State of the University address by Dr. Annette Trimbee, President and Vice-Chancellor

Wednesday, OCTOBER 21, 2015 at 12:30 pm

Convocation Hall

Thank you all for being here today. This is my first official State of the University speech and I want to begin by sharing some of the highlights for me as President in year one.

I have found it invigorating to be part of the rhythm of the university: our rituals, traditions and celebrations. There is the buzz at the start of a new year with students everywhere: Orientation, the Great Rock Climb, the talent on display at ArtsFest.

We’ve had some remarkable valedictorians, faculty and staff award winners, and Honorary Doctorate recipients at our Convocations this past year --- such as John Ralston Saul, Steve Van Bockern, Miriam Toews and David Suzuki. We will remember Dr. Suzuki advising students to save the planet before the status quo captures them.

What these events all have in common is that they are steeped in tradition, family and community. They are uplifting, joyful celebrations.

I have been wowed by the Axworthy Distinguished Lecture Series which has brought Cornel West and Jane Goodall to campus. There is something very special about creating those memorable community events on campus and seeing the diversity of the crowds that gather here.

When I was a student here on the mid 1970s, the leading feminist of that time was Germaine Greer, and she came to speak. It was the first time in my life that I heard someone so provocative and mesmerizing in real life.

However she spoke during the day and the audience was limited to faculty and staff. I am so pleased we are still doing this, but doing it so much better now, by opening it up to everyone in the community.

It has become so apparent to me that students choose us because of you, the people here in this room.

They receive a high quality education, unparalleled research opportunities, and smaller class sizes. As I like to put it: we are big enough to offer students a world-class education, and small enough to know their name.

We hear this over and over again: students value their direct contact with professors and support staff. They don’t feel like a number: they are treated like individuals with ideas and dreams.

That is what I call the secret sauce at the University of Winnipeg.

One of the many highlights for me is seeing the deep commitment to inclusion in action and especially the awareness that Indigenous perspectives must form part of this academy.
March 26 - The day Senate approved the Indigenous course requirement in principle was a proud one for me.

June 2nd was also deeply memorable: I started the day meeting Aboriginal high school students here in Convocation Hall. They were in a program to become entrepreneurs that we offer with Cape Breton University.

From here I walked to Riddell Hall, where the historic Truth and Reconciliation Commission report was webcast. This report is going to continue to have a huge impact and we were so honoured to be chosen as a site to bring the community together to share it live.

In August I had the pleasure of touring our Adventure Summer Camp and math camp grad ceremony with the Premier. It was inspiring to see inner-city elementary, junior high and high school students, including many siblings, come up to get certificates. Imagine giving up a month in summer to do math. That is real dedication.

I have been living in the neighbourhood and sometimes I wander through the AxPlex on a Friday night. Seeing the place bustling with activity, the multi-generational mix and diversity of people…. is inspiring.

I have had some really interesting conversations. I meet students for lunch in Riddell Hall every few months to hear what is on their mind.

I have met incredible alumni of all ages here and in Calgary, Vancouver and Victoria. They tell me that coming here changed or is changing their lives. I have come to realize that all it takes for many of us is to be told we have potential, for someone to believe in us.

I have enjoyed the conversations about our future directions: there is such pride in what we do, and a great sense of purpose. I think that is unique to the people who choose to be at UWinnipeg.

As I think you can see, my first year as President has had a powerful effect on me and I feel it is a privilege to serve in this role.

I’ve learned a lot about who we are and where we’ve been – which is critically important to where we want to go.

Behind me you can see the image of a Jenga sculpture. It is clearly a beautiful construction that took much creativity to build. The question is: How stable is that structure? Can it handle more blocks? We are like this Jenga model.

Our top priority is to shore up the base. We need to make sure our trunk, our core, is broad and strong enough to take us through the next decade.

As you know, the University of Winnipeg has grown its footprint by 35% in the past 10 years. We have increased enrolment by 55%. We have added new faculties, new programs and graduate degrees. This has been an amazing transformation that has added new possibilities on campus and energy to our downtown community.
We need to be innovative, deliberate, collaborative, responsive, and thoughtful as we move forward.

Last spring we held eleven open workshops to help guide our way forward. People from across campus participated in the discussions, including Board of Regent members, and we received written submissions as well. Many of you here today added your insights and we thank you for that.

We need to remind ourselves of the Why? Why are we doing this?

The answer is that our fundamental mission is to **grow leaders**.

We have a responsibility to our current and future students to offer them the best and most relevant educational experience possible, and the supports they need to be successful.

We have a responsibility to the community around us, both locally and globally, to nurture smart, compassionate, engaged citizens who will take on leadership roles and add value to whatever they tackle as their life’s work.

