Good morning everyone and welcome. This is my sixth opportunity to address you at the start of a new academic year. Getting ready for September, and anticipating our halls filled again with students, is why we’re all here. At Mount Royal, much has changed over these last few years, and I’m more excited than ever to see what the new school year will bring to our campus.

I’d like to acknowledge we are on the traditional lands of the Niitsitapi, the Blackfoot Peoples and Confederacy, as well as the Treaty 7 Nations, which include the T’suut’ina Nation, the Piikani Nation, the Kainai Nation, the Siksika Nation and the Nakoda Nations. The University also acknowledges the Metis and Inuit Peoples.

1. FORT MCMURRAY/ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS FROM TOM SAMPSON, CEMA

Before we get started, I need to acknowledge, thank and recognize our entire campus for coming together in the spring during the Fort McMurray wild fires. As you know, Mount Royal’s student residences were home to nearly 600 displaced evacuees from the Fort McMurray area. I could not have been more proud of our campus, as everyone united together under the umbrella of the Emergency Operations Centre to host our guests and give them a home away from home.

From Residence Services putting a roof over their heads, custodial working around the clock to prepare more rooms and beds, and our campus food services researching and providing culturally-appropriate meal plans, there wasn’t an area of campus that wasn’t involved.

Our ITS department ensured that our guests could access internet as they started to put their lives back together. Our Communications team kept the campus, our guests and the public informed. Our Finance team monitored and tracked our activity, with prudent recommendations along the way. Enrolment Services connected with current and incoming MRU students living in the Fort Mac area. Recreation opened up their facilities to our guests, and areas such as the Library extended their hours and developed specialized programming to keep children engaged. Our Risk and Security teams provided the oversight to keep everyone safe and connect us with other agencies. And when a call for volunteers went out to employees, the answer was always, “Yes, we’ll be right there.”

Our campus was kind, compassionate and welcoming, and for that, I thank you. A pillar of Mount Royal University is community responsiveness, and several goals in our Strategic Plan outline the importance of our role within our broader community. Seeing our campus come together to respond to this emergency showed us, and both the municipal and provincial governments, that we are indeed invaluable to Calgary and Alberta.

I have a special guest here who also would like to say a few words. Throughout the Fort McMurray evacuation, the Calgary Emergency Management Agency, known as CEMA, partnered with Mount Royal
2. WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY

Before we begin, I want to take a quick moment to introduce you to some new members of our community. I got to meet some of our new faculty members last week and let me say that it was great to see new tenure track members, including people new to Mount Royal, those moving from Limited Term Contracts and contract instructors earning tenure track positions.

Our executive leadership team is experiencing some dynamic change. This spring, we welcomed Steve Fitterer, officially, into the role of vice-president, Student Affairs and Campus Life, after having served in the interim capacity since last summer.

Over the summer, we welcomed Paul Rossmann as our new vice-president, University Advancement. Most recently, Paul was engaged as a consultant to government agencies, industry associations, financial institutions and non-profit organizations. Previously, he worked as vice-president, Strategy and Corporate Development with Credit Union Central Alberta.

I can’t thank Jeff Goldberg enough for stepping into the role of interim Provost and Vice-President Academic on an interim basis. Jeff is with us for the full academic year, and we are seeking to have the new incumbent in place by July 1st of next summer.

It’s my distinct pleasure to welcome Elizabeth Evans to campus. As our Founding Dean of the Faculty of Business and Communication Studies, she officially joined us August 1. Previously serving as Associate Dean Academic of Undergraduate Programs for the Ted Rogers School of Management at Ryerson University, Elizabeth has the unique blend of skills to do great things for our newly merged Faculty of Business and Communication Studies.

In January, we will welcome Jonathan Withey to campus as our new Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology. Jonathan is an organic chemist, and is currently serving as Chair of the Department of Physical Sciences at MacEwan University. I’m very appreciative of Tracy O’Connor who is serving as interim dean of Science and Technology during this transition.

We are also conducting our search for a new Dean of the Faculty of Health, Community and Education. I want to thank Pam Nordstrom for taking on the interim dean role since Chad London’s departure.

One of my main priorities this year is the hiring of a Provost and Vice-President Academic. I spent a great deal of time last spring listening to the community, faculty, staff, management and students on what they are looking for in an academic leader. This feedback was built into the position profile and we are in the process of selecting a search firm that will help us in our quest. But rest assured that the process will be owned by MRU and the search committee.

