1) Background

The Talk Exchange was organized by the Board of Governors Community Relations and Advancement (CRA) Committee to provide a forum for a cross-section of Carleton University’s communities/stakeholders (students, faculty, staff, alumni and donors) to engage in an open discussion about Carleton’s future.

The forum was a board-led engagement event, premised on the idea that open dialogue could be best achieved without the presence of other board members or senior administrators in the room.

Linda Ann Daly, chair of the CRA and Nik Nanos, vice-chair, organized the event with the support of the Board Office and the Department of University Communications.

To encourage registrations, a promotion plan was developed. The Advancement Office assisted to reach out to interested alumni and donors. A dedicated Talk Exchange webpage was created. The event was promoted through emails, the Intranet Top Five daily news service, social media and the network of communication officers on campus. The MacOdrum Library provided space for the event and set up historical displays in the meeting room.

The forum was held on March 20, 2017 and included over 24 participants who registered in advance through the Talk Exchange website as well as five student note-takers from the Paul Menton Centre.

2) The Conversation

The Talk Exchange planning committee identified two key questions to focus on for the session:

a) What is our collective ambition for Carleton’s future in the next 75 years?

b) What do our students, faculty, staff, alumni and donors think about the kind of Carleton they want to build for future generations?
What is our collective ambition for Carleton’s future in the next 75 years?

Main themes raised by participants

Campus and physical space

- The physical space of our campus was recognized as one of Carleton’s strengths – our green space, our accessibility and our buildings create an inviting community for students.
- Expansion into the Ottawa community provides opportunities and risks. If we have expand too much, we might lose that community feeling. Having a downtown campus could benefit us for relationships with government.
- It is important that new infrastructure is accessible for all.

Delivery methods and online education

- There is a challenge with online learning in ensuring skill sets such as writing and critical thinking are reinforced. It is difficult to have the in-class experience transfer to online and have meaningful participation for students doing distance learning.

Diversity

- Representation and being a place of belonging for First Nations people is important and we should be at the forefront of leadership in the Truth and Reconciliation recommendations to the government. Diversity is an uplifting function of the university.

Funding and tuition

- The university was established for Second World War veterans and gave free tuition. We should move back to having low tuition or free tuition. We need to advocate for public funding. We also need to seek large donations to build the endowment. Whatever the funding source, academic freedom cannot be jeopardized.
- We need to have incentives to address the barrier that students have getting into university, and remain involved with any struggles that students may be having. Relationships with donors and students (granting of bursaries can also highly positively influence a student’s experience).

Governance

- Main topics highlighted were: transparency, student representation,
accountability, the need to feel listened to and cared for, diversity, accessible reporting.

**Mental health and sexual violence**

- There is a core value of acceptance of mental illness at Carleton. Carleton needs to continue to adapt and innovate so that the barriers for anyone incoming to Carleton can be addressed through support services for all, including faculty, students and staff.

**Programs and interdisciplinary approach**

- A strength of Carleton is interdisciplinary, collaborative (with national and global partners, businesses and government) and specialized programming, which are all areas where we can expand and grow.
- There is space to grow with internationalization so students can come to Carleton and learn about the broader world.

**Relationship building and reputation management**

- The campus has a strong sense of identity or “Raven’s pride” that students take on quickly.
- Student support is important throughout the students’ time on campus.
- The role of supervisors and mentors for students is meaningful.
- The relationship the university has with the community starts from a young age for individuals (pre-university).
- Carleton has an opportunity as a leader in Canada to have a role in society, including training those employed by the federal service to help employees make informed decisions that will affect future generations and leaders.
- How do we make the student population aware of the value of post-secondary education?

**The visual and audio arts**

- The need to maintain a firm arts and social sciences core at the university was expressed.
- Encouragement for Carleton to become a venue for artists with outreach.
What do our students, faculty, staff, alumni and donors think about the kind of Carleton they want to build for future generations?

Main themes raised by participants

Campus and physical space

- Want to be known for: the beautiful campus, community environment, tunnel system, Paul Mention Centre, athletics, student services, open creative spaces, nurturing environment.
- The library is a leader in forward thinking, publishing and open access.

Diversity

- There is a need for visible minority students on campus to feel comfortable and safe, including First Nations students, students of colour and LGBT+.
- Hiring visible minority faculty and staff is a step towards a feeling of inclusion.

Faculty and staff

- Faculty members are finding that students want more contact with them, which puts demands on their time.
- There is a need for growth in the number of faculty in order to have engaged instructors. The nature of contract instructors is shifting.
- We want Carleton to be the best place in Ottawa to work.

Funding and tuition

- The budget is stable.
- Need to grow the endowment.
- Alumni want to give back because of bursaries they received attending the university.
- Future Funder projects can help support growth for community driven projects.

Governance

- More of a connection is needed between the Board of Governors and the students.
- Students want to be consulted and want to have the opportunity to present to the board. They want to hear, listen and debate.
- More diversity and transparency needed on the board.
- Contract instructors would like to be engaged in governance.
Programs and interdisciplinary approach

- A common ground between disciplines is needed as various backgrounds will all work together in the future.
- Community programs and opportunities for students to work with the community help students to be “distinctive” to employers.
- Teaching excellence should continue to be rewarded and recognized. Instructors are moving towards more experiential learning and using different teaching styles while addressing different learning styles including adult learners. We are in the “digital age of learning.”

Relationship building and reputation management

- A nurturing environment for all, including support, kindness and care.
- Connection to the Ottawa community – working for and with the community.
- Highlighting alumni achievements, networking events.

3) Key Findings

The Talk Exchange participants expressed a strong desire to have more opportunities for constructive conversations within the university community and the board.

The two themes of “Relationship Building/Reputation Management” and “Governance” dominated the feedback. Both themes relate to the mandate of the CR&A Committee. From the feedback, the board has an opportunity to review the Board’s procedures; assess how it engages with the community; and how it can build relationships in the future.

Top-of-mind issues highlighted in the discussions included:

Governance

- “Transparency, accountability, students feeling like they are listened to. We want to feel cared about.”
- “More student representation in BOG meetings; want them to be heard, not be demonized.”
- “Problem in transparency in governance.”
- “Students not heard because only the board is meeting.”
- “It is not a conversation.”
- “The feeling is that the BoG consults with various groups, but sometimes it feels like the students are being overlooked.”
Relationship Building and Reputation Management

- “Big theme to be talked about is to be a nurturing environment.”
- “Retention will be an issue because those that are the hardest to keep are the ones that come in below the universal average: and Carleton accepts these people.”
- “Proud to graduate; nurturing environment.”
- “Carleton to be a leader in Canada/ Sexual violence policy; Carleton to be know for its nurturing and how people care for people.”
- “More conversations like this; bottom up conversations.”

Diversity

- “Role of Carleton is becoming a place where Indigenous people can come and be comfortable.”
- “Relationship with Indigenous people; un-ceded Algonquin people.”
- “Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommendations.”

Mental Health and Sexual Violence

- “Sexual violence policy should not be an issue here.”

Funding and Tuition:

- Students have to take two jobs to support tuition and themselves; “Do we see change in students for their stress over money? Pay for school and not worry about money.”

Attachments

Summary Notes – CRA Talk Exchange

Participants Feedback Summary