

## Summary Report of Campus Consultations: Research and Creative Activity

### Introduction

The University of Windsor launched the Aspire online survey between February and March 2022 as the first step in the strategic planning process. The survey was accessed by more than 2,000 respondents, with 1,534 usable responses. The Aspire Café Conversations were the second step in the consultation process. These sessions provided students, staff, and faculty with the opportunity to provide their input through in-person, discussion-based, consultation sessions targeted at key topics identified through the Aspire survey. A total of 665 students and nearly 200 staff and faculty participated in these events. The Aspire online survey and Café Conversations aimed to gather respondents' perceptions of where the University of Windsor should be and how the University can best get there. As part of the consultations, attendees were asked questions centered around research and creative activity at the University of Windsor. This summary will discuss the student, staff, and faculty responses to these questions.

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 consultation questions, dedicated consultations with community members using informed and appropriate methods were also needed to ensure that this priority was supported by rich and informed processes.

### Strengths in Research at UWindsor

As part of the Aspire Café Conversations, staff had the opportunity to answer the following question: **What do you see as the University's strengths in research and the opportunities research brings?** Respondents submitted 101 individual answers to this question. Table 1 presents the five most common themes identified in the responses.

Staff noted the University's movement towards increased collaboration and partnerships 20 times. Responses in this theme included collaborations with cross-border companies and leaders within the automotive industry. Staff also frequently mentioned research opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students as a significant strength of the University of Windsor. Finally, staff discussed community impact as a strength of the institution, noting that the University engages the community in research projects, supports local businesses, and creates spaces that can be used by community members.

Table 1. Five most frequent themes of the University's strengths in research.

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
Collaborations and Partnerships (20)	Research (9)	Community Impact (7)	Research Program, Centre, Area (7)	Promotion and Branding (6)

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

### **Enhancing Research and Creative Activities at UWindsor**

As part of the consultations, staff responded to the following question: **What do you think are opportunities for the University to enhance excellence in research?** Respondents submitted 65 individual answers to this question. Table 2 displays the five most frequent themes for this question. Not only were collaborations and partnerships viewed by staff as a strength of the University, but they were also seen as the area of greatest opportunity for future enhancement. This included internal collaboration in the form of interdisciplinary research among various faculties, and external collaboration with industry, cross-border companies, and cultural institutions. Research was also seen as an area of potential enhancement, with staff primarily mentioning a need for increased financial investment in student research. Finally, the staff perceived the physical campus as an area for enhancement. This included a need for better facilities and additional funding for maintenance of equipment.

Table 2. Five most frequent themes of opportunities to enhance excellence in research.

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
Collaborations and Partnerships (11)	Research (10)	Campus (Physical Campus as a whole) (6)	Promotion and Branding (4)	Alumni (4)

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

In addition, faculty respondents were asked the following question: **How do we enhance the impact of our research and creative activities on a regional, national, and global scale?** Respondents submitted 137 individual answers to this question. Table 3 presents the five most common themes identified in responses. Collaborations and partnerships were seen as the leading method for promoting the University of Windsor's research and creative activities. Faculty members discussed the need for more national partnership, grants, cross-border connections, and better relationships with local government and tech companies. Faculty respondents also mentioned the need for improvements in the University's *promotion and branding* of research. This includes more student involvement in conferences and workshops, getting researchers into national newspapers and media, dedicated support from a public relations office, and better promotion of faculty for major government grants. Finally, faculty saw improved community impact as a way to enhance the impact of the University's research. This includes mobilizing our research to connect with the local community and solve real problems facing businesses, organizations, and community members.

*Table 3. Five most frequent themes for enhancing the impact of research globally.*

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
Collaboration and Partnerships (30)	Promotion and Branding (24)	Community Impact (17)	Research (14)	Budget and Finances (9)

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

As part of these discussions, faculty were also asked: **How can we foster more cross-disciplinary research that breaks down traditional academic silos?** Respondents submitted 113 individual answers to this question. Table 4 presents the five most common themes identified in these discussions. Within the comments regarding the University's budget and finances, improvements to research funding structures were regularly mentioned. This included more centralized funding models and increased financial incentives for interdisciplinary research. Improvements to collaboration and partnerships were also brought up in these conversations, with faculty discussing the need for more interdisciplinary conferences, public talks, brainstorming sessions, research collaboration opportunities, and funding for community partnerships. Respondents also referenced how communication could be improved, mentioning the need for more interdisciplinary communication (e.g., meetings or presentations) to facilitate collaboration across departments.