We will determine the interview process and the questions we ask. We will balance the necessary need for confidentiality with the equally important need to have broader input from the community. This will be a fulsome search, looking for an academic leader who favours consultation, listening and leading a team of strong deans, engaged chairs and the best darn faculty in the country.
3. CELEBRATION

At this time of year, I always like to take a moment to celebrate our achievements from the past academic year. I will repeat what I said at my last fall talk. If this is a “State of the University Address”, I would say that the University is strong. We have faced challenges, we have overcome them and we are stronger as a result. So why are we strong? Because of the great things we do.

Here are but a few highlights from the past year. It’s important to note that every initiative engaged multiple areas of our campus, uniting us together to make the project successful. And what makes me so proud is that each and every one of these activities, events and projects advanced one or more of the goals outlined in our University Strategic Plan.

I should not be surprised, as the Strategic Plan was created by all of us.

We advanced a number of our broader mandates.

On the student mental health front, the recommendations from the President’s Task Force continue to be implemented. A key highlight was the creation of the Peer to Peer Mental Health Education Program, which educates students about campus mental health in an effort to decrease the stigma associated with mental illness.

The Office of Student Success implemented an Early Support System to serve as a mechanism for early intervention, and a workshop was developed to increase faculty knowledge of the tools and resources available to them when they witness a student in distress or crisis.

On the employee front, “The Working Mind” program was rolled out, which provides workplace-based mental health education.

Another important area of focus is sexual violence on campus. A dating violence prevention project called Stepping Up was introduced to promote healthy relationships among students. Last fall, we were part of the #IBelieveYou campaign in Alberta, to help educate people on how to effectively respond to victims of violence.

We now have a satellite office for the Calgary Communities Against Sexual Abuse here on our campus. A new full-time position has been filled to provide support to survivors, help create formal processes around disclosure and coordinate education and awareness initiatives on campus. We must continue to discuss this issue and work towards changing behaviours.

At Mount Royal, we believe Indigenous People have the right to meaningful access to quality post-secondary education. I’m pleased to announce the completion of Mount Royal’s Indigenous Strategic Plan. Work on the Plan started in 2013, with a framework in guiding principles. The Aboriginal Steering Committee then did extensive consultation with the campus community and our Indigenous Advisory Groups.

This Plan will guide us in indigenizing our campus, fostering culturally-respectful research, building relationships with stakeholders, supporting learners and promoting inclusive curricula and pedagogies. The completion of the Indigenous Strategic Plan is a major milestone for us, and I thank everyone who had a hand in its creation.
Mount Royal researchers continue to improve their success in attracting prestigious national funding. In the last round of tri-agency competitions, faculty members were awarded two NSERC grants, two SSHRC grants and a CIHR grant. This was in addition to two grants to support conferences, and numerous other research and scholarship awards.

Also this year, we secured an Indigenous Studies Tier Two Canada Research Chair. There is intense competition around Canada Research Chairs, and Tier Two Chairs come with funding of $100,000 per year for seven years. To get one of these Chairs, a university must be conducting a certain level of research in all disciplines across its campus, must have a high level of expertise among its professorship, and must be graduating high caliber students. This Chair is a major accomplishment for Mount Royal. It is an important first step in the federal government recognizing we are doing quality research at MRU – a key milestone in our evolution as a university.

In February, we launched the Broadcast Media Studies major of the Bachelor of Communication, the only one available in western Canada. This major will set our students up for professional success. More and more industries are recruiting media professionals for their strong communication abilities and skill in digital story-telling.

And, our Bachelor of Science in General Science has been re-vamped to include two concentrations and two community-focused capstone courses.

We brought notable, and at times highly controversial speakers to our campus.

Health, Community and Education hosted the Stephanson-Cooke Interprofessional Event with Sheldon Kennedy in October. Naomi Klein came to campus in March to raise awareness about environmental issues. Kate Bornstein was named our Arts Distinguished Speaker, and Jay Ingram helped kick off Research and Scholarship Days. Paul Brandt became our story-teller in residence, helping students raise awareness of sexual exploitation and missing and murdered Indigenous women.

We had interesting, and again, often controversial conversations.

Hosted by the Library, the Big Ideas Lounge took place in January. Offering a safe venue for open dialogue on trending media topics, this year’s focus was on the fascinating topic of “micro-aggressions and trigger warnings.”

