

Seneca

Challenge Accepted

The 2020-21 Business Plan

Preface

Providing a safe and healthy teaching and learning environment is paramount at Seneca. While that basic goal has always been the case, it has never been more important than in the last several weeks as the coronavirus changed virtually everything about how we – and the rest of the world – operate.

Once a presumption, providing a safe environment for students and employees has risen to the number one priority.

Providing that safe environment meant sending students and employees home in mid-March after undertaking extraordinary efforts to move program and service delivery to online and virtual platforms.

As this is being written, the gradual reopening of Ontario businesses and services has begun as new infections decline. The government is slowly expanding the list of what can be offered in a variety of in-person formats. Postsecondary education has not yet been given permission to return to campus, but we expect a positive decision soon.

In this environment, business planning – and equally important, the execution of those plans – is challenging. We are operating in the uncharted waters of a pandemic like none other in a century. Public health and government directions are constantly evolving, sometimes unpredictably, as more is learned about COVID-19. This business plan will look like no other we have produced.

With no prescience claimed, several months ago Seneca launched the Challenge Accepted theme for our marketing initiatives. In this unprecedented environment, we proudly accept the challenge of navigating through these troubled waters to emerge from the pandemic strong, with a renewed sense of mission.

Introduction

Seneca's annual business plans are guided by the strategic plan adopted in 2017. Strategic plans are directional; business plans are operational. Any plan, annual or multi-year, can be superseded by events and developments, whether by a known risk or a unique event such as COVID-19.

Anticipation, adaptation, innovation and resilience across the institution are required, never more so than in today's uncertain and ambiguous environment.

While there has always been a tight integration of the budget and business planning, the uncertainty of this fiscal year's revenue forces a different approach in 2020-21. Seneca's fiscal health is essentially tied to enrolment. Given the chronic underfunding of domestic postsecondary education, international enrolment, which has been dramatically disrupted by the pandemic, is the most important predictor of our financial performance. The rules that govern enrolment forecasting in this environment have not been written. Uncertainty reigns.

In a more stable environment, the business plan would contain a number of initiatives – continuing and new – that enhance our ability to deliver our core mission of providing a great polytechnic education. Each of those initiatives would have a set of outcomes, quantitative or qualitative. The plan would be presented as a whole, with the ambition to meet not only the outcomes of the collective initiatives, but also successfully deal with whatever in-year challenges or opportunities arose.

That approach was what we followed in preparing our pre-pandemic 2020-21 plan. It was completed literally days before we closed our campuses, and shelved once it became clear that it was unachievable in the context of COVID-19. Nonetheless, it provides an inventory of initiatives that might be restarted once conditions change.

In 2020-21, the fiscal year has started with an operational and financial retrenchment to allow us to continue to focus on delivering our core mission as a postsecondary institution. Hiring has been frozen, cost restraint measures have been enacted, new initiatives suspended, employees have been redeployed: we have focused on cost control and cash preservation.

As conditions improve over the year, our approach will be to gradually layer on additional activities and initiatives similar to the process of reopening the Ontario economy.

However, there will be three tests to any resumption of on-campus activities or new initiatives that had been postponed:

1. May we? The first test asks whether the activity is permitted under government and public health directives and whether in the context of our operation we can proceed safely.
2. Can we? The second test is financial and asks whether we can prudently make the financial commitment to underwrite the activity.
3. Should we? The third test is whether we should resume or undertake an activity given both what we have learned through operating virtual Seneca and what we expect in a post-pandemic world.

In some cases, our focus will be on protecting key priorities in a time of financial restraint – not making advances, but also not losing the progress we have made. The two most important in this category are our foundational commitments to the Indigenous Education strategy and to environmental sustainability.

On Indigenous Education, Seneca will continue to implement the calls to action of the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) through whatever model of teaching and learning we are using. On environmental sustainability, we will look for ways in the return to campus to augment our efforts to reduce Seneca's carbon footprint.

