

# OUR SHARED **PRIORITIES**

A strategic vision for the  
**Ontario Agricultural College**  
for 2018-2023.

UNIVERSITY  
of GUELPH

IMPROVE LIFE.

# INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The Ontario Agricultural College (OAC) of the University of Guelph is internationally renowned for its research, teaching and knowledge extension in the broad areas of food, agriculture, communities and the environment.

The OAC community includes 3,700 diploma, undergraduate and graduate students, 35,000 alumni, 140 faculty and 600 staff members. We are a community of individuals, departments, schools, associations, groups, centres, institutes, teams and labs, each with its own set of goals and aspirations. Our community also has a strong sense of shared purpose: **To Improve Life by inspiring leaders, generating knowledge and creating innovative solutions for food, agriculture, communities and the environment.**

We work together in various ways to achieve this mission and, as a result, have many shared priorities. These priorities form this guiding document, reflecting a more than year-long process of consultation and discussion with students, staff, faculty, alumni and stakeholders.

The results of this process were:

- 1) broad engagement with the OAC community,
- 2) a document that summarizes the priorities of our community, and
- 3) a guide that can inform our strategic and operational decisions.

*Our Shared Priorities* will act as a touchstone for all of us, helping us to focus our efforts and remind us of the value we place on: **student success, achieving excellence, supporting our people, organizational effectiveness and our legacy and reputation.**

Together, as we move forward through the next five years, we will look to this document for guidance—to help us focus our efforts and to remind us of what matters most in terms of who we are and what we do. It will also influence an annual reporting exercise that will share key examples of how our joint purpose is being realized across OAC.

## Our History

Established in 1874, OAC is one of three founding colleges of the University of Guelph.

Its original mandate was twofold: “In the first place, teach to the succeeding, if not the present, generation of the most improved methods of cultivation – in one world, ‘train young [people] in the science and art of improved husbandry;’ and in the second, it must conduct experiments and publish the results.”

After 144 years, much has changed, but the core focus of OAC has remained consistent: teaching, research and knowledge extension.

Our students, staff, faculty and alumni have made significant contributions to food science, policy, environmental science, international development, animal and plant science, rural planning and extension, economics, landscape architecture and agricultural production. Our positive impact can be seen across the world in fields and environments (natural and human-made), in communities and on our plates.

It is important to note the Indigenous lands that the college is situated on. The Guelph campus resides on the ancestral lands of the Attawandaron people and treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit. The Ridgetown campus resides on the territory of the Anishinaabe and Wendat peoples and the treaty lands of the Lenape people of the Delaware Nation at Moraviantown. Today, these lands are home to many First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. Acknowledging them reminds us of our important connections to this land where we learn and work, and our commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples of Canada.

## Our Present

Today, OAC is recognized as Canada's largest and most renowned agricultural college and a global leader in education, research and service in food, agriculture, communities and the environment.

We continue to be core to the university's overall mission and, through the leadership, collaboration and outreach efforts of our community members, we play an important role in contributing to the university's vision, success and brand recognition.

Our six academic units, located on two campuses in Guelph and Ridgetown, Ontario, lead OAC's efforts:

- Department of Animal Biosciences
- Department of Food, Agricultural and Resource Economics
- Department of Food Science
- Department of Plant Agriculture
- School of Environmental Design and Rural Development
- School of Environmental Sciences

We offer seven associate diplomas, 17 undergraduate majors in seven degree programs and 26 graduate program options.

The University of Guelph is ranked as the top agricultural school in Canada and is consistently ranked as a top agricultural university internationally. Much of this success is due to the research efforts of OAC faculty, staff and students who receive \$58 million in research funding annually.

## Charting Our Future

In 2017, OAC Dean Rene Van Acker initiated a collaborative process to develop a new strategic plan, since the college's Integrated Plan had ended in 2016. While the college would benefit from a new guiding document, the true benefit would be the engagement of the OAC community.

It was important to Dean Van Acker that the full community have an opportunity to provide feedback on what OAC does well and express their needs for the future, particularly in relation to the many opportunities we have in food and agriculture. The process provided occasions to talk about our successes and plans for the future; this document is the culmination of those discussions.

Dean Van Acker also felt it was important that the final document released not be prescriptive, given that most of the action being guided by this document will take place within our academic units and at Ridgetown Campus. Because of this, the document evolved from a strategic plan to a strategic vision that reflects the ideas and priorities of the OAC community, including our students, staff, faculty, administration, partners and alumni.

