

# **THE FALKRIDGE MANIFESTO: REALITIES, RESPONSIBILITIES, RISKS AND RAISING THE DESIGN BAR ON COMPLEX PROJECTS IN UNCERTAIN TIMES**

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## **ABSTRACT:**

Design and Sustainability prove fundamental to our present journey. In our complex world, issues pertaining to environment are intensely considered, contested and connected. Within this dynamic and challenging milieu institutions of higher learning have imperative roles and responsibilities. Charged with a manifold societal mission, including the generation of new knowledge and the education of enlightened professionals, practitioners and citizens, universities must assume and demonstrate great wisdom, skill and leadership. It is arguably essential for universities to act as role models within our society, including the demonstration of design excellence, social equity, cultural diversity, human rights, resource optimization, economic accountability and environmental responsibility. To these ends there are pressing obligations and exceptional opportunities. Universities must position themselves as exemplars within a rapidly urbanizing world, as stalwarts within an ever-escalating ethos of change, and as leaders within realms of uncertainty, chaos, contradiction and confusion.

The University of Calgary is a large research intensive institution located in Alberta, Canada. As a young and ambitious post-secondary institution, the University of Calgary has placed great emphasis on matters of architectural, interior, landscape and urban design while concurrently underscoring the vital integration, interconnection and importance of environmental aspects. A comprehensive strategy advocates 'green' buildings, energy efficiency, waste management, water conservation, ethical investment, innovative procurement, core curricula, environmental literacy, public education, and other key aspects of sustainability.

Progress on far-reaching, design-focused and environmentally-oriented planning has been intense and impressive. Despite a strong pledge, an unprecedented capital projects array, a charged economy and a collaborative approach, the challenges have been many and the obstacles significant. Paramount to success on the journey has been commitment, at all levels, to asking the appropriate questions, fostering an environmental ethic, making a better campus, doing the 'right' things, and making a difference. Design and Sustainability Matter.

In response to the need for greater effectiveness moving forward, and the necessity for a framework for strategically managing complex projects in uncertain times, the author convened and facilitated a design think tank of prominent architects and planners from across North America. The group came together in a retreat session for intense brainstorming, engaged debate and critical dialogue concerning trends, trajectories, pressures and possibilities for designing innovative effective buildings and landscapes. The framework for design took shape as a set of vital principles coined "The Falkridge Manifesto". The manifesto takes aim at major problems haunting conventional design approaches and delineates a comprehensive path to better considered and more responsive design solutions and environmental interventions. The manifesto points to culture busting, creative consideration and process building in our complicated and too often confusing ethos.

*Keywords: University of Calgary, Falkridge Manifesto, Design, Architecture, Master Planning, Urban, Landscape, Innovation, Environment, Sustainability*

## INTRODUCTION

*"A great city must have a great university.... To create the great Calgary to which we all aspire, we need the city, postsecondary sector and, indeed, the public and private sectors, to work and plan together more effectively and purposefully."*

*Dr. Harvey P. Weingarten<sup>i</sup>  
President, University of Calgary*

The University of Calgary is a major comprehensive research institution nestled in the foothills of the Canadian Rocky Mountains. Just 40 years old, and with a current student population pushing 30,000, the University of Calgary is ambitious, innovative and aggressive in many realms. Of particular interest in the present paper are strategies assumed to advance the vital causes of design and sustainability. This paper is written by the author in his capacity as Presidential Advisor on Design and Sustainability, a role unique globally in its focus, influence and significance. Progress towards a better designed environment and more sustainable campus has been realized in part through the establishment of this central position as well as through the concerted efforts of many allied individuals and units.

Leadership in support of design and sustainability has been impressive and essential, with demonstrated success at numerous levels from the Board of Governors and senior administration through to staff, students and community members. While serious advancement has been witnessed over the past four years, there have been real obstacles and barriers that demanded skill and grace on political, technical, financial and most certainly cultural fronts. In assessing accomplishments to date, it is clear that the University of Calgary has travelled a huge distance in a short period of time. It is equally

apparent that much work remains to be done as the institution grapples with rapid growth, elevated standards, and a commitment to make a difference and develop best practices.