The Sexual Exploitation Awareness Conference in April was organized by a Bachelor of Child Studies capstone class. Representatives from community organizations all over the city attended, and students were able to learn and advocate alongside these veteran change-makers.

Last year, we were engaged with our broader community more than ever.

In February, we again participated in Who’s Frank?, a partnership with Cochrane High School aimed at discussing the motives and myths around bullying.

In March, students from across several programs supported the Flames Foundation for Life and WinSport in the Calgary Flames Health Training Camp, teaching individuals and families about the importance of living healthy and active lifestyles.

The Calgary Peace Prize was hosted at Mount Royal in April. The Faculty of Arts and the Peace Studies Initiative presented the 2016 Calgary Peace Prize to three commissioners from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.
Continuing Education held a series of Business Professional Education sessions to respond to economic and environmental changes. The focus was on building practical skills, thriving in the new normal, and building personal and organizational resilience in the face of change.

In January, we hosted the Bissett Networking Day, bringing professionals from the business community in Calgary and beyond to campus to provide students with the opportunity to meet professionals in their fields.

Just this month, the Pop Up Poetry initiative brought “poetry to the people” on Stephen Avenue Mall. The community lined up around the block over the lunch hour to be treated to a personal poem from Mount Royal faculty members, created on old fashioned typewriters.

Last but not least:

Over the school year, the Library hosted several events to enable faculty, staff, and most importantly our students, to discover and engage in the Riddell Library and Learning Centre. The building will have flexible learning environments, contemporary visualization labs, an immersion studio and “makerspace” for creation and collaboration. We’re all excited to officially open this new building next summer. It will be a space not only for Mount Royal, but also for our broader community to enjoy.

4. COMING UP

Next year is shaping up to be another active year.

The Big Bike Challenge for the Heart and Stroke Foundation starts at noon on September 2nd. Ride a 29-seat bike and raise funds – you only need $20 in pledges – and enjoy a BBQ at the end. Find more information here, or buy tickets for the BBQ at the BookStore.

You can support the Calgary Corporate Challenge through the Big Bike, or through other athletic and non-athletic events.

We will again participate in the Pride Parade on September 4 starting at noon. Walk alongside your peers, colleagues, friends and family to celebrate gender and sexual diversity. More information can be found at mtroyal.ca/positivespace. This celebration of inclusion is so important for the community. But it is also a great way to kick off our academic term, as these values are ones that we share. I am really proud of our campus community’s work to provide peer mentors and to offer training on how to create safe spaces for each other.

September 4 is Move-In Day for our students in residence, followed by Welcome Week.

New Student Orientation takes place September 6 and 7. New this year is an Indigenous Grand Entry down Main Street on September 6. We’ll need many employees cheering them on during this, plus I am told that we still have hundreds of volunteer roles that need filling. If you can please help out by helping with a few roles, that would be appreciated. Please visit mru.ca/helpNSO to sign up – especially for the Grand Entry.

The fifth annual Colour-U-Blue run takes place this year on September 17. Be here, be blue! Go to mru.ca/colourublue for more information. For those that have not taken part or witnessed it, you should try to attend – you can walk if you don’t want to run. And food trucks! We are shooting for over 600 students participating this year. The same day will be the home opener of the women’s soccer season. Please come cheer on our student athletes with me. The caliber of competition is amazing. And admission is free with your MRU ID.
After a successful pilot last year, Continuing Education’s ThinkTalk takes place September 20. You can visit mru.ca/thinktalks for more details.

Tickets are available for the Music to Your Ears concert season at the Taylor Centre for the Performing Arts. With Chantal Kreviazuk, Ziggy Marley and Chris Hadfield, it will be an exceptional line up this year. The Mount Royal community gets a 10% discount on tickets, so visit tickets.mru.ca to get yours.

Under Western Skies 4 will take place from September 27th to the 30th. Under Western Skies is a gathering of academics, artists, policymakers and community members to discuss the most pressing environmental issues of our time. This year’s theme is Water: Events, Trends and Analysis. Visit mru.ca/uws2016 for tickets. Today is the last day to get a $50 early bird discount.

On October 5, we will host A Royal Night: featuring the Alumni Achievement Awards, celebrating the talents and successes of our alumni community. Learn more, and get your tickets at mru.ca/royalnight.