This document will act as a touchstone, helping us to focus our efforts and remind us of our shared priorities. It will also act as a guide for an annual reporting exercise that will be just as valuable as this document, as it will inspire ideas and share best practices across OAC.

It is also important to note that this document serves as a complementary document to pre-existing agreements and frameworks. Our priorities link strongly with *Our Path Forward: The University of Guelph's Strategic Framework*, which was released in 2016. In the drafting of this document, attention was also paid to alignment with the University of Guelph's Strategic Mandate Agreement with the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development and the new Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs-University of Guelph Agreement.





The Arboretum, University of Guelph  
Photo by William Alabish

# MISSION AND VALUES

As part of the strategic discussion process, there was a need to review and affirm our mission and values in relation to the context above and the feedback received by the community.

OAC leadership, including the Dean's Council Management Group (see Acknowledgements section), met several times to develop a mission and a set of values for OAC. Although most OAC community members can intrinsically speak to the values and mission of the college, which was evident through the feedback process, it was vital that these be formalized.

Building upon the University of Guelph's vision *To Improve Life*, OAC's mission and values direct our choices, priorities and everyday work.

## OUR MISSION:

To Improve Life by  
inspiring leaders,  
generating knowledge  
and creating innovative  
solutions for food,  
agriculture, communities  
and the environment.

## WE VALUE:

- Student success
- Achieving excellence
- Supporting our people
- Organizational effectiveness
- Our legacy and reputation

The mission and values are intended to be used by OAC leadership and community members to guide our way forward, including decisions on investments of time and resources over the next five years. These are also the key areas on which OAC's leaders will report annually.





Samantha Lebre-Gutierrez,  
Veterinary Office Administration  
Certificate student, Ridgetown  
Campus Class of 2016

## WE VALUE

# Student Success

We define “Student Success” as **students being prepared to begin their chosen path and contribute to society**. Since our founding, OAC has focused on ensuring that our students graduate with the skills they need to succeed in life. Our methods, approaches and supports need to continue to adapt to meet the needs of students, their employers and society.

## Our Priorities

- Improving access to education, including a focus on scholarships, alternative course delivery, inclusivity and recruitment
- Encouraging student wellness by creating an environment that supports and nurtures the student as a whole person
- Promoting and encouraging experiential learning opportunities, including international experiences, involvement in research, workplace experiences such as co-op, and an overall coordination and communication of opportunities across OAC
- Fostering communication, problem solving, interpersonal, leadership and critical thinking skills in a variety of ways
- Ensuring all of our instruction is relevant and engaging, and promotes the adoption, evaluation and improvement of teaching methods and technologies that address the needs of students
- Working toward modernizing and updating the infrastructure needed for student success

### SUGGESTIONS

*Provided by the OAC community*

*“We need to require and support writing courses for our students. We need to allow students to attain the breadth of study that prepares them to be citizens.”*

– Faculty member

*“Continue to ensure experiential learning is a focus in the undergrad program.”*

– Graduate student

*“Involve students in research. Invite them to participate.”*

– Ridgetown Campus student

*“More hands-on learning, courses and/or field work.”*

– Undergraduate student



## WE VALUE

# Achieving Excellence

We define “Excellence” as **achieving national and international impact through teaching, research and service**. For nearly a century and a half, OAC has been a leader in the areas we serve: food, agriculture, communities and the environment. To continue to lead, the pursuit of excellence must always be a priority.

## Our Priorities

- Promoting the scholarship of teaching and learning
- Supporting faculty and instructors to diversify and modify the curriculum to reflect emerging areas and cross-disciplinary topics
- Valuing intellectual and academic freedom, evidence-based inquiry, and the discovery and application of new knowledge
- Providing greater support for researchers to help them be successful
- Encouraging collaboration and interdisciplinary research
- Supporting research in emerging areas
- Collaborating with Indigenous communities to create partnerships and new research and program opportunities that serve reconciliation
- Enhancing the recruitment and professional development of high-quality graduate students
- Encouraging faculty to engage at grassroots and industry levels and identify research needs
- Supporting the mobilization of knowledge locally and globally

### SUGGESTIONS

*Provided by the OAC community*

*“Provide support for new faculty, workshops on grant writing, mentorship and support research administratively.”*

– Community member

*“Create incentives for inter-disciplinary research with an overseeing body.”*

– Alumnus

*“The college needs to give considerable thought to how we mobilize knowledge emerging from the research at OAC.”*

– Faculty member

*“Place more emphasis on applying to graduate school and pursuing research during undergrad. Have workshops dedicated to applying for funding, determining a research topic and finding an advisor.”*

– Graduate student



**Prof. Ali Navabi**, Grain Farmers of Ontario Professors in Wheat Breeding, and PhD student **Harwinder Sidhu** in the Wheat Breeding Lab.