Clearly universities operate within the larger context of society and hence struggle with not only local issues but vitally regional, national and international problems and pressures. As we seek to build the scale, scope, strength and success of the University of Calgary we must be concurrently attending to immediate jurisdictional and global considerations. Some of the pervasive aspects at play include economics, diversity including bio-diversity, security, climate change, human rights, water conservation and access, energy, and public/population health. It is no mean feat to juggle various demands with available resources, to seek to determine and do the right things for the right reasons, to model ethical behaviour, to educate wise and responsible citizens, to generate new and valuable knowledge, and to build a better stronger campus & community. The challenges are many yet the possibilities profound.

## THE ACADEMY AT A CROSSROADS

*"Universities contribute to the problem by the way they elevate competition. Results, not efforts, count. Individual stakes are high. Faculty have positions, tenure and promotion to secure. Administrators have careers to consider. And institutions have created a lot of competitors."*  
John B. Bennett<sup>ii</sup>

Contemporary times are highly complex and undeniably complicated. Higher education, inextricably interwoven with its surrounding parent culture, grapples and struggles for meaning and value within an increasingly uncertain milieu. Without current and relevant metrics, the academy is arguably confused about the look and feel of success. Perhaps the modern university is marching to the beat of a distant and different drummer. With its tightly contained silos and firmly delineated boundaries, the university's momentum and trajectory seem at odds with the characteristics and approaches seemingly demanded today to manage chaos, conflict and dilemma. Turf protection and restricted points of view severely limit innovation, invention and ingenuity – subscription to the status quo regularly translates into ineffectiveness and inability to handle current problems, crises and even impending catastrophes.

At the present time university education, writ large, needs to carefully and critically question its purposes, processes and products. The academy needs to transition from a pool of all too frequently rampant aggressive individuals obsessed with personal self-preservation into a much more egalitarian community minded and selfless crew with collective health & wellbeing placed front and centre. We need to search with sincerity and resolve for universally shared values. Once found, said values must be developed, protected, propagated and celebrated. Included in the mix will likely be human rights, diversity, freedom, tolerance and respect for the other. Pursuit of such basic facets of humanity must pervade the academy, reaching impressively into both undergraduate and graduate curricula and witnessing operational cultivation within research, scholarship and creative endeavour. Inculcating rich knowledge in our curious & clever students is both opportunity and obligation. Instilling wisdom is, however, a far more demanding, vital and noble goal. Wisdom can be seen as the coupling of head and heart, a tall order within the academy where the objective trumps the subjective and the rational eclipses the emotional.

## OBSTACLES + OPPORTUNITIES

*"The heart has its reasons which  
reason knows nothing of."  
Blaise Pascal*

*"Man may have forgotten how to listen."  
from Lady in the Water  
M. Night Shyamalan (director)*

University environments, from organizational, governance and decision making perspectives, tend to be very intricate and convoluted. Over the years, as disciplines have become more specialized and information more bountiful, the academy has seen significant boundaries placed around departments and colleges, greater turf protection, and the heightened formation of silos of knowledge. Bureaucracy is often cast as impenetrable and 'red tape' as infinite. While great efforts are being made towards multi and interdisciplinary models of the university, there remains impressive entrenchment of traditional ways of seeing, thinking and acting. Within this highly complicated milieu it is easy to understand how capital projects and master planning can be easily bogged down in paperwork and committee work, saddled with unclear and contradictory communication, and hamstrung through conflict arising via competing agendas and a climate of individualism. Simply put, public universities tend to be unique, multi-faceted, multi-facility, multi-stakeholder clients who arguably and commonly struggle far more than private sector entities with the pressures of tight deadlines, difficult budgets and cogent decision making. They strain to cope with funding formulas that separate capital costs from operational & maintenance dollars and promote short-term short-sightedness, versus being able to pursue and implement more responsible life cycle assessment and 'cradle-to-cradle' strategies that offer greater value over the longer term. Universities as clients are often a blessing and a bane. Certainly one of the author's real challenges in his role as Presidential Advisor on Design + Sustainability at the University of Calgary, within such a broader set of parameters and pressures, is education and reform – in essence striving to make the institution a more informed, responsive and responsible client and advocating for quality architecture, planning and progress to sustainability.

