

THE ACADEMIC PLAN



THE CUE STORY

In the ordinary university, belonging is not a certainty.

As students move from cavernous theatre to massive hall, they seek what they've been promised by post-secondary institutions all their lives. Close and supportive friends. Faculty mentors and allies for life. Extraordinary growth and profound experiences.

Perhaps students find what they yearn for there. Perhaps not.

Here, at Concordia University of Edmonton, we rally around that central promise in everything we do and all that we build. We say to students: if you join us, you will belong.

For more than a century, it has felt this way here.

Today, if students arrive on campus with doubt or hesitation, someone at CUE will see them, and help them. That someone will likely cheer them years later at convocation. Here, connections endure.

In our classrooms, CUE is a university of action and passion, small enough that every student is essential but large enough to make real differences when we tackle global challenges. We are a students' university. Students can sit in the back. But at CUE, when they're ready, someone will invite them to the front.

Because of our size, our closeness and connection, we blend and mix in surprising – sometimes delightful – ways. If we're scientists, we can follow our curiosity into drama. A business student can graduate with a foundation in history, philosophy, and Indigenous knowledge.

We can test our ideas with people from every department and course of study, from around the world. We can change directions and find our path. We can be our best selves.

At CUE, the centre for innovation may focus on the very latest on artificial intelligence, while our Education faculty braids into contemporary curriculum millennia of Indigenous ways of knowing and sharing. In the Tegner Centre, CUE's president might sit down with students, buy them coffee, and ask why they chose this school and how we can all make it safer, more diverse, more accessible and memorable and fun.

Our ultimate goal has not changed since 1921: to be more than students and professors, to create a community of active citizens, to inspire good and honourable people who have found a university where they belong.

Message from the President and Vice-Chancellor

At Concordia University of Edmonton, we do things differently. As such, our Academic Plan is distinct from that of other post-secondary institutions. This is not a lengthy document defining key performance indicators, metrics, and drawn out strategies. We want this plan to be accessible, to tell our story, and to reflect the initiatives that shape who we are.

Our approach to our last Academic Plan was to be concise and engaging, and we opted for a similar format this time. This Academic Plan sets out our areas of focus in narrative form, and explains why we have chosen them.

The name of our university has been synonymous with quality education in Edmonton for over 100 years, and we owe our longevity to our ability to plan and execute on long-term goals. The benchmarks in this academic plan will shape our university in ways that will allow many generations of students, faculty, and staff to work together to enhance our already substantial presence and reputation across Canada and the world.

We do not view this plan as inflexible or rigid, and each academic department will be expected to create their own plans for meeting the benchmarks outlined in this Academic Plan. The work towards accomplishing this plan occurs at the ground level; in our classrooms, labs, library, Departments, and Faculties. CUE is about people, and about working together. This plan is an opportunity for all of us to engage and work towards the common goals that we developed as a



Message from the Vice-President Academic and Provost

This Academic Plan was written to authentically capture the essence of Concordia University of Edmonton (CUE). The plan spotlights four stories that I feel embody CUE's spirit and, if you asked most students here, they would tell you about the strong student-mentor relationships that grow on campus. The stories are ones of inspiration, belonging, and stretching beyond what they thought was possible.

I was genuinely moved by these stories. When a student embraces a challenge and their instructor can light that inner fire within to push them past their comfort zone – real magic happens. Students at CUE feel deeply cared about; from the day they enroll in their program, right through to graduation and beyond.

Our goals for student success are lofty, which is why the Centre for Teaching Excellence is supporting faculty and sessional instructors in constantly evolving their pedagogy, so students are engaged and transformed by their education.

CUE is getting a reputation for being a powerhouse in research and innovation. We are teaching students to be problem-solvers and entrepreneurs through our Innovation Hub. We value creative solutions to critical issues, and we have made significant strides in research, including key areas such as waste management, development of detection mechanisms from disease biomarkers to pathogens in aqueous environments, cybersecurity advancements, inclusion of ASL in theatre productions, philosophy of religion, animal cognition and behaviour, inclusive education, artificial intelligence, and renewable energy.