2017 OAC Welcome Back BBQ for students, staff and faculty.

## WE VALUE

# Supporting Our People

We will “Support Our People” **to be engaged employees, with leading-edge skills and capacity, who feel valued and are empowered to lead.** Our people are the core of our college. Ensuring employee success and engagement is vital to achieving all of our strategic priorities. Our people need to be acknowledged as the key agents of action and change, and imperative to our pursuit of OAC’s vision.

## Our Priorities

- Promoting a safe, supportive and respectful environment that fosters equity, diversity and inclusion on all campuses
- Supporting a culture of communication, awareness and connectivity for staff, faculty and students to increase collaboration and the sharing of best practices
- Fostering a culture of professional growth, where people feel valued and motivated to excel, through:
  - recognizing excellence and achievements
  - encouraging training and development
  - providing opportunities for our employees to innovate and lead
- Recognizing the importance of balancing the demands of work with family and personal life, and encouraging appropriate workloads, and providing support when and where needed
- Recruiting, retaining and developing exemplary people by encouraging a focus on succession planning, and on equity, diversity and inclusion through hiring, recruitment, policies and procedures

### SUGGESTIONS

#### *Provided by the OAC community*

*“More consistent and comprehensive onboarding/orientation. Training and mentorship support, especially at the operational-level.*

*Facilitation of networking opportunities.*

*Address workplace culture: articulate values and expectations. Articulate key goals/action plans.”*

*– Administrative staff*

*“More professional development opportunities delivered by qualified personnel.”*

*– Graduate student*

*“Have a better understanding of individual employee goals and ambitions.”*

*– Alumnus*

*“To work better as a college, its members have to have a stronger sense of community which can be achieved through interaction.”*

*– Technical staff*

*“More college-wide communication. Special events, achievement, opportunities could be shared across college.”*

*– Graduate student*





Prof. Lisa Duizer (left) with students in the new Department of Food Science Formulation Lab.

## WE VALUE

# Organizational Effectiveness

We define “Organizational Effectiveness” as **leadership and vision to eliminate barriers, integrate activities, act on opportunities, and monitor progress to stay on track.**

Stewarding our valued resources is a fundamental element to our success. By working together, we can further enhance our efficiency and impact.

## Our Priorities

- Providing strong, effective leadership and a central, cohesive strategic vision that guides action, review and reporting on progress in relation to our priorities
- Fostering transparency, accountability and effective use of resources by:
  - ensuring our people have the right tools, information, data access and decision-making framework to be efficient and effective
  - reducing duplication of administrative effort where possible
  - providing adequate support to ensure clear communication of policies and procedures
- Supporting increased collaboration, partnership and cooperation, such as:
  - encouraging the sharing of resources
  - enhancing data access and infrastructure across OAC
  - promoting the exchange of managerial and administrative best practices
  - facilitating a greater integration of Ridgetown and Guelph campus operations

### SUGGESTIONS

*Provided by the OAC community*

*“Have college administrative brain-storming meetings.”*

– Administrative staff

*“Create a database that includes all the equipment and lab resources available.”*

– Graduate student

*“There is a disconnect from main campus.”*

– Ridgetown Campus student

*“Create a stronger internal chat amongst classes, committees and Dean’s Office.”*

– Undergraduate student



Helen Quinn (1914-2018),  
BSA Class of 1935

Photo courtesy of  
University of Guelph  
Library's Archival and  
Special Collections

## WE VALUE

# Our Legacy and Reputation

We define “Our Legacy and Reputation” as **rich traditions, strong partnerships, engaged alumni and a long history, for which we have a responsibility to champion, steward and leverage.** Perhaps the most cherished and unique elements of OAC are our history and our alumni. As we approach our 150th anniversary, it is important to leverage this history and our connections for the benefit of our mission and our future.

