The University of Guelph’s
Presidential Lineage

Since the founding of U of G in 1964, seven presidents have led the University, bringing varying expertise and leadership styles to a growing and changing institution.

John D. MacLachlan took the helm for the first three years from 1964 to 1967. A Harvard graduate, the botanist from the Kingston area joined the faculty of OAC in 1939. He became president of OAC in 1950 at age 44 and head of the Federated Colleges in 1964, then was named president of the newly formed U of G.

In steering the transition from college to university, the founding president introduced the trimester system, established the character of governing bodies of the institution, played a key role in setting up the first academic programs and hiring faculty and administrators, and provided for a master plan of campus. He also launched a successful capital campaign. He retired in 1967 at the age of 61 and died in 1987.

Bill Winegard was 42 and assistant dean of graduate studies at the University of Toronto when he succeeded MacLachlan. The Hamilton-born metallurgist earned three degrees from U of T, where he continued to teach and do research in the solidification of metals, establishing a world-renowned reputation in the field.

During his years as U of G president from 1967 to 1975, Winegard provided students with an official voice on governing policies, set up faculty policy and appointment committees, opened Senate meetings to the public, promoted teaching evaluation and initiated reorganization of the college structure, which culminated in an aims and objectives document. He later entered federal politics, representing Guelph and eventually becoming Canada’s first minister for science. He retired from politics in 1993 and was named an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1998. He currently chairs the Premier’s Research Excellence Awards board.

At 41, Donald Forster became Guelph’s third president, serving from 1975 to 1983. The Toronto native earned his BA from U of T and his master’s from Harvard in political economics. He came to Guelph after a 15-year career in the academic and administrative ranks at U of T.

An advocate of lifelong learning, he expanded continuing education and introduced distance education programs, established the University School of Rural Planning and Development, forged ties with Beijing Agricultural University, encouraged international activities, paved the way for academic co-operation with the universities of Waterloo and Toronto, founded the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre and set in motion the articulation of Guelph’s vision of education in Toward 2000. Forster died suddenly just before he was to assume the presidency of U of T.

In 1984, at 57, Burt Matthews became Guelph’s fourth president. Raised in the London area, he earned his undergraduate degree at OAC and his PhD in soil chemistry at Cornell. He spent 20 years at Guelph, beginning as a lecturer at OAC and eventually becoming vice-president, academic. From 1970 to 1981, he was president of the University of Waterloo.
Returning to Guelph as president, Matthews spearheaded a campaign that raised $65 million, stimulating a major capital expansion on campus. He also broadened and clarified vice-presidential positions, initiated a strategic planning process, strengthened the co-op program, encouraged multidisciplinary programs, established the President’s Scholarships, increased research activities and improved staff benefits. He retired from the presidency in 1988.

**Brian Segal** became U of G’s fifth president in 1988 after eight years as president of Ryerson Polytechnical Institute. The McGill-educated 44-year-old had earned his PhD in social welfare from the University of Pittsburgh.

Before Ryerson, Segal was an associate professor of social work at Carleton University and a strategic planning director for the Secretary of State.

At Guelph, he made commitments to employment equity and enhancing the role of women. He was responsible for an internal review that would make administration leaner and help check the University’s growing deficit in economic hard times. He oversaw the renovation of Zavitz Hall, the opening of the Bovey Building and the expansion of the Research Park, and established the Heritage Fund to generate capital income. He resigned from Guelph in 1992 to become publisher of *Maclean’s* magazine and vice-president of Maclean Hunter Publications. He is now president and CEO of Rogers Publishing.

**Mordechai Rozanski** took over the helm of U of G in 1993 at age 45 and served for 10 years. A BA history graduate of McGill and PhD graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, he joined U of G from Wagner College in New York, where he was provost and vice-president for academic affairs.

His tenure at Guelph was marked by challenge, innovation and substantial growth in the University’s enrolment, financial resources, facilities and academic stature. He initiated a process leading to the preparation of the University’s strategic plan, “Making Change” (1995) which remains the foundational document for the University’s strategic directions with its focus on the University as a learner-centred and research-intensive institution committed to collaboration, internationalism and open learning.

Working with dedicated faculty, staff, academic and administrative leaders, students, board members and alumni, Rozanski provided leadership that refocused Guelph’s mission and enhanced its national reputation for sustained academic distinction. This stature was symbolized, in part, by Guelph’s recognition for the first time as the best comprehensive university in the nation in *Maclean’s* magazine’s annual ranking of universities. The University has remained among the top ranked universities in its category ever since.

Other achievements during Rozanski’s presidency include increasing annual research funding support by $40 million to more than $106 million; expanding and diversifying the University’s financial resources and achieving balanced budgets for nine consecutive years; growing the endowment by some $100 million to $134 million; and undertaking the most significant building and renovation activity in the University’s modern history, an activity totaling more than $250 million, including the establishment of the new University of Guelph-Humber in Toronto.

In 2003 at age 50, **Alastair Summerlee** became Guelph’s first-ever internal candidate installed as president, and now stands to become the University’s longest-serving president. His second presidential term was extended by a year to coincide in 2014 with completion of the $200-million BetterPlanet Project fundraising campaign and the University’s 50th anniversary.
Summerlee arrived at U of G in 1988. He joined the Department of Biomedical Sciences in U of G’s Ontario Veterinary College from the University of Bristol, where he had completed a PhD and had been named as a member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.

During his presidency, Summerlee addressed issues including capital planning, a structural deficit, rising costs, pension and endowment funds, curriculum review, enrolment growth, integrated planning, deferred maintenance, student housing and athletics, strategic research planning, accessibility and sustainability. The University’s research funding has grown to $140 million annually, and its annual fundraising has increased from about $13 million in 2003 to more than $27.5 million in 2012. During his tenure, U of G renewed a multibillion-dollar partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

A 3M Teaching Fellow, Summerlee continued to teach and conduct research throughout his presidency.

While president, Summerlee chaired the board of directors of World University Services Canada and the Council of Ontario Universities, spearheaded successful United Way campaigns, and led fundraising and awareness-building projects for Kenyan refugee camps. Under his leadership, Guelph cemented its international reputation for community engagement as “the world’s most caring university.” In 2004, Summerlee received an honorary doctorate from the University of Bristol; in 2012, he received the International Quality of Life Award from the United Nations and the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Award.