

**Final Report:
Phase 1 of the Academic Visioning Initiative**

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Prepared by the Academic Visioning Steering Committee:

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This final report is based on comments from the community received by the Committee on its penultimate report during January and February, 2006. The Committee would like to express its deep appreciation to those who provided input. This report was approved by Senate on April 19, 2006 to direct academic planning for the University over the next five years.

Purpose and Background

Over the course of its first decade as an independent post-secondary institution, the University of Northern British Columbia has responsively developed over sixty undergraduate, professional, and graduate degree programs. In doing so, the University has become regarded as one of Canada's leading small universities. In addition to engaging in ongoing curricular and administrative changes during this relatively short time period, the University has conducted two major strategic academic planning initiatives (Appendix 1). While the earlier strategic plans varied in both focus and content appropriate to the University's stage of development at the time, they did not specifically identify what the University of Northern British Columbia's programmatic and pedagogical areas of academic strength were. Without such an organizing vision, it is difficult to direct investments strategically toward strengthening the academic programs and services of the University in ways that best meet the needs of students.

It is within this historical strategic planning context that the Academic Visioning Initiative (AVI) was established in early 2005 by the Academic Planning and Services Committee of President's Council. The purpose of the AVI was described to the Board of Governors in the following way:

It is now timely to review the basic philosophical and pedagogical foundations for academic programming at the University of Northern British Columbia, to examine the success of current programs in attracting and retaining students, and to consider areas of potential new programming that would build upon the University's existing academic strengths and broaden the program options available to students in areas of potential enrolment growth. Plans for academic development will consider teaching and research programming in an integrated way.¹

The importance of undertaking this planning initiative at this juncture is underscored by the fast changing post-secondary environment the University finds itself in, one marked by ever-increasing levels of public accountability, sharp competition for the best students and faculty, and significant underlying demographic and economic changes in the region and province. The recent overall decline in undergraduate enrolments at the University provides ample evidence of the need to take stock of our academic strengths and to use these strengths strategically in the coming decade for planning purposes. General enrolment declines and/or lack of growth in many undergraduate programs, when coupled with increasing interest in professional and graduate education, points to underlying changes in student preferences that must be considered when planning for the future. If the University is to meet the challenges these changes engender, the strategic academic plan must provide a clear vision of what the University of Northern British Columbia wishes to be, become, and be known for.

This document is intended to provide the university community with the results of the work of the AVI Committee in the first phase of its two-part mandate. The purpose of

¹ Responding to British Columbia's Changing Post-Secondary Environment: Report to the Board of Governors, November 20, 2004.

this Phase 1 Report is to present a strategic academic vision supported by an organizing academic framework that will be used to guide the University's future investments in its programs and pedagogy. The second phase of the AVI will direct the implementation of the strategic academic plan.

The Work of the AVI Steering Committee

Overview

Following the appointment of its members in February 2005, the steering committee² made the decision to approach the development of the strategic academic plan in two phases, both of which would be conducted through broad consultation with faculty, students, staff, and community members. In the first phase, the committee's focus was on the development of an organizing framework to describe the University's academic vision and its thematic areas of strength in both program areas and pedagogy. This framework will be used to inform and direct academic development over the coming five to ten years in the following operational areas:

- Academic program development and planning
- Student, staff, and faculty recruitment and marketing
- Resource allocation for programs and services
- Accountability reporting to government
- Evolution of the University's strategic research plan

Beginning in the spring semester of 2006, the second phase of the AVI will focus on the more detailed operational implementation of the strategic academic plan.

Process

In March 2005, faculty members were invited to participate in an assessment of how well their teaching and research interests aligned with the University of Northern British Columbia's Strategic Research Plan³ and to suggest other academic thematic areas they believed either existed, or should be developed. In the absence of a plan that described the University's thematic areas of academic strength, the Strategic Research Plan provided a springboard from which to work. The results of the March review were released in April and formed the basis for further consultations that took place between May and November, 2005. Of great interest to the committee was the finding that two-thirds of the respondents indicated they were engaged in academic and research activities that were not represented by the Strategic Research Plan. This gap demonstrated that a more detailed and intensive period of investigation and consultation was warranted if the committee was to develop a meaningful academic planning document.

² Committee members include Max Blouw, Howard Brunt (Chair), Bill McGill, Paul Michel, Jim Randall, Peter Rans, Carolyn Russell, Heather Smith, Bob Tait, Diana Thomson, Eleanor Wint.

³ The Strategic Research Plan for UNBC was developed in response to the requirements of the Canada Foundation for Innovation and the Canada Research Chair programs. While this plan was never intended to serve as a broader academic plan, it did provide the committee with a starting point for its work.

