

A NEW REALITY FOR UNIVERSITY CONTINUING EDUCATION IN CANADA: LEADING THE WAY TO A RE-DEFINED ACADEMY

CONTEXT

The Canadian Association for University Continuing Education (CAUCE) is a professional association of academics, administrators, and practitioners who have made university continuing education the basis of their careers and life's work. The diversity of CAUCE is an important differentiator of the association. The offerings of institutional members range widely from for-credit programs to community programs to professional programs to transitional programs including English/French as a second language and Aboriginal transition programs to lifelong learning and personal interest programs. Some continuing education units offer a mix of program types. Additionally, CAUCE institutional members are leaders in the use of new educational technologies and pedagogies such as online learning and flexible learning models.

Given the varied nature of its membership, CAUCE itself is characterized by breadth in its organizational fabric. As such, CAUCE services, activities, and publications are of interest to diverse educators across Canada and, increasingly, around the world.

With changes occurring within post-secondary education and the workplace in Canada, this is an important time for university continuing education. Stated another way, continuing education sits at the crossroads of opportunity and changing times. The principal factors affecting Canadian post-secondary education and the workplace include but are not limited to:

- Increasing demands for workers to possess new skills in quickly changing labour markets
- Canada's growing immigrant population and the importance of immigrants to the Canadian workforce
- Market-based demands for continuing education for professionals including credentialed learning
- Demands for flexible learning opportunities such as online and blended learning
- Trends to globalization and mobility among workers and citizens more generally
- Increased interest in internationally recognized professional designations
- New and emerging educational and communication technologies
- Changes in the roles of community colleges and other educational institutions in Canadian society
- Demographic changes including smaller families and the beginning of the retirement of the boomer generation
- Increased indigenization of post-secondary institutions
- Growing demands for social and moral accountability by public sector institutions including universities
- Increased competition for learners
- The professionalization of university continuing education

Given the above, universities are challenged to be more responsive and nimble than ever before. In responding to this challenge, continuing education has much to offer including processes grounded in real world realities and needs; a greater flexibility than the main university; and deep connections within communities and groups that comprise the fabric of Canadian society. In essence, continuing education is a living lab where strategies that work are used to meet the needs of learners and employers in timely and practical ways.

Indeed, continuing education is well positioned to assist universities in developing new educational models that are responsive and competitive. In the accomplishment of this work, continuing education will stand out as a leader in forward thinking; developer of re-defined processes and enactor of strategic actions; and practitioner of community values including social accountability to individuals and groups. Continuing education will not only serve as a living lab for 'trying out' new approaches. It will serve as a catalyst for thoughtful change for universities taking on the task of institutional re-invention.

A STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-2020

Responding to the above context, CAUCE began the process of developing a new strategic plan in 2014-2015. This process was sustained in 2015-2016 with the formalization of our Mission statement by the membership at the 2015 Annual Conference. Presented below, as developed through a collaborative and iterative process, are the vision and mission statements that are the outcomes of this work.

Our Vision

Through its many relationships with present students, successful graduates, and diverse communities, continuing education will take its place as the fourth pillar of the university. Canadian universities will be redefined through their excellence in teaching, research, service, and continuing education.

Our Mission

Advancing learning and workplace readiness in 21st century Canada, CAUCE is dedicated to supporting the success of our members in serving professional and adult learners and diverse learning communities. We accomplish this by fostering best practices in lifelong teaching and learning, flexible learning models, including online learning, and university community engagement.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS AND ACTIONS

Based on its new vision and mission, CAUCE has identified five strategic directions. These directions and corresponding actions are described below.

1. **Community engagement:** As an association, CAUCE mobilizes its members, the post-secondary sector, and civil society in understanding the importance and impact of university continuing education. CAUCE provides leadership for initiatives that strengthen the university continuing education community and the civil, social, and educational communities it serves.
 - 1.1. CAUCE as advocate: CAUCE will advance university continuing education on the national scene through its partnership with Universities Canada and dissemination of relevant information about its activities.
 - 1.2. CAUCE newsletter: CAUCE will review the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of the CAUCE newsletter for the purpose of being a timely and responsive source of information for its members. The communication strategies and approaches of partner associations will also be leveraged.
 - 1.3. Annual statement about trends in university continuing education in Canada: CAUCE will explore the possibility of producing an annual brief or short document describing trends in university continuing education across the country.
 - 1.4. Creation of virtual networking environments for CAUCE members and communities of CAUCE professionals and practitioners: Strategies for communication within the age of social media will be investigated in order to develop an infrastructure for CAUCE communities to be connected and engaged.
2. **Promotion of enhanced understanding of best practices in university continuing education:** In order to provide guidance to members, CAUCE studies and documents continuing education practices. This initiative provides members information that may assist them in developing and assessing their own practices. CAUCE supports research into adult learning as well as continuing, professional, and online education in order to discover and promote evidenced-based practices. CAUCE creates a public space for discussions about continuing education. It disseminates research findings and exemplary practices to improve the work of continuing education practitioners.