I also want to add here that planning is a dynamic process, we will take an adaptive management approach, which means we will keep evaluating and tweaking and collaborating as we go. We will do what makes sense for us to do within the resources that we have.

We will remain nimble, flexible and responsive. That is one of our key strengths.

**The strategic directions framework includes 5 equally important and inter-related directions.**

**The first is Academic Excellence and Renewal**

Our reputation is built on academic excellence. We need to make sure that we understand the needs of our faculty members and allocate the resources we can to those needs.

We also need to be intentional and strategic with our growth in graduate programs, and make sure that existing academic programs are operating efficiently and effectively. So we need to do some evaluating.

We also need to ensure that our library, as the heart and soul of our academy, continues to be a hub for research, collaboration, and learning.

We also must fully understand and strengthen the role of our Professional, Applied and Continuing Education division (PACE), English Language Program (ELP), and the Collegiate as pathways in and around UWinipeg and beyond.

Are we making it easier for students to find a way in and around the post-secondary system? That is our challenge.

We need to pay particular attention to faculty succession. A significant number of our most experienced and dedicated professors are nearing retirement.
Within our resources, we must hire new faculty in keeping with our identified needs and priorities.

We need the right balance to meet student demand for our established programs, while also supporting new programs and the academic and research interests of faculty members.

Everything around us is changing quickly. We know that technology is having an enormous impact on the way youth learn and experience the world.

It is hard to believe that even five years ago Twitter did not exist. Now millions Tweet daily. YouTube has one billion users with 300 hours of video uploaded every minute. This is staggering. It is where young people live today.

Yet even with all these “smart” devices around us, we believe that there is no substitute for face-to-face teaching.

This is our predominant method of delivering a high quality educational experience.

Yet we must also adapt and incorporate technology and experiential learning. Why?

Because today’s youth want more active, hands-on, engaged learning opportunities. We must ensure that technology supports students, as well as faculty needs. We are increasingly offering co-op and experiential learning opportunities.

For example: At PACE, the Management Certificate program is now fully on-line for students who want to study outside of normal hours. Our Departments of Business and Economics are also expecting to offer six to eight new online courses next year.

Since 2010, we have partnered with industry sectors, such as government, IT, accounting, scientific research and others to develop co-op programs. Our co-op students are often hired into jobs as a result of their placements.

In 2008, Debbie Schnitzer and other faculty launched the Experiential Learning Network on campus.

In January 2013, the Experiential Learning Fund was established to advance for-credit experiential learning. Since then, we have funded 34 projects.

We have numerous creative faculty doing interesting, hands-on things with their students. Here is just a flavour:

The Department of Indigenous Studies offers a Summer Field course in Ethnobotany. It involves classroom lessons and four days of experiential learning from herbalists and Indigenous elders in the Keeseekoowenin* First Nations near Riding Mountain National Park. (*Kee-cee-koh-way-nin)

At the Randy Kobes Poster Competition last month there was a poster produced out of Rafael Ofinowski’s course. The class completed a project on reducing weeds in community gardens with Spence Neighbourhood Association.
We call these experiential learning but they are also examples of knowledge mobilization: how we are taking our expertise out into the community.

That said, these programs have grown organically. We need to clearly articulate what the role and institutional goals are for both online and experiential learning.

We are very pleased to welcome Daniel Leonard as our new Experiential Learning Coordinator. He will be working closely with the Network to ensure that your priorities are supported.

Membership to the Network is open to any faculty with an interest in experiential learning so I would encourage you to take advantage of this new resource on campus.

**The second strategic directions is Student Experience and Success.**

The majority of our students spend a number of years with us and proudly walk across the stage on Convocation Day to receive their degree.

But many of our students do not successfully complete their course of studies. We need to understand why. Are they dropping out? Moving on to other institutions? Are they traveling for a year? What stressors lead them away from our campus?

We simply do not have the data to answer those questions. This September we launched a retention analysis so that within the next few months, we will have more evidence-based answers.

Once we have that data, including student exit surveys and focus groups, we can start building the right supports to help our students make it all the way through to graduation.

We are going to put an increased focus on student success.

We value accessibility and diversity in our student body, and we have developed a number of specific supports to attract those who have been traditionally under-represented in post-secondary.

We’ve done a good job. One out of every three students self-identity as visible minorities and Indigenous - First Nations, Métis and Inuit. We need to keep creating an environment where people from all walks of life feel welcome on campus and are supported in achieving their full potential.

We also need to strengthen non-traditional pathways into the university and link this work with the academic activities of the university.

We are good at this, and it is worth noting that this aligns with the Manitoba government’s vision. We have been featured in the national media for our outreach work and for reducing barriers to post-secondary education.

We have an existing foundation to build on here. We can add more Jenga blocks strategically to this model.
We know that demographics are changing and this presents new opportunities for us: According to Statistic Canada, in the past four years, Manitoba has experienced its largest modern-day immigration inflow, welcoming almost 60,000 people from around the globe.