Informed by eight facilitated forums conducted at the Prince George campus and six held in the regions⁴ and written submissions from individuals, groups, and programs, the committee worked in an iterative way over a six month period on an evolving document to describe the academic themes at the University. The committee took a ‘living document’ approach as the consultation process unfolded, revising the key findings based on re-analysis in light of new information and then sharing those results with the university community through email updates and a dedicated website. In addition, the committee reviewed documents from other universities to understand how academic themes were organized and used elsewhere.

Based on input from the consultations and external reviews of other institutions, the committee decided to work on the development of an organizing academic framework with two main thematic branches: academic program themes (“what we do”) that capture both the educational and research activities of the University, and pedagogical themes (“how we do it”). The academic program themes were further sub-divided into thematic academic clusters and foundational academic themes. The committee also deemed it important to revisit the University’s vision and mission statements, as they are critical to the development of a coherent strategic academic planning document. The results of these consultations and deliberations are detailed below.

Academic Vision and Mission Statements

Academic Vision Statement

A vision statement provides an institution with a way to communicate succinctly what it wishes to be and become; put another way, it says “where we are going.”⁵ For a vision statement to provide meaningful direction for an institution it must be both aspirational and, to the extent it communicates the heart-felt hopes of its constituents, inspirational. At the same time, a vision statement must be realistic and have the potential for being achievable. The AVI Steering Committee proposes the following academic vision statement:

The University of Northern British Columbia aspires to be Canada’s premier small research-intensive university, with internationally recognized academic and research programs that prepare its graduates in select areas of high relevance to the peoples of our region, province, and beyond.

This vision statement is aspirational; the AVI Committee believes it provides a demonstrable and realistic goal that the University can strive for and achieve, while at the same time celebrating what makes the University of Northern British Columbia unique. This statement signals that, while the University remains firmly rooted in and committed to the region it serves, it aspires to be more than a regional institution. The statement also highlights that the University views the preparation of graduate and undergraduate

⁴ UNBC’s campuses are in Terrace, Prince Rupert, Ft. St. John, Quesnel, and Prince George and there is a federation agreement with Wilp Wilxo’oskwhl Nisga’a in New Aiyansh

⁵ Sir Graeme Davies, Association of Commonwealth Universities benchmarking conference report, August, 2005.

students as central to what it does. Given its accomplishments in just eleven years, it is time to signal clearly to potential students, faculty and staff, that the University has a national and international presence. It should be understood that incorporation of the modifier “small” is not meant to classify the University within any particular group of universities (i.e. rankings in Maclean’s magazine); rather, it is both factually accurate and used to celebrate the fact that the University of Northern British Columbia’s small size is highly relevant to what shapes the academic vision and mission of the University. The use of the phrase, “select areas,” is deliberate as the committee believes that it is time to firmly plant the University’s flag in the ground with respect to those thematic academic clusters for which it wishes to be known. The Northern regional context of the University, with its rural, remote, and small communities, resource-based economy, and high concentration of indigenous peoples, has much in common with other regions in Canada and elsewhere in the world.

Academic Mission Statement

A mission statement not only identifies what the organization does, but also specifies whose needs and expectations are being served.⁶ Consistent with its mission, the University of Northern British Columbia’s academic mandate is *to bring the world to Northern British Columbia and Northern British Columbia to the world*. The committee developed an academic mission statement that places the University’s students front and center:

The mission of the University of Northern British Columbia is to provide excellent academic programs and services for its undergraduate, professional, and graduate students so that they are prepared for roles that will improve the quality of life for the peoples of Northern British Columbia, the rest of the province, Canada, and beyond. The University’s core academic values of excellence, inclusiveness, curiosity and creativity, and responsiveness underpin its mission. To demonstrate accomplishment of its mission, the University of Northern British Columbia’s graduates will exhibit the following:

- *Appropriate depth and breadth of knowledge in their chosen areas of study*
- *Analytical, critical, and creative thinking informed by research and theory*
- *Liberality, inclusiveness, and an appreciation of diverse perspectives and ways of knowing, in keeping with UNBC’s Carrier motto – ‘En cha huná (respecting all forms of life)*
- *Personal growth, leadership skills and the ability to effectively communicate ideas*
- *Passion for pursuing life-long learning and intellectual development*
- *Commitment to positive citizenship from the local to global levels*

⁶ It is by attending to the needs of students for high quality academic preparation that the University’s social mission is accomplished, and, importantly, the mission statement outlines some key student outcomes that the AVI Committee believes should be made explicit. Without providing faculty and staff with the environment and tools they need to do their jobs, it would be impossible to serve students or accomplish UNBC’s mission as a university.

Students will be provided an educational environment marked by its student-centeredness, relevance, and pedagogy that optimizes learning. To enable its mission, The University of Northern British Columbia seeks to provide its faculty and staff members with a positive, stimulating, and supportive environment in which to conduct their student-centered academic work.