Three Immediate Core Initiatives

In the recasting of the 2020-21 budget resulting from the pandemic, three priorities were identified for resource allocation:

- Initiatives related to health and safety as a result of the pandemic
- Activities related to ensuring academic continuity
- Recruitment efforts to boost enrolment

These are the business plan components related to those priorities.

Returning to Campus

Gradually and safely reopening our campuses is important from a number of perspectives. We need to get students in programs with significant in-person components back into the labs, studios, airplanes and dive tanks to complete their semesters or to start new ones. Campus life is also a significant element of the student experience, especially for international students who are far from home. And even as an institution that was a pioneer in distance learning and had significant pre-pandemic online learning, campus activity – however limited by necessary physical distancing – is a sign of normalcy. These activities will take place under the direction of the Incident Management Team.

FY20-21 Outcomes

- Working under government and public health direction, gradually reopening campuses with appropriate screening and safety measures in place
- Establishing new protocols for using all campus spaces safely
- Acquiring sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE) where required to resume appropriate activities on campus

Assuring Academic Delivery

Our core activity is delivering our postsecondary programs, with appropriate support activities that provide our students with the best possible chance of success. In the pandemic environment, moving online has also provided opportunities to adopt new delivery models, streamline services and rethink experiential learning.

FY20-21 Outcomes

- Providing enhanced pedagogical and technological supports to faculty for moving courses to online and virtual delivery, including upgrading the learning management system
- Leveraging digital technologies such as XR and creative software to further develop student and employee digital competencies

- Expanding use of micro-credentials in both programs and faculty development to respond to demand from students and faculty

Protecting and enhancing enrolment

Recruitment, conversion and retention activities take on a new urgency with enrolment challenges posed by the shift to online and the uncertainty of when there will be a return to full in-person teaching and learning. Although the funding environment is challenging, we will seek to preserve and possibly grow domestic enrolment. International enrolment will decrease because of the online environment, combined with travel challenges. Rebuilding efforts need to start this fiscal year.

- Focusing recruitment on three key segments: new students, graduating students and alumni
- Formalizing three new inbound program pathways into Seneca programs with Ontario college partners to offer innovative opportunities for credential completion
- Developing strategies to rebuild international enrolments with key initiatives focused on prospective students, academic partners and recruitment agencies

Priority Initiatives

Certain initiatives – already ongoing – are continuing to proceed. They are either crucial to managing through the current environment or critical to future success as we contemplate the post-pandemic world and the need to emerge as a renewed and focused institution.

Seneca Au Large

With the shift to virtual and diminished revenue occurring at the same time, Seneca has both the opportunity and the requirement to re-examine both what we do and how we do it in the context of our core mission of offering a great polytechnic education. The Seneca Au Large project will take a hard look at the former Seneca and recommend how we can emerge from the pandemic with a renewed sense of mission and purpose.

The report will focus on:

- Benefitting from the digital and virtual expertise acquired throughout the organization
- Capturing improvements and efficiencies from going online, including changing or eliminating policies and procedures to enable more virtual activities
- Proposing both new opportunities to pursue and activities to discontinue in the context of the core mission

Digital Strategy

Seneca's substantial investment in its information technology infrastructure, combined with our recently launched Digital Strategy, allowed for a faster and smoother transition to online than many other institutions. Seneca is transitioning its academic and services operations to digital platforms. This includes the Digital Learning Strategy, developing the digital competencies of our students, enhancing teaching practices, designing enriched curricula and creating a flexible and adaptable information technology infrastructure. Administratively, digitization is streamlining business processes, increasing online operations, saving energy, expanding cloud strategies and digitizing records.

FY20-21 outcomes

- Working with Teaching and Learning and Human Resources to support employees teaching and working virtually
- Moving all student- and employee-facing transactions online, eliminating paper and in-person transactions to focus on higher-value interactions such as advising and complex service needs
- As students and employees return to campus, implementing Smart Campus initiatives through advanced lighting and sensor technologies to improve services and increase efficiencies

Seneca2020

Seneca2020 is the multi-phase and multi-year project to manage the largest set of program and employee moves in Seneca's history. While activity on the remaining construction projects related to Seneca2020 was temporarily halted, the projects will be completed in 2020-21 with the possible exception of the parking garage. Among the impacts will be optimizing space use, increasing collaboration opportunities among programs and enhancing the student experience with new and renovated buildings.

