



UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA



Organizational Values Consultation

What We Heard

APRIL 2025



Contents

- Thank you** **3**
- Introduction** **4**
- What are values?** **4**
- Overview of the development process** **5**
- What we heard** **6**
- Most prominent themes** **7**
- Other important themes** **9**
- Other general comments** **10**
- What’s next?** **11**



An aerial photograph of a city skyline, likely Minneapolis, Minnesota. In the foreground, a large, modern building with a bright yellow facade is visible. A bridge spans a river in the middle ground, and the city skyline with various skyscrapers is in the background under a cloudy sky.

Thank you

As executive co-sponsors of this initiative, we extend our sincere gratitude to the students, faculty, staff, governors, senators, alumni, and other university community members who dedicated their time and shared their perspectives during this important consultation process. Your thoughtful contributions are invaluable as we work together to define the core values that guide our institution.

Verna Yiu,
Provost & Vice-President (Academic)

Todd Gilchrist,
Vice-President (University Services, Operations and Finance)

Introduction

In early 2025, the University of Alberta launched a process to develop its organizational values. Our values will sit alongside our mission and vision as long-term guiding lights for the whole organization.

This process is a major early commitment in *Forward Together: The University of Alberta People Strategy*, which was launched in fall 2024.

During the extensive consultations that informed the People Strategy, we heard clearly that articulating our values should be an early priority.

What are values?

An organization's values are the principles and beliefs that guide its actions, decisions, and culture. Values reflect what an organization stands for and how it aspires to interact with its community, stakeholders and the world.

Values are a cornerstone for building a sense of belonging and connection and provide a lens to guide the university in priority setting and decision-making over the long term.

Values are typically concise and direct – a small number of keywords or phrases easily understood and embraced across the institution. Organizational values also tend to be authentic to the institution (reflecting its history, mission, aspirations), relevant across the organization over the long term and action-oriented (i.e. can be reflected in our actions).

This report summarizes the feedback and key themes gathered during the consultation process to inform our values. It is provided for validation by those who participated in the consultations and for response and input from the broader university community. The themes presented here may not represent consensus positions or capture the full range of nuance expressed. They also do not represent a completed set of values. Rather, they identify the major areas of generally shared thinking emerging from many conversations.



Overview of the development process

The process to develop organizational values is overseen by the People Strategy Steering Committee, a broad group of faculty, staff, students and leaders, co-chaired by the Provost & Vice-President (Academic) and the Vice-President (University Services, Operations and Finance).

The university community has offered extensive input on its values through a number of consultation processes, and a number of our institutional plans include principles and values. The values process builds on this work.

The development process has two phases.

Phase One

In the first phase, we conducted broad consultations focused on identifying major themes, informed by the university's existing values-type language (e.g. in various plans and official statements). Our learnings are summarized in this report.

MECHANISMS

- **Board-General Faculties Council (GFC)-Senate Summit:** all three governance bodies were engaged in a joint session to reflect on existing university documents and explore which ideas resonated the most and least strongly from the standpoint of long-term values and which ideas might be missing.
- **"Values lab" workshops:** five workshops were held in April 2025, including one in French. Participants were asked to reflect on the university's past, present and future to identify the values and characteristics at the core of our identity and success.
- **Online survey:** available in March-April 2025 for those unable to attend a values lab.

Phase 2

In the second phase, the Steering Committee is releasing this What We Heard report and several sets of hypothetical organizational values. This phase aims to validate that the themes from phase one have been captured accurately, to seek feedback on the draft values to determine whether they resonate as intended, capture the university's core commitments and identity and to identify what adjustments need to be made.

As part of this phase, we will also conduct more focused engagement with groups that did not participate as fully in the initial consultations, including alumni and students.

In fall 2025, the Steering Committee expects to submit a proposed set of values to GFC and the Board of Governors for endorsement.



What we heard

Over 200 individuals participated in the first phase of consultations and provided over 1000 data points. Ideas have been grouped into thematic clusters for review and validation.

These clusters should be read with the following considerations:

- **Not draft values:** These clusters are *not* intended as suggested values themselves, nor do they imply that the ideas within each cluster are interchangeable. They simply represent groupings of related concepts.
- **Overlap and nuance:** The groupings are inherently inexact, and some overlap exists between clusters. In some cases, respondents may feel that a theme that has been reported as a distinct idea in fact belongs with a broader cluster.
- **Qualitative approach:** The grouping reflects the prominence and recurrence of ideas across different consultation methods, rather than being strictly quantitative. Factors like the number of contributions per individual, expressions of amplification or agreement, and the format of input were considered qualitatively.
- **Validation needed:** Given this approach, validation from the community on these themes is a critical next step.

The themes have been broadly categorized as “Most prominent themes” or “Other important themes” based on their prominence in the consultation data. This categorization reflects how frequently and widely these ideas appeared; it does *not* reflect their potential importance in the final value statements.

- **Most prominent themes:** Appeared consistently across all or most consultation sessions/streams, were mentioned by multiple respondents, and often received explicit expressions of support or amplification from other participants.
- **Other important themes:** Appeared in multiple consultation streams but were typically raised by fewer respondents and/or received fewer expressions of explicit support. In some cases, a degree of disagreement regarding these themes was also expressed.