Willow Wilson will come to campus November 4. Wilson is the writer of the Ms. Marvel comic books, and the books’ heroine, Kamala Khan, is the first teenage, Muslim and female comic book superhero. Free tickets to the event, which is happening in the Bella, will be available September 26.

And these are just the events in the fall semester. It suffices to say there are lots of opportunities for everyone to get involved, learn and have fun.

Let’s take a look at our student numbers.

While official figures won’t be finalized until the end of September, there are some positive enrolment trends to report leading up to the first day of class.

As of today, there is a 4.0% increase in applications, a 2.5% increase in distinct applicants and, most importantly, a 7.0% increase in qualified applicants for the Fall 2016 term when compared to last year.

We expect to meet or exceed the admission targets for most programs across the institution. With a total of 4,236 new to program seats available for the Fall, it is anticipated that Mount Royal will fill 102% of its Fall intake.

As of this week, there is a total of 42,387 registrations in credit courses, which is 1,600 (or 4.0%) more registrations than at this time last year.

Our Conservatory enrolments are also up, surpassing the 10,000 mark with more students than ever gaining a superior music and speech arts experience.

In other areas of Continuing Education, our full time occupational programs, including educational assistant, funeral director, massage therapy and personal fitness trainer have also expanded to increase intake in response to demand. And new Business Professional Education programming has been enhanced to respond to a changing environment and economy.

5. CONTEXT

As we look around the world, we can’t help but feel fortunate that we live here in Canada. If you’ve been watching the events unfold in Turkey, with the recent coup attempt and subsequent suspension of thousands of academics from their positions, you may be reflecting on our rights to free expression in Canada.
While we as Canadians value free expression, universities celebrate it and academic freedom as critical parts of our existence. We are fortunate to live in a country that values the role that universities play in the search for truth and knowledge. But it is not enough to be fortunate. We owe it to our peers in Turkey and every other country that stifles academic debate to continue to search for truth and not be afraid to speak it.

Closer to home, we know that our province remains in a prolonged recession. As a result of this recession, post-secondary education is critical to our economy, now, more than ever.

Mount Royal University is ideally positioned to respond to these economic challenges. We are unique, and what makes us special is particularly relevant, in this tough economy.

As you know, we offer experiential learning through practica, work terms and many other applications. Our students have the ideal blend of practical experience to enhance their theoretical studies. Our Career Services department further supports our students’ experiential learning through work placements. They have generated 140 new clients over the past two years, successfully making up for the shortfall in the oil and gas sector. Our graduates are attractive to employers, which makes Mount Royal attractive to prospective students.

We engage our undergraduate students in research opportunities, which we know is often reserved only for graduate students at most other universities. The educational experience is much more robust at Mount Royal, as a result.

And of course, we provide a liberal education. This ensures our students graduate with enhanced and well-rounded skills and exposure to disciplines and program areas outside of their area of study.

Many of us have travelled to conferences and speaking engagements throughout the summer. I had the distinct privilege of attending a conference on liberal education with Jim Zimmer, Jeff Keshen and Karim Dharamsi. This was a U.S. conference, where many attending institutions share our view that liberal education is a critical part of any university experience.

I was struck by how well we accomplish this at a school our size because many of the attending institutions were smaller, private or religious based.

In addition, we learned that there is a growing body of empirical evidence suggesting that liberal education, when thoughtfully-implemented, does in fact cultivate the types of intellectual skills and capacities we have long claimed it does. With a view to developing an informed, empathetic and engaged citizenry, the need for a liberal education has never been greater. In the words of keynote speaker Andrew Delbanco’s the university classrooms is, among other things, a “rehearsal space” for democracy and civil society.

For those of you who attended Employee Awards on Wednesday, you heard me reference the CUSC and NSSE survey results, with a promise that we’d dive deeper into these results at today’s Address.

Since I’m giving you a lot of acronyms here, CUSC stands for the Canadian University Survey Consortium and NSSE stands for the National Survey of Student Engagement. CUSC surveyed 379 first-year Mount Royal students, and NSSE surveyed 1,101 of our students.
I’ll refer you to the CUSC survey, Table 4: Applications. I’m pleased to read that, even though 70% of students surveyed said that they did apply to other universities, 80% of the students said that Mount Royal University was still their first choice, which is on par with comparable universities and institutions across the country.

