retrofitting an existing classroom into a fully functioning chemistry wet lab. This is a significant step as it means we will not have to cap enrolment to one of our strongest programs.

Events Recent and Upcoming

At the end of January each year, classes take a brief day-long break to allow students to participate in a Program Day where faculty and students from each program participate in a day of activities pertinent

to each program. Events this year were as diverse as exploring the spectacular new downtown Calgary public library; a geocaching exercise; a visit to the Military Museums; a spiritual retreat; and a number of program-specific panels and speakers. And, as important as anything during the day, time spent together as a group engaging over a meal. Faculty reported high levels of engagement for the day and were encouraged by many of the conversations that took place.

February 5 marked our third annual day of prayer. While classes continued as usual, there were a series of times throughout the day for the community to gather and pray. It was a delight to welcome staff from a number of local churches who came to campus and participated in some of the day's events. Several also met with students from their churches over the lunch time to eat together and pray. Opportunity was also provided for churches at a distance to include prayer for Ambrose in Sunday services the weekend prior to February 5.

As always, our graduation events will take place at the end of April. We anticipate in the region of 175 graduating students this year across undergraduate, education, and seminary. All three graduation ceremonies will take place on Saturday, April 27. We have secured three superb speakers for 2019: Those graduating from our undergraduate programs – Arts and Science and School of Ministry – will be addressed by Dr. Santa Ono, President of the University of British Columbia. Our education graduates will receive words of encouragement and commendation from Dr. Ken Badley, retired professor of education at George Fox University; and our seminary graduation speaker will be Rev. Greg Hochhalter, Lead Pastor of Sherwood Park Alliance Church, Edmonton, AB.

Constituency Engagement

I try to preach in our partner churches at least once per month and I have been pleased to be invited to a number of churches over recent months, including Skyview Community Church, Calgary (twice!); Mission Creek Alliance (Kelowna); Spruce Grove Alliance; Ancaster Village Church; Fraserlands Alliance; and, upcoming, Trailview Alliance (Swift Current); First Alliance (Toronto); Stony Plain Alliance; and Lethbridge Church of the Nazarene.

We have been pleased to have representation at a number of the denominational pastors' retreats in recent months, and anticipate Ambrose representation at most of the spring assemblies and district conferences across the country. We very much appreciate the opportunity to participate in these events.

Our alumni and friends events continue with dates planned for Regina, Toronto, and Calgary in the coming months. On May 4 we will celebrate 10 years on the west Calgary campus with a day-long event. And, we are very aware that 2021 marks the centennial of the formation of our Nazarene predecessor school Calgary Bible Institute (as well as the 80th anniversary of the formation of Canadian Bible Institute in Regina), and we hope to appropriately celebrate this significant milestone at that time.

Towards the end of February I was pleased to speak at an event for pastors from the great Red Deer region. Hosted by CrossRoads Church, one of the larger Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada congregations (Ambrose has a partnership agreement with the EMCC) it was very good to have this point of connection with a portion of our broader constituency. I spoke on "Being Christian in a Secular Society", something that seems to become more challenging with each passing year.

Conclusion

Thank you for your continued support of Ambrose University. These are not easy days in the academy but our partnership with our founding denominations is both appreciated and essential. Thank you for your prayer support, your financial support, and for encouraging the young people in your congregations to consider Ambrose for their post-secondary education.

Respectfully submitted

Gordon T Smith, PhD
President