Sustaining fast growth in research and innovation requires a healthy environment – both physically and mentally for students and employees. When our community feels supported, it fosters creativity and encourages experimentation. Our proactive approaches outlined in this plan show we've made enormous headway through collaborative health and wellness working groups, and by implementing improvements to counselling supports.

Our culture at CUE is built on shared values and respect for one another. CUE community members from many backgrounds are playing important roles in cultivating an environment where we can express our whole selves safely and productively. The benchmarks we set for diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives will be reflected in our policies and processes, as well as through professional development to ensure that all staff and students can achieve their full potential.

I would like to also acknowledge the great work the Indigenous Knowledge and Research Centre (IKRC) has achieved in promoting a deeper understanding of Indigenous cultures, traditional and spiritual practices, and wisdom. The IKRC has made meaningful outreach efforts, focused on educational opportunities and on strengthening relationships on and off campus.

Above all, we believe that students are drivers of their own academic experience, and the strategies we set out in this plan are there to prepare them for graduation, and ultimately as accomplished leaders in their career.

INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

Concordia University of Edmonton is a community of learners engaged in a process of continuous and mutually supportive learning that recognizes the importance of academic knowledge, information literacy, engagement with Indigenous peoples and perspectives, international awareness, and wellness. In keeping with these principles and with Concordia's mission and vision, our goal for you when you graduate is to ensure that you achieve these four learning outcomes:

1. You demonstrate independent thinking
 - by considering problems carefully and reflectively;
 -



FOUR THEMES

Inspiring A True Students' University

THEME ONE:

BUILDING ON BELONGING AND CONNECTION



It is one thing to promise students they'll belong at your institution, that they'll find enduring connections – friends, professors, mentors – who will influence their whole lives and careers.

It is quite another to build a university that delivers on that promise, to make every decision and infuse plans like these with belonging and connection in mind.

This strategic and intentional plan continues to preserve what makes Concordia University of Edmonton worthy and special in the eyes of students and all who work here.

Every student will experience the trust and confidence that develops in a small class. Something profound can happen when professors know students' names. It's a dynamic where we can elevate and encourage learners who might initially feel skeptical or lost in a new, often challenging environment. True mentorship in a classroom leads students to independent and critical thinking, to problem-solving, to curiosity and active learning.

Our priority is to combine academic rigour with this special spirit so that students are prepared for whatever their futures may hold – success in a career, in advanced study, and as citizens whose full lives reach out beyond academia and the workplace. (Our Institutional Learning Outcomes on page 5 speak eloquently to this.)

Designing curriculum that primes students for successful and rewarding careers remains a priority because it's good for them and good for society. Workforce-readiness is likely to remain an imperative of all of our stakeholders, and rightfully so. We'll continue to add courses and programs according to student demand and social need.

We seek students driven by all sorts of motivations: the thrill of discovery for discovery's sake, the desire to learn what binds us together, the acquisition of skills that will help them both think critically and empathize. We hope that our students grow into full citizens, armed

with that powerful sense of belonging and connection long after they leave our campus as engaged alumni.

Though Concordia could choose to grow exponentially over the next five years, we will maintain a target enrolment of 4,000 students.

It's a healthy balance that considers local and international demand, and allows us to continue to be a good neighbour and not a disruptive and outsized silo in the midst of our beautiful community. We'll continue to actively reach out to our neighbours to find opportunities to collaborate and celebrate through events and community-building.

A thoughtful, manageable target also means we're better able to meet our students' needs. This will be a particular challenge over the course of this plan. As students become more empowered to ask us for help – if they're reckoning with mental health issues, for example, or addiction – they may come to us more often and with more complex challenges. We might not always have all the answers or the expertise to match their need, but we'll continue to grapple and question and problem-solve so we can be a better ally for students who need resources.