Most prominent themes

- **Connection / Interconnectedness:**
 - Participants emphasized the importance of relationships, collaboration and cooperation, partnership, and a sense of interconnection across the university.
 - These ideas were cited as reasons for our past success and values key to our future. Some drew on terms like mutuality and flourishing.
- **“Uplifting the Whole People” / Community / Impact:**
 - Participants focused on the university’s purpose in serving society, advancing human potential, promoting well-being, and contributing positively to the public good through our research, teaching, and community engagement activities.
 - The phrase “uplifting the whole people” resonated particularly strongly.
 - Several responses noted that support *from* the external community has been critical to the university’s past success, and that we will need to have a community orientation in order to earn similar support for the future.
- **Curiosity / Discovery / Innovation / Research / Creativity:**
 - Participants highlighted the university’s commitment to curiosity and discovery in teaching and especially in research, and its commitment to driving innovation for major impact within Alberta and beyond. Several participants emphasized the importance of the university committing to research as a core value.
 - There was some emphasis on curiosity-driven research, while others emphasized translating research into innovative impacts.
 - The term “creativity” was frequently shared, but its meaning was not always clear.
- **Truth / Quaecumque Vera / Debate / Challenging Accepted Norms / Freedom of Expression / Honesty:**
 - This reflects a cluster of related but distinct ideas, centred on a view of the university as a community committed to the pursuit and expression of truth, willingness to challenge consensus and accepted beliefs (“irreverence”), and openness to debate and disagreement within an environment that values free expression and academic freedom.
 - Several participants directly cited the university’s longstanding motto – “*quaecumque vera*” or “whatsoever things are true.”



- **Respect:**
 - Participants highlighted respect as a central principle. In discussion, several explained that this referred to establishing norms for respectful interactions, respecting the expertise and autonomy of colleagues (academic and non-academic) and creating a sense that all members of the university community are valued.
- **Resilience / Tenacity / Persistence / Adaptability:**
 - These ideas were particularly highlighted as important for the present and future – recognizing the importance of perseverance, adaptability and the ability to navigate challenges and change effectively.
 - This was not always a positive sentiment – one participant shared, “I wish we didn’t have to be so resilient.”
- **Indigenization / Decolonization / Reconciliation:**
 - Participants emphasized different terms, but in general, participants expressed the importance of advancing the university’s Indigenous commitments, particularly as a key to our ability to thrive into the future. Some specifically emphasized the importance of supporting Indigenous students.



Other important themes

- **Excellence:**
 - For both our past and future, a number of participants emphasized the importance of the university's commitment to excellence — particularly academic excellence. For some, this seemed to be distinct from ideas like “impact” or “innovation,” connoting the value of excellence for its own sake.
 - There were a few expressions of disagreement with excellence as a value. One participant shared that excellence is often under-defined and can seem hollow.
- **Intellectual and Disciplinary Diversity:**
 - Several participants shared the importance of valuing a wide range of fields of study, perspectives, and viewpoints — particularly emphasizing the importance of sustaining the U of A's traditional comprehensive scope.
- **Ambition / Boldness / Courage:**
 - Participants highlighted the value of encouraging aspiration, leadership, and a willingness to take initiative and pursue challenging goals. This was a distinct idea from the university's impact or excellence — ambition or boldness seemed to refer to an attitude or approach that cuts across other themes.
 - However, some also expressed discomfort with this language or felt it did not resonate well.
- **Inclusion / Inclusivity:**
 - Some participants highlighted inclusion or inclusivity as a core value for the university's past and into the future.
 - While this was not among the most prominent themes expressed, it is possible that some participants considered this to be captured in the phrase “uplifting the whole people” (a connection expressed in previous consultations).
- **Integrity / Accountability / Transparency / Trust:**
 - These ideas were shared particularly in the context of discussion about how to ensure that the university's values are truly reflected across the university, ensuring that the entire leadership group embodies the values, and that there is accountability for failing to live up to the values.
 - The idea of the university's accountability to its external communities may be captured in the phrase “uplifting the whole people.”
- **Care / Compassion:**
 - These responses seemed to highlight empathy, support and concern for the well-being of community members. This seemed to be a distinct idea from “respect,” but the themes may be complementary.



Other general comments

Beyond specific themes, several general points were raised during the consultation:

- **Interrelation of Values:** Participants noted that values do not exist in isolation; they must function together cohesively. The interplay between different values is as important as the individual concepts themselves.
- **Skepticism:** Some participants expressed skepticism about the values development process, questioning whether the outcomes will be meaningfully implemented or if it is primarily a branding exercise.
- **Leadership Embodiment:** The importance of consistent modelling and embodiment of the chosen values by university leadership was frequently emphasized.
- **One vs. Multiple Cultures:** Discussion occurred around whether the university possesses a single, unified culture or multiple distinct sub-cultures, and how values should reflect this reality.
- **Francophone Education, Research, and Engagement:** The community at Campus Saint-Jean particularly emphasized the importance of Francophonie and bilingualism as foundational to the U of A's identity.

It was also felt important to reiterate that organizational values are not disconnected from the university's strategic and action plans, but emerge from and also give direction to these — i.e., our values need to be an integral part of the university's direction and not a stand-alone planning exercise. By the same token, the university's organizational values should not displace the value statements or principles articulated in our unique plans within their own scope.



What's next?

This “What We Heard” report, along with draft values language developed by the Steering Committee (being released concurrently), will now undergo a validation process.

The university community is invited to provide input on whether the themes from phase one have been captured accurately and to provide feedback on the draft values language.

As part of this phase, the Steering Committee will also conduct more focused engagement with groups that did not participate as fully in the initial consultations, including alumni and students.

In fall 2025, the Steering Committee expects to submit a proposed set of values to GFC and the Board of Governors for endorsement.

Updates on the validation process and subsequent steps will be shared through the [People Strategy web page](#), The Quad and regular updates to governance bodies.



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