

## Summary Report of Campus Consultations: Alumni Listening Survey

### Introduction

The University of Windsor began strategic planning consultations in the winter semester of 2022 with the Aspire online survey. Since the survey, additional discussions with the University and Windsor-Essex communities have taken place on and off campus, including the Aspire Café Conversations, Focus Group Design Sessions, Community Pop-Up Events, and Community Listening Sessions. In alignment with the broader community consultations, the University of Windsor launched the Alumni Listening survey in the summer of 2022. The survey was accessed by more than 1,000 alumni, with a total of 494 usable responses. The results presented in this report focus on the responses to the Alumni Listening survey.

It is important to note that these consultations were intended for broad, community-based input. The University also implemented separate consultations with approaches that are appropriate for specific communities whose voices must be heard. For example, while questions about Indigenization and Decolonization and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) were included in the survey, dedicated consultations with community members using informed and appropriate methods were needed to ensure that this priority was supported by rich and informed processes.

### What is one value/characteristic that you would associate with being a perfect university?

Respondents submitted 491 individual answers to this question. Figure 1 presents the five most common themes identified in these responses. Participants indicated that a perfect university has high academic standards and integrity, including academic excellence, fostering critical thinking, providing practice-based learning, academic freedom, and freedom of speech. Alumni also indicated that the culture and atmosphere of a perfect university should be fair, caring, collegial, collaborative, compassionate, helpful, open, engaging, respectful, welcoming, supportive, friendly, positive, progressive, and values its community members. Respondents felt it was important that the perfect university values and is known for trust and integrity, noting that it should be committed to truth, honesty, accountability, loyalty, credibility, integrity, transparency, responsibility, and authenticity. Alumni also expressed that EDI of students, faculty, and staff are essential characteristics and values of a perfect university. Examples described include diverse faculty, staff, students, and Board of Governors, as well as inclusivity regardless of political leanings, religious beliefs, ethnicity, and gender identity. Another essential aspect of a perfect university is its community impact locally, provincially, nationally, and globally. Respondents mentioned community engagement and outreach, providing an education that meets societal needs, conducting

research that supports the community, valuing the local community, and being responsive to the community's needs as examples of characteristics or values of a perfect university.

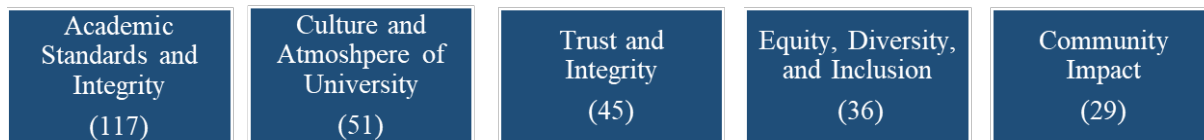


Figure 1. Five most frequent themes regarding characteristics of a perfect university.

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent the frequency of the theme.

### **What do you see as a current strength of the University of Windsor?**

Respondents submitted 478 individual answers to this question. Figure 2 presents the five most common themes identified in these responses. Alumni respondents most frequently indicated that a current strength of the University of Windsor is its location. Alumni mentioned that Windsor is a border city leading to strong cross-border collaborations, access to the automotive industry and the Great Lakes, and the ability to travel to other cities in Ontario. Alumni also commonly reported EDI as a current strength of the University, noting the diversity of the campus community, multiculturalism, inclusive environment, and ongoing EDI efforts. Respondents felt that the small size of the institution was also a key strength, noting that it is small enough to feel personal while still providing a comprehensive education. Similarly, respondents also viewed the breadth of the courses and programs offered by the University as a strength. Finally, alumni felt a strength of the University of Windsor is its community impact. Comments indicated that the University is community-oriented, has strong community relations, is a significant part of the city of Windsor, and opens the doors to education to its local, provincial, national, and global communities.



Figure 2. Five most frequent themes regarding the current strengths of the University.

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent the frequency of the theme.

