



# LAURIER

*Wilfrid Laurier University*

## ACADEMIC PLAN 2010-2015

### WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In 2011, we will celebrate our first centenary. It is therefore timely that we initiate this new Academic Plan, which recognizes the strengths and unique characteristics we boast as an institution while identifying the areas which we will continue to emphasize and in which we will initiate focus. This Plan has been developed out of a desire to merge the previous academic plan—the Century Plan (2005)—and the Values, Vision and Mission statements created in 2008-09. The goal of the Academic Plan is to identify the core principles and academic domains which underscore our uniqueness and demonstrate our excellence in the Canadian university system.

Wilfrid Laurier University strives to be a diverse, personal and supportive community. A hallmark of Laurier is its community of faculty and staff that is accessible to students and responsive to student needs. Laurier's institutional-wide community is dependent on the richness and efficacy of the interaction of its many varied sub-communities, which are a tapestry of remarkable and intersecting constituencies that transcend our campus locations. Laurier is strengthened by the multi-campus dimension of the university. We recognize the value that comes from having variety in scope, specialization and emphasis of the core academic strengths of campuses as dictated by their strategic locations, histories, visions, academic profiles and student and learning environments. The Laurier Values, Vision and Mission, and this Academic Plan, unite the Laurier community while recognizing that campuses will develop in unique ways with distinct directions.

Wilfrid Laurier University has a long and distinguished history of teaching excellence and concentration on student success in the liberal arts and sciences and select professional programs. This is now coupled with growing research intensity and increasing numbers of graduate programs. Laurier's commitment to teaching and learning is manifested in our focus on integrative and applied learning. Theoretical research and academic programs are balanced by applied, practice-based research and pedagogy generated across academic disciplines and the professions. Application of knowledge is central to our commitment to enriching the lives of those in both local and global communities; to preparing students for fulfilling careers; to making meaningful contributions through the application of research-grounded policies and practices to society's most pressing problems; and to facilitating innovation that improves systems and processes in the natural, technological, business, social and cultural arenas.

Universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are called upon to be many things to many people. Universities are charged with equipping learners with the skills, knowledge, habits of mind, and rigors of practice needed to function in our increasingly complex world. At Laurier, we focus on preparing people for lives of leadership characterized by responsibility, commitment and compassion. Acquisition of academic knowledge and critical thinking skills are balanced with opportunities for engaged and relevant application and reflective practice. This requires that we accommodate—indeed encourage—analysis and scrutiny of society's most difficult and complex questions and problems. We do this by facilitating deep disciplinary knowledge, providing students with the tools needed to deal with society's most pressing issues, and focusing on meaningful student development.

Laurier's approach to post-secondary education is distinguished from that of other universities not only by our balance among teaching and research, graduate and undergraduate curricula, and professional and academic programs, but also by our fostering of community and enhancement of the student experience. This unique niche in Canada's post-secondary education sector is best described by our:

- **Core Principles:** the overarching characteristics and key intellectual areas that define us institutionally; and
- **Domains:** the strategic areas where we have acknowledged excellence and where we seek to maintain or develop national and international recognition. The domains are supported by the comprehensiveness of the academic programs and the academic-support, administrative and student-affairs units throughout the institution.

## LAURIER'S CORE PRINCIPLES

As Laurier continues to grow in size and complexity and as a multi-campus institution, it will incorporate its core principles into the academic and student life experiences of each campus, while recognizing the importance of academic diversity, individuality and specialization within each campus.

**Discovery and Innovation:** The discovery and transfer of knowledge among scholars and students, and beyond to society, are cornerstones of a great university. Laurier enjoys a long-standing reputation for creation, application and teaching of innovative academic knowledge that is relevant to society as a whole. Laurier will strengthen our focus on regional, national and global discovery and innovation initiatives through partnerships and programs that bring academic and applied scholarly focus to bear on important business, social, cultural and technological issues.

**Civic engagement:** Civic engagement is individual and collective action intended to identify and address issues of public concern. Civic engagement requires a reciprocal process between the community and university. At Laurier, we exemplify this notion of engagement both inside and outside the classroom. Inside the classroom, we demonstrate our interest through specific programs and courses that teach students the impact of their actions at both local and global levels. Outside the classroom, Laurier's students make a difference through programs that encourage community volunteering, performance, field studies and service learning. Our faculty tackle problems of public concern in their scholarly research, which informs and enhances their course offerings.

**Diversity:** We acknowledge and respect the richness and diversity of all members of our community and value their contributions to every aspect of university life. Laurier strives to affirm people of all genders and sexual orientations, persons with disabilities, Aboriginal persons, persons of a visible minority and other historically disadvantaged groups as contributing to the vitality of the Laurier community, not in spite of their differences, but because of them. Laurier recognizes the unique heritages of Aboriginal peoples and supports the intentions of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples to preserve and express their distinctive indigenous cultures, histories and knowledge through academic programming and co-curricular activities. We are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion within the university and larger communities.

**Integration:** The purpose of integration is to graduate students with the capacity to be critical thinkers and problem solvers who can draw on knowledge, skills and personal and work experiences to resolve complex issues encountered in life and in work. At Laurier, integrative forms of pedagogy move beyond the generation and transmission of knowledge in a particular discipline to various modes of synthesis as facilitated by the Library and found in multi- and interdisciplinary programs and research centres; the application of both theory and practice in academic and professional programs; hybrid forms of pedagogy including interdisciplinary courses; and community, practicum, volunteer and work placements. Overall, integration involves curriculum design; attention to assessment practices to enable interdisciplinary teaching; the connection of work and learning; and the connection of social, personal and community responsibilities with intellectual life.

