Western Libraries to undergo renaissance

Students seeking study spaces filled with natural light, better technology and unique architectural designs are in luck thanks to some big changes on the horizon for Western Libraries. The University recently made significant commitments to the future of two of its busiest locations – The D.B. Weldon Library (Weldon) and the Allyn & Betty Taylor Library.

As the largest academic library on Western’s campus, and one of the largest academic libraries in the country, Weldon is well-known to undergrad and graduate students alike. Western will invest $15 million in this iconic building. Changes will include a large, two-storey Learning Commons, a Digital Scholarship Centre, enhanced space for community outreach and engagement, and possibly a rooftop reading garden.

Designed as a flexible, multi-purpose learning space, the Learning Commons will feature bleacher-style stairs and be used as both an everyday meeting place and a dynamic venue for events and community engagement. A separate mezzanine level will overlook the Commons and include areas for student learning services.

Exclusive space will also be set aside for grad students to work individually and collaboratively and to gather for community-building events. The new rooftop garden will provide a green space for students to relax. It will also serve as an environment for teaching, learning and special events.

The Allyn & Betty Taylor Library will see some significant changes, with a planned multi-storey atrium housing a learning and Research Commons and a dedicated technology sandbox and makerspace for digital learning and research activities.

The changes to the libraries are guided by Western Libraries’ Space Master Plan. Recently created after extensive consultations with students, faculty and staff, the Master Plan provides a long-term road map for the transformation of Western’s library facilities for the 21st century.

“We gathered feedback from as many groups and individuals across campus as possible, and we combined it with our own ambitions for the future of our academic libraries in the country. Western is well-known to undergrad and graduate students alike. Western will invest $15 million in this iconic building. Changes will include a large, two-storey Learning Commons, a Digital Scholarship Centre, enhanced space for community outreach and engagement, and possibly a rooftop reading garden.”

As early as grade ten, Aboriginal (Abbey) Edwards couldn’t wait to go to university. The Caledonia, Ont., native thoroughly researched potential universities. When she started looking into Western, she knew she had found her place. “Western is a top-tier institution with a really high admission average and a focus on research – that’s why I wanted to come here. And when I toured campus, I loved it; it just felt right,” she said. She has always loved languages and enrolled in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. “I love French but since it’s my second language I didn’t feel confident enough to pursue a French degree,” she said. She quickly decided to focus on linguistics, the scientific study of human language. “I fell in love with linguistics in first-year because of its relation to language as well as the critical analysis and problem solving. I often feel like I am solving a puzzle when working through data sets, so it is not only interesting but quite fun for me,” she said.

In second-year, Edwards received a Parents’ Fund award in recognition of her academic excellence, extracurricular involvement and community leadership.

“Edward felt the impact on many levels. ‘I pay my tuition myself and obviously that’s a really big burden, so getting the award really helped with the financial aspect. But it’s more than that. To receive the award, students must have achieved at least a 75 per cent average in the previous academic year. Although awards often address financial need, which I think is really important, I appreciate the academic requirement because I feel that getting honors in first-year was a big accomplishment. It felt really good to be recognized for that. I added to my sense of achievement,” said Edwards.

As a university student, I was fortunate enough to not have to worry about the financial aspect of my education. As a result, I was able to participate in many extracurricular activities. I wish the same for every student at Western, which is why I give. I want to support students who may lack the funds or family support to take full advantage of all of the wonderful opportunities Western has to offer.”

“Why do I support Western?”

I support Western because as a parent of a son who will be graduating this year, the past four years have provided him with an excellent academic experience that will contribute to creating an exciting and fulfilling career path. It is my hope that other students attending Western will have a similar opportunity to chase their academic hopes and aspirations.”

Veronica Stoiber
Parent of a third-year Western student

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“Why do I support Western?”

I support The Parents’ Fund to help Western continue to support the entire university experience and success of the students.”

Marya Clowes
Parent of a fourth-year Western student
Partnering to support our students

As Western’s newly appointed Provost & Vice-President (Academic), I consider it my personal mission to help ensure students have access to the best possible resources that support their academic success and enhance their overall student experience.

This includes everything from access to state of the art study space to an expanding array of services that help students care for their physical and mental well-being. At Western, we believe student success is achieved not just through what happens inside the classroom, but also through the resources and opportunities that will lead to life and career success beyond our campus gates.

We couldn’t possibly succeed in this ambitious mission without the help of extraordinary donors.

Every year, parents of past and present students donate to Western to help us fulfill our mission to deliver Canada’s best student experience. Last year this included more than 550 donors who supported The Parents’ Fund. This fund supports many areas on campus including student bursaries and scholarships, which relieve financial stress, inspire academic achievement, and support the pursuit of extracurricular activities and personal development.

In this edition of Western’s Parent Connection, you’ll meet Abigail Edwards, a Linguistics student in the Faculty of Arts & Humanities, who received a parent-funded award in recognition of her academic achievements and community leadership. We’ll introduce you to Music student Olivia Adams, who explains how an award alleviated some daunting feelings. We’re also grateful to student Olivia Adams, who was able to pursue his research interests in global health thanks to donor support.

I am proud of our students, and I am grateful to every parent who entrusts their child’s education to us.

Gareth Cunningham, Associate Director, Recreation and Facilities, says the two go hand in hand.

“Physical activity can have a tremendous impact on a person’s mental health,” he said. “We really want to encourage students to recognize the link between the two and pay attention to both forms of wellness.”