### **The University of Windsor's next strategic plan will be in place until 2027. What is one fundamental change you think the University should focus on between now and then?**

Respondents submitted 480 individual answers to this question. Figure 3 presents the five most common themes identified in these responses. Respondents indicated that they would like the University to focus on maintaining high academic standards and integrity. Suggestions included hiring and retaining high-quality instructors who teach challenging curriculums, continuing the work towards academic excellence across all programs, fostering critical thinking skills, and supporting intellectual freedom. Alumni noted they would also like the University to focus on course and program options by providing a greater variety of

programs, offering programs at satellite locations in other cities, offering online programs targeted towards mature and working students, and working towards more engaging, meaningful, and impactful program offerings. Respondents suggested that the University should improve its reputation and ranking to increase its appeal to potential students as well as new partners and collaborators. In addition, alumni want the University of Windsor to have a more significant impact within the community. Some comments suggested that the University should create stronger ties to the local community, increase its number of partnerships, be more involved in the community, provide greater access to the campus, programs, and services to the community, and be a voice for the regional and local community. Alumni also indicated that they would like the University to continue its EDI initiatives. This work includes ensuring the institution is meeting the needs of the communities impacted by these efforts, dismantling oppressive systems and policies, and recognizing the achievements of campus community members without including classifications or labels.



Figure 3. Five most frequent themes regarding the key changes the University should focus on between now and 2027.

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent the frequency of the theme.

**Where do you see the most critical opportunities for collaboration or partnership between the University and alumni? What about more broadly?**

Respondents submitted 415 individual answers to this question. Figure 4 presents the five most common themes identified in these responses. Alumni respondents most frequently mentioned that they would appreciate engagement to attract them back to campus and give back to the University. Some examples included giving career-based talks, guest lectures in courses, volunteer opportunities, networking with current students, access to campus facilities, supporting research and creative projects of its graduates, and focusing on engaging alumni outside of Windsor-Essex. Related to this, respondents were also interested in mentorship opportunities with current students and felt that this was an important opportunity for collaboration with the University. Respondents also wanted the University to have improved communication with its alumni and partners. Specifically, they suggested that University engage in more frequent and meaningful communication through having more personal forms of contact, having a contact point or “face” for the University, and continually seeking feedback (e.g., surveys and focus groups). Various forms of collaborations and partnerships were suggested by respondents, including consulting alumni on large projects and industry needs, collaboration with local industry (e.g., agriculture and automotive), collaborations with the government, financial partnerships, and sponsorship of alumni events and projects. Alumni also mentioned co-op and internship opportunities as another significant opportunity to support the University of Windsor and its current students.



Figure 4. Five most frequent themes regarding the most important opportunities for collaboration and partnership between the University and its alumni.

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent the frequency of the theme.

### **What barriers limit engagement of alumni after they leave University?**

Respondents submitted 425 individual answers to this question. Figure 5 presents the five most common themes identified in these responses. Most frequently, respondents noted that the location of the University was a barrier to alumni engagement, explicitly stating the physical distance between the University and many of its graduates. Similarly, alumni often mentioned time as a barrier indicating that alumni have various conflicting priorities (e.g., work, family, relocation, etc.) that make it challenging to find time to engage with the University after graduation. University communication also limits alumni engagement. Respondents specifically noted the need for a specific contact point at the University, the need for more information regarding continued involvement at the University, the desire for personalized invitations to events, the lack of ability to contact alumni due to outdated or missing contact information, and a general lack of contact from the University as specific challenges. Alumni also mentioned difficulties with engagement due to issues such as a lack of interest from alumni in engaging with the University after graduation, too great a focus placed on alumni who live nearby, and a lack of programs for alumni. Finally, some alumni felt that the University only had an interest in contacting them for donations, this concern was a barrier to further engagement with their alma mater.



Figure 5. Five most frequent themes regarding alumni engagement post-graduation.

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent the frequency of the theme.