This mission statement clearly identifies what students should expect from their educational experience at the University and these student outcomes are discussed in more detail later in this report. The mission statement demonstrates that the University is deeply committed to imparting a life-long appreciation of knowledge for knowledge's sake as well as supporting the application of that knowledge for the greater good of society.

Thematic Academic Clusters, Foundational Academic Themes, and Pedagogical Academic Themes

Overview

As noted above, the primary objective of Phase I of the academic strategic planning process was to create a coherent organizing framework for describing both the thematic focus of the University's academic programs and how those programs are delivered. Following a review of how other institutions approached this task and consultations within and external to the University, the AVI Committee determined that three inter-related, yet distinct, types of themes would be used to create the framework: Thematic Academic Clusters, Foundational Academic Themes, and Pedagogical Academic Themes. Each will be described in more detail below.

Thematic Academic Clusters

The first type of theme, the Thematic Academic Cluster, describes a higher order area of substantive academic study that a cluster or grouping of programs and faculty members seeks to address. Thematic academic clusters are, by their nature, inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary and explore complex issues and phenomena. These thematic clusters are issue, problem, population, and philosophically based.

In order to assess potential thematic academic clusters, the committee used a guiding set of principles that were developed through consultation with the University and the broader community. The following criteria for the identification of the clusters were adhered to:

The thematic academic clusters will

- authentically represent the University's academic strengths and aspirations
- exhibit a reasonable balance between breadth and depth (i.e. neither too specific nor too broad)
- be maximally inclusive of current programs as well as directive of new programs

Although the AVI Committee was not set on a particular number of clusters as it began its work, reviews of other institutions' frameworks and the committee's own internal consultations suggested that the optimal number would be between four and eight. The names of the thematic academic clusters were informed, but not determined, by those used at other academic institutions.

Based on the consultation process and application of the above guiding review criteria, the committee identified a set of six thematic academic clusters that it believes best represents what the University should seek to address through its academic programs over the coming decade:

- Natural Resources and Environment
- Health and Human Development
- Commerce and Community Sustainability
- Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge
- Global Processes and Perspectives
- Artistic and Cultural Expression

What follows is a brief discussion of the six thematic academic clusters in terms of what each addresses, its relevance, and the related academic programming at the University. The programs that have been identified as being related to a particular Thematic Academic Cluster are not meant to be exclusive, but only to demonstrate those most obviously related to each theme.

Natural Resources and Environment

The Natural Resources and Environment thematic academic cluster encompasses the scientific, socio-cultural, and humanistic examination of renewable and non-renewable natural resources and the physical, cultural, and social environments in which we live. As such, this cluster is inclusive of all forms of life and ecosystems, and its primary purpose is the development and sharing of knowledge that will be used for responsible stewardship of natural resources and the environment, particularly in the North and other rural and remote regions. The topics covered in the Natural Resources and Environment cluster are inherently interdisciplinary with the diverse inter-relationships among humans, resources, and ecosystems at their core.

The environment of British Columbia has many unique attributes, including its diversity and multiple, sometimes competing, opportunities for human enterprise and renewal. At the same time, most, if not all, of the environmental and natural resource challenges that are addressed by the University of Northern British Columbia's academic programs are global in nature and go well beyond our immediate region. Responsibilities in the University's academic mandate range equally from survival of resource based communities to maintenance of global ecosystem services. The challenges of responsibly managing the natural resources and related industries in the University's immediate region and in similar regions internationally are considerable given the implications for the physical (i.e. air, land, and water), cultural, and social environments. The Natural Resources and Environment cluster is favored by UNBC's central location within an environmentally diverse region with established traditions of land stewardship among

First Nations interacting with industrial land management ethics, an economy based on extraction of natural resources, and a societal expectation of local and global sustainability.

The University has a wide range of academic programs engaged in education and research related to Natural Resources and Environment: Biology, Business, Chemistry, Computer Science, Economics, Education, Environmental Engineering (jointly with UBC), Environmental Planning, Environmental Science, Environmental Studies, Forestry, Geography, GIS, Health Sciences, International Studies, Mathematics, Physics, Political Science, Resource Recreation and Tourism, and Wildlife and Fisheries. The University of Northern British Columbia's Natural Resources and Environmental Studies Institute provides a forum to promote integrative research to address natural resource systems and human uses of the environment, including issues pertinent to northern regions.

Health and Human Development

The Health and Human Development cluster provides academic preparation associated with improving the well-being of the whole person. The multifaceted concepts present in Health and Human Development link physiological, emotional, intellectual, and behavioural elements of the individual to the economic, social, cultural, spiritual, political, and environmental dimensions of the family, group, and the wider community.