Despite the many obstacles that confront universities in their roles as clients for capital projects, there are many positive aspects of architecture and design within higher education. Typically universities are long-term, stable, respected members of the community. With such stature they tend to place high value on aspects of identity, reputation and place-making. Students and faculty increasingly elect to come to given universities in large measure based upon the quality of the built environment. Included in such assessment are aspects of cultural amenity, recreational facilities, affordable housing, and a strong sense of community. Universities that neglect or discount the importance of their built fabric, and the quality of their spaces and places, overlook important opportunities and neglect critical obligations.

The University of Calgary is focusing on the real challenges of building a better institution, including academic, operational, administrative and environmental dimensions. This work demands open-mindedness, self-criticism, innovation and creativity. It also requires great transparency, fairness, thoroughness, rigor and a willingness to engage in broad consultation. Master planning, campus design and community building, if done successfully and well, is a serious undertaking that warrants

buy-in, support, engagement and respect at all levels within the enterprise, and often beyond.

## DESIGN



*Urban Campus – Sinclair Conceptual Design*

*“If we believe that good design will influence life, make it more meaningful, and affect our health and well-being, we must ask, ‘What is good design?’”  
Eberhard H. Zeidler<sup>iii</sup>*

Our world is increasingly complex and perplexing, filled with intense challenges yet rich with potential and opportunity. Our cities are hotbeds of activity, creativity and excitement, yet often tend to be infrastructure deficient, chaotic and demanding. Our buildings and their spaces contain much of our lives – in fact, we spend a significant portion of our time indoors. Research clearly makes the connection between our environment and ourselves – in terms of happiness, health, productivity, sense of place and quality of life. Design proves a powerful vehicle to manage change, introduce order, bring inspiration, promote wellness, increase productivity, encourage happiness, foster exchange, and generate meaning in our lives. In the minds of a growing number of campus administrators, and certainly for the present author, “Design matters!”

A fundamental vehicle with which to realize design focus on campus is the procurement process and, more specifically as pertains architecture and design, the ‘request for proposal’ (RFP) approach. In light of the institution’s expressed commitment for raising the quality of design, the author was invited to write a section of all RFP documents underscoring the central role of design on campus. In addition to crafting sections of said RFP’s, the author formally presented at RFP launch, briefing and question sessions with attending environmental design professionals and proponents.

Architecture matters for the University of Calgary. Celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as an autonomous institution of higher education, achieving record research performance, and immersed in a precedent setting \$1.5 billion of new capital projects, the University of Calgary is exploring innovative and interesting approaches to campus planning and design. Key to our equation for success is a willingness to think in unconventional ways, and a desire to create an exceptional physical environment that is meaningfully related to intellectual, social and cultural aspects of our community. The idea of linking bricks and mortar to the vision and values of the university is fundamental. We need to understand that our spaces and places capture, communicate and celebrate our identity. Architecture and design can signify important aspects of our community – such as who we are, what we stand for, and what we aspire to become.

Architecture is both fine art and applied science. It is as much about symbol and meaning as it is about building technology and structure. It is also generally built to last. When we design and construct a building we need to be particularly concerned with 'getting it right' considering that countless scores of students, staff, faculty and friends will use the facility for many years. We need to carefully attend to the complex array of issues involved in creating a good building – aspects such as materials, systems, function, and form. In an era of escalating costs we need to be concerned about energy and operations. We also need to be especially considerate of the environment and the impact our products, including buildings, have on our larger world. To this end the University of Calgary has demonstrated great responsibility in setting LEED Platinum (high building sustainability index) for all new projects. Another pressing concern for design and architecture on campus is that it proves adaptable and flexible over time. Change is commonplace, with the rate of change escalating as new technologies are invented and as user demographics shift. Buildings constructed today will need to be readily and certainly modified tomorrow.