Campus Rec is currently in the beginning stages of a pilot program with Western’s Wellness Education Centre (WEC) called Move Your Mind. Started to start in October, it will see students work with the WEC to develop goals and plans for how they can incorporate physical activity into their strategy for mental wellness.

On top of the health benefits offered to students, Campus Rec also serves as a source of student employment. Part-time work is available in a variety of positions from intramural sport officials and lifeguards to camp leaders and fitness instructors. Nearly 400 students are employed each year.

“it’s a really critical experience,” said Cunningham. “These positions have students in real-life scenarios with multiple peer groups and clients. They’re learning to lead in a diverse environment, taking direct responsibility for things like program planning or individual training; working with customers, and even learning emergency training.”

Building that competency base and honing those skills provides valuable takeaways for students to use in their lives beyond the University gates.

Campus Recreation strengthening students’ bodies and minds

With a dedicated team of professional and student staff, Campus Rec offers Western students a wide range of programs and activities – from aquatics and dance to fitness and personal training – geared to all levels and abilities and designed to help Western deliver the best student experience.

Each student registered at Western receives a membership, which is funded through the annual student activity fees. Membership includes access to group fitness classes, the fitness centre and drop-in gym activities.

And once the program focuses heavily on physical activity and health, they also work to remind students to care for their mental well-being.

Western Campus Recreation has been in the business of helping students live healthy lives for more than 100 years.

The key to teaching

Olivia Adams believes there’s more than one way to become a great teacher.

The Don Wright Faculty of Music student transferred from Western to the University of Saskatchewan in third year. Originally studying general music education, she wanted to shift her focus towards piano pedagogy and performance.

“People always ask me why I chose Western, and I tell them the truth, I did a Google search on ‘who has the best piano pedagogy program for undergrad’ and Western was number one,” she laughed.

“Last year was my first year in the performance circle, which was not the path I had planned out. Being told my whole life, ‘you’re such a teacher, you’re such a teacher’ I thought I had to go into education,” she said. “Then it became obvious – to become a great teacher, I first needed to become a great player.”

Last year, Adams received a Parents’ Fund award, granted in recognition of academic excellence, extracurricular involvement and community leadership.

The award helped alleviate the significant financial stress she was feeling. “I already work a part-time job, so receiving this award helped me to worry less about making rent. Receiving the award meant I didn’t need to go out and find another piano student to teach or another part-time job folding clothes on weekends,” she said.

The extra funding also enabled her to go back home to Saskatchewan during the summer, which was important to her peace of mind.

With a passion for working with youth, Adams has led summer programs in her hometown with seniors and underprivileged teens. She also volunteered in Romania, Moldova and the Philippines with Canadian Fire, a Saskatoon-based non-profit organization that helps local churches around the world reach those in need.

Adams incorporates her musical abilities into her volunteer work. “In the Philippines, I did some teaching with a music team, and in Romania I was a member of a group that volunteered in a ladies’ prison. I sang for the inmates – that was an incredibly moving experience,” she said.

She plans to finish her last year in Music Performance and then pursue a Master of Piano Pedagogy. Long-term, she is considering teaching at the university level. “Eventually I may pursue a PhD and become a university professor, but for now I will continue to focus on being a good teacher and adjudicator.”

Andrew H. N. Hyman
Provost & Vice-President (Academic)
Western University

A wholistic view

Dory Abelman had a global perspective on social problems long before he arrived at Western.

“My family came to Canada from different parts of the world when I was four, which inspired me to learn more about people and places beyond our quiet suburbs of Richmond Hill. Oftentimes, lots of time reading and exploring my eyes opened to global challenges and the disparity of safety, security, and well-being for people around the world.”

Abelman began volunteering early in elementary school. He gained leadership skills organizing his peers in high school in support of Me to We, an international charity that equips families with the tools and skills to lift themselves out of poverty.

With this marked and leadership experience, Abelman had choice of schools, and chose Western. “With Western’s diverse modules, I have created my own degree – an honors specialization in Health Sciences with Biology, which merges the big picture of global health challenges with the specifics of biological and social determinants of health. I never thought I’d find such an education as the one I’m pursuing at Western.”

In his short time at Western, he’s researched and written a 20-page report on the role of nutrition in reducing cancer risk and how this is taught in North American medical schools; assisted faculty with survey design and analysis; and worked as a research assistant. He’s also acted as a student ambassador, having represented Western at national and international health conferences.

Abelman recently received a Parents’ Fund award. Already working one part-time job, the award meant he didn’t need to find a second.

Not one to sit still, he used the time to complete a research paper on mitigating the risks of students’ use of study drugs. The paper was published by the Harm Reduction Journal and, to date, has been accessed more than 3,000 times.

Abelman courts himself lucky to live in a place where donors support student ambitions and hard work. “Although I’ve always had jobs, I was the scholarships and awards that gave me the support I needed to travel and hone my skills as a writer, researcher and presenter.”

In addition to The Parents Fund award, other donor and institutional support has enabled him to study foreign language and epidemiology in Tours, France; spend one and half months in Telos Politeka, Quebec performing his French diploma; and since his first year to study Hebrew and international relations.

Abelman is grateful for donor support, saying it has been instrumental in his short-term goal of completing a PhD in epidemiology, and global health, and his long-term plan of becoming a public health leader.