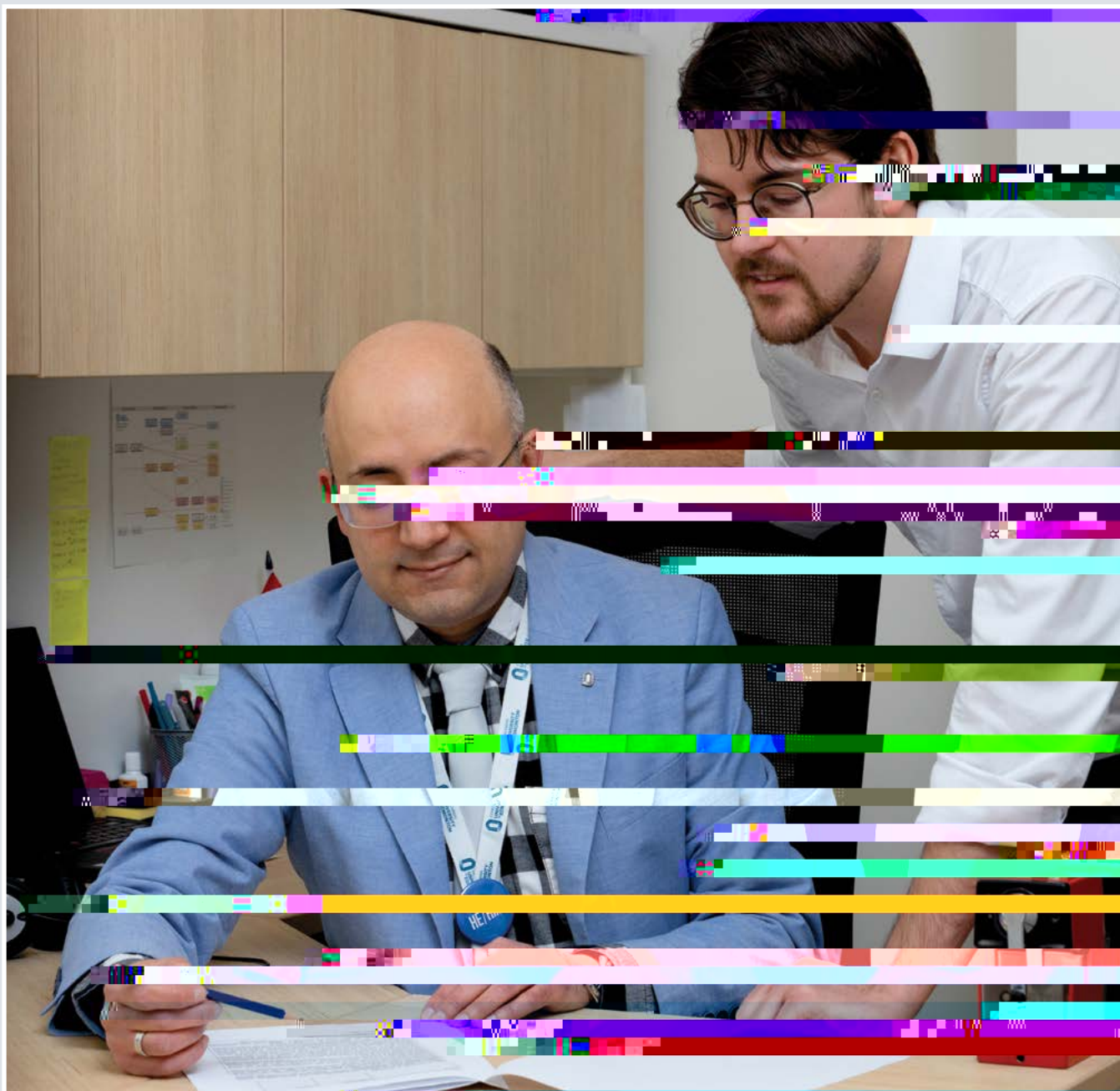
A good start will be adding to the meaningful social spaces we have on campus, places that buzz with vibrancy and cheer, but also where ideas can collide and scholars can challenge and support each other.

And we can increasingly recognize the value of the student voice in evaluating excellence in the classroom, perhaps through refining student evaluations so they yield sharper, more actionable feedback that feels constructive, not superficial or punitive.

Students, professors, and community partners have choices, here and throughout the world. For more than a century, we have had the chance to build a different sort of university. While we'll never have the resources to be all things to all people, belonging and connection – the hallmarks of a true students' university – are within our grasp.

