

June 8, 2015

Dear Board Executive,

I am writing further to our previous discussions. I want to express my appreciation of your support as I complete the first year of my Presidency. We share a dedication to this great university, and to its continuing improvement. I also hear your concerns and take them seriously.

As I said in my installation speech, and believe more firmly than ever, UBC's is a record well worth applauding, and advancing. UBC is widely recognized to be amongst the top 25 public institutions of higher learning in the world. It is my goal, in close working relationship with you and with others in the UBC community, to lift UBC from the top 25 to the top 10. To be clear, the goal is not the rankings per se, but what rankings suggest about who we are as a university: our excellent faculty, students, and staff; our deep relationship to teaching, learning, and community; and our capacity for service to the city, the province, the country, and the world. That is, I would argue, our responsibility: to take UBC as we find it – and make it better.

Creating an environment of trust, collegiality and collaboration

I strongly believe that achieving UBC's full potential depends on all of us working together. It is vital that we create an atmosphere of professional trust among decision-makers, and stakeholders. Indeed, as I reflect on the successes of the programs and institutions I have built in the past, it is clear to me that a trusting environment was a key to success; this was especially significant when paradigms had to be shifted. An important element in building trust is to recognize that we all have a role to play in promoting an enhanced level of collegiality and collaboration. To be successful, processes must promote honest two-way communication and shared responsibility. I look forward to an even deeper engagement with the Board and senior administrators towards the creation and implementation of a shared vision. No leader can succeed without listening, seeking advice, being receptive, and engaging in positive reinforcement. On my own part, I will be engaging an executive coach to help enhance my leadership skills.

I am also proposing a series of specific actions to achieve our shared goals and objectives:

- UBC Executive: Over the next several weeks, I will meet with each member of the executive team to invite a discussion about the transition, to listen to any concerns, to assure them that they are vital and valued members of the team, to support them in understanding what success means for them in their roles, and to discuss a positive go-forward plan. I believe that individuals may have different issues and these one-on-one meetings will allow me to address specific questions and then help us move forward as a team.
- Deans: I see two goals. First, it is incumbent on us to fully support Dr. Redish in her authority as Provost pro tem (UBCV). Her successful experience as Vice Provost and Associate Vice President, Enrolment and Academic Facilities makes her well suited for this interim role and I am impressed by how quickly, and powerfully, she has stepped into the position. The success of this role depends on ensuring that the Deans are

reinforced in their reporting relationship, even as it is appropriate that the President also engages with them. To this end, I have been meeting with each Dean individually. Dr. Redish and Dr. Cynthia Mathieson (Provost, UBCO) are contemplating the creation of a university-wide academic table that would meet monthly to discuss issues of academic strategy; it may include myself, the Provosts from both campuses, the Vice President Research, and 4-5 Deans across UBCO and UBCV.

Second, the Deans under the leadership of the Provost pro tem have an integral role in the development of the institutional academic strategic plan. There was a strategy session on March 2 with the UBCV Deans and then on March 25 with the UBCO Deans. These discussions fed into an Executive retreat in late April. Dr. Redish has scheduled a second strategic planning retreat – which I will attend – with the UBCV Deans for June 10. We are scheduling the same with the Deans at our UBCO campus. The Provost model review process is high on the agenda for the two retreats. In tandem with the retreats, I am establishing a working group to consider various models and to consult with other valued members of the administration, including Vice Presidents, with a report due at the end of July. The process to identify members of the search committee has been expedited and is already under way; we are identifying an executive search firm to assist with an extensive global search; exploring how students and others can be selected this summer; and a committee will be assembled to begin deliberations as soon as a quorum is met.

- The Board: I am committed to a relationship of professional trust with all Board members, including the Board's Executive. I value the Board's input and guidance and respect its members' commitment to UBC and the importance of their contributions. It is my role to set the broad agenda, in consultation with you, and to provide relevant context and data for the substantive, strategic conversations that need to happen at this level of governance at the University. I understand that UBC's Board is a Governance Board with distinct powers as laid out in the University Act. I also share your opinion that the Board should be engaged as a brain trust for strategic discussions as I appreciate the significant expertise assembled in this group. Our January 30 meeting gave me a chance to get feedback from the Executive around the draft strategic framework. Subsequent meetings with the Deans, Heads, and others have helped to enrich and deepen the framework. We will regularly bring specific elements of the framework to Board meetings as well as to the September strategy retreat.