Topics encompassed in the Health and Human Development cluster are critical to maximizing the quality of life and potential of individuals, families, and communities and, as such, are universally considered relevant and important to post-secondary study. The emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and physical health of individuals and the collective human development of all communities, from the local to the global, are vitally important to the mandate of the University. This academic cluster's particular focus is on meeting the health and human development needs of rural, remote, and indigenous peoples and communities, though its applications are universal.

As the contributors to and determinants of health and human development are wide ranging, it is not surprising that many academic programs at the University are associated with Health and Human Development. At the program level, the primary contributors include the following: Anthropology, Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, Biology, Community Health Sciences, Disability Management, Education, Environmental Planning, First Nations Studies, Geography, Health Sciences, Mathematics, the Northern Medical Program, Nursing, Psychology, and Social Work. The new Northern Sports Centre will provide opportunities for the University to consider expanding its programming into new areas such as fitness, kinesiology, sports management, and health professions such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy. The University houses a number of major research initiatives and institutes, such as the British Columbia Rural and Remote Health Research Institute that focus on remote, rural, and aboriginal health and human development.

Commerce and Community Sustainability

The Commerce and Community Sustainability cluster provides an understanding of the exchanges of things of value in ways that sustain and vitalize the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of communities. Things of value include natural resources, goods, culture, services, knowledge, and information. In the context of Commerce and Community Sustainability, communities are broadly defined, not only on the basis of geography, but also on ideas, history, culture and traditions, interest, enterprise, or other shared characteristics.

Communities without adequate commerce within and among themselves are unsustainable. If it does not enrich and sustain communities, commerce lacks purpose. The Commerce and Community Sustainability thematic cluster provides insights into ways to enhance commerce and community vitality. The University of Northern British Columbia is in a region with historically significant cultural diversity, recent immigration, marked by primarily small and rural communities, and a resource-based industrial economy coupled to a global economy. Under such circumstances, sustaining and enriching all forms of communities presents challenges with global implications. The University aims to contribute to meeting these challenges.

Commerce and Community Sustainability is flavored with the unique geographic, cultural and economic environment in which the University of Northern British Columbia is situated, but has implications for other rural and remote regions internationally. In support of this thematic cluster, the University has programs, schools and research dedicated to Business, Computer Science, Economics, Education, Environmental Engineering, Environmental Planning, Environmental Science, First Nations Studies, Forestry, Geography, International Studies, Mathematics, Northern Studies, Nursing, Political Science, Resource Recreation and Tourism, and Social Work. In addition, research centres and institutes such as the Community Development Institute and the BC Rural and Remote Health Research Institute become vital partners to communities by helping them make informed decisions about their futures.

Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge

Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge promotes both the development and understanding of indigenous peoples and the unique ways they know and understand the world. This thematic academic cluster embraces the diverse, dynamic, and traditional perspectives of indigenous peoples to find balance within physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual realms. Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge provides the supportive environment where leadership development, traditional knowledge exchange and enhancement, and academic excellence are fostered. Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge provides students with educational opportunities to understand a wide range of indigenous knowledge, including comparative perspectives to contemporary global indigenous issues, research methods, traditional ways of living and knowing, languages, philosophies, governance, and arts and culture. While this academic theme contributes to the celebration of diversity, it also aims to build partnerships and improve the quality of life for indigenous and non-indigenous peoples and communities

From its inception the University has had a special mandate for assisting indigenous peoples to attain their post-secondary goals, supporting indigenous communities in their self-governance initiatives, and creating meaningful opportunities for knowledge exchanges between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. Thus, Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge is vitally important for the University's continued success in providing effective and relevant academic programming, research, and community partnerships.

The Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge thematic academic cluster enhances and supports the continued development of programs related to First Nations Studies in the following areas: Community Resource Planning, First Nations Languages, First Nations Public Administration, Metis Studies, Nisga'a Studies, and Traditional Environmental Knowledge. As a multi-disciplinary theme Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge also relates to many academic programs, including Anthropology, Arts, Disability Management, English, Environmental Planning, Forestry, Geography, Health Sciences, History, Medicine, Natural Resources & Tourism, Northern Studies, Nursing, Political Science, Psychology, Social Work, and Women's Studies. In addition, there are many research initiatives that have been established to help in the revitalization and growth in the areas of indigenous health, education, and governance.

Global Processes and Perspectives

The Global Processes and Perspectives academic theme is a reflection of the multi-layered nature of the world in which we live. It is a cluster that captures the social, political, cultural, and natural linkages between the local and the global in virtually all areas of academic study. This theme is also supported by an appreciation and understanding of languages. Interdisciplinary and holistic, Global Processes and Perspectives promotes understanding of the host of connections between the University of Northern British Columbia, its region, and the world at large and embraces competing perspectives on the nature of those connections.