In the realization of buildings both process and product prove critical. To this end the University of Calgary has demonstrated a strong understanding of the need for innovation. As noted, we have set targets that are both responsible and progressive in terms of building performance, environmental sustainability, and reduced impact (or ecological footprint). On the aesthetics side the challenge becomes much more complex – there are few measures to look to in the realm of beauty, creativity and the generation of inspiring spaces and memorable places. One gesture that can contribute positively to such ends is the engagement of the brightest and best architects and designers. The University of Calgary has developed a leading approach to architect selection that promises to encourage ingenuity in concept, to foster exceptional architecture, and to promote more integrated and successful urban design. The model, which is bold and inventive, reflects the University of Calgary's commitment to be forward-looking and world-leading.

At the heart of the model is the linkage between a Signature and an Executive Architect. Signature or Master Architects are typically professionals who are undeniably top of class within their global market niche – internationally recognized award-winning designers who are acknowledged leaders within given building types or building approaches. Executive Architects, or Architects of Record, are typically exceptionally qualified and talented regional architects who understand the nuances of place, climate and culture. These architects, also leaders in design, management and construction, tend to assume key roles within the context of the university and commonly act as 'prime' consultants given their close working relationship with the institution. Out of this marriage of top architects from the international and regional scene arises the potential and promise for design brilliance and extraordinary buildings. In many ways we are pioneering -- given the high stakes and incredible possibilities it is important that we demonstrate this kind of inspired leadership, process innovation and considered experimentation.

Great architecture arises when three elements align: talented designers (i.e., Signature|Executive Architects), enlightened clients (i.e., University of Calgary senior administration), and cooperative authorities with jurisdiction (i.e., provincial funding and approving bodies). Added to this mix is a user-base & community that understands and values architecture and design. In my four years back in Calgary, and at the University

of Calgary, it is apparent that such an alignment is very strong and incredibly exciting. From our largest projects, such as development of the West Campus, to our smallest ventures, such as the student-centered precedent-setting 'Take Your Place' spaces, the chemistry, energy and excitement is proving profound. There is a common vision for a well-designed campus with quality architecture, inspiring interiors and a rich landscape. There is a shared and passionate pursuit of design that makes a difference and place-making that celebrates the uniqueness of the University of Calgary.

## PLANNING PRINCIPLES

*"When you build a thing you cannot merely build that thing in isolation, but must also repair the world around it, and within it so that the larger world at that one place becomes more coherent and more whole; and the thing which you make takes its place in the web of nature as you make it."*  
Christopher Alexander

In Spring 2006, at the request of the University of Calgary President, the author crafted a framework, coined the 'Design Matters Stratagem', to provide guidance to the institution as major capital projects were coming on board and key planning decisions were being rendered. Given that there were compelling reasons to marry mission + place, and that design presents the University of Calgary with a potent vehicle with which to build the strength, reputation, effectiveness and attractiveness of the institution, the author presented the following 10 points to inform decision making in light of unprecedented building projects and campus growth. This punchlist of items was intended to shape, guide, enthuse and influence, in a high-level and overarching manner, the conception, creation and construction of new plans, grounds, buildings & interiors at the University of Calgary.

1. People First
2. Celebrate Community
3. Exemplify + Embody Values
4. Present + Pursue Vision
5. Learning Landscapes
6. Outstanding Architecture
7. Inspiring Spaces
8. Livable Places
9. Sustainable Environments
10. Mix Uses | Mix Users

Several issues that underpin the above-noted points include:

- Vital need for ongoing design-focused open, inclusive and transparent communication + conversation with a broad spectrum of stakeholders on and off campus.
- Dedication, willingness and ability to seek 'social concentrators' + realize extraordinary places on campus that define our institution and that together symbolize a 'heart & soul' for the University of Calgary.
- Significant need to more fully and meaningfully develop the aforesaid 10 point punchlist in a way that promotes qualitative + creative aspirations while concurrently underscoring the importance of quantifiable measurable targets and realistic achievable commitments.