I also recommend that UBC join the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB). AGB is dedicated to strengthening the performance of higher education boards and enhancing the relationship between the Board and the University Executive, and I believe that the experience and services offered by this organization can be helpful to us as we move forward. (www.agb.org).

Communication and coordination

While we are moving forward in necessary ways for the long-term health of the institution, I am committed to continuous improvement of my approach to change management. I am eager to ensure we work collegially, collaboratively, and constructively. I particularly appreciate your

identification of the need for improved resourcing in the President's Office. With your support, I intend to address this gap. I am currently gathering input from experts in academic communications to augment the team to better enable strategic information flows within and external to the University.

In order for UBC to reach the top 10, this great university will need all of us to work together in collegial support. Moving UBC into the top 10 will take time, focus, and energy. This includes honest dialogue with attentive listening to a wide variety of UBC stakeholders, of which the Board, Senate, Executive, and other senior leadership are clearly an essential part. Also important are staff, students, faculty, alumni, and donors. I have had regular meetings with student leadership groups, as well as with staff in various fora including, most recently, a staff lunch.

As you know, I have also been meeting with faculty (and will continue to do so) in every department across the two campuses, a first for a recent UBC President. With over 70% of departments and units visited to date, I've been encouraged by the enthusiastic support I have received from many faculty for a dedicated refocusing of resources on the core academic mission of the university: research, teaching, and learning. Monthly breakfasts with faculty, staff, and students have provided an intimate setting to engage and listen carefully to the concerns, interests, and innovative ideas of our community. I have also established a President's Academic Advisory Committee that engages distinguished faculty in conversation and debate about topics key to the research and learning mission of UBC. The Committee includes representatives from both campuses and meets approximately three times a year.

A solid foundation

It has been an exciting year with many successes, but also a challenging one. Excellence depends on a solid foundation. Much of my time in this first year has been about establishing this necessary foundation. I am grateful that the Board of Governors supports my "getting back to basics approach" and that, as you have written most recently, you understand my messaging to have been clear about my priorities. I have worked diligently with my office and the University's Executive in three areas in particular:

- to set the broad strategic priorities that will enhance the University's global reputation
- to immediately address the structural deficit, balance the budget and put the University on sound financial footing, ensuring that spending is efficient and focused on our core academic mission and enabling UBC to make long term plans
- to start the conversation about reorienting our internal academic structures in order to manage opportunities and challenges more coherently and transparently through my One University vision

I believe that we are moving forward in necessary ways for the long-term health of the institution. That said, change can induce anxiety and resistance. This is further magnified in a university setting; universities are places of great innovation, but also, historically, places which resist institutional and structural change. Even without an agenda of reform, there are typically

tensions between various parts of the university that vie for resources for their own needs and plans. The current highly decentralized nature of UBC, often exaggerates this, contributing to tensions between the central administration and the Faculties; large Faculties and small; the Provost and VP-Finance; UBCO and UBCV; etc. I believe that significant change across the entire university, and across our two campuses, will require a capacity for strategic thinking and action at the centre as well as in the Faculties. My plans include generating funding necessary to improve our undergraduate and graduate programs, strengthen our research output, expand our capacity for experiential learning, and better engage our local, national, and international communities, through a growing financial pie. Even so, hard and sometimes unpopular choices, will have to be made. It will be essential in this process to respect the diverse cultures of individual Faculties and Departments while also developing more effective and more efficient strategic and supportive systems at the centre. For the university to thrive and move in tandem, it is also essential that there be no perceived gap between the Board and the President; any public perception of such a gap must be dealt with quickly. I look forward to working with the Board, the UBC Executive, the Senate, the Deans, and others on behalf of the collective interests of UBC.

As President, it is my responsibility to forge effective communications and foster an environment of professional trust. Let me stress to you how much I value your commitment to service on behalf of the University. This is a mission I deeply share and I look forward to working with you on moving forward, together.

Sincerely,

Arvind Gupta
President and Vice Chancellor