If the University is to contribute to the well being of Northern British Columbia and other rural, remote, and resource-based regions across the world, it is imperative students understand the global processes in which such regions are embedded. The natural environment is influenced by global environmental systems and changes (e.g. climate change), the local economy is subject to the vagaries of the world economic system, and the composition of the region's population is affected by migration trends. In turn, Northern British Columbia and similar regions have an impact on global ecosystems, economic trends, and demographics. In order to respond to this reality, the topics covered in the Global Processes and Perspectives cluster address global issues of the day through a host of lenses that compliment the University of Northern British Columbia's commitment to diversity, indigenous perspectives, and interdisciplinarity.

Programs throughout the university contribute to this cluster: Anthropology, Business, Economics, Environmental Science, Environmental Studies, First Nations Studies, Forestry, Geography, History, International Studies, Northern Studies, Political Science, Resource Recreation and Tourism, Social Work, and Women's Studies. In addition, The International Centre, the First Nations Centre, and the University's research institutes

also contribute to this cluster in the areas of human health, quality of life, and social change.

Artistic Cultural Expression

The Artistic Cultural Expression theme spans a variety of forms of aesthetic expression that illuminate and celebrate human cultures and human experience. The vehicles for artistic cultural expression range from more traditional forms such as writing, painting, music, theatre, and dance to the more contemporary emergence of electronic and digital media. In comparison to the other thematic academic clusters, Artistic Cultural Expression is relatively undeveloped and, as such, demonstrates the University's aspirations to expand its programs into new areas.

The importance of the Artistic Cultural Expression theme to our immediate region is evident in the vibrant and robust fine arts and visual and performing artistic communities in Northern British Columbia. The enormous resurgence and international interest in indigenous artistic expression is well represented in Northern British Columbia. Beyond providing entertainment, enjoyment, cultural cohesion, and contributing to the economic activity of our communities, artistic cultural expression provides a way to understand, share, and demonstrate human beauty, spirituality, aspirations, and experiences. Many people involved in Arts organizations within Prince George and the regions, such as the Prince George Symphony and the Two Rivers Gallery, and similar organizations throughout our region have expressed an interest in forming a closer relationship with the University and would be an excellent source of teachers, researchers, and mentors. Numerous studies have considered the relationship between a vibrant 'Arts' culture and retaining human capital and human creativity within a community.

Academic programming related to Artistic Cultural Expression is currently limited at the University, but there is a significant demand both within the university community and the wider community for its development. Artistic Cultural Expression enriches the academic offerings in the following related program areas: Education, English, First Nations Studies, History, Political Science, Resource Recreation and Tourism, Social Work, and Women's Studies. It also draws to the University visual and performing artists who enhance the 'life' of the campus outside the classroom. Beyond the campus, visual and performing artists and their activities become economic generators, providing employment to individuals who would otherwise move to larger urban centres. Recent initiatives in developing a Fine Arts joint degree between the University of Northern British Columbia and Emily Carr Institute provide one model for future activity. The English program is exploring the greater development of a Media Studies concentration based on faculty teaching and research interests. The First Nations Studies program has combined such diverse arts as story telling, carving, sculpture, and clothing and adornment as part of its existing program

The University is poised to consider the further development of courses, concentrations, and activities in such diverse visual and performing arts as Art History, Carving,

Computer Graphics, Dance, Film, Music, Painting, Photography, Sculpture, and Theatre. The speed and scope of these developments will depend on resources, future partnerships, capital acquisition, and the collective will of people within the University and its communities to collaborate around this new thematic area.

Foundational Academic Themes

The second type of theme, the Foundational Academic Theme, represents more traditional groupings of discipline-based academic programs and courses. All universities aspire to offer a liberal education and the ability to do so is often a metric for determining the academic strength of an institution. Educational and research programs and courses within foundational academic themes contribute to their individual disciplines as well as provide the foundational knowledge required for the Thematic Academic Clusters. The AVI Committee identified the following foundational academic themes:

- Science and Mathematics
- Social Sciences
- Arts and Humanities

What follows is a brief discussion of the foundational academic themes, their particular relevance, and the University's related academic programs.

Science and Mathematics

Science and Mathematics are key foundations for professions and applied science disciplines. Scholarship within this theme generates new fundamental knowledge about how the world works; when combined with human ingenuity, scientific and mathematical knowledge results ideally in technologies that help students work with the world. This theme can be intellectually liberating and can lead to opportunities and life-long learning in a wide variety of careers.

The range of sciences, Natural, Physical, and Life Sciences, is demonstrated in the University's course offerings. As the foundation to technological development and as the reservoir of basic scientific knowledge and understanding, this theme, Science and Mathematics, is essential to the University's contributions in the full range of thematic academic clusters.