### **How can the University of Windsor improve existing programs, initiatives and activities related to alumni?**

Respondents submitted 401 individual answers to this question. Figure 6 presents the five most common themes identified in these responses. The most frequent suggestion from alumni was better communication from the University about these programs. Recommendations included more frequent updates via social media, asking alumni for feedback, using existing contacts at the University (e.g., faculty) to maintain alumni connection to the University, having a dedicated representative or department for alumni communication, more personal invitations to alumni events, and increased promotion of

alumni events and opportunities. In addition, respondents would like to see more diverse, family-friendly, Faculty or department-specific alumni events taking place in a wide range of cities. Respondents suggested engaging with alumni in impactful ways that tap into their knowledge (e.g., course presentations, career development workshops, sessional positions, etc.), are targeted (e.g., regional chapters and discipline-specific groups), and have a manageable time commitment. Respondents also suggested using incentives (e.g., stipends, win-win activities, food, swag, etc.) to encourage alumni participation in events. Finally, alumni suggested there needs to be more substantial promotion of existing programs, focus on alumni achievements, promotional items, and University initiatives.



Figure 6. Five most frequent themes regarding improving programs and initiatives.

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent the frequency of the theme.

**Thinking about Windsor-Essex County, what is the biggest challenge that we face as a region and how can the University play a role in tackling it?**

Respondents submitted 404 individual answers to this question. Figure 7 presents the five most common themes identified in these responses. Alumni most frequently reported that the economy was the biggest challenge facing the region, specifically mentioning the lack of economic diversity in the region, economic recession, unemployment, and the need for more well-paying employment opportunities in the area. Respondents suggested that the University could help by retaining and bringing new economic opportunities (e.g., new industries, employers, and jobs) to the area through collaborations, partnerships, and educational opportunities. Respondents indicated that the reputation of the region and the University was its biggest challenge, noting the negative perceptions of the area such as being a “lunch bucket,” “blue collar,” “motor city,” “not exciting,” and “not a nice place to live.” Suggestions for overcoming this challenge included improved marketing, creating something that entices people to visit or stay, and supporting the community (e.g., community services, local businesses, and maintaining infrastructure). Housing (e.g., homelessness, lack of housing, need for affordable housing, etc.) was the third most frequent theme of responses to this question. Respondents recommended that the University could support initiatives such as the Downtown Mission through donations and volunteers, provide affordable student housing, engage in research and development in these areas, and lobby government officials who can create social change regarding these regional challenges. Finally, participants felt that the University could tackle these efforts through its community impact, specifically mentioning volunteer and fundraising efforts, lobbying, providing community services, partnerships, and engagement with the area. Environmental sustainability (e.g., agricultural runoff, climate change, and land management) is another critical challenge facing the region. Alumni suggested that the University could help improve the region's environmental sustainability through developing innovations to address these concerns, the work of its

research centres and institutes (e.g., GLIER), training in areas supporting sustainability, and reducing the University's and Windsor's carbon footprint.

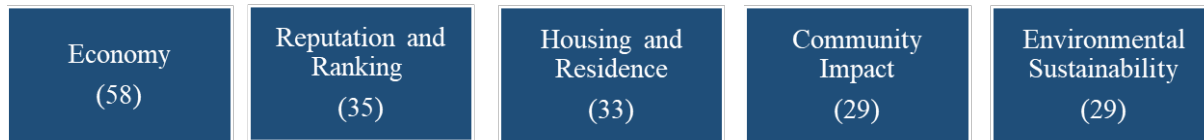


Figure 7. Five most frequent themes regarding the biggest challenges facing Windsor-Essex. Note. Numbers in parentheses represent the frequency of the theme.

**What is the biggest opportunity for the Windsor-Essex region and what role do you see for the University?**

Respondents submitted 375 individual answers to this question. Figure 8 presents the five most common themes identified in these responses. Alumni felt that the most significant opportunity for the region in which the University has a role is in maintaining, expanding, and developing collaborations and partnerships. Several partnerships were noted, including the automotive and agricultural industries, hospitals, battery plant, City of Windsor, St. Clair College, Gordy Howe Bridge, and collaborations with the U.S. The location of the city and University was also a significant opportunity noted by respondents. Cross-border opportunities (e.g., tourism, partnerships, entertainment, educational experiences, and jobs), access to the automotive industry and Great Lakes, and the pleasant climate are benefits of living in the area. The University can also play a significant role in impacting the regional community in many ways. Alumni mentioned the University's growth downtown, ability to build industries in the region (e.g., automotive and technological), educating the local workforce, supporting locally owned businesses, increasing tourism, and providing innovative solutions to local, regional, provincial, national, and global issues as ways the University play a role in these regional opportunities. Environmental sustainability is another regional opportunity that the University could support. Roles brought up by respondents included working towards pollution-free industries, automotive innovation (e.g., transition to the electric car), harnessing renewable sources of energy (e.g., wind), and reducing greenhouse gases caused by agriculture in the area. Similarly, respondents also felt that innovations in the automotive industry, technology, entrepreneurship, transportation, healthcare, and think tanks were also an opportunity for the region that the University could support.