On Table 7: Satisfaction with Orientation. In every category, we surpassed the average among comparable universities and the average among all universities, when it came to making our students feel welcome and giving them information to help them get started on the right foot. Our students are more likely to attend orientation, and be satisfied with their orientation experience.
On Table 10: *Biggest differences in experiences with professors*, we see the same thing. In every category, we offer more positive student-professor experiences when measured against comparable universities and all the universities surveyed. This is remarkable, but not surprising, as we know that personalized student-faculty engagement is one of our cornerstones. As the statement says, “Mount Royal University students have much more positive perceptions of their professors than students elsewhere.” What a fantastic statement.

Let’s take a look at Table 12: *University education*, where we see that our first year students are more likely to find their classes interesting compared with students nationally. Their course loads are manageable, and they report feeling like they had adequate information about the program before enrolling.
In Table 15, *Key Indicators*, we see our students have more positive experiences than students nationally. This makes them more likely to recommend MRU, to be very satisfied with their decision to come to MRU, to say the experience exceeds their expectations, and to be satisfied with both the quality of teaching and the concern shown to them as an individual. Incredible!

Now, we also need to take a look at the areas for improvement.

In Table 2: *Academic profile*, we see that just 32% of our students received a scholarship or bursary from MRU as compared with more than 50% at other universities. Part of the Strategic Plan is to increase these numbers. More on that later.
Table 1: Demographic profile, shows us that, while we have more self-declared visible minority students, relative to comparable universities, our self-declared Aboriginal students are just 4%, in contrast to 7% at comparable universities. Implementation of the Indigenous Strategic Plan will serve to increase these numbers.

The CUSC and NSSE surveys are important tools at our disposal, to measure where we’re sitting, and where we want to go.

6. STRATEGY

I’d like to talk a little bit about the University Strategic Plan, Learning Together, Leading Together, and let you know where we will be placing our focus this year.

As you know, because I’m certain you’ve all memorized every strategy, the 10-year Strategic Plan includes 10 overarching goals. We have identified 33 strategies in order to meet those goals.

Last year, we reviewed those 33 strategies, and identified 16 which needed our greatest focus for the next three years. Some of these 16 strategies were well in hand, and some needed more dedicated attention.

In the spring, the University Strategic Council, or USC, which is made up of deans, directors, AVPs, VPs and other leaders from across campus, came together for an in-depth discussion about these 16 strategies. Ten of the strategies emerged as the most critical to the success of our campus. The group provided extensive data and detail around this prioritization.

From there, the President’s Executive Committee, which is known as PEC, took those 10 strategies and the data and detail behind them, to consolidate the discussions and identify just five strategies for utmost priority focus. Who are the members of PEC? I chair the committee that includes our four vice-presidents, our AVP of Human Resources, Ariane Tennant, and our Director of the University Secretariat, Jane O’Connor.

Of course, every strategy in the University Strategic Plan is important – and we need to meet all of these strategies by 2025 – however, our campus must have clear priorities for the next couple of years.
I’d like to thank the University Strategic Council for doing so much of the legwork to get us to this point, and for our institutional analysis and planning folks for structuring the conversations to get us to productive results.

Let’s talk about the top five strategies for a moment.

As we go through them, it should become apparent why these were the five critical ones for this year. In some cases we have made some great strides, but need to continue the momentum. In others, we are behind, and we need to make some real progress.

Many of us will be involved directly in these priorities, while others of us continue to work on initiatives that are in progress and not part of the top five. We are not asking anyone to stop advancing the other initiatives. We are now in year two of an ambitious 10-year Plan. We have made substantial progress in many areas … heck our list of celebrations and upcoming events make that clear. So let’s continue our journey together on all strategies of our Plan, but recognize that some of our initiatives are immediate priorities.

**Strategy 4.1: Grow to Meet Demands of Alberta Learners**

Strategy 4.1 won’t be a surprise for anyone here: we need to grow to meet the demand of Alberta’s learners. We need to increase access by increasing our student numbers – our “Full Load Equivalents” or FLEs – and we will increase our physical capacity to accommodate this growth in FLEs.

We will expand academic programming to meet learning and market demands. To continue to attract qualified applicants to our four-year bachelor degree programs, we will fully implement our You Belong Here brand concept, which communicates our four brand pillars to applicants and the wider community. This campaign conveys what differentiates Mount Royal University from other institutions in our market.