The University supports this theme with a number of academic programs including Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Earth Science, Geography, GIS, Mathematics, Physics, and Psychology.

Social Sciences

The Social Sciences are comprised of a group of disciplines that study virtually all facets of human society. As we strive to understand ourselves and our realities, and how we shape our identities and destinies, the Social Sciences employ a broad range of methodologies and approaches, which help us to better understand human phenomena and social relationships.

The Social Sciences make critical contributions to an understanding of many aspects of human and social experience from the way we think to the way we interact with others. For example, the disciplines of social science may offer solutions to the myriad of complex challenges facing individuals, groups, and communities.

Foundational Social Science is practiced across many programs, including Anthropology, Economics, First Nations Studies, Geography, International Studies, Northern Studies, Political Science, Psychology, Resource Recreation and Tourism, and Women's Studies. It also constitutes a critical component within professional programs such as Business Administration, Education, Environmental Planning, Medicine, Nursing, and Social Work.

Arts and Humanities

Arts and Humanities include those branches of knowledge that are concerned with human thought, expression, and culture. A number of academic disciplines in the Arts and Humanities have developed in response to our desire to better understand what it means to be fully human and how we interact with others and the world around us.

Collectively, the academic disciplines comprising Arts and Humanities make significant contributions to our understanding of our human and social experience and help us to express, celebrate, and appreciate our humanity. These disciplines assist us in expressing and experiencing the full range of what it is to be human,

The University currently provides programs of study primarily related to Arts and Humanities in Anthropology, English, First Nations Studies, History, International Studies, Northern Studies, and Women's Studies. In addition, a wider range of programs contributes to, and utilizes, humanistic perspectives.

Pedagogical Academic Themes

The third type of theme, the Pedagogical Academic Theme, is comprised of both expected student outcomes and how those outcomes are to be achieved through the University's approach to teaching and learning. Throughout the AVI consultation process, participants stressed that the University's academic mission must be focused on the student and of how the University of Northern British Columbia delivers academic programs and supports student learning.

Expected Student-Centered Learning Outcomes

Although the student-learning outcomes described below have already been outlined in the academic mission statement, their reiteration here is in keeping with the University's commitment to a student-centered and research-intensive learning environment. While recognizing that academic aspirations will be different for every student, the University believes that those involved in supporting the teaching and learning environment are responsible for providing students with opportunities and experiences that support a number of common outcomes. The intention of the University is that its students and graduates will exhibit:

- Appropriate depth and breadth of knowledge and skills
- Analytical, critical, and creative thinking skills
- Liberality, inclusiveness, and an appreciation of diversity
- Personal growth, leadership skills and effective communication
- Life-long learning and intellectual development
- Engaged citizenship from the local to global levels

Knowledge and Skills. Appropriate depth and breadth of knowledge and skills includes both specific disciplinary knowledge as well as core numeracy, literacy, computing, and oral and written communication skills. While the knowledge and skills students develop will to a significant degree be discipline-specific, students must have an opportunity to gain a solid grounding in more broadly defined knowledge and skills that are required to succeed.

Thinking Skills. Developing analytical, critical, and creative thinking is central to the future success of the graduate. Beyond basic knowledge and skill sets required within disciplines, the University also values higher order learning across disciplines and strives to produce students who can think analytically, critically and creatively. These thinking skills have broad application and provide the basis for life-long learning.

Inclusiveness. Students will learn in an environment imbued with the values of liberality, inclusiveness, and an appreciation of diversity. The University of Northern British Columbia is an institution that holds diversity and equality as some of its most important defining values. As such, an understanding and appreciation of diverse points of view and competing visions of the world, experiences of working with a wide-ranging group of people and cultures, and exposure to diverse ways of knowing and learning, are all essential elements of the educational experience at our University.

Personal Growth. University life is not only about intellectual growth, it is also about personal growth, the development of social networks, and having fun. The University must provide an environment where students are able to develop leadership skills, skills associated with effective communication, and the skills that they themselves identify as integral to their personal growth and empowerment. In this regard, the roles of sports, clubs, societies, international exchanges, and recreational activities in fulfilling the mandate of the University are as important as its academic programs.

Life-long Learning. The University of Northern British Columbia is both a teaching and vibrant curiosity-driven research institution that promotes creative learning opportunities across a broad range of programs. By virtue of their experience in an environment rooted in a culture of knowledge-creation, our graduates will embrace a passion for life-long learning, creativity, and intellectual development.

Engaged Citizenship. Finally, the University envisions its graduates as engaged citizens and this engagement may be at the local, regional, and/or international level. Just as the University has a mission to serve its region, it aspires to foster in its students a sense of

connection and responsibility to others – a personal vision of connection to the greater world that provides graduates with the passion to engage in and with their communities.