**Global Citizenship:** Laurier students graduate with international and cultural dimensions to their learning, providing them with opportunities to understand what it means to live in a world defined by globalization. Global citizenship is not solely about geopolitical boundaries but about understanding the mosaic of world views that are framed by culture, geography, ethnicity, spiritual beliefs and socio-economic status. Internationalization brings a global dimension to the curriculum as well as to the broader university experience.

**Sustainability:** The most complex questions involve challenges related to cultural, economic, environmental, and social sustainability. Inherent in sustainable systems is the need to work toward equitable distribution of opportunities, benefits and decision-making. Sustainable development occurs when we improve the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems. At Laurier, we focus on sustainability from all perspectives across our academic and professional programs. Achieving global sustainability requires multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to address changing relationships among individuals, societies, organizations, resources, ecologies, businesses, technologies and development.

**Justice:** Laurier will continue its long-standing focus on citizenship and justice. This institution inspires ideas of fairness, equality, and social justice throughout the university community and in society. Citizenship and justice are evident in the social and personal development of students; in academic and professional program curricula; and in scholarly focus and teaching emphasis.

**Quantitative and Scientific Analysis:** Laurier is committed to promoting scientific literacy and to producing graduates with a broad range of quantitative and analytic skills and understanding. Such knowledge provides a foundation for contributing innovatively to the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines, as well as to business, economic, political, ecological, social and health related issues and analysis and the interdependent decision-making processes related to these issues. This principle recognizes the complexity of the problems facing our world, and that their solutions will require expert knowledge of both their quantitative and qualitative aspects.

**Communication and Performance:** Communication and performance are important in a range of careers as well as in all positions of leadership. Making knowledge public—regardless of discipline, context, venue, or audience—is a form of communication or performance. Learning develops best when presentation of the self develops concurrently. Research, analysis, organization, rehearsal, review and delivery are involved in performance or communication of learned material.

## LAURIER'S DOMAINS

The following domains are our strategic areas of nationally- and internationally-benchmarked clusters of excellence, in research, programming, and creative areas. They have been forged from, and are interconnected with, the high quality and comprehensiveness of, and synergies among, our academic and professional programs. The combination of these “spheres of influence” within a Canadian university is unique to Laurier. The domains are recognized in the Academic Plan to intentionally emphasize the global impact and influence of Laurier’s graduates, scholarly output, and community and professional outreach.

**Professional Programs:** We offer professional programs that consistently exceed national and international standards (including accreditation) and provide graduates with the skills they need to succeed in their chosen careers. The integration of research and theoretical knowledge with technical and analytical skills, practicum, volunteer, service learning or co-operative opportunities, and application of ethical principles, are all characteristics of Laurier’s professional programs. The scholarship in these areas similarly requires a synthesis of theoretical and practical knowledge. Tomorrow’s leaders in Laurier’s professional disciplines are equipped with the experience and knowledge needed to enrich lives

locally and globally, make meaningful contributions to societal and business challenges, and engage responsibly in our global reality.

**Governance:** Governance relates to decisions that define expectations, grant power, or verify performance and is relevant to governments, businesses and organizations. The issues of governance at all levels centre on the relationship among citizens, groups, businesses, institutions and the state. Governance is concerned with accountability and responsiveness, be it in the public sphere via democratic or other institutional processes, in the private sector through reporting relationships and transparency or in the numerous parts and organizations of society that transect these spheres. In all cases, proper governance mechanisms serve as important conduits of interaction between individuals, groups and larger bodies, and provide mechanisms to question, analyze and propose changes to policies and procedures. As such, governance challenges are ongoing and best addressed from multi-disciplinary perspectives, as the impact of decisions is felt at all levels of society.

**Environment:** At Laurier we approach environmental issues from multiple perspectives, ranging from analysis of the health of natural ecosystems and urban environments, including their impact on human health and well-being, to psycho-social perspectives on environmental awareness and activism and their relationships to the development of natural- and urban-environment related policies and practices. Our scientific, historical, socio-cultural, and theoretical analyses cover a wide range of natural environments and human communities around the globe. Enhanced understanding of the interrelationships of ecosystem parts, human-environment interactions, and human values toward natural and urban systems, are essential to understanding the complexity of contemporary debates about access to natural resources, land rights, climate change, and to sustainability.

**Health and Well-Being:** The study and implementation of ideas related to human and community health and health practices from biophysical, social and organizational perspectives are core to Laurier's health programs. Focus areas include best practices for optimization of human health, disease amelioration relative to the environment, administrative, delivery and clinical practice issues. A multidisciplinary scope of enquiry relative to both community and individual health and well-being issues underlies our academic approaches to their understanding.

**Social and Cultural Analysis:** Social and cultural analysis relates to the examination of material production, social institutions, media and popular texts, artistic works, science and technology, governance, patterns of equality and inequality, and everyday actions, beliefs, and values in relation to a people, a community, a particular time period, or humanity in general. Social and cultural analysis also encourages new ways of understanding and addressing the many pressing social issues of our time, while providing new tools for explaining the human condition in ways that move beyond parochialism, prejudice, and conflict. Laurier recognizes that meaningful actions and policies to achieve social justice and sustainability are reliant upon in-depth analysis of how events and issues have evolved, their impact and effects, and how they are represented, historically and cross-culturally, by citizens, communities, businesses, institutions, and the state.

**Cultural and Artistic Production:** Cultural and artistic production relates to the activities and products of artistic and intellectual creativity, whether in visual, aural, material, kinaesthetic, or written form, that express and call forth emotions, communicate ideas, create aesthetic experiences, environments, and/or explore the nature of perception. Communities with strong cultural and artistic foundations provide greater opportunities for engagement of all citizens and for increased social and economic development and prosperity. We recognize the centrality of creative expression to individual and community well-being and development, and the role of the arts in identity-making and advocacy.