*Table 4. Five most frequent themes for breaking down traditional academic silos.*

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
Budget and Finances (21)	Collaboration and Partnerships (17)	Communication (17)	Campus (Physical Campus as a whole) (13)	Campus Life (13)

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

### **Incentivizing Excellence and Celebrating Success in Research and Creative Activities**

Faculty had the opportunity to respond to the following question: **How can we incentivize excellence and celebrate success in research and creative activities?** Faculty members submitted 93 individual answers to this question. Table 5 presents the five most common themes identified in these responses. Within the comments regarding staff supports, faculty members mentioned the need for financial support in the form of research and mentorship awards, compensation for pinnacle publications, and better support infrastructure. Faculty also mentioned the need for a more balanced teaching/research workload, to provide more time and resources for research and creative pursuits. Finally, regarding the culture and atmosphere of the University, faculty respondents believed that it was important to recognize and celebrate both traditional and non-traditional forms of success in research.

*Table 5. Five most frequent themes for incentivizing excellence and celebrating success in research and creative activities.*

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
Staff Supports (15)	Workload (13)	Culture and Atmosphere of the University (17)	Budget and Finances (14)	Collaboration and Partnership (9)

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

### **Student Involvement in Research and Creative Activities at UWindsor**

As part of the Aspire Café Conversations, students were asked: **What prevents students from getting involved in research or creative projects?** Respondents submitted 813 individual answers to this question. Table 6 presents the five most common themes identified in these responses. Students cited their workload as the biggest obstacle to getting involved in research or creative projects. Students mentioned feeling overloaded with assignments, poor work/life balance, and a heavy course load, leading to a lack of time to pursue other projects. Communication was also viewed as a significant barrier to getting involved in research. Some issues brought forward were a lack of awareness of research opportunities, limited visibility of various labs, and a general lack of communication about research projects at the school. Finally, limited research opportunities were the final theme of note for students. Students regularly mentioned a lack of availability of research jobs/opportunities either with faculty or industry, and a lack of guidance from professors about where to get involved.

*Table 6. Five most frequent themes for what prevents students from getting involved in research or creative projects.*

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
Workload (224)	Communication (204)	Research (86)	Belonging (65)	People (36)

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

Students also were asked: **What do you think students get out of being involved in research or creative projects?** Respondents submitted 929 individual answers to this question. Table 7 presents the five most common themes identified in these responses. Students saw professional development as the greatest benefit of getting involved in research or creative projects. Students discussed the ability to enhance their skills relating to creativity, critical thinking, professionalism, interpersonal skills, time management, and technical skills. Students also perceived these opportunities as a positive way to build their resumes while gathering recognition and experience. Students viewed research and creative projects as a way to enhance their post-graduation opportunities, and discussed how these types of projects can expose them to potential post-graduation career opportunities while also providing an opportunity to gain real-world experience. Finally, students mentioned people as a significant benefit of research and creative projects. This came in the form of increased opportunities for networking, professional connections, and reference letters, to benefit students in their post-graduate life. Overall, 93% of students who were asked if they

would like to get involved in research activities answered yes, demonstrating a genuine desire for increased participation.

*Table 7.* Five most frequent themes on what students get out of being involved in research or creative projects.

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
Professional Development (278)	Post-Grad Skills/Training and Opportunities (175)	People (171)	Experiential Learning (130)	Research (68)

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

**Next Steps**

Research and creative activities are a foundational pillar of academia. This data helped form the basis for deeper conversations on research and creative activity with faculty and staff in June, and function as a key source of corroboration as more detailed discussions unfold. The tensions and opportunities outlined in the consultation data above is not a complete picture of the University’s research and creative activity status, but it will help contribute to the work both of developing the strategic plan, and of research plan that will be subsequently developed from the final strategic plan.