GOAL 1:

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THEME #1 STORY:

Cole Babcock and Dr. Makan Golizeh

Considering he built a beautifully functioning lab in his hometown and now shares research with chemists around the world, it's hard to believe that Cole Babcock ever had doubts about being a scientist.

And yet there Cole was, in his early undergrad years at CUE, at the precipice of an enormous decision: should I stay in chemistry, or leave it behind?

"I wanted to do something where I could help people. But I didn't understand how I could do that in chemistry beyond, say, drug design. And that didn't interest me," says Cole, now 25 and a 4th-year student.

"I was still looking for something that let me know that this is where I belonged. And then I found it."

Cole found it in Dr. Makan Golizeh, Assistant Professor of Analytical Chemistry, whose eye had been caught by Cole's "extraordinary passion around using science to solve problems for his community, and the wider world."

The two found common ground in their uncommon drive and discipline, in their interest in diagnostic technology, in the sorts of grand ideas shared over coffee that might someday benefit medicine.

"I had the impression that he was unsure about staying, but I could also see that he had energy, that he had passion and purpose and real dedication to research. It was my job to rekindle all of it," says Dr. Golizeh.

Dr. Golizeh introduced Cole to old colleagues at McGill University; now Cole is helping develop a non-invasive urine test that will diagnose river blindness, a parasitic infection that impacts millions of people – mostly poor – in sub-Saharan Africa. (As Cole notes wryly, big drug companies aren't as interested in these sorts of diagnostics because the financial margins aren't great.)

"During the pandemic, Cole built his own private lab in Wainwright, two hours east of

Edmonton. He's applied for six-figure grants, designed courses, and won a graduate seat in McGill's division of experimental medicine."

Cole attributes his drive, in part, to his background in ballet, which saw him train with the Royal Winnipeg and National Ballet schools. But he also credits Dr. Golizeh and CUE's "unusually welcoming community of professors."

"You feed off their encouragement, their expertise, their gift of time," Cole says. "The work is hard, but it's easy to find your place."

For his part, Dr. Golizeh, who has studied at large institutions throughout the world, says there's an intimacy and sense of connection at CUE rarely found on post-secondary campuses.

"Students can be 'discovered' here, if their potential isn't immediately visible," he says.

"And I can help discover them, because I'm not just here to teach chemistry. I'm here to train young chemists, to model contagious determination, to discover them and stoke that fire.

"If I can train 20 Coles through my time at Concordia, then I can die knowing I did something useful for this planet."

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DR. MAKAN GOLIZEH

THEME TWO:

GOAL 2:

Develop and sustain a diverse community and positive cultural climate, where students, faculty and staff of diverse identities and abilities can thrive.

OBJECTIVES

Objective 1: Establish and amend institutional structures and processes to enhance accessibility and inclusivity, and representation among our populations that reflect local demographic diversity.

Objective 2: Incorporate inclusive pedagogy, research, and innovation wherever possible and appropriate.

Objective 3: Provide faculty, staff and students with support and tools to further foster an inclusive and respectful learning environment where all members experience dignity and belonging.

Objective 4: Promote a culture of professional development that supports the sustainable balance of mental, physical, and emotional wellness.

Objective 5: Enhance on-campus spaces to improve experiences and ensure physical accessibility of all campus spaces.

MEASURES

Measure 1: Increase in demographic diversity across employee groups.

Measure 2: Increase in student recruitment, retention, and program completion among Indigenous and equity-seeking groups.

Measure 3: Increase in self-reported EDI awareness and positive changes in attitudes, skills, and behaviour among faculty, staff, and students.

Measure 4: Increase in self-reported satisfaction with campus experiences among equity-seeking groups.



THEME #2 STORY:

Mitchell Moore

In Mitchell Moore's last year of high school, the Edmonton Youth Council renamed its perseverance award after him.

It spoke to the tenacity and determination Mitchell has showed since he was diagnosed with a cancerous brain tumour at age 8. But it also hinted at what he endured while navigating a K-12 school system that often seemed wrong-footed by the challenges he faced.

Mitchell, an eternally sunny 21-year-old who recalls even hurtful memories with a smile, remembers teasing from classmates when he'd ask repeated questions of teachers.