We need a full court press on two important arms of this strategy. First, I would like next fall to look like this fall – except more full time faculty and staff additions in exchange for accepting more students in our school. We are ready to move. The government is looking at a post-secondary review and we are the most poised to help get Alberta’s participation rate closer to the national average.

**Strategy 9.1: Indigenization**

Strategy 9.1 is core to our evolution as a community-responsive University. We will continue to indigenize our campus through the implementation of the institutional Indigenous Strategy.

We will increase the numbers of Indigenous students enrolled at Mount Royal and incorporate Indigenous content into all programs. We will seek to increase awareness and understanding of Indigenous culture and issues among faculty, staff and management. Our campus indigenization will be supported through an increase in our partnerships with Indigenous communities and the implementation of a transition year program for our Indigenous students.

Why this one? The list is long.

- We have just approved an Indigenous Strategic Plan;
- We are committed to doubling our intake of Indigenous students;
- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is calling on Universities to be a major component of redressing past wrong-doings;
- We have a fantastic team in Iniskim, and now a Tier Two Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Studies; and
Jim Zimmer together with a dedicated group of faculty members have made great headway in our goal to create a more Indigenous curriculum.

**Strategy 9.5: Internationalization**

As part of Strategy 9.5, we will develop an institutional Internationalization Strategy. We will seek to increase the numbers of international students at Mount Royal. At the same time, we will establish new international partnerships and we will build collaborative initiatives with existing international partners. This will enable us to grow opportunities for Mount Royal students to study abroad, and participate in high impact learning experiences.

We will increase our campus student support for international students, and expand the opportunities for MRU students to participate in international initiatives. This includes exchanges, field schools, work experience and practicum opportunities.

The structural changes we made to our International office has nicely positioned us to make substantial progress in strategy 9.5. Now what we need is to work across the campus to accomplish this goal. In fact, it was at one of the managers meetings that we had one of our best discussions on working collaboratively to make progress on this goal.

This year we need to develop an international strategy that:

- Includes our great efforts in Cont. Ed.;
- Identifies the programs and countries where we can attract international students;
- Has the right support in place to make our international students successful;
- Explores further opportunities for 2 & 2’s with international partner institutions;
- Expands opportunities for our students to spend a semester studying abroad, with more international students on our campus for study terms; and
- Exploits the tremendous international footprint of our faculty when they travel abroad. This will serve to make further connections that will benefit the entire campus community by creating and fostering a greater community of global citizens.

**Strategy 4.3: Timely Degree Completion**

Strategy 4.3 is focused on reducing the time it takes for our students to complete their degrees. As part of this strategy, we will implement full-year registration, while expanding the first-year registration assistance program. We will identify and remove barriers to credential completion and implement year-round course delivery. And, we'll maximize our course transferability across Mount Royal and to other institutions.

To meet this Strategy, we will continue to increase spaces in University Entrance Option while reducing spaces in Open Studies. If you’re not familiar, University Entrance Option and Open Studies are two very different programs – two very different access points into a four-year baccalaureate program.

We know that the success rate of our students in University Entrance Option, or UEO, is considerably higher than it is for the students in Open Studies. Our UEO students want to get into a degree program, and we've discovered that our Open Studies students are more interested in academic upgrading. Since our focus needs to be on degree students, and the success rate in UEO is so much higher, we can ensure we’re meeting our mandate to expand student access by focusing on UEO and eventually phasing out Open Studies altogether.

**Strategy 8.3: Fundraise with Intention**
Strategy 8.3 is all about enhancing our fundraising efforts. We'll be further developing and implementing an integrated university advancement model, which will set us up as we start to position ourselves for our next transformational campaign.

We need to grow the University’s endowment funds, start to develop alternative revenue sources to fund student activities and bursaries, and secure additional sources of research funding. We'll be looking to further develop and create new national and international alumni branches.

As some of the PowerPoint slides have demonstrated, there is a connection between these last two strategies. We are well below average when it comes to financial support for our students. As a college we were doing well, but as a four-year degree granting institution we have work to do. More financial support will help students hold down full course loads, leading to faster degree completion. We have set a goal in the Strategic Plan to grow our scholarships and bursaries to a financial level that equals five per cent of our institutional operating budget – a common measurement for post-secondary institutions.