Innovative Pedagogical Approaches

The delivery of high quality academic programs and the creation of a positive learning environment to support them matters at the University. “How we teach” and “what we teach” has a direct impact on students. The University of Northern British Columbia’s pedagogical vision is grounded in innovative approaches to enhance learning and teaching. In order to provide the University faculty, staff, and students with a stimulating and supportive environment, the following approaches were identified as critical to the University’s academic mission:

- Experiential, collaborative, and active learning
- Inter-disciplinary approaches to knowledge acquisition
- A diversity of approaches and perspectives toward teaching, learning, and knowing that optimizes student outcomes
- Appropriate use of technology in the classroom and at a distance
- Research enriched and enhanced instruction
- Internationalization

Experiential, Collaborative, and Active Learning. The University must continue to provide students with opportunities for applied and experiential, collaborative, and active learning. Applied and experiential learning is at the core of initiatives undertaken through Co-op and the international exchange program. Teachers across the University engage in creative lab design to ensure students have experiential learning, and through internships students receive a sense of how their studies fit in to the world outside the University. Active learning should be, and is, central to the delivery of many courses as faculty members understand that students learn better by doing than by simply being told what to do. Faculty members throughout the University promote active learning through activities as simple as debates and as complex as intensive simulations. In these learning environments students will achieve both basic skills sets and the higher order skill sets related to creative and critical thinking.

Inter-disciplinary Approaches to Knowledge Acquisition. Inter-disciplinary educational experiences assist students in gaining understanding of complex phenomena that span academic disciplines, cultures, and programs. Inter-disciplinary educational opportunities provide students with exposure to disciplinary approaches to complex issues, problems, and phenomena that require the application of multiple perspectives. As demonstrated by the University’s use of Thematic Academic Clusters, some of the most rapidly growing fields in post-secondary education are modeled on inter-disciplinarity. Thus, inter-disciplinarity is highly relevant to the academic preparation of students and how the University of Northern British Columbia organizes programs.

Diversity in Teaching, Learning, and Knowing. Central to the University’s pedagogical vision is liberality, diversity, and inclusiveness, and these values are evident in the way teaching and learning is conducted. The University is committed to providing

different pedagogical approaches to assist student with acquiring the knowledge within a particular discipline. These approaches to teaching and learning may be based in scientific, humanistic, socio-political, and spiritual traditions. Lectures, seminars, tutorials, group projects, self-directed course work, and field trips are representative of some of the ways we support student learning. The University also recognizes that communities and community members are important sources of specialized and traditional knowledge that enhance the learning opportunities for our students.

Appropriate Use of Technology in the Classroom and at a Distance. The role of technology in the academic setting in pedagogy and student engagement in learning is increasingly important for university education. As the University of Northern British Columbia evolves as a multi-campus university, understanding the appropriate role of technology is critical. In order to provide students with the best possible learning environment, the University must appropriately integrate technology into its classrooms and its courses. The opportunity to deliver interactive education directly into a student's home will help transform the availability of our programs in ways that are not dependent on classroom location and availability. Technology has a wide range of applications and that technology must be merged with an understanding of what it is to learn and teach. Appropriate use of technology enhances access and opportunity for students and provides them with basic tools required in order to effectively function in the 21st century.

Research Enriched and Enhanced Instruction. The University of Northern British Columbia is a research-intensive university where knowledge creation is highly valued. Faculty members are both teachers and scholars and they are able to enrich their classrooms with their research and their insights. The University is committed to providing students with opportunities to engage in research with faculty and staff, where appropriate. By engaging students in research and exposing them to research-enhanced instruction, the University lays the groundwork for the growth of curiosity, essential to the life-long learner.

Internationalization. As the final component of the University's pedagogical vision, internationalization is consistent with many of the other student-centered learning outcomes. It supports good citizenship at the global level, broadens perspectives, supports diversity, and broadens opportunities for learning. The University of Northern British Columbia promotes internationalization through student exchanges, through the adoption of diverse perspectives in the classroom, and through creative, globally-informed curricula.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The AVI Committee would like to express its deep appreciation for the extraordinary level and quality of participation in the AVI consultations by the faculty, staff, and students at the University, and by the wider community in the region we serve. This final report will be brought to both Senate and the Board of Governors for approval. The implications of Phase 1 of the AVI for the future development of academic programs at the University are significant and to implement this strategic academic plan will require

the engagement of the entire university community. While the AVI Committee will coordinate the second phase of the initiative, the real work of implementation will take place within the programs, colleges, academic administrative units, and various Senate committees.