Figure 8. Five most frequent themes regarding the biggest opportunity for Windsor-Essex. Note. Numbers in parentheses represent the frequency of the theme.

**How can the University better leverage its alumni over the next 5 years to tackle these challenges or take advantage of these opportunities?**

Respondents submitted 342 individual answers to this question. Figure 9 presents the five most common themes identified in these responses. Communication was the most common suggestion for how the University could better leverage its alumni to tackle these issues. Respondents mentioned that the University should connect with its alumni consistently to make them aware of these challenges and opportunities to be involved in initiatives targeting these issues. Suggestions for creating a more personal connection with alumni included having focus groups, asking for regular alumni feedback, including alumni on committees, making personal phone calls, and providing incentives. The University should also engage its alumni in more meaningful ways, including inviting graduates back to campus to present or meet with current students, providing remote or virtual opportunities for engagement, participation in university committees, providing support for alumni development (e.g., networking, start-up support, workshops), and creating an engagement campaign. Respondents also felt that the University could leverage their alumni through collaborations and partnerships in industries to provide work placements, sponsorships, and opportunities for growth in the region (e.g., new research centres). Respondents indicated that the University could leverage its alumni more effectively to have a more significant community impact. Recommendations included encouraging alumni to invest in the region, having personnel in each department to build bridges with the community, expanding involvement in the local school systems, opening facilities and services to alumni and the community, and connecting with alumni who are in positions to make social change. Finally, respondents felt that more effective promotion and branding for the University and region would help graduates tackle these regional challenges. For example, respondents suggested the University should highlight alumni (e.g., via social media) and their achievements in ways that encourage graduates to stay in the area.



Figure 9. Five most frequent themes regarding leveraging alumni to tackle regional challenges. Note. Numbers in parentheses represent the frequency of the theme.

**Is there anything else you want to tell the University about its role in the community, partnering with alumni led community organizations or engaging alumni directly?**

Respondents submitted 183 individual answers to this question. Figure 10 presents the five most common themes identified in these responses. Alumni most frequently commented on the University's community impact. They mentioned the ability of the University to advocate for educational and recreational opportunities in the community, build partnerships that support local and regional needs, provide access to services and facilities to the community, and support community-based initiatives through volunteers and funding. Respondents also wanted to see more personalized opportunities for alumni engagement. Recommendations included participation in think tanks, opportunities to continue their education, committee

service, and project support. Related to this, alumni felt that the University could improve its communication through direct, personal, and consistent contact with alumni. The University should demonstrate that it listens to alumni feedback and show why continued engagement with the University is beneficial. Respondents also suggested that the University could improve its promotion and branding. Suggestions for improvement included highlighting successful alumni, advertising online courses and programs targeted at working professionals, expanding marketing outside Windsor-Essex and the Greater Toronto Area, and creating Facebook groups based on discipline, class, or residence halls. Finally, respondents also highlighted the maintenance and development of collaborations and partnerships as an important opportunity for the University. Specific examples mentioned by alumni included partnerships with other post-secondary institutions (e.g., St. Claire College), the Gordy Howe Bridge, regional industries (e.g., automotive manufacturing, healthcare, etc.), and local businesses.



*Figure 10.* Five most frequent themes regarding improvement to existing alumni programs, initiatives, and activities.

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses represent the frequency of the theme.

### **Next Steps**

This consultation helped inform the current draft of the University’s strategic plan. This version of the strategic plan will be available to the campus community for review and feedback during Winter 2023. Approval from the University of Windsor Senate and Board of Governors will be sought during Winter 2023 after the completion of the campus consultation.