## Our Priorities

- Continuing to capture and share our history
- Celebrating our history and traditions through the support of alumni events and alumni involvement in our campus communities
- Telling our stories and communicating the breadth of OAC’s programs, its people and their accomplishments, to a broad variety of audiences locally, nationally and globally
- Engaging external stakeholders, including our alumni, as partners in pursuing OAC’s goals, by:
  - initiating, hosting and supporting outreach events both on and off campus
  - involving alumni and external stakeholders in course delivery and curriculum development

### SUGGESTIONS

*Provided by the OAC community*

*“More marketing.”*  
– Alumnus

*“Develop an advisory board.”*  
– Alumnus

*“Celebrate OAC.”*  
– Alumnus

*“I think more emphasis should be placed on getting faculty and students in contact with industry partners.”*  
– Graduate student

*“More opportunities for alumni, corporations and stakeholders to have hands on involvement with classrooms, projects and mentorship of students.”*  
– Administrative staff



# COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

## Going Forward

We hope all OAC community members will use this document and the priorities outlined to guide their efforts and work. In particular, this document is the primary guidance for OAC's academic units, Ridgetown Campus, and the Dean's Office in the creation of their own strategic plans and the pursuit of operational activities. In turn, these activities will be reported on to the Dean of OAC and shared with the broader OAC community through an annual reporting process. The first of these will be published in the spring of 2019.

## A Recap on Process

Our strategic planning process began late in the Fall of 2016, when the Strategic Planning Committee convened for the first time.

Following discussion, the committee decided to release an online survey in the spring of 2017 to staff, faculty and students for input on their ideas for the future of OAC. There were 134 responses from our community. Their ideas, feedback and suggestions were reviewed by the committee and included in a "Strategic Planning Status Report", which was released in summer 2017.

To continue the conversations and consultations, four in-person meetings were held throughout the fall of 2017: an external community meeting with 22 participants, the Student Federation of the Ontario Agricultural College with 15 participants, associate diploma students at Ridgetown Campus with nine participants and in-person townhall for faculty, staff and students with 21 participants. An additional online opportunity for all community members was provided, with 16 submissions collected.

After reviewing all of the feedback and suggestions, the OAC Strategic Planning Committee submitted a report of consolidated feedback from the OAC community to the Dean's Council Management Team. Throughout the fall of 2017 and spring of 2018, the Dean's Council Management Team met several times to reflect on the report and draft this document: *Our Shared Priorities*.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### Strategic Planning Committee Members

The OAC Strategic Planning committee was tasked with leading the strategic plan development process. The committee consisted of nominated faculty from each academic unit and Ridgetown Campus, a staff representative and two student representatives.

- Prof. Emmanuelle Arnaud, School of Environmental Sciences
- Prof. Trevor DeVries, Department of Animal Biosciences
- Jordan Graham, OAC Graduate Student Council Representative
- Prof. Massimo Marcone, Department of Food Science
- Colleen O'Brien, Staff Representative
- Eric Prelaz, Student Federation of the OAC Representative
- Prof. Darren Robinson, Ridgetown Campus
- Prof. Rene Van Acker, Dean
- Prof. Michael Von Massow, Department of Food, Agricultural and Resource Economics,
- Prof. David Wolyn, Department of Plant Agriculture
- Prof. Nonita Yap\*, School of Environmental Design and Rural Development

### Dean's Council Management Team Members

- Prof. John Cranfield, Chair, Department of Food, Agricultural and Resource Economics
- Prof. Hugh Earl, Chair, Department of Plant Agriculture
- Laurie Halfpenny-Mitchell, Senior Manager, Finance and Human Resources
- Prof. Rebecca Hallett, Acting Associate Dean, Research and Graduate Studies
- Prof. Art Hill, Chair, Department of Food Science
- Prof. Sean Kelly, Director, School of Environmental Design and Rural Development
- Prof. Karen Landman, Interim Associate Dean, External Relations
- Ken McEwan, Director, Ridgetown Campus
- Prof. Jonathan Schmidt, Associate Dean, Academic
- Prof. Jim Squires, Chair, Department of Animal Biosciences
- Prof. Rene Van Acker, Dean
- Prof. Jon Warland, Director, School of Environmental Science

*A special acknowledgement to Carly O'Brien of Intrigue Media and Stephanie Craig, OAC Communications Manager, for their support throughout the strategic planning process and, in particular, in the drafting of this document.*

\* On Saturday, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Prof. Nonita Yap tragically passed away. She was a tireless and enthusiastic researcher and advocate. She truly embodied the University's mission to "Improve Life" and will be greatly missed by the OAC community.



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