- 2.1 Journal renewal: A new academic journal called *Journal of Professional, Continuing, and Online Education* will be launched in Spring 2016. The journal will focus on university continuing education as well as professional and online learning.
 - 2.2 Research and studies of practices and trends in university continuing education: A review will be conducted of how CAUCE supports research in university continuing education in Canada. The idea of funded studies on practices in continuing education and annual trends will be investigated.
 - 2.3 Impact of UCE on Canada: CAUCE will continue its work on the impact of university continuing education on Canada, and develop annual indicators of this impact.
 - 2.4 Excellence and its recognition in professional, continuing, and online education: A review of the CAUCE awards will be conducted to align them with the practice areas typical of university continuing education. New ways of inspiring excellence will be identified and implemented.
 - 2.5 Evidence-informed practice including benchmarking: CAUCE will identify the data required to assess the operation and overall performance of continuing education units. This data will be used to create a minimum benchmarking portfolio. The annual institutional report will be reviewed in order to improve it and ensure that it is line with the benchmarking portfolio.
 - 2.6 Unit review support: With an increasing number of continuing education units being reviewed, CAUCE will investigate how it can support members undergoing such review.
3. **Professional development:** CAUCE offers timely professional development opportunities for continuing education and online learning specialists. It also fosters the development of leadership for practitioners of university continuing education. Deans and Directors are supported through an annual winter meeting while the CAUCE annual conference and regularly scheduled webinars offer other important professional development and networking opportunities.
- 3.1 Leadership for changing times: Members will be consulted to identify how CAUCE can support the development of leadership skills for emerging and new leaders as well as the staff who work in continuing education.
 - 3.2 Review of the organization framework for CAUCE's annual conference: In light of challenges in identifying member universities to organize the annual conference, CAUCE will review the existing model for the organization of the annual conference. Leaders who have organized past conferences will be consulted to clarify the complexities and difficulties of conference planning. A new framework for the organization of the conference including costs and operational elements will be developed and validated with the membership before it is adopted.
 - 3.3 CAUCE communities: CAUCE will identify subgroups or communities of specialists within university continuing education and develop a statement of the benefits of such groups. Possible strategies for supporting these subgroups include but are not limited to forums for the exchange of practices, networking opportunities, and alignment of the groups' interests and work areas in the conference program and annual webinar series.
4. **Partnerships:** CAUCE engages in dialogue and formal relationships with sister organizations in Canada, the US, and abroad to advance its mission and maximize benefits for members through exposure to other perspectives and resources. The partnerships also provide learning opportunities for CAUCE as an association.
- 4.1 University Professional Continuing Education Association (UPCEA, United States): CAUCE will formalize its existing partnership with the University Professional Continuing Education Association. It will continue to participate in UPCEA surveys dealing with marketing practices and operational issues, and explore how the UPCEA research centre could act as a research provider for CAUCE. This strategy would advance the benchmarking initiative.

- 4.2 University Association for Lifelong Learning (UALL, Great Britain): CAUCE will formalize its partnership with the University Association for Lifelong Learning. Learning about the UALL conference model and how CAUCE members may be able to participate in UALL's international network will benefit the association.
 - 4.3 Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE), Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE), and other associations where there is intersection with continuing education: Possible partnerships with the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE), Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE), and other associations where there may be benefit to CAUCE members will be explored.
 - 4.4 Universities Canada: Work will be sustained with Universities Canada to develop a measurement framework to assess the impact of university continuing education in Canada. This framework will inform impact statements for sharing with Canadian university leaders.
5. **Sustainability in Management and Operational Practices for the Association:** CAUCE is committed to the principles and practices of sustainability in its management and operational strategies. It makes ethical decisions and ensures that rigor and efficacy characterize all facets of the life of the association. The association listens to and consults its members to be sure that its actions are in line with the needs of its members, while advancing the organization toward a shared vision in changing times.
- 5.1 Membership recruitment strategies: In order to minimize increases to membership fees, CAUCE will reassess its penetration of the market. Institutions that are not yet members and those that have left the organization will be the target of a membership drive to maximize CAUCE membership within the Canadian universities.
 - 5.2 Reviewing the secretariat model: In light of the anticipated work on a revised conference model and CAUCE's advocacy agenda, CAUCE will reassess the structure and operational functions of the secretariat to ensure that services to members are adequately supported and enhanced.