FY20-21 outcomes

- Completing:
 - o program moves
 - o Newnham Food Hall
 - o CITE 4th and 5th floors
 - o Newnham parking structure and expanded parking lots

International Strategy

The pandemic has severely disrupted international education around the globe, challenging all institutions to find ways to build back the recruitment channels and partnerships that have provided both richness on campus and financial stability. International education is an area of strategic importance to Seneca and one in which it excels. This is not the time to abandon our international ambitions.

FY20-21 outcomes

- Launching Seneca International Academy (SIA) at Markham Campus to offer more learning opportunities for international students
- Continuing to diversify international recruitment in key markets to provide a great learning experience and mitigate country risk
- Expanding international contract training to diversify income sources and provide development opportunities for employees

Important Initiatives

This group of initiatives signal that, even in challenging times, Seneca must continue to move forward. However, until our financial situation stabilizes and new funding is available, these will have to work within envelopes in our recast and restrained 2020-21 budget.

Academic excellence

From ongoing program development and review to innovation in program delivery to strengthening pedagogy, academic excellence initiatives ensure that Seneca's credentials and courses are high-quality, relevant and meet the needs of students, employers and the economy.

FY20-21 outcomes

- Submitting eight new programs to the Board of Governors, including three new degree proposals, to meet labour market needs
- Launching a case development centre to establish case-based learning methodologies

Humber-Seneca Polytechnic Partnership (HSPP)

This innovative, first-of-its-kind partnership between the two polytechnics, Seneca and Humber, is designed to enhance access for our students to further learning opportunities and to co-operate on a number of planning and development fronts.

FY20-21 outcomes

- Establishing six new program pathways between Seneca and Humber to expand student opportunities
- Creating linkages between Seneca's and Humber's applied research and entrepreneurial centres to foster innovation

The student experience

Supporting students is at the core of virtually all areas of Seneca. In 2020-21, several initiatives are focused on major issues affecting all postsecondary institutions, Seneca included: mental health, personal resilience and sexual assault.

FY20-21 outcomes

- Introducing a new model for student services and support – spanning the student journey from recruitment to graduation – to streamline services
- Developing an integrated service delivery for mental health and wellness
- Supporting student retention and leadership development through the introduction of Strive: Strengths, Resilience and Excellence program
- Strengthening a culture of respect and academic honesty
- Establishing a peer-led program to assist survivors of sexual violence

Enhancing the employee experience

Seneca is fortunate to have a talented and dedicated workforce, highly engaged and motivated. Recent employee surveys have focused on communications and innovation and the initiatives below respond to the recommendations made by Seneca's employees.

FY20-21 outcomes

- Launching a new intranet for employees to improve internal communications
- Establishing *Seneca Innovates*, a program to encourage and recognize employee innovation
- Expanding the Seneca Leader and Individual Development Planning to provide increased professional development opportunities for employees through enhanced online training

Strengthening our foundations

As postsecondary education evolves, Seneca continues to innovate its business model to maintain its leadership role in 21st century education. The core of what we do remains: offering a great educational experience to students. How we do that is changing.

FY20-21 outcomes

- Launching Seneca Innovation as the new hub for internal and external innovation and entrepreneurship open to students, employees, industry and the community
- Establishing an integrated business development model across the organization to strengthen partnership relationships
- Through Marketing and Advancement, establishing the Challenge Accepted strategy to build brand strength, student recruitment and fundraising efforts

The coming year will also see a continued emphasis on enhancing internal communications, providing excellent customer service in all operations and strengthening the collaborative culture across Seneca. In fact, all of these are even more important given our new operational realities.