We know most of those newcomers settle in Winnipeg and a large number right here in this neighbourhood.

The Aboriginal population has grown 20% between 2006 and 2011, compared with just 5% for the non-Aboriginal population. Manitoba's population also includes the largest number of Metis people per capita in Canada.

And more youth are graduating from high school. Between 2002 and 2014, Manitoba's high school graduation rate has increased 16 percentage points.

We need to fully understand the changing demographics of our student body over the next ten years and create an enrolment plan based on these projections.

We need to define our enrolment goals for specific populations including mature and new immigrant students, international and Indigenous students, for example.

**The third strategic direction is Indigenization**

We are proud to begin our meetings on campus by acknowledging that we are located on Treaty One land, in the heart of the Métis homeland.

The treaties are agreements which opened up these lands for settlement, and are fundamental to Canada. We are also proud to live in a province where the Metis nation played an important role in bringing this part of the world into Confederation.

We are one of the top universities in the country for Indigenous participation: 12% of our incoming students this year self-identify as First Nation, Metis and Inuit.

Understanding a plurality of world views makes the educational experience richer for all. Our Senate recently approved, in principle, a degree requirement that would see all undergraduate students complete coursework with an Indigenous focus before they graduate.

We have an active committee chaired by Neil Besner and Wab Kinew working to bring this to fruition; the committee includes Elders, students and faculty members.

This is in keeping with the recommendations and spirit of the recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, which sets forth a new way for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada to move forward.

At the heart of this report is education: It is part of our work to help build a culture of understanding. We recognize that we must do more to include Indigenous people, perspectives, and knowledge in every aspect of the academy.

The author of that seminal report, the Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair, will be our guest on November 17 as he receives this year's Duff Roblin Award.
This year’s dinner includes some roundtable discussions on Indigenization. I invite all of you to attend that important dinner, which supports Indigenous scholarship on our campus.

There are tangible things we can and ARE doing: such as working with the community to create more opportunities for Indigenous students, as we do through our many programs at Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre, and through programs such as Let’s Talk Science.

We can collaborate more with the K-12 system to increase bridge programs into university.

We can increase Indigenous language instruction. We offer Ojibway and Cree as a credit course now for students and as a free community program at Wii Chiiwaakanak. Language is incredibly important to the preservation of identity and unique world views.

We want to be known as a place where Indigenous students are welcomed and are successful and a place where Indigenous culture, teaching, and learning is understood and recognized.

Our role is to help faculty and staff determine how they can specifically participate in this opportunity, and to support those efforts.

**The 4th strategic direction is Research Excellence and Knowledge Mobilization**

We have exceptional scholars and researchers. This is one of our foundational strengths.

It is risky for me to share a few examples with you because of course that means leaving others out: so here is my blanket statement. In every single department we have exceptional faculty members doing amazing work that matters in the broader community.

Here are a couple of examples:

Just last week five of our researchers were featured at the Manitoba Legislature Women in Science event: Nora Casson, Sara Good, Amy Desroches, Tabitha Wood and Melanie Martin. They are an inspiration to the next generation of girls pursuing science and research.

Jan Stewart is leading a Canadian study aimed at helping refugee youth navigate school and find meaningful careers.

Our kinesiology team with Nathan Hall and Rob Pryce is working to educate and prevent diabetes among inner city youth.

WE HAVE A CLUSTER OF WATER RESEARCHERS working on the health of Lake Winnipeg and Charles Wong is studying toxins in water bodies in Southern Manitoba.

ON THE SUSTAINABILITY FRONT: Craig Willis is world renowned for his research on white-nose syndrome in bats.

And with Danny Blair and Ian Mauro we are partnering with the International Institute for Sustainable Development to focus on climate risk reduction on the Prairies. We just received $400,000 dollars from the province last week towards this initiative.
The breadth, depth and diversity of expertise among our faculty members is truly inspiring. This IS what we mean by Knowledge Mobilization.

We need to explore opportunities and resources that will move UWinipeg research even further into the public domain. We must continue to communicate the results of our research and creative activities, both internally and to the general public.

We recognize the value of growing our research capacity. We are investing in this area to help faculty members secure tri-council and other external research funding.

A couple of actions have already come about on the research front as a result of the strategic planning workshops.

The Research Office will be hiring a new staff member, with an external funding focus, within this fiscal year.

And the Library and Research Office are co-hosting a new series this academic year called "Mobilizing Research."

In terms of adding research capacity in graduate studies, we recently received $825,000.00 in funding that allows our students to study at a Commonwealth university, and bring that research back here. It is another experiential learning avenue.