Appendix 1

Brief Overview of Previous Academic Planning Initiatives at UNBC

The AVI is the latest in a cycle of academic strategic planning initiatives at the University of Northern British Columbia. As such, this report builds upon what has come before, and the committee is indebted to those who contributed to the earlier documents. Barely a decade old, the University has produced two major academic planning documents that built upon the original concept of the institution that was presented to government. Some of the core elements of those planning documents related to academic programming are summarized below.

- In 1989, one of UNBC's seminal academic visioning documents⁷ was produced for the founding Interior University Society. This early visioning document contains many elements that are as current today as they were when they were written. For example, this document envisioned a university that
 - is northern in character and serves the needs of the region it serves
 - provides a range of undergraduate and graduate academic and professional programs, including offerings in aboriginal studies (Dene-Athabaskan), applied computing, business, education, fine and performing arts, health sciences, natural resource management, northern development, transportation and distribution, and social services.
 - has a special mandate to serve aboriginal communities
 - embraces inter-disciplinarity
 - is readily accessible to college transfer students and has regional offerings
 - would likely have an enrolment of 4,000-6,000 students

The eventual submission to government from the Implementation Planning Group for the creation of UNBC proposed a more modest thematic grouping of academic programs in aboriginal studies, applied computing, business studies, education, and natural resource management.⁸ Subsequent to the founding of UNBC, academic programming was broadly guided by five “mandated” areas, including Environmental Studies, First Nations Studies, International Studies, Northern Studies, and Women’s and Gender Studies.⁹ While these five areas were never sanctioned or formalized by Senate or the Board of Governors, they did inform the academic plan and, arguably, served as the University’s initial thematic framework.

- In January, 1997, the University’s first formal strategic plan, *Planning for Growth: Final Report of the University Planning Committee*, was released in. This strategic planning document spoke to the needs of a maturing institution for better administrative and organizational structures to support academic growth. Of note, this document articulated for the first time a clear mission statement and set of values to guide the University¹⁰. The document also raised concerns about the sustainability of UNBC’s current array of programs and hinted at the need to consider reducing the number of undergraduate

⁷ *Building a Future of Excellence: A University for Northern British Columbia* was presented on October 10, 1989 to the Implementation Planning Group for the Interior University Society. This group was formed to champion the development of a university in the north.

⁸ Submitted to the Hon. Bruce Strachan, December 29, 1989, by the Implementation Planning Group.

⁹ This is referenced in the 1997 document *Planning for Growth* (p. 1)

¹⁰ Learning, Interdisciplinarity, Innovation, Excellence, Responsiveness, Leadership, Diversity and Equity.

degrees. As its title suggests, the document set enrolment growth targets (3500 FTEs by 2002) and identified a number of enabling factors that would assist with this growth:

- The importance of student services and student life
 - A commitment to comprehensive academic programming (but no specific thematic areas are identified)
 - The importance of co-op and other community-engaging programs
 - A renewed commitment to regional operations and links to colleges
 - A commitment to research excellence
 - A restructuring of 5 Faculties into 2 Colleges
- In 2002, the most ambitious academic planning document to date, ACTION (Answering the Challenge Through Innovation, Opportunities and Networks), was developed after an extended period of consultation and covered the planning period 2002-2007. This document identified areas for strategic development¹¹ and, for many of them, set out objectives, strategies, and measurable outcomes. Like the 1997 strategic plan, ACTION was largely an enabling framework for academic growth, but extended those strategies to include applied learning, technology, and internationalization. While this document set out a plan that was more comprehensive than earlier academic plans, its breadth led to challenges with its implementation and follow-through. While ACTION did not address any specific or thematic programmatic areas for academic growth, it did set the stage for more explicit emphasis on internationalization and the use of technology for teaching and learning. Similar to the 1997 document, but in more explicit language, ACTION identified the need to consolidate current academic offerings as a way to improve the quality of UNBC's programs. ACTION also identified one new value to underpin UNBC's academic programming: research.

While this walk through UNBC's academic planning history is necessarily brief, it is included to convey the importance the University has always placed on strategic academic planning. Earlier plans varied in emphasis and content, though what is remarkable is that, other than in the submission to the government at the very beginning, subsequent official academic plans did not place much emphasis on the types of academic programs UNBC should pursue. This is perhaps understandable given the heady days of relatively rapid growth and the wealth of opportunities for adding programs earlier in the University's development. In such an atmosphere there was perhaps less pressure to focus strategically on what to offer for the future; nonetheless, and as early as 1997, the University's academic leaders were concerned about the need to consider consolidation in light of lower than expected enrolments and variable uptake of programs.

¹¹ Teaching and Learning, Student Quality of Life, Applied Learning, The Wired University, First Nations, The Regional Mandate, Research, Internationalization of UNBC.