This spring we will finish the Riddell Library and Learning Centre. But we need to secure both provincial and private support to make the best use of those areas that will be vacated to move next door. We need to identify opportunities for future campus development, including a bold Indigenous Housing Project, new academic space and the eventual replacement of our East Residences. We need to have a strategic approach to fundraising that will allow us to accomplish these goals.

Over the course of the year we will be talking about these five strategies a lot. We’ll talk about both the progress and the challenges at my informal meetings with staff, the managers group and with faculty. We’ll also be working with the Communications team to share regular updates.

Again, our long-term objective is to advance all the strategies of the University Strategic Plan. However, these five priority strategies will help us to focus our work.

I urge you to familiarize yourselves with these five Strategies. Pull out your copy of the University Strategic Plan, and read about these Strategies in more detail. Take a moment to reflect on your own work, and the work of your colleagues within your own team. Speak with your supervisor, and brainstorm where you might fit in. I am certain that, regardless of the role you play at Mount Royal, you will recognize your own work in one or more of these Strategies. I can’t say this enough – the success of the University Strategic Plan, and our achievement of these five priority Strategies will only happen if all of us are engaged, and pulling in the same direction.

As the budget and the Strategic Plan are two halves of a whole, we’ve also launched a brand new task force. The Resource Planning Task Force first met before the summer break, and is now working outward to engage a larger group of internal stakeholders. The Task Force is charged with a review of the current budget process. They’ll be providing feedback on what works and what doesn’t work. They will dive into specific areas which require greater attention. They’ll review and validate any potential changes to the budget process and provide advice on how to improve budget planning overall. I look forward to hearing what this task force recommends.

I’m also exceptionally pleased to say that the new Academic Plan is underway. I thank Dean of Arts Jeff Keshen for taking on the critical leadership role. An ad hoc committee of General Faculties Council was formalized yesterday at the GFC special meeting and work will begin right away. The new Academic Plan will be built with foresight and collaboration, and we are all excited to watch this unfold.
I can tell you, with both certainty and enthusiasm that I’m entering this new school year with a renewed sense of energy. We have a refreshed executive team, and we have new academic deans with exciting ideas. We have filled and will continue to fill key leadership roles. These roles are complemented with energetic staff, managers and faculty. We are ideally positioned to leverage existing talents with fresh perspectives.

A healthy student environment begins with a healthy workforce of staff, faculty and managers. As you know, we’ve outlined the importance of a healthy workplace in our University Strategic Plan, and we remain committed to this. We are starting our new school year with vigor, and I have heard from so many of you that you share my excitement for the year that lies ahead. We have overcome some significant challenges – there’s no doubt about that – but we’ve done it together. And we have come out the other side stronger than we were before.

As you return to your work today, I’ll ask you to take one thought with you….

I’ll ask you to remember why we’re all here.

Picture, for just a moment in your minds, that student: perhaps she’s female, in her first year at MRU, and perhaps she’s struggling with her own sexual identity, but for certain, she’s both excited and terrified at the unknown school year ahead. She doesn’t know anyone, and she hopes she’s picked the right classes, and that she’ll make some new friends.

She headed downtown this weekend, and stood on the sidelines of the Pride Parade. She watched with interest as 100 students, staff, faculty and managers from Mount Royal University walked by, some in blue feather boas, celebrating diversity together.

She comes to campus on the first day of classes. She’s thinking about her program, and she’s keen and disciplined, determined to start off on the right foot. She is hoping she can sustain that determination right through to finals. She really wants to do well, to make her family proud, and to prove to herself that she’s ready for what life will have in store for her when she graduates.

She’s walking in, full of uncertainty.

But, as she heads to her first class, she starts to feel better. She knows she received sound advice from the student advisors on her courses. She’s got all her supplies and resources from the BookStore. Suzy and Grace at Starbucks made her a special coffee, and a kind staff member in the hallway helped her find her classroom.

She walks in and sees a couple of students she met at New Student Orientation and sits down beside them. Her professor begins the class, and starts to outline, in a highly compelling way, exactly what she’s going to learn this semester.

She breathes a sigh of relief, because she realizes that it’s going to be OK. There’s something about the energy in this place that lets her know that she belongs here. It’s going to be challenging, but she’s up for it. She’s ready to face the uncertainty and leap into her future.

This is why we’re here. Please always remember that each and every one of us has a role to play in that student’s success. She is the reason we do what we do every day. Her potential is our potential, and her greatness is our greatness. I thank you all for your unwavering commitment to greatness.