Graduate studies has also increased resources and now has a staff member helping students with writing scholarly papers, preparing for publication, and grant writing.

We are also a place that values teaching excellence. Research is tremendously important but the ability to inspire young minds and mentor the next generation of scholars in the classroom is equally important.

At UWinipeg, it is not either/or. It is both – excellence in teaching AND research.

We will connect teaching and research, such as better aligning the 3rd and 4th year curriculum with faculty research.

We are well known for providing research experience, especially to undergraduate students, and we will do more to strengthen this and link research with experiential learning opportunities.

We are collaborators: we have a history of strong interdisciplinary research based on partnerships between departments, post-secondary institutions, and external organizations.

We need to identify best practices in the execution of interdisciplinary research to increase our funding successes.

I mentioned our partnership with the International Institute for Sustainable Development. We have many more of these successes: we just created the first Chair in the History of Indigenous Arts of North America, with the Winnipeg Art Gallery; and we created a new shared faculty position with TRIUMF, Canada’s national laboratory for particle and nuclear physics.
As we seek out partnerships and collaborations, we must ensure that the work we do has a direct connection with teaching and research and aligns with our academic priorities.

Partnerships need to be mutually beneficial, with clearly defined expectations and outcomes.

**The 5th strategic direction is Financial and Institutional Resilience.**

We need financial stability in order to preserve and enhance our work. Our first step is to develop a three-year budget which is already underway. Our budget decisions will be guided by this framework along with data such as enrolment trends.

We all know that finding the resources we need to do all the things we want to do is challenging. We continue to seek an equitable level of support from the provincial government, and have made headway with an additional million dollars granted to us last year. So I am optimistic.

Even so, we are historically underfunded compared to other post-secondary institutions in Manitoba. Within this context, it is our responsibility to develop sources of revenue.

We are already doing what we can to help ourselves, and we can do more on that front. That includes our outreach through PACE, ELP, and the Community Renewal Corporation.

One of the additional benefits of this framework is it provides some direction for our fund-raising activities. We will work with our Foundation on a new capital campaign with a launch planned for our 50th and Canada's 150th anniversaries (that is in 2017).

Our fundraising decisions must be made with an eye to the future. Our past ten years has been about expansion. Now our building phase has slowed. Other universities have considerable land assets that can be leveraged to provide an ongoing source of revenue for their programming. We do not.

We must examine the opportunities that are available to us and develop a clear strategy.

We apply the sustainability lens to all our practices and processes. We have done a great deal to reduce our environmental impact, and we have played a leadership role in demonstrating that sustainability is not only possible, but a strategic advantage.

In 2005 we identified a path to Kyoto compliance, which we met and surpassed several years ago. Some quick highlights from this past year:

We submitted our first report to the Sustainability Tracking Assessment and Rating System,(or STARS) earning a high Silver rating. Both Diversity Foods and the UWSA BikeLab were selected to be highlighted in the STARS Annual Review.

We just achieved LEED Gold for the Richardson College for the Environment and Science Complex, joining an elite group of eco-friendly buildings in Manitoba.

After several years of work by the University of Winnipeg Students’ Association, Winnipeg’s City Council approved funding for the UPass for the transit system. A target date for that is fall 2016.
This year we are going to be asking ourselves:

Ten years from now, what story about sustainability do we want to be able to tell? How can we continue to involve our students and integrate sustainability into experiential learning on campus? What more can we do to integrate the concept of sustainability into our institutional culture and our academic mission? So watch for that.

Our next step is to create well-developed and intentional plans.

We are turning to you: faculty, staff, students, as well as external stakeholders to provide input as we develop a series of interlinked plans: These include:

- An Integrated Academic and Research Plan – which is our overarching canopy
- an Enrolment and Student Success Plan;
- a vision for Indigenization, and
- a Financial Resources Plan that includes capital development.

These plans will outline our specific actions within the context of our three-year budget.

So you may be wondering, what does this mean to me? And how do I get involved? I want to flip that and say, how does your contribution align with this vision? We want you to plug into this direction and offer your unique talents.

Jino Distasio and Neil Besner have formed a committee to develop the integrated academic and research plan. In the coming weeks, they will be consulting broadly with the University community.

This document is our high-level framework. People are telling me they like this direction because it is all about our relationships.

As a result of this process, we already know the following:

We will likely remain about this size, at around 10,000 students. The mix of students may change but we LIKE being a mid-sized university where people have names.

That really does make us unique. It is the essence of who we are and is an essential part of the lasting impact we have on students.

We have worked hard together to develop our Strategic Directions. We have a good sense of our common values and how to nurture an extraordinary educational experience for our students.

I’ll end with a quote by George Eliot, which perhaps defines our task ahead:

"It will never rain roses: when we want to have more roses we must plant more trees."

Let’s roll up our sleeves and plant some trees.