- Obligation and opportunity to consider precedent and apply best practices.
- Importance of seeking world-leading, long-lasting and exceptional-quality legacy projects that transcend current styles, politics, and personalities.
- Aspiration to propel and position the University of Calgary as an exemplary and model institution of higher learning at the regional, national and international levels.

Building from this list of ten, the author subsequently worked collaboratively with the then newly hired University Architect to tighten up and distil said principles into a collection of six that comprised a high level document entitled “Principles, Plans and Placemaking: A Campus Community Plan for the University of Calgary”. This document, which has been widely disseminated to RFP proponents, campus leaders, and consultants engaged on projects at the University of Calgary, delineated the following points:

#### i. People First

The University of Calgary supports a rich diversity of people and is informed by their many needs – physical, intellectual, cultural, emotional, social and spiritual. Many memorable places of an appropriate scale are intended to accommodate people in casual cross-disciplinary exploration, in large formal ceremonies, and in individual contemplation.

#### ii. Celebrate Community

The University of Calgary is developing a denser physical environment that stimulates interdisciplinary interaction with spaces that have their own energetic and unique character. The University of Calgary would like to share its innovative, mixed-use learning environments with the larger community. We are exploring opportunities to soften the campus edges and create powerful community-oriented places.

#### iii. Learning Landscapes

The University of Calgary’s public spaces are remarkable, with the capacity to engage and motivate students, faculty, researchers, staff and visitors, while concurrently acknowledging the changing Canadian seasons. Unlikely and unexpected adjacencies characterize our public spaces. Natural light and dramatic views make the indoor/outdoor campus experience legible in time and place.

#### iv. Outstanding Design

Design matters at the University of Calgary. We aim for the inventive, the exceptional and the truly inspirational in our built environments, both inside and outside. We demand excellence in our sustainable planning, architecture, landscape architecture and design, just as we expect it of our academic and research enterprises.

#### v. Embody Our Values

Established in 1966, the University of Calgary is young – consequently our outlook is fresh and experimental. We value curiosity, experiential learning and interdisciplinary inquiry. We are a physically active community set in a rugged picturesque landscape that enjoys considerable sunshine and blue skies. We are entrepreneurial in spirit. “This is Now” is one of our repeatedly used mantras.



## vi. Looking Forward

The University of Calgary is building its future on principles of social, economic and environmental sustainability. We will model campus wide sustainability stewardship for Calgary, for Alberta and beyond. Our Sustainability Stewardship Program integrates faculty, students, staff and community.

These principles are being applied in a very active design, planning and construction ethos at the University of Calgary. With a handful of very major buildings on the drawing boards, a heated construction market in place, and pressing need for more space on campus, the document “Principles, Plans and Place-Making” fills an essential void and points in key directions. While this set of directives is informing and inspiring action in the immediate term, it is undeniably also influencing directions as longer-term, broader and overarching master planning transpires within and for the institution.

## THE FALKRIDGE MANIFESTO



*Participants at Falkridge Design Think Tank*

*“I’m used to a culture where change  
comes out of lively discussion.”  
Franco Bianchi, President - Haworth<sup>iv</sup>*

In July 2007 a number of prominent designers, architects, university and business leaders, lead by the author and sponsored through the support of Haworth Inc., gathered in the Foothills of the Canadian Rocky Mountains to consider current conditions of practice, and to develop a comprehensive framework for approaching and executing contemporary complex projects. Growing out of intense discussion, engaged debate

and creative exploration was a set of 15 principles, crafted by the author, that together comprise the framework dubbed 'The Falkridge Manifesto'. The manifesto aims to highlight the substantive areas of process, practice and projects that warrant our intense attention and inventive solutions in modern times filled with growing demands, heightened complexity, intricate expectations, and a pressing need to promote a better quality of environments, experiences and life.