When chemotherapy attacked the feeling in his fingers, a music teacher said he'd never play the saxophone (the teacher would ultimately be proved wrong). Another teacher grimaced

when Mitchell asked for a washroom break so he could take anti-nausea medication, worrying aloud that she'd "catch his stomach flu."

"High school was definitely better, but school in general wasn't often a very positive place for me," Mitchell says. "Not a lot of support there but lots of ignorance."

A high school teacher Mitchell grew to trust suggested he consider CUE, musing that a bigger institution might overwhelm him with "bell curves and huge classes." (Indeed, CUE was the only university that offered Mitchell a scholarship.)

Mitchell enrolled in Concordia's Arts faculty and still vividly recalls his first day. He was scared, and had every right to be.

"But as soon as I walked onto campus, I felt ... comfort. Friendliness. It seemed like an empathetic place. Then when I started classes, professors were happy to make accommodations. Even more than that, I found them inspiring."

Mitchell's own story and the recognizable figure he cuts on campus has inspired CUE's own academic leaders who share the Edmonton Youth Council's admiration for his perseverance.

"I find myself overwhelmed with emotion around Mitchell," says Dr. Carla Craverio Salvado, Associate Vice-President, Research.

"He's such an incredible person, so passionate. Life hasn't always been fair to this young man. Other places, other institutions have turned from him. But here he was embraced and he has flourished. That's what it means when a place like ours says we're inclusive. That's what it means when we say we champion equity."

Dr. Salvado says students like Mitchell are a big part of why she chose to come to Concordia from another institution.

"In a world that's constantly on edge and unstable, to see that there's a place where people care and everyone matters? That's why I came. That's why I am here."

Mitchell intends to graduate from Concordia and pursue a Master of Human Rights at the University of Manitoba; he ultimately wants to help refugee and Indigenous Canadians via social work or law. It's in part an act of service, a way of paying forward the empathy and understanding he found at CUE.

GOAL 3:

Embed Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and global thinking, ideas, cultures, and worldviews in our formal and informal programs.

OBJECTIVES

Objective 1: Recruit, hire, and retain Indigenous faculty and sessional instructors across all disciplines.

Objective 2: Renew and implement the institutional priorities for Indigenization outlined in CUE's Indigenous Strategy.

Objective 3: Promote and advance the development of a foundational understanding of Indigenous histories, languages, worldviews, and experiences among students, faculty, and staff that can be applied in curriculum, coursework, and research.

Objective 4: Promote and support community-engaged, community-led, and relationship-centred research practices with Indigenous communities, and continue to develop and refine cultural best practices and ethical guidelines for entering collaborations with Indigenous communities.

Objective 5: Promote and support opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to gain international experience and develop global competencies.

Objective 6: Promote and support the incorporation of cross-cultural and global worldviews in course curriculum, research, and non-academic programs.

MEASURES

Measure 1: Increase in the integration of Indigenous content and course design in CUE courses.

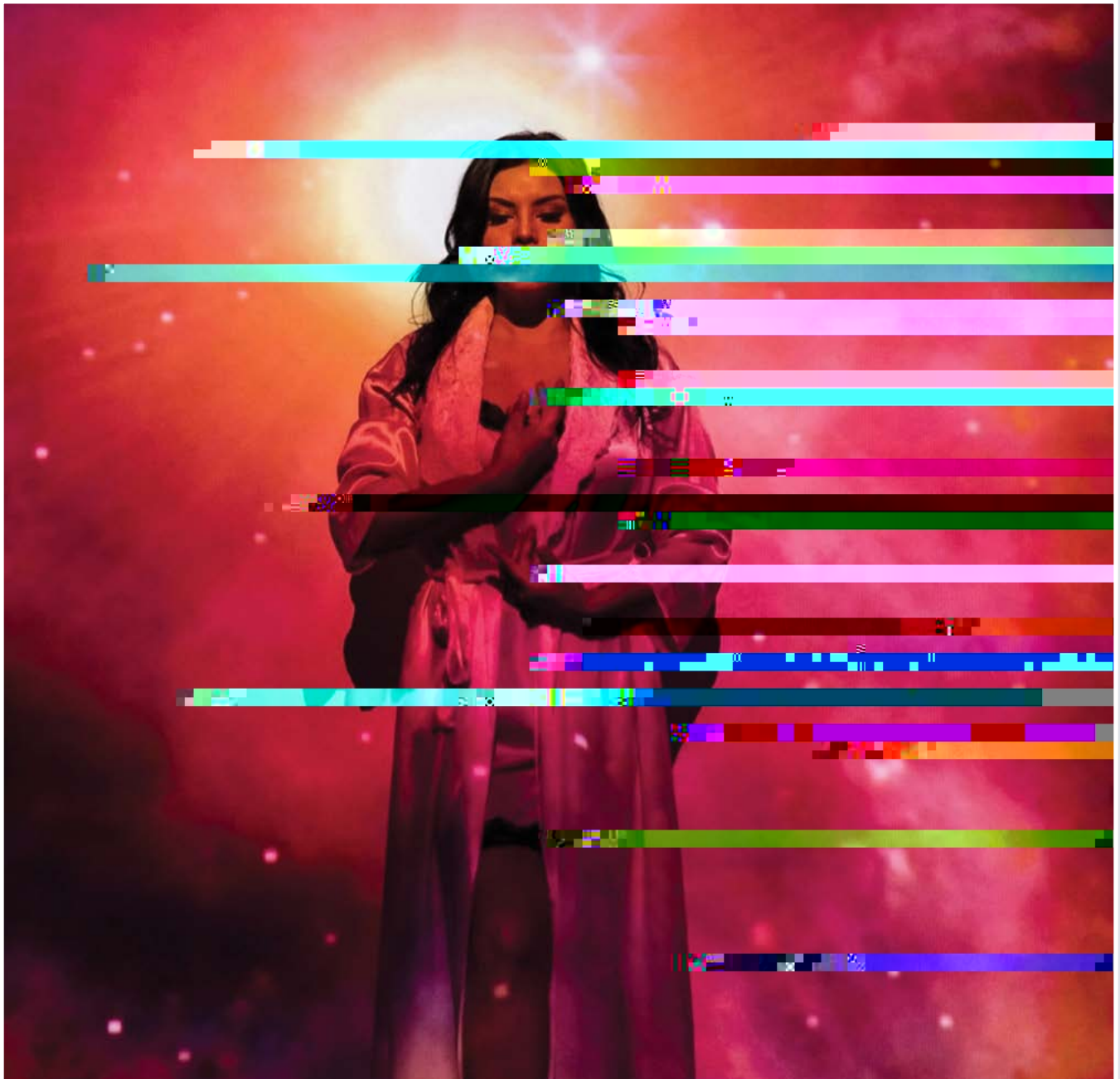
Measure 2: Increase in Indigenous student participation in research, innovation, and entrepreneurial activities.

Measure 3: Increase participation of CUE community members at Indigenous cultural, ceremonial, and educational events.

Measure 4: Demonstration of the impact of research projects undertaken with Indigenous communities and partners.

Measure 5: Increase in student, faculty, and staff participation in international exchange opportunities for study, research, and professional development.

Measure 6: Increase in the integration of global, international and intercultural perspectives into CUE courses.



THEME #3 STORY:

Teneil Whiskeyjack and Glenda Stirling

As in a dramatic work, which takes years of polish and hard-won revisions before it's ready for the world, Teneil Whiskeyjack's "first-draft" experience at CUE had its rough patches.

Teneil, a veteran film and television actor from age nine, first attended CUE in her 20s as a young mother thinking of launching a career change into social work.

"I felt like the only Indigenous person on campus, put in a little box and asked to succeed with no light and no help."

She left CUE for a few years, and then returned in the mid-2010s, inspired by a new vision, the artistic seed of a new idea, and a revitalized CUE better prepared to nurture all of it.

Soon after Teneil's return, the Indigenous Knowledge and Resource Centre was formed, under the thoughtful guidance of Danielle Powder. CUE's Indigenous Studies program was beginning to flourish. Teneil felt Indigenous kin at CUE starting to coalesce around her.

She changed her major, to drama, and took a fourth-year course designed to encourage students to develop and pilot a new work. Her idea blended theatre and Indigenous dance, inspired by her grandmother Bernice and telling a non-linear multi-generational story of transcending trauma and creative healing.

The class was led by Glenda Stirling, an assistant professor and co-ordinator of CUE's Drama program. The two had an instant connection, bonding over the power of Teneil's idea and Stirling's abundant spirit.

"Glenda said to me: 'I think you have something special here. And as you develop it I will be here to support you in any way I can. Not for money and not for credit. Just from one woman to another.'

"It left me feeling more empowered and at peace with myself. I was more confident, more comfortable with my voice. She spoke to the leader in me. She let me be autonomous. It was adult-to-adult, no hierarchy."

Stirling says she dispels that feeling of hierarchy by starting every class with everyone seated in a circle.

"We are all on the same literal level, equals in the circle, and I share as vulnerably and openly as is appropriate. You can't create honest art if you aren't safe, if you don't have a voice," Stirling says.

"And I tried to centre her voice. Teneil is the expert on her own culture, history, and possible futures. The whole point of writing her own piece of theatre was to use HER voice, not someone else's."

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GLEND A STIRLING

THEME FOUR:

A UNIVERSITY OF ACTION AND PASSION



In our classes and our labs, research and teaching aren't treated as separate silos but rather as close-knit vocations that combine and collide to spark action and passion throughout CUE.

Research and research advancements spark discussion in our classrooms. A special sort of scholarship emerges when students work side-by-side with professors committed to excellent teaching and hands-on research opportunities that put that learning into practice.

The student-professor relationship is crucial; at a typical university, a student's foray into research or other scholarly activity would likely be mediated by a graduate student, a technician, or a lab manager. Not so at CUE, where professors share their mentorship and expertise freely and directly across graduate and undergraduate research.

We'll continue to build on the work started by teams of CUE faculty and staff devoted to advancing our complementary mandates in teaching, research, and innovation.

The Centre for Teaching Excellence will over the life of this plan offer workshops to sharpen the craft of pedagogy, share resources and advice on technology and course delivery, and offer to provide no-strings-attached feedback designed exclusively to be constructive. For students, CUE will offer for the first time a course in Academic Integrity Training, in part to show students how to work productively with artificial intelligence, instead of against it.

Our Office of Research Services will deliver a fresh research strategy in 2024, and be true to its name as a service provider, facilitator, and advocate for all researchers across CUE – including our students. The unique model at CUE, where the research portfolio is integrated within the academic stream, is worth preserving, as the closeness and connection of CUE's research and teaching aspirations demands a fuller approach.

Action and passion come together in CUE's Innovation Hub, which provokes faculty and students to strive to apply their research and learning to a market problem, to consider risks, to identify industry partners and funders. Students needn't look beyond CUE to access entrepreneurial advice or work through customer validation.

The Hub will also bring together the BMO-Centre for Applied Research and Innovation, the Concordia Centre for Applied Artificial Intelligence, and the McNeil Centre for Applied Renewable Energy. This will sharpen our access to funding, align us with government strategies such as Alberta 2030, and amplify our opportunity to connect and collaborate with industry partners, government, and other universities throughout the world.

All of this focus and attention does not come at the expense of what makes CUE special: a student's experience in the classroom or our library or in the lab. Nurturing a spirit of invention and discovery among students, professors, and staff will encourage us all to test our best ideas with the world.



THEME #4 STORY:

Rubreet Dhillon

Rubreet Dhillon's path to launching her own business unfurls in a kaleidoscopic story that seems quintessentially Canadian – and totally CUE. Rubreet, born and raised in India with grandparents in Edmonton, chose to attend CUE in 2019 out of a desire born in childhood “to learn, to know, to study and to become aware of the world and my place in it.”

On her first day, she stepped onto campus with optimism and purpose. Within minutes, she got lost.

"It seemed like a small, compact campus, but I still managed to turn the wrong corner. And this gentleman, who turned out to be a classmate, finds me, lost, asks where I'm going, and leads me there," Rubreet says. "If you ask me for help, I will always say yes. So when I was given help, without even asking, I knew I'd found my home."