The Falkridge Manifesto principles are:

#### FM01. SHAPE, ADVOCATE & REALIZE VISION

Foster, facilitate, conceive and construct well-designed human-centered sustainable environments.

#### FM02. EMPOWER LEADERSHIP

Charge leadership, at various levels, to advocate and advance the VISION, based upon organization values and global design | sustainability ideals.

#### FM03. DIFFERENTIATE COST|VALUE

View and address costs & budgeting differently, most critically seek long-term value versus short term return and bottom line thinking.

#### FM04. FOSTER CULTURE OF COLLABORATION

Foster strong teamwork, cooperation, collaboration and sharing, including a distribution of responsibilities, risks and rewards.

#### FM05. ENACT INTEGRATED DESIGN

Aggressively integrate process, policy, procedures and players, including the innovative deployment of advanced technologies, from the very initial conceptual stages of a project through to construction, completion and operations.

#### FM06. CELEBRATE THE PUBLIC REALM

Celebrate public spaces and places, thinking beyond architecture and buildings into urban, landscape and social realms.

#### FM07. TAKE RISKS

Assume calculated risks and be pioneering, experimental, precedent-setting, bar-raising and on the edge as pertains design and sustainability.

#### FM08. SEEK CARBON NEUTRALITY

Demand zero-footprint system oriented developments and create a carbon-neutral sustainable holistically-considered campus.

#### FM09. ELEVATE DESIGN

Advocate, celebrate and advance design, as process and product, in all aspects of the built environment and community building.

#### FM10. CULTIVATE A CULTURE OF QUESTIONING

Cultivate a culture of questioning where it is commonplace to challenge convention, transcend the status quo, rely on critical inquiry and value the findings.

#### FM11. ENCOURAGE FEEDBACK & LEVERAGE

Seek continuous improvement in process and product based on leveraged learning, structured feedback and systems approaches.

#### FM12. PROMOTE + POSITION CHAMPION[S]

Appoint, equip, authorize and respect design | sustainability experts.

#### FM13. ENSURE TRANSPARENCY

Demand and ensure within and between projects, procedures and teams full transparency, reasonableness and accessibility.

#### FM14. FACILITATE CLEAR DECISION-MAKING

Facilitate clear evidence-based, single-point, efficient and effective decision making.

#### FM15. PRIORITIZE OPEN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Demand and ensure smooth and efficient information flows and communication within | between all projects and processes that is open, clear and well-served.

### MOVING FORWARD

*"First life, then spaces, then buildings –  
the other way around never works."  
Jan Gehl<sup>v</sup>*

The University of Calgary is on a challenging yet promising trajectory pertaining to design & sustainability, one that demands great knowledge, skill and commitment. Institutions of higher education, and perhaps especially those that are publicly funded, assume particularly elevated levels of responsibility and accountability. Charged with knowledge generation and the education of future citizens, professionals, politicians and leaders, universities must strive to exercise sound judgement and render decisions based on strong evidence. That said, such institutions must also be as concerned with matters of the heart as with affairs of the head. While science and technology need to inform our path, they must be accepted in their fallibility. Equally important to the rational and the empirical are aspects of emotion, feeling, intuition, compassion and indeed humanity. In striving to raise the bar on design and sustainability universities,

and of course many other organizations, corporations and agencies within contemporary society, must look broadly, comprehensively and far downstream. Countering modern trends promoting short term return on investment, celebration of the individual at the expense of the collective, and problematic compartmentalization of knowledge, universities must seek fairness, justice, equity, conscientiousness and morality. While these might be slippery terms to an increasingly pluralistic global civilization, it seems important for the academy to take on the challenges of definition, determination and pursuit of same. The University of Calgary, as a young and innovative institution of higher learning, is openly, aggressively and meaningfully